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Summary

Mark Tully, interviewed by Alban Webb at his home in New Delhi, India, talks about his professional life working for the BBC as Acting Representative and Representative in India and then as BBC South Asia Correspondent.

Initially, he describes his upbringing in Kolkata, in India, his family background, home life, and moving to the United Kingdom in 1945. He reminisces on his time at Marlborough College and the influence of the Anglican church.

Tully talks about his National Service, his studies at Cambridge University, and the influence of Robert Runcie. He describes his experience at Lincoln Theological College and his subsequent jobs, firstly in teaching and then with the Abbeyfield Society housing elderly people.

Tully mentions his first experience of listening to BBC radio on his parents' radiogram in India. He then describes his appointment to the BBC personnel department and subsequently successfully applying for the position as assistant representative in Delhi. He describes moving to Delhi at a time of food shortages and the role of the assistant representative. He goes on to tell anecdotes about being persuaded to begin doing some programme work and his first attempts at delivering output. He talks about the need to tailor his editorial approach to the intended programme. He then goes on to talk about the influence of the BBC World Service in India and being promoted to the de facto representative although officially remaining as the assistant representative.

Tully tells an anecdote about his recall to London in 1969 and his journey back to the United Kingdom. He then talks about the BBC documentary "Phantom India" and how it led to expulsion of the BBC from India and his subsequent return to Delhi in 1971 as South Asia correspondent.

Tully considers the difficulties finding the right balance when reporting relations between India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. He talks about reporting from Pakistan, again considering the difficulties of reporting fairly, and tells an anecdote about an attempt to capture him in a "honey trap".

He talks about working in collaboration with the BBC's Eastern Service based in London before addressing accusations of BBC bias in favour of the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Tully discusses and tells several anecdotes about Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. He talks about representing the BBC on technical and institutional matters and his friendly relations with Indian officials. He tells an anecdote about the

documentary "The Pilot Prime Minister" and how he was ordered by the BBC to review it for the Director General Alasdair Milne.

He talks about being expelled from India in 1975 for refusing to agree to censorship, and his return in 1977 to cover the general election which was lost by Indira Gandhi. He describes at length the return of Gandhi in 1980 and the 1984 storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, including an analysis of the importance of his reports' audiences and the BBC's credibility. He adds an anecdote about Brian Barron flying in from Hong Kong when there was a big story for domestic television.

Tully describes at length reporting on the 1984 Bhopal chemical leak tragedy and how covering disasters poses personal ethical problems.

He then turns to institutional matters, addressing which part of the BBC he worked for and why it mattered. He mentions that he did not have to engage with the British Foreign Office despite the World Service being funded by it.

Tully remarks on the personal cost of being a foreign correspondent with frequent travel commitments. He describes at length the changes at the BBC with the appointment of John Birt as BBC Director General and how they led to him delivering a controversial public speech in 1993 at the Radio Academy Festival in Birmingham. He talks about his resignation from the BBC in 1994 and how it was both a sad event and a relief. Tully talks about what he did after leaving the BBC, working as a journalist on documentaries. He also remarks on his love of locomotives. He talks about his involvement for over twenty years with the radio programme "Something Understood" and its reflective standpoint. He continues with remarks about his religious beliefs.

Tully gives an analysis of how the role of the BBC in India has changed and the continuing importance of shortwave radio transmission. He concludes by talking about the enduring values of a news reporter for the BBC being telling the truth, being well informed, and doing one's best in reporting accurately and with balance.

Contents

Transcript

Q: [0:00:12] So, this is Alban Webb on behalf of the Connected Histories of the BBC Project, interviewing Mark Tully at his home in New Delhi, on Thursday the 31st of May 2018. First of all, my thanks to you Mark, for welcoming us into your home today. Perhaps we could start by taking you back to your very earliest memories.

A: [0:00:33] [Laughs].

Q: [0:00:34] You were born in Calcutta –

A: [0:00:35] Yes.

Q: [0:00:35] In 1936 –

A: [0:00:35] '35, yeah.

Q: [0:00:36] Now known as Kolkata, in the Indian province of West Bengal. You were the second eldest of six children. What stands out in your formative memory of that early period in your life?

A: [0:00:51] Well, I think what stands out most perhaps when I look back on it, is the extraordinary privileged life that we, the wealthy British in India, lived. We were isolated from all the problems of India, we had central air conditioning, which was a very rare thing, or quite a rare thing in those days. We lived in a bungalow with a big garden, we had plenty

of food, we had plenty of everything, even during the terrible days of the Bengal Famine, we didn't notice that anything was going wrong there. And it was also an extraordinarily British life in the way – I should say British-India life, in the way that we would not have dreamt of playing with Indian children, all our friends were English. We had an English nanny who was there to stop us getting to close to the servants, and who was insistent that we should not learn the servants' language. And we were bought up to think of ourselves as British, that was the one thing which was really drummed into us. Because I think our parents were afraid that we'd be seduced by India as so many have been seduced in the past.

Q: [0:02:24] And what did they think would happen if you were seduced by India?

A: [0:02:27] Sorry, I didn't hear.

Q: [0:02:28] What did they think would happen if you were seduced by India?

A: [0:02:33] Well, of course, they thought then that we would fall – we would maybe become attracted by Hinduism, which was a dreadful thing to them to think of. That we would be in a way traitors to our culture.

Q: [0:02:50] Could you describe your home for us? Do you have strong memories of it?

A: [0:02:55] Yes, it was a big house as I said, with a lot of – a lot of the floors were that red concrete you get, and there was quite a lot of marble around. There was a big garden with a dovecote in it and the tennis court, and the garden was very well-maintained by more than one mali [gardener]. There were a lot of servants around the place, and there were also quarters as they were known, where the servants lived, they were just on the left as you came in through the front gate.

Q: [0:03:33] And could you describe your mother and father to us? What were they like as characters?

A: [0:03:42] Well, my father was a very competent, a very meticulous businessman, who expected everyone to be as meticulous and competent as he was, and who was not very should I say, mild-tempered if they fell below the standards he thought they should keep up. And he was highly respected, he was a very good singer, he took part in the Gilbert and Sullivan shows that the Calcutta Musical Society put on, and he often had that very difficult part with, I think called the Mutter Song in it, you know, "the very model of a modern Major General type" song. He was a great churchman, regular churchman, friend with the clergy as well, but a distant figure really. My mother was I feel rather forced to be distant and didn't really want to be distant, 'cos the sort of regime was that we would be taken in to see our parents when they were having their bed tea in the morning, and then we would be taken in to see them again in the evening when they were having their sherry. The rest of the time, we were in the hands of nanny basically, and I think my mother would have, and certainly when we came back to England, she wanted a much closer relationship with her. My mother was universally accepted as a very beautiful woman, she was not very well educated because women

didn't get well educated in those days, but she did have a sort of diploma in domestic science, and she was highly competent when it came to the social life, everyone loved her. Her name was Patience and there were plenty of jokes about the patience she needed to live with my slightly irascible father.

Q: [0:05:45] So, in India you had a regulated relationship with your parents, morning and evenings.

A: [0:05:50] Yes.

Q: [0:05:52] Did you have a close relationship with your nanny?

A: [0:05:54] Yes, I was very fond of Nanny [Oxborough 0:05:57]. My eldest sister didn't like her, my eldest sister always said she only liked [Hume 0:06:02], but I was very fond of her. She was not a very sociable person herself; she was not a very sort of outgoing person either, but somehow her fondness for me made me very fond of her.

Q: [0:06:27] And was she quite strict in terms of how you behaved and who you mixed with?

A: [0:06:31] Oh yes, absolutely, particularly how we behaved with the servants and who we mixed with, what we'd do with our time. Every morning we would go out for a ride and she would walk along with the [inaudible 0:06:47] to make sure that everyone – everything was in order. Yes, she was very strict.

Q: [0:06:53] And did you only speak English, or did you speak Hindi as well?

A: [0:06:58] Well, no, we hardly spoke any Hindi because we were not allowed to learn it, but we did pick it up, you couldn't avoid picking up the odd word or two, and of course we heard our parents speak it to the servants. But I remember one occasion when I got into the car before Nanny had arrived, and when she got into the car she heard the driver teaching me to count in Hindi, *ek, do, teen, chaar*, and she smacked me across the head and said, "That is the servant's language, you don't learn that language." And my grandfather who was a great character, a great character, used to annoy Nanny because he'd come to see us at teatime, he was allowed that privilege, and he would teach us nursery rhymes in Hindi, and Nanny would get very cross about this. And that was as I might tell you later, to influence my BBC career.

Q: [0:08:01] How far back does your family connection to India go?

A: [0:08:05] On my father's side, no, he was the first one. He was a chartered accountant. He came to India because he had three brothers and his father went bankrupt and he had to earn money. And there was another reason he used to give was, that he said, "As a chartered accountant I didn't want to have to play golf with bloody fools I didn't want to meet at all and try and get their audits off them." So, he came to India for that. He stayed for 22 years in India, and perhaps if independence hadn't come along, he might have stayed 'til his retirement. My mother's side, particularly my mother's father's side, goes right back to – we know back to the early 1840s, and we know because we have the diary of my great-grandmother that my great-great-grandfather was what is known as an opium agent in

Eastern Uttar Pradesh. An opium agent was someone who obliged farmers to grow opium, provided the money for their seeds, and bought the opium off them, all for the China trade.

Q: [0:09:29] You started your formal education in India, if I'm correct, in Calcutta. What are your memories of being at school in Calcutta?

A: [0:09:41] I don't really remember a lot because I was very young, and it wasn't very long before we were all whisked off to boarding school in Darjeeling. There were two reasons for that; one was because there was a general belief that frail little white children didn't do well in the hot weather in Calcutta, and if the War hadn't come, I might have had the misfortune to be sent back to England to school at the age of four or five. There was a school in Winchester near where I went to my prep school, which was called a pre-prep school, and that was a boarding school. So, I went to Darjeeling and I have lots of happy memories of that, and I think it was the best stage in my education, certainly until I went to Cambridge.

Q: [0:10:31] You mentioned the Second World War, I wonder if you have any memories of the Second World War in India at all, and what impact it had on your family.

A: [0:10:40] Not a great number of memories, no member of my – no, my Uncle, sorry, my father's brother joined the Indian Air Force, but my father was an air-raid precaution officer, he was too old – he was just too young to do the First World War and really, too old for the Second World War. So, he was the chap who went round telling people to put their lights out and that sort of thing, but that was about all. I have

another Uncle as well, Uncle Tim, my father's – my mother's brother, and he was a very interesting man, he got a job in a thing called V Force which was a force right up on the eastern border of India with Burma. And their main job was intelligence and trying to keep the tribals on the side of the British.

Q: [0:11:38] So, it's still playing the great game.

A: [0:11:41] Yes but playing into the wrong place [both laugh].

Q: [0:11:45] And so, the Second World War, it didn't come to your front door in any noticeable way.

A: [0:11:52] No, it didn't come to the front door in any noticeable way. The one thing I do have a memory of is in Calcutta, when we went shopping, when my mother did take us shopping, I saw a dead body in the drain. And I now realise that that dead body was – that person probably died as a result of starvation, but I didn't really know that the Great Famine was taking place.

Q: [0:12:27] Your family moved to the United Kingdom in 1945, or at least your mother and your siblings did, and your father stayed in India 'til 1947. Tell me, when you arrived in the UK, what were your immediate impressions of Britain? Did it meet your expectations?

A: [0:12:46] Well, we never wanted to go as children and we were horrified when we arrived in Britain, because of course it was still the War, just before the War ended, it was very cold, dark, we saw our

mother having to do the washing-up and that sort of thing which seemed to be appalling. And the only thing we heard discussion was, what ghastly boarding school we were relatively slammed into immediately. And Nanny walked out very quickly because she saw that there was no-one else to do the work, so she's had to join in the housework, and we weren't even sure how long we would live in the house because we took one on very short rent. So, all together – and there's no sun, none of the colour, none of the rest of it, you know.

Q: [0:13:48] Where was your first home when you arrived in the UK?

A: [0:13:52] Winchester.

Q: [0:13:52] In Winchester.

A: [0:13:52] Mmm.

Q: [0:13:53] Okay. Having spent your first nine years being told that you are British in India, when you arrived in Britain, did you still have this sense that you were British, or did you feel different from your peer group?

A: [0:14:09] No, I wanted to maintain my difference, I was very proud of having been in India. I remember one thing I used to do, I always used to run races barefoot because I thought that was the Indian thing to do, and I was very proud of having been in India, in a rather childish and stupid way. And I didn't take to the school in Britain at all because in Darjeeling we had had a wonderful school. The headmaster was a

Quaker, that was why as a conscientious objector – he went on – he was a man called Loukes, he went on to have a very distinguished academic career in education in Oxford, and he ran the school as liberally as it was possible, and Darjeeling was open to us. We even used to go, if you think of it now, into an American – there was a big American rest and recreation camp there, and we used to go there, and the Americans would give us chewing-gum and chocolates. And going from that very open life to being locked – my prep school had, you know, four high walls round it, you only went out on Sundays in a crocodile, and all that regime. I think your parents were allowed to come once or twice a term to take you out, and that was always funny, they were rather artificial occasions somehow. So, I didn't take to it at all really, you know.

Q: [0:15:45] So, you transitioned from a happy educational environment in Darjeeling to prep school in England –

A: [0:15:53] Yes.

Q: [0:15:54] And then on to Marlborough College –

A: [0:15:54] Yes.

Q: [0:15:55] As a boarding pupil. Could you describe your experience of living and studying there? Did you fit in?

A: [0:16:02] In Marlborough?

Q: [0:16:03] In Marlborough.

A: [0:16:04] No, I was bolshie, I didn't like Marlborough at all. The funny thing about Marlborough was I didn't – I was a sociable guy, so I had plenty of friends, I was not bullied, and I wasn't lonely. It was one of those extraordinary things, but I hated moving home, at the end of the holiday I would go in floods of tears, but virtually as soon as you got on the school train or something, you went right back into it again. So, it was not a question of bullying or anything like that, it was just that I found the teaching appallingly dull. I learnt what I learnt because I felt I was forced to learn it. I was forced to do classics which I didn't want to do. I did discover – we had a miserable three periods a year in his – a term in history, and my essays were very good whereas my Latin prose was rather poor. So, I said to my housemaster, "I don't want to do this classics, I want to do history," but he was a classicist and he said, "No, you can't." And it's the sort of education whereby you did sixty lines of Latin translation, sixty lines of Greek translation, and that type of education, and I just didn't take to it. And because I was bolshie, I didn't like the idea of public school at all, I was a socialist, I used to have awful arguments with my father who accused me with lack of generosity. When we had a general election, a mock general election, with the election – the second Attlee election, I was a socialist, we used to go round with little bits of wool in our lapel the colour of the party you were, and I was told there were only fourteen of us with red things there. So, the principle of the thing I didn't like. The only thing I liked, and I loved, was the chapel and it's the chapel which gave me my enduring love of Anglican fellowship, Anglican liturgy, and the Anglican church.

Q: [0:18:28] What was about it about the chapel at Marlborough? Was it the chaplain, the space, or the liturgy that particularly suited you?

A: [0:18:39] It was partly the chaplain, a man called John Miller, who was the only guy who really took any interest in me at all, and I used to serve as an altar-boy and that sort of thing. But it was just that – it's difficult to describe in a way, but it's something that if you've ever come – you as a choirboy must have felt that sometimes – once you have Anglican liturgy inside you, once you have the music inside you, it's something other-worldly, is the only way I can call it. And also, the other thing about the chapel was you had voluntary services and they were lovely because they're very peaceful, they're quite, very few people came. You had voluntary Evensong where the choir sang beautifully and there were perhaps only 20 or 30 of you in the congregation, but that was a lovely experience.

Q: [0:19:38] So, there was much at Marlborough that you disliked or rebelled against, but there were other things about it that also shaped you.

A: [0:19:47] Yes, I mean, I think the fundamental problem with me at Marlborough is – and maybe it's entirely my fault, but the fundamental problem was that I didn't get interested in any work subject at all. And when I came to go up to Cambridge, I still had this attitude that work was boring, and you looked forward to having half-holidays and lessons were boring. And you know, there was one tragedy which occurred to me, there was one period – if you were doing classics – you see, I was in the scholarship stream at Marlborough, and if you were doing classics there was one period, one year – it was basically a four year course, but there was one year when you had a wonderful

master who really talked to you about art, poetry and all that sort of thing much more than boring translations and all that. And he fell ill right at the start of the year when he was teaching me, and then we had pretty unsatisfactory temporary teachers instead of him, he never came back, so I lost all that. And then to make matters worse, when I came to the classical sixth which was where you did your A-levels, the master who took that lasted one term, then he went off to Pakistan. Then, they appointed the classical fifth master to do the classical sixth, and we went as a class, led by me I'm proud to say, to the head of the classics department and we protested. And we said, "This man," the classical fifth man, "does not like us, we don't like him, so why should he be inflicted on us again?" It had no impact but, you know, I found teaching for the most part, totally uninspiring.

Q: [0:21:49] So, protesting was core to your experience [laughs] –

A: [0:21:53] Yes [laughs].

Q: [0:21:54] Of education.

A: [0:21:55] [Laughs].

Q: [0:21:56] When you left Marlborough what ambitions did you have for yourself, if any?

A: [0:22:02] Well, I never knew what I wanted to do. My main ambition was to get out of Marlborough as soon as possible and find somewhere else to go to. So, I thought of going into the Merchant Navy, but that

was pooh-poohed, then I had the idea of becoming a doctor because I knew that if I became a doctor, I would have to leave Marlborough and go somewhere else which would teach me science quickly because I had no science. You know, it's a measure of the narrowness of the teaching at Marlborough that at the age of sixteen when I did my O levels, because you weren't allowed to do them before that, I could only get Latin, Greek, elementary maths, and elementary – and English language, i.e. no English literature, no geography, no history, nothing like that. So, I wanted out of that and so, I thought if I became a doctor – and I was attracted by the doctor because I was very much a Christian at that stage, and I had ideas of medical missionaries and all the rest of it. But – and I did leave Marlborough a year early because of that, and I went to a crammer in Manchester called Grimes [laughs], which was not as grim as it sounds. And I got through my science enough to go to St Thomas' Hospital, but by that time I had discovered I was wholly unsuited to be a doctor.

Q: [0:23:36] And okay, after that experience, was that when you went on to do National Service?

A: [0:23:44] Yes.

Q: [0:23:45] In 1954.

A: [0:23:45] Mmm.

Q: [0:23:46] And you were, am I right in saying, commissioned in the First Royal Dragoons.

A: [0:23:48] I was, yes, yes.

Q: [0:23:50] Was that a happy experience for you, those two years?

A: [0:23:52] No, not at all. a) I was very bad at the Army, I could never clean my kit very well or – and I remember once when I was in Oxford officer training, that I got a whole series of extra drills and all that sort of thing. So, it didn't suit me in that way at all, a), and b) of course, I was a socialist still, and I didn't believe in the whole idea of officers. And yet, the ridiculous thing was that I allowed myself to become an officer, which was really absurd of me and was rather typical of my life. I might have had strong principles, but I always went with the drift.

Q: [0:24:47] Did you make those views known to your superiors?

A: [0:24:50] I think it was well known to them. I remember two things I'll tell you. One, I always used to annoy my brother officers by drinking Guinness at mess nights instead of posh wines, and that was very frowned on, but they had to disguise it in nice silver mugs. And the other thing was, once the adjutant used to ask us to write, or order us to write essays for him, and he ordered us to write an essay on morale in the Army, and I wrote an essay which said that morale would never improve in the Army – and morale was very bad in the National Service Army – would never improve in the Army unless the difference between officers and other ranks was abolished. And as you can imagine, that went down like a lead balloon.

Q: [0:25:44] You left the Army just before the Suez crisis –

A: [0:25:49] Mmm.

Q: [0:25:51] Fully erupted into armed conflict in the autumn of 1956. If you had still been doing National Service and had been asked, would you have served?

A: [0:26:02] Now, that's a – I have never been asked that question before. I don't think I know the answer to it, to be honest. I don't know. I really don't know. Probably with my tendency to drift, I would have done, yes, but I did the join demonstrations against it in Cambridge because by that time I had reached Cambridge.

Q: [0:26:27] And what did you read at Cambridge?

A: [0:26:27] I read history for two years and then theology for one year.

Q: [0:26:33] And at Cambridge your tutor, in theology I imagine, was Robert Runcie, later to be Archbishop of Canterbury. What was your experience of being taught by him?

A: [0:26:44] Well, Robert Runcie was my moral tutor as well, the person who looked after me. Robert Runcie was just a wonderful man; I can't say anything more than that really. I loved Robert Runcie as a person, I admired him deeply, he was very careful, a very caring person. In my last year, I got into sort of a mental mess because I couldn't make up my mind whether I was the right person to be ordained or not, and I

couldn't make up my mind on other important issues, and Robert again was very caring about me at that time. So, no, I owe a huge debt to Robert and I'm a huge admirer of him. He was also a wonderful person to be with 'cos he had an absolutely sensational sense of humour, you know.

Q: [0:27:42] And you stayed friends with him.

A: [0:27:43] Yes, absolutely, in fact, the last time I saw Robert we were lecturers together on the Minerva cruise ship, and we had great fun together, and I went to his 75th birthday party, so we remained together – and when I was asked to give a series of lectures called The [Teep 0:28:08] Lectures and they were a foundation where someone gave lectures in Oxford, Cambridge and Bristol. And when I gave the lectures in Cambridge, Robert came all the way from St Albans to hear them.

Q: [0:28:27] More widely, what are your recollections of Cambridge at that time?

A: [0:28:32] Well, my – when I look back on it [laughs], I have to say my recollections are of – I carried into Cambridge for a long time that bad habit I had at Marlborough of being – thinking reading and all that was rather boring, so I didn't really make the best of it. I was a wild person, we used to drink a lot. I wish now, and I've often thought, why didn't I do it, join the Socialist Party in Cambridge, but I didn't. The only thing I did join was various Christian organisations, and I kept my Christianity, my observance, going and I used to – I was friends, especially in my last year, with some of the great theologians of that time, so that meant a

lot to me. But that apart, I was – a lot of time was spent in public houses [laughs] and enjoying myself, but I have to say, the great thing is that really, my real lasting friends or almost all of them, are the ones from Cambridge.

Q: [0:30:03] Was it significant do you think that, having spent so much of your young life in institutions like boarding school, arriving at Cambridge was a source of liberation from what had gone before?

A: [0:30:17] Yes, well, that's my excuse, that's what I say to myself. What can you expect because you'd had the Army on top that, you know, and I'd been as unhappy in the Army, intellectually, spiritually, mentally, call it what you want, I'd been as dissatisfied with where I was, dissatisfied with myself, as I was dissatisfied in boarding school. And constrained I felt, as well. And so yes, you're right, there was this tremendous sense of liberation.

Q: [0:30:54] And you then moved from Cambridge to the Lincoln Theological College –

A: [0:31:00] Yeah.

Q: [0:31:00] With a view to being ordained.

A: [0:31:03] Mmm.

Q: [0:31:06] How was that? Did you feel you – once you arrived, did you feel that you were in the right place for you?

A: [0:31:11] No, I didn't because there was a sort of boarding school atmosphere that all oppressed me a lot, and I got into my head that to be a proper priest you should be celibate and I knew perfectly well if I tried to be celibate, it would be an utter disaster [laughs]. So, I had that going through my head. And I was rebellious, the bolshie side of me came out, and in the end – I used to go down to the pub as well, which wasn't forbidden, but wasn't, you know, a part of it. And in the end, Alan Webster, who again was another wonderful man who I remained in touch with all my life, who was the warden. He sent me to see the Bishop of Lincoln, and the Bishop of Lincoln said with a big smile on his face, "I think probably you're more suited to the public house than the pulpit," and that was a great relief to me because I realised that was so. But as I said, Alan Webster, like Robert Runcie, was a lifelong friend.

Q: [0:32:28] And so, you left Lincoln Theological College at age 22?

A: [0:32:36] 23 or 24, yes, rising 25, 24/25, yes.

Q: [0:32:41] Okay, so at that age, having been at Cambridge and at theological college, what were your hopes, fears and expectations for your future at that point?

A: [0:32:55] Well, I didn't know have the first idea what to do really. I – so, I went to see a very famous firm called Gabbitas and Thring, who I think were the same firm as John Betjeman went to when after his unsatisfactory academic career, he needed a job, and they were educational agents and they got me a job for one term in Clifton and

one term in Taunton. And then I had a stupid thought, I thought I really enjoyed this, and I was quite good, I got on well with the boys and all the rest of it, and I thought, you know, this is really a good thing to do. But then I thought to myself, if you as an arts graduate with not the best degree in the world, and you just drift into teaching because you can't think of anything else to do, that's not a very good idea. And at the age of forty or so you'll look at yourself and say, "Well, look at me, I've never done anything," so, I decided to do that. And I spoke to Robert Runcie and he said lots of people asked him for people to suggest for jobs, and he suggested me for the Abbeyfield Society, and they accepted me.

Q: [0:34:20] And what did the Abbeyfield Society do?

A: [0:34:23] The Abbeyfield Society housed old people in a novel way. We bought ordinary houses in ordinary streets and provided housing for four or five old people only. And the idea was that the houses would be ordinary houses in ordinary street, and therefore they'd be integrated into the neighbourhood, and the old people instead of being isolated, would be integrated in the neighbourhood. And it was started by a man called Richard Carr-Gomm, a wonderful man, who started it in Bermondsey. And I was employed to spread the work of the Society in the north of England, and this was all virgin territory virtually. And it was a very exciting job and I enjoyed it thoroughly. The pay was abysmal and I always realised – because by that time I was married with two children – that I couldn't go on doing this forever, but in the end my career there was cut short because there was a row as there so often is between the administrator who had great ambitions to make this the largest old people's housing organisation in England, and Richard Carr-Gomm, who was determined to preserve the principles of

the thing. And Franklin, the administrator, packed the board with business people, and the business people sacked the founder. And therefore, I said, "Well – " and actually, my colleagues as other regional directors, all of them walked out.

Q: [0:36:12] If that hadn't have happened, would you have stayed?

A: [0:36:14] Well, I don't know whether I would have stayed or not. To be absolutely honest, I did need to earn more money and all the time I was there I was thinking – looking occasionally for jobs. But nothing came my way, and nothing came in my mind.

Q: [0:36:34] And where were you living at this time?

A: [0:36:36] I was living in Cheshire again, which I loved, back in my – what became my home county after we left England – India, and I loved that.

Q: [0:36:49] After the Abbeyfield Society you joined the BBC, but before I ask you that question, slightly out of kilter, I'm just curious, what's your first recollection of listening to the radio?

A: [0:37:06] Well, it was my father and mother had a wonderful old-fashioned wooden radiogram, and I would hear them listening to the news on that. I suppose that was my first real experience of it. We didn't listen to radio in Darjeeling as I remember it at school, in fact throughout my school career, at school we hardly ever listened to the radio as far as I can remember. But I remember my first – when I first

came to really love the radio and that was listening to *Dick Barton: Special Agent*, when I came back for my holidays. And another one I used to love was *Much-Binding-in-the-Marsh*.

Q: [0:37:59] And would you listen to that on your own or with the family or your siblings?

A: [0:38:02] Oh no, my mother and everything would listen to that, yes.

Q: [0:38:07] It was a family affair.

A: [0:38:08] Yes.

Q: [0:38:10] And did you go straight from the Abbeyfield Society to the BBC? And if you did, what was your motivation for joining the BBC?

A: [0:38:22] Well, I went via I think a month or two on the dole [laughs], but what happened was I wrote to the BBC – the Cambridge University Appointments Board and they sent me three possible jobs, one of which was the BBC, another of which was – I was really interested in was in the personnel department of a company which was a company owned by all the employees called Scott Bader, I think it was called. And so, I applied for both of them and I got both of them, and I thought to myself, well, the BBC – I suppose I was impressed by the glamour of the BBC and everything, so I took the BBC job and I found myself in the personnel department of the BBC.

Q: [0:39:19] And what were you doing in the personnel department? What were your specific duties?

A: [0:39:21] Well, it was a ridiculous job and I felt very uneasy in it because I had no broadcasting experience at all, and I was in the appointments department, so I would be chairing appointments boards for people who knew, you know, were thoroughly experienced radio or television producers and all the rest of it. Of course, I was accompanied by, you know, executives from those departments, but nevertheless, you felt a bit of a Charlie really, sitting there. And there was also a lot of paperwork involved, and I just thought it was awful. On top of which, I was living in London, I hated – I was homesick for Cheshire, I hated living in London, and it was very expensive living in London as well. And so, I remember vividly one very wet day looking out of the window of my office which was in 5 Portland Place, just opposite Broadcasting House, and the rain was sleeting down, and I remembered a saying which we used to have in the Army which was, "Roll on death, demob's a failure." And that was about what I was feeling at that time, [laughs].

Q: [0:40:48] Did you – you mentioned just before that you – the desire to earn some more money. Did the BBC give you rich rewards?

A: [0:40:57] [Inaudible 0:40:57].

Q: [0:40:57] You mentioned how you had a desire to earn a little bit more money than you were at Abbeyfield. Did the BBC pay more?

A: [0:41:05] Oh, yes, mmm.

Q: [0:41:06] Do you remember what the salary was?

A: [0:41:09] I think it was 1,400.

Q: [0:41:11] Okay.

A: [0:41:12] I think it was that, yeah. Yes, they did, yeah. But there was a nice story which takes you back to my grandfather and nursery rhymes, because during my board to go to India when the India job came up, and I applied for it, and I went before this board and I thought I had no chance 'cos I'd only been one year in the BBC and lots of people wanted the job. But they said to me, "Well, you know, you were born and bought up in India, so you must speak Indian languages very well, which would be a great help." And I said to them very stupidly, it sort of slipped out of my mind without thinking of it, I said, "Oh, well, I can say *Little Miss Muffett* and *Humpty Dumpty* in Hindi [laughs]," and then I tried to explain to them all this business about never learning the language. But I thought they must think I'm trying to take the mickey out of them or something [laughs]. But somehow I got the job, I don't know how.

Q: [0:42:15] How did you know that the job was available and what motivated you to apply for it? Was it a desire to return?

A: [0:42:25] Well, you see, all BBC jobs internal and when one – externals were being invited, were put on the noticeboard, so I saw this came up on the noticeboard, the vacancy for assistant representative in Delhi.

And, you know, I'd always been a great believer in fate and in drift and in God guiding our lives and all that, and I just thought to myself, well, it's just possible that I can get out of this desperate situation by going to India and I would love to go and see it again anyhow. And occasionally I had visions of my – the way my parents used to live their lives, and I thought, you know, well they had a jolly good life there. But basically, it was that I wanted to get out of personnel, I mean, I wanted to find somewhere where I felt I belonged 'cos I never really felt I belonged in England, funnily enough. I belonged in Cheshire in a way, and I was very strong about that, but that apart, I didn't really feel I belonged. And I wanted of course, to get out of the personnel job, so that's why I applied for it.

Q: [0:43:41] That's interesting. What do you think it was about Cheshire that felt particular to you?

A: [0:43:48] Well, I think in part it was because we had basically a very happy home life. In part because I never got on with my father that well, and he was always saying, "Oh, I don't belong in Cheshire, I'm from the West Country. The West Country's the only part of England which is any good." So, I would, in my bolshiness, staunchly defend Cheshire. And I had lots of friends and it's a very beautiful, lovely county.

Q: [0:44:21] So, before you left England for India, in the year that you spent at the BBC, what was your impression of it as an institution and the people who worked in it?

A: [0:44:35] Well, I thought, although I didn't like my job, I thought it was a wonderfully exciting and very prestigious organisation. And of course, I became interested in the programmes, much more than I had been, and I thought it was the sort of organisation which you could spend the rest of your life in, if you only could find an interesting part of it, and that was my ambition. I thought, you know, to try and get into another side of the corporation and spend the rest of my life there.

Q: [0:45:13] And you felt that at the time, that desire to build your career within the BBC?

A: [0:45:17] Yes, yes, yeah, mmm.

Q: [0:45:20] And do you remember any key figures in your life at the BBC at that time? People that you have fond or difficult memories of?

A: [0:45:28] In the early stages? Yes, I remember that although our job was really a very boring one and not a very prestigious one, I don't think, there was wonderful people doing it. I remember one of them is still a very dear friend, and I recall, Denis Moriarty and another one was a New Zealander who had been a very distinguished radio producer called John Laird. And although we were pretty bored when we were in our offices, at lunchtime and in the evening, we had a very good time together. And it's interesting that almost all the people of my age in the appointments at that time, went on to very good careers in completely different fields. Denis became a very distinguished art and – music and arts producer for instance, and I of course, went off to do my little thing in India.

Q: [0:46:36] When you moved to India, that was with your family at the time?

A: [0:46:38] Yes.

Q: [0:46:39] How many children –

A: [0:46:40] They came later.

Q: [0:46:40] They came later. How many children did you have at that point?

A: [0:46:45] Two – three, three.

Q: [0:46:45] Three.

A: [0:46:45] Mmm.

Q: [0:46:46] And what did it feel like to be resettling in India? It was the reverse journey from that which you had taken twenty years previously.

A: [0:46:55] Well, it all started very strangely because I got off the aeroplane and it was about 15 hours or more it took in those days, I remember it was a Qantas flight. And I was picked up by the man who was still head, who didn't want to see me at all, because he had tried to argue the conditions in India were so bad that young people shouldn't be sent out, and that people with families shouldn't be sent

out, and therefore neither I nor Mark Dodd who was to succeed him, should be sent out. And when the BBC didn't listen to him, of course he wasn't too happy to see me because he loved it and wanted to stay on. So, I arrived at my hotel and I was tired, I realised I wasn't going to have a very warm welcome, I didn't really know what on earth the job was going to be, or anything like that, and I didn't have my family. I went on to the verandah and I smelt the smell of the gardeners cooking their meals, and they were cooking in a bucket, and the smell of that was exactly the same smell as the smell of the servants in my father's – in my family home in Calcutta, the smoke which used to come out of the servants' quarters. And somehow, that bought the whole of the childhood back and the only way I've often said I can describe this, it sort of rushed through my head like an express train. And from that moment on, I absolutely felt there must be something special about India for me. I don't know what it is. And then, of course, I had the great good fortune to be given an enormously warm welcoming by All India Radio, and I made very good friends with them quickly, so it didn't matter to me that I was not really made very welcome by my so-called boss, and I knew he was going anyhow. And from the All India friends, other friends came, and by the time my wife came about two months later, I was the happiest bunny and well-established, and not feeling homesick or anything for India – for Britain at all.

Q: [0:49:41] Who was the BBC representative in Delhi at the time?

A: [0:49:46] Well, he was a man called Peter Albany who had been a Bush House man, and he was a very good man, but he didn't want to leave, and I understood why he didn't want to leave.

Q: [0:49:58] And what was he referring to specifically when he said that young people shouldn't be sent?

A: [0:50:06] Well, the food situation was very bad in India at that time. The country was said to be living from ship to shore because they were dependent on PL 240, I think it was called, American food aid. Nehru had died and there was all the uncertainty about that, and the possibility of riots or civil disorders and all the rest of it. And there was a shortage of electricity, so to find air conditioning for children would be difficult. All those sort of things, you know.

Q: [0:50:46] So, resources were running short –

A: [0:50:49] Yeah, mmm.

Q: [0:50:51] And the political atmosphere was febrile –

A: [0:50:52] Yes.

Q: [0:50:56] Did you feel it was dangerous when you arrived?

A: [0:50:58] No, not at all. [Laughs] I ignored all that, I don't know why, perhaps I was very stupid. I ignored all that, I simply charged in, you know.

Q: [0:51:09] And what was your job as assistant representative in Delhi? What specific role did you have?

A: [0:51:14] Well, there wasn't really very much to do. I was in charge of the office accounts, but there was a clerk, Mr [Lull 0:51:24], who was so competent that all I did was to sign the accounts at the end of the month basically. I was responsible for looking after the Indian staff, but they'd all been there along time and were perfectly happy and, you know, they'd come and ask for a loan for a wedding, or that sort of thing, you know. And so, I set about – what I decided to do was to associate myself as much as possible with the programme side. I decided that when people came out to make programmes, I would offer myself as a sort of, you know, unpaid run-around man, whatever you want, and help and prepare and that sort of thing. And that's how I really first got into the programme side.

Q: [0:52:16] And so, beyond offering your services –

A: [0:52:19] Mmm.

Q: [0:52:20] What happened so that you actually ended up with a job in – a reporting job –

A: [0:52:27] Well, what happened with one particular producer was – who became a very good friend of mine and still is, called Jonathan Stedall – he said that, "You should start doing some programme work," and I said, "Well, I can't do television," because in those days, you know, it was very expensive to hire crews and all that. And they said, "No, put some ideas up for radio." So, I said, "Okay, but I'm not sure I'll know how to do it," and he said, "Well, listen a lot to radio, and ask for help and ask for advice." So, I did, and there was – I did some recordings at

The Statesman Vintage Car Rally, and the recordings – the Vintage Car Rally ran up to a place called Sohna where everyone stopped and got out and had breakfast, and I interviewed the breakfast people. And they were very nice and interesting, but the programme department was particularly delighted with an interview I did with the Maharaja of Bharatpur who had a wonderful haw-haw accent and sort of, "Now come and sit down, dear boy, and share a glass of champagne with me," and that sort of thing, and they were thrilled by this. So, that was my first broadcast really and it ran on *Woman's Hour*. And then, another occasion when John Freeman was the High Commissioner and the World Service were doing a series of interviews, and if you may remember, or may have heard, that John Freeman had been a very famous interviewer and he'd run a series of interviews called *Face to Face*, and the BBC World Service wanted to do these. So, they said – sent me a message saying, "Go and interview John Freeman," so I thought, God, get an interview with John Freeman. Anyhow, I went, and John Freeman was very friendly and nice, and then there was a disaster because I opened the Uher tape recorder, you remember those heavy box-like things, and I found that I had forgotten to bring a wind-on spool. So, I said to John Freeman, "What do I do?" And he said, "Well, I don't know, but do what you want." And then I said – I'd bought a spare tape as well, so I said, "Well, do you mind very much if I unwind this entire tape on your carpet?" [Laughs] And he said, "No, go ahead," so I had to unwind – so, this was a very bad start to the interview and didn't make me any less nervous. But funnily enough, the interview went fine and was broadcast. And from those two things onwards, I got quite a few jobs like that and I did a lot of work with television teams as well. And I remember particularly wonderful times with Malcolm Muggeridge, wonderful times with Malcolm Muggeridge, wonderful times with one of the *Panorama* reporters, Michael Charlton, wonderful times with a lot of people. Wonderful times with Jonathan

Stedall. And I really – that really fed me into the whole programme part of the BBC, and then I realised that was where my future lay, I hoped it lay.

Q: [0:56:16] So, once the door was slightly ajar, if you could take the initiative –

A: [0:56:20] Yes.

Q: [0:56:21] You found the BBC was listening.

A: [0:56:23] Yes, yes, mmm.

Q: [0:56:24] can I just read you something –

A: [0:56:25] Yes.

Q: [0:56:26] From a letter, it's a letter to you from the 27th of February 1969, from Walter Wallick who was editor of the *Today* programme, and you had clearly proposed an item for them.

A: [0:56:40] Yeah.

Q: [0:56:41] And I wonder if you remember this. It says, "Thank you very much – " this is to you, "Dear Mark Tully, thank you very much for the tape of your interview with the Aga Khan. I like it as a conversation, but it is not really suitable for the *Today* programme. It is too thoughtful

in content and not sufficiently tied to an event of the day." Do you remember that interview with the Aga Khan at all?

A: [0:57:07] I don't remember it, but I do – I can understand what he was saying now, and – but I think it's very interesting that he thought it was too thoughtful. It must have had some quality about it still, you know.

Q: [0:57:25] Presumably that was part of the skill as a reporter was not just to do items on interesting things, but to editorially sharpen your approach so that it would fit with the needs of commissioners and editors.

A: [0:57:41] Yes, absolutely yes, yes. You see, most of the things I had done were for programmes like *Woman's Hour* and that sort of thing, you know, and I realised, you know, the *Today* programme was a different bag of tricks.

Q: [0:58:00] And when you – in those first years back in India, what was your impression of the BBC in India? The role it played in reporting Indian news to the UK and the rest of the world, and the stature that the BBC had in India itself.

A: [0:58:18] Well, I realised that the BBC had a very considerable following here. I realised that the World Service mattered in India, I realised that the language services, particularly the Hindi service, were important to a lot of Indians, and one of the things I did actually was, we got so many requests for *London Calling* which was the World Service magazine. And that was only sent in very limited numbers to us, so with the assistance of Mark Dodd, I started something called *The BBC*

Calling India, and we were able with that to meet the demand for *London Calling*. But I realised, yes, it was important, but it didn't come home to me in the way it did later, you know.

Q: [0:59:17] And did you stay as the assistant representative in Delhi in those first years, even though you were doing reporting and [inaudible 0:59:26]?

A: [0:59:26] No, what happened was that Mark Dodd fell ill and – first of all, so I ran the office, and then he got promoted to be head of the eastern service, so he went off and by then they realised that really one person was more than enough in this job in a way, and so they said, "We will make you the acting representative. We can't make you the representative because you've not got the years of service or experience in the BBC and it would mean your pay would be too much," and all that bureaucratic stuff. So, I then served until the end of my time as acting representative.

Q: [1:00:10] And that takes you to 1969?

A: [1:00:13] Yeah.

Q: [1:00:14] And so, your term in India was over and you were recalled to London.

A: [1:00:19] Yes, that's right.

Q: [1:00:21] And you spent two years in London. What were you doing in that time?

A: [1:00:24] Well, I'll tell you a story about that that I recall which might interest you and which illustrates my obstinacy. But one of the things I was absolutely determined to do – I thought and was worried that this might be the end of my time in India, so I said, well, I'm going to do this the proper way and I vowed that I would not spend one moment in an airport or anywhere near an aeroplane going home. And fortunately, it was right at the end of the time where the BBC would still pay for sea passages, so I caught a train from Delhi to Bombay, got on the boat in Bombay, went to Venice, from Venice to Calais, Calais to Dover, Dover to Victoria. And that was partly a reflection of my wanting to make this something very special, and partly a reflection of my love for railways and hatred of – and hatred is not too strong a word, of aeroplanes.

Q: [1:01:29] How long did it take you to travel back?

A: [1:01:33] A very long time and it was lovely because we had to go – because of the Middle East war, we had to go around Suez – around the Cape, so we went all the way down to Cape Town and back up again, you know. So, that was a glorious time, you know.

Q: [1:01:53] And when you eventually arrived back at the BBC [both laugh], what did you do for those next two years? Was it related to India, or [inaudible 1:02:02]?

A: [1:02:01] Well, when I arrived back, I felt about as shocked and horror-struck as I did when I was a child and first came back then as a child.

Because it was about November, it was horribly cold and dark, and we'd let the flat to some students and they'd really tra – it was a house, a small house – trashed the house, and oh, it was dreadful. But I had a dilemma, I had two options. Either I could become the Hindi programme organiser, or I could join the religious affairs department as the organiser. And my wife said to me, and I thought she was right, you know, "That it's India which matters to you, India is something to you, so stick with India." The temptation was the glamour of the television service, but I stuck with India and I thank God for ever since that I did.

Q: [1:03:12] In the time that you were back in London, 1969 to 1971, the BBC was kicked out of India as a result of showing Louis Malle's documentary film, *Phantom India* on British television. You returned to India in 1971 when the BBC was welcomed back. In what capacity did you return to India?

A: [1:03:37] Well, you see, the Louis Malle expulsion which was totally unjustified in terms of a film with nothing to do with my success or Ronnie Robson, but the expulsion and all the complication of negotiating the re-entry led the BBC to think we should send someone back there who understands the Indian government. So, of course, I immediately put up my hand and they couldn't really argue because I had survived the first four years, and so that's how I was sent back there.

Q: [1:04:17] And what was your role? What was your title?

A: [1:04:19] Well, by then the representative job and correspondent's job had been moulded into one, so I was if I remember the South Asia correspondent by then.

Q: [1:04:36] Covering both aspects?

A: [1:04:38] Covering India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka, and both aspects. I was expected – and I did have to negotiate with some tricky things with the BBC.

Q: [1:04:51] So, you had an institutional role –

A: [1:04:53] With the Indian government.

Q: [1:04:55] As well as a reporting role.

A: [1:04:55] Yes, I had an institutional role, yes.

Q: [1:04:58] Okay. I want to talk a little bit now about your reporting about India to the UK and the rest of the world. A consistent theme in your reporting from Delhi has been India's relationship with Pakistan. And very soon after you arrived in India in 1965, or arrived back, the second war with Pakistan erupted over the disputed territory in Kashmir. Could you say a few words on how you have reported this sort of core topic over the three decades of your work in Delhi? And the extent to which it's been a dominating influence?

A: [1:05:40] No, but that's not right really, 'cos I didn't come back after the second war, I arrived after it was over.

Q: [1:05:51] Ah, okay, in '65.

A: [1:05:53] Yes.

Q: [1:05:54] Okay.

A: [1:05:54] I arrived, and Shaftesbury died.

Q: [1:05:58] I see.

A: [1:06:03] That's it really, you know.

Q: [1:06:06] Well maybe, not starting with that [laughs], but thinking –

A: [1:06:08] I mean, in some ways it's better to start with the – when I really started reporting which was in '71 and that was after the Bangladesh War.

Q: [1:06:17] Okay, well let's go from there then.

A: [1:06:19] That may be easier.

Q: [1:06:23] So, when you returned to India just after the Bangladesh War, how did you go about reporting Indian relations with Pakistan, problems in Kashmir and of course, East Pakistan and Bangladesh? It was a core theme of your job was it not?

A: [1:06:41] It was, yes, very much a part of my job, and it wasn't an easy thing to do because, of course, you were always finding yourself accused of being biased in one direction or in the other direction. But what was really harder than that was that was reporting situations like in Pakistan, for instance, where trouble broke out – I'm sorry, I get [muddled 1:07:19]. If we talk about that then we have to jump to '77, so we don't want to do that. So, let me answer this one.

Q: [1:07:22] No, we can do that.

A: [1:07:25] We can do that.

Q: [1:07:25] We can do that because, I mean, in a way what we're trying to do here is take a wider view of your reporting career –

A: [1:07:33] Yeah.

Q: [1:07:34] Which isn't necessarily year by year.

A: [1:07:35] Yeah, okay.

Q: [1:07:36] So, I think discussing – sorry, I should have explained a bit more as in thematically –

A: [1:07:42] Yeah, yes.

Q: [1:07:43] Reporting on India and Pakistan. So, I think we can do that.

A: [1:07:47] Yeah.

Q: [1:07:48] So, would you like to say a few words about the difficulty of finding the right balance in reporting Indian relations with Pakistan?

A: [1:07:58] Well, yes, there was obviously a problem in finding the right balance when you're reporting relations between different countries of South Asia, not just India and Pakistan, Pakistan and India, but India and Bangladesh went through periods of very bad relationship, India and Nepal went through periods, India/Sri-Lanka went through the time when the Indian Army was sent into Sri-Lanka. So, yes, it was very difficult, and you had to be very – do your best to be balanced. Of course, because a lot of the time you were reporting from India, there were some people who would suspect that you were biased in favour of India, but again, the Indians could sometimes get very cross about your reporting.

Q: [1:08:54] And did you report from Pakistan often?

A: [1:08:57] Yes, very often, and Pakistan reporting was very difficult, particularly at the time of the agitation against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Bhutto won the election, but there was – in '77, but there was widespread evidence of rigging and a movement started up by an alliance of opposition parties. And I reported that very regularly, I spent a lot of time in Pakistan. And that was very controversial because the Bhutto government said, "The BBC is on the side of the opposition," because the Bhutto government was giving no information, they weren't reporting any rallies or anything like that, so people would turn to the BBC. And we had to question ourselves time and again, I said, are we really operating as a sort of sounding-board for the opposition? Are we announcing their rallies for them, doing their work for them and that sort of thing? To this day, I don't know to what extent we got it absolutely right, but I do know we thought about it a great deal, and I came under regular attack. I used to joke with people that I'd just wait for the next headline in the *Pakistan Times* saying, "Another BBC lie, nailed." There was a time when the government attempted to attract me in what I think is called a honey-trap. Someone was sent who gave me a lot of information about what was happening in the government, and I thought this was a great source. And the next time he came he gave me some more information and then he said, "I have arranged for a woman for you," and I said, "But I don't want it." So, he said, "Well, the woman is here," and she appeared. And we were sitting outside my room, and she went into the room. So, I said, "But I don't want it," so he said, "Well, if you don't want it, I'll go inside." So, I thought, what do I do? Anyhow, about a week or so later there was an article, a report, in the *Daily Jang* that Mark Tully had slept with prostitutes in Rawalpindi. Fortunately, the *Daily Jang* also published this in their English paper, and I have a brother who is a very clever solicitor, so we were able to take them to Court. They revealed that they had absolutely no evidence for this, but I realised it was all part of the put-up job.

Q: [1:12:07] When something like that happens, do you report that back up the channel into the BBC?

A: [1:12:14] I honestly can't remember whether I did or not. It would have been sensible to do, but perhaps I wasn't sensible.

Q: [1:12:23] And with accusations of bias, what sort of editorial review process do you go through with that? I mean, if you were back in London, there'd be a programmer review board that would be assessing everything that was broadcast. It's very difficult to do that from Delhi.

A: [1:12:38] You see, what happened was that the Eastern Service was full of people who knew India and Pakistan very well. It had a head of department who knew them very well, Mark Dodd, and every day they would have two editorial meetings, and they would review what I had done and look to what they might want in the form of stories for the next time. So, there would always be that review going on, and there would be conversations between us. And I would have conversations sometimes with them saying, "Are you sure we're doing the right thing," and that sort of thing, so it was very much a collaboration between them.

Q: [1:13:24] So, there was monitoring occurring –

A: [1:13:26] Oh, yes.

Q: [1:13:26] Through the World Service hierarchy.

A: [1:13:31] Through the Eastern Service, which is that part of the World Service which looked after languages – South Asian language services, you know.

Q: [1:13:40] And at this time, were you using the services of BBC Monitoring at all in appraising you of –

A: [1:13:48] I didn't, no, because I was doing straight reporting, but of course, the people in London were very much using the services. They used to get all the monitoring reports.

Q: [1:14:05] Going back to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, there had been accusations in the past that the BBC was biased in favour of that and reported accordingly. What is your view on that? Do you think the BBC was?

A: [1:14:25] Well, I think it's a bit like the Pakistan story, it's very difficult because there's no – the government has clamped all information down, we get information, we know things are happening, so we report them, and that is our job to report them. And one answer to this criticism is to say, well, the Pakistan government should have stopped the incidents happening. And no-one – I can't remember a time when any of our reports were challenged. And I remember when I went to Bangladesh I was among the party of journalists, the first party after the military crackdown who went there and were free to report. And, you know, I found the situation was quite as bad if not worse than we had been reporting it.

Q: [1:15:17] Okay, so there was evidence for what had been broadcast.

A: [1:15:20] Oh, yes, yeah.

Q: [1:15:22] That moving around as a group of journalists, was there a fraternity of international journalists that you felt a part of at the time?

A: [1:15:31] Yes, I mean, it was a floating fraternity, but one of the fun of being on a big story was the camaraderie of it all.

Q: [1:15:45] Moving on a little bit to another consistent theme in your time reporting from India, has been the Nehru/Gandhi family in Indian politics. As you mentioned earlier, Nehru had died just before you arrived in Delhi and was replaced by his daughter Indira Gandhi, and she was a dominant political force in Indian politics while you were the BBC representative. What are your thoughts on her political career and her role as a figurehead for India?

A: [1:16:19] Well, I think Indira Gandhi was a very formidable person and having met her on more than one occasion, many occasions, I can bear witness to that. She was a person who commanded huge loyalty among the poor people of India, but she was a person I think who made very serious mistakes and was responsible for a lot of the longer-term problems that India has suffered from. In particular, she really dominated the Congress Party and she therefore took the democratic spirit out of it. She wanted a bureaucracy which was totally subservient to her, and she wanted a judiciary which was subservient to her as well. She promoted her son as her – younger son – as her successor, completely undemocratically without any consulting the rest of the

Party or anything like that, and she went in for this very extreme form of socialism which tied the Indian economy up in red tape.

Q: [1:17:48] Did you have access to her as a journalist? Was she easy to reach, or was she quite protected?

A: [1:17:55] Well, you wouldn't kind of knock on the door and go and see her, unlike a later Prime Minister I found. But I interviewed her quite a few times. Every time a director-general came out, I would get an interview for them with her and I would go along for the interview as well, and when she was out of power, I saw her quite often.

Q: [1:18:27] That's interesting, so when a BBC director-general came to India he would meet with the Prime Minister –

A: [1:18:34] Yes.

Q: [1:18:35] And you were there.

A: [1:18:36] Yes.

Q: [1:18:37] What kind of things did they talk about?

A: [1:18:39] Well, various things. The first director-general was Charles Curran and Indira Gandhi seemed very bored by this, and you could tell, she was tapping a pencil on the paper. And after about ten minutes I sort of intervened and tried to wind it up and Charles Curran

picked that up and wound it up. When Alasdair Milne came for instance, it was a very different story because she was in a very good mood and she said with a big smile to Alasdair – because Alasdair had made a big point in all his PR before coming here that he was born in India – and so, she looked at him and looked at me and smiled, and said, "Is it a prerequisite for BBC representatives to be born in India?" And then she went on to – we talked to her about her love of wildlife and we said – I said, "Alasdair's going to Corbett Park," and she said, "Oh, I would love to go but, you know, with all my security I don't go because I'd just disturb the wildlife." And then, the main purpose of the interview was for her to – she said, "I'm very angry with your sales department because they're asking outrageous sums of money for *Yes Minister* and I want *Yes Minister* to be on our television, so that my ministers see it." And when we got back home, back to my office, I remember Alasdair Milne picked up the telephone to Aubrey Singer who was then in charge of enterprises, as they called them, and said in his usual abrupt manner, "Aubrey, I don't care what they're willing to pay, how little they're willing to pay, you will sell *Yes Minister* to Indian television," and put the phone down. But I don't think it ever got on the television in the end [laughs].

Q: [1:20:44] As the representative of the BBC in India, did you have to engage with the Indian government on technical issues or institutional issues –

A: [1:21:01] Yes, yes.

Q: [1:21:02] Besides on the reporting, and what were they?

A: [1:21:04] Well, a lot of them concerned television programmes because they had to go through complicated processes to get permissions, and they would not – very frequently the Indian government turned the proposals down. So, we then had to go and negotiate with them and try to organise, and sometimes that led to embarrassments for us. One very quick example is when the BBC wanted to make a programme about a man from the Thames Water Board who was coming to assist the government efforts to clean the Ganges. And the officials of the Indian government said, "No, because we know perfectly well you will make a film which will all be about the Thames man and indicate that the Thames man is doing the whole job." So, I reported this back and then they came back with, "No, no, of course we're not going to do that," so I reported that and didn't think much more about it and persuaded them to agree on that basis. About four months later, I got an irate call from the Indian press counsellor in London saying, "Do you know what your colleagues have called this film on the Ganges cleaning?" And I said, "No, what?" He said, "They've called it *Thames Wallah*." And I said, "Oh, my God." But there was nothing you could do, and the storm passed over as they almost always did.

Q: [1:22:51] Was there a conflict between your negotiating institutional relations in India and your reporting of India? Did the fact that you had to negotiate with various parts of the government get in the way of your reporting on the government?

A: [1:23:11] No, not really, no. I mean, I had very friendly relations with officials and I never saw my job in any country as to sort of induce hostility, to make myself report so dramatically that I, you know, got into a hostile position with officials. Maybe I was too soft-hearted, I don't know, you know, history will judge. But what the conflict did sometimes

come about, and once there was a very serious one, was when I felt that something was wrong or when I was asked to judge something the BBC had done. And there were two times really. One was, I did feel that there was justification in the Indian government's consistent claim that our television documentary approach was too negative and too much, and I put that to Alasdair Milne, and Alasdair Milne agreed. And then we did a programme called *From Our Own Correspondent* which I presented, which was deliberately a positive film. Now, you might say as a purist, this shouldn't have been done, that this was a PR puff. Well, I don't think it was a PR puff, it turned out to be quite a strong film, but you could argue that that was the wrong thing to do. Then another really serious problem emerged when John Birt was director-general and the man – I can't remember the guy, a very nice reporter – made a film about Rajiv Gandhi called *The Pilot Prime Minister*. And this film enraged the Indian government, and Birt sent me a letter saying – an email or whatever it was in those days, saying, "You must view this view film and let me have your view on it." I sent back to him that, "I'm not the editor of India, I have always strictly tried to avoid anything like that," and I sent this via my head of department. Eventually, the head of department said to me, "Look, he's the director-general, he has the power to order you, so you see this film." So, I saw the film and I did think it was a very unfair film and so I had to report back and it's a very unpleasant thing to have to do. I liked the man who made it very much, we had good times with them when they were making the film. And in the end, I was very impressed that the production team did not hold it against me as I thought they would do.

Q: [1:26:20] And your – did you view it prior to broadcast?

A: [1:26:26] No, no, after broadcast.

Q: [1:26:26] After broadcast, okay, so there wasn't a question of –

A: [1:26:29] No, no.

Q: [1:26:29] Should it be broadcast or not?

A: [1:26:30] No, no.

Q: [1:26:31] Okay.

A: [1:26:31] It was a question really of should there be an apology of some form?

Q: [1:26:35] Okay, I see, so it was a review, I see. In 1975 Indira Gandhi was found guilty of electoral malpractice and quickly followed that up by declaring a state of emergency which lasted for two years.

A: [1:26:55] Mmm.

Q: [1:26:55] And the BBC was once again expelled from India. Tell me, what was the experience of that like?

A: [1:27:05] Well, in a way it's sort of a personal expulsion. What happened was that they instituted – immediately after the emergency was declared, they instituted a system of censorship and it got more

and more strict and more and more ridiculous. And eventually, they said – we went for about two months of negotiations with them trying to say, "Look, well, let's have a sensible policy of censorship," but in the end, they said, "This is the document, you sign this document, or you go." And so, I put the document to the BBC, and they said, "You can't sign this," so I got a telephone call saying, "Please leave the country within 24 hours."

Q: [1:27:52] What were they asking of you in the document?

A: [1:27:54] Well, they were asking basically that you should report on parliament, this is one of the things I remember, but that you shouldn't report anything the opposition said, you shouldn't report that all the opposition leaders were in prison, so you would be giving the impression that parliament was functioning and everything was fine, when it was a complete lie. That was just one of the things, you know.

Q: [1:28:24] There's a story that Indira Gandhi was rather upset with you soon after the declaration of the state of emergency. Could you say something about that?

A: [1:28:34] Well, it was really I think one of her sidekicks, a man called Mohammad Yunnus, she had this coterie and he was very much in there. And after I returned, I was told by the man who had been the information minister at the time of her defeat, Inder Gujral, he told me that this Mohammed Yunnus had called him up and had said that, "Mark Tully has reported that one of the senior most cabinet ministers has resigned in protest against the emergency. I want you to arrest him, take his trousers down and give him a beating, and then put him

in jail." Those were roughly the words. I have recorded this interview, and it is also transcribed in a book I wrote with Zareer Masani called, *From Raj to Rajiv*. So, I discovered 18 months afterwards that I had had a lucky escape because Gujral said to this guy, "I've checked with the Monitoring, there's absolutely no evidence that Mark Tully has said this and furthermore, it's not my job to arrest him it's the home minister's, so go and speak to him."

Q: [1:29:57] So, you were saved.

A: [1:30:01] I was saved, yes.

Q: [1:30:01] Indira Gandhi lost the general election in 1977. Was this a big shock in political terms in India, a break with the past?

A: [1:30:15] Yes, It was a shock in one way of course, because for a person like Indira Gandhi to be dethroned was a big thing but, you know, we were – well, what happened was that we, expelled journalists, were allowed to come back to cover the election, when she called an election. And it was very clear to us, as it was to most Indian journalists as well, that certainly in North India, Indira Gandhi was in very deep trouble. So, when the results came out, they were not that shocking in that respect to us.

Q: [1:30:56] She returned to power three years later in 1980. Was she a very different type of political character on her return or was it more of the same?

A: [1:31:09] No, I think she was a different character. Soon after she returned to power, her son Sanjay killed himself doing aerial acrobatics and Sanjay had been absolutely her support, her lynchpin, her everything during the emergency, and the relationship between the two was extraordinarily close. And this was a huge setback to her, and I think thereafter she was less certain, less confident a person than she had been before.

Q: [1:31:53] So Mark, 1984. Indian troops storm the Golden Temple in Amritsar and kill Sikh militants hiding there, and in reply, Indira Gandhi is assassinated by her Sikh bodyguard. Did India feel on the brink of sectarian disintegration at the time, and how did you report those globally important events?

A: [1:32:21] Well, India's never, in my view, felt to me in danger of sectarian disintegration. But I reported that. We were in Amritsar right until the start of the operation when we were all forcibly removed by the police. I, and my colleague Satish Jacob, we'd been reporting all the run-up to this thing, and it was a huge event, and it was an event which in my view, showed Indira Gandhi in a very bad light because she had let the situation get completely out of control. She had allowed the militants to occupy the second most sacred building in the complex, to sandbag it all up, to bring in arms, ammunition and everything. And we all knew this, we journalists knew this. We were inside the Akal Takht talking to the leader, Jamail Singh Bhindranwale, two days before the operation. And yet, when the Army went in, they adopted a strategy which indicated that they were completely ignorant about the situation they were going to face. And Indira Gandhi had allowed all this to happen without stopping it, she'd allowed the crisis to build up when she could have stopped it a year

earlier when a senior police officer was shot dead on the steps of the Golden Temple. That was before Bhindranwale had moved into the sacred bit of it. Surely, at that time, she could have gone into the hostels where Bhindranwale was and dealt with him there and then.

Q: [1:34:17] This was a global event and you were reporting directly from it through the BBC. Were you conscious of your audience as you were reporting this, that your words carried a lot of weight?

A: [1:34:37] Yes, well, to be honest I was always much more conscious of our Indian audience than anyone else, because they were the ones we got the feedback from. You get the kick in the backside from them, occasionally praise and, you know, I think one of our absolutely top priorities was maintaining the credibility of the BBC. That was what we wanted to do more than anything else. And so, our concern was very much for the South Asian audience and for the Indian audience, in particular during the Golden Temple operation. And in a way, our reporting – we had almost two different styles of reporting because if you reported for South Asia you needed to have more detail and that sort of thing. I'll give you an example; when the emergency was declared, I was woken up by an Indian journalist about four o'clock in the morning and he said, "Go down to Reuters office quickly and look at the tapes. Get out of bed at once." So, I went down and there was no-one in the office, but it was open, and I saw the tapes and I saw this long list of people who had been arrested and the declaration of emergency. So, I immediately rang up the BBC and gave two stories, one for the bulletins and one for the World Service. And with the World Service I gave this long list of names as well, because it was very impressive, there was two previous prime ministers, Morarji Desai and Charan Singh, and all the opposition literally. I was rung up later in the

day by the editor of the BBC radio home news and he said to me, "You know, well, well done for getting that story, you were ahead of everyone else, but why did you waste the time of the foreign duty editor by reading out all those names?" And I said to him, "Well, ring up Bush House and ask them whether they're pleased that I did that or not," you know. So, that was the sort of classic example of the differences.

Q: [1:37:14] And the significance of having credibility with your South Asian audiences was what? What was the long-term value of that?

A: [1:37:23] Well, the value I think to the BBC was the BBC's reputation and of course, the number of people who listened to the BBC as well. Those were the values because if you didn't want people to listen and if you didn't want people to think the BBC was the best news agency in the world, then what were we broadcasting for?

Q: [1:37:48] And yet, there were different news and editorial sensibilities in, for example, Bush House and domestic BBC news.

A: [1:37:57] Yes, there were and there were these differences of opinion as I've described, sometimes. And quite often of course, when a story became big like Blue Star, people were sent out from London to assist and the *Today* programme would have a special reporter, for instance. Brian Barron would frequently come from Singapore when there was – no, Hong Kong, when there was a big story to do television. So, it wasn't just all being done by me necessarily, but there was a definite difference in the audience you were aiming for, in your domestic and in your World Service.

Q: [1:38:41] And so, your editorial line in detail was slightly different for each audience.

A: [1:38:48] Yes, I'm not sure I'd call it editorial line really, because that slightly indicates that you slant it. It's more that you gave more information, you gave stories of course time after time again where the domestic weren't in the least bit interested in them. So, you were – I think the best, simplest way is, whenever you do a broadcast you have some idea of your audience and I had my domestic audience and my South Asian audience. Or I should say our audiences.

Q: [1:39:27] 1984 was also the year in which there was a major leak at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, as a result it was the largest industrial accident in the world at the time, perhaps since, thousands were killed. Where were you when that happened? Were you in Delhi, and did you travel to somewhere near the vicinity to report?

A: [1:39:50] What happened was, we heard of it one day and the next day I got on a flight and went to Bhopal. I couldn't have gone quicker than that. I could have caught the overnight train, but that would have landed me about the same time as the first flight, and railways being a bureaucratic organisation it's always difficult to get tickets. And I've often thought, you know, that nowadays with all this health and safety stuff going on, we would probably have been sacked for doing that because nobody knew – part of the story was that nobody knew what this gas was. But every – all the colleagues, foreign correspondent colleagues, everyone, rushed there and reported the story.

Q: [1:40:41] And it's quite an emotionally driven story in the sense of the scale of the tragedy. Is there ever any difficulty in reporting tragedy, of finding the balance being an emotional human response in your reporting, and a professional objective response?

A: [1:41:01] Yes, I think there is a problem sometimes. I think you can have little problems, well problems which I think are important. I think it's very wrong to intrude on people's grief under these circumstances. I personally don't like the idea of showing dead bodies. There are those sort of restrictions you have. There is the problem that you might tell so many very sad stories and basically not get across what the basic story was, what had actually happened. There is a danger of that happening I think sometimes as well. But, you know, the thing really in the end was a personal thing, and I used to feel this as well when I covered flood stories in Bangladesh, that in a flood story you would be taken by helicopter to some remote island in the middle of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, the Padma River. You would land there, you would record the story, you would find people as I found once who had been living and were still living in the rafters of a bamboo hut, sitting on the bamboo rafters. And you'd get in your aeroplane and go back to the air-conditioned InterContinental Hotel and send your story. And then sometimes I'd think to myself, you're just like a vulture really. You come and make your living on these people doing this and you do nothing for them really, and you don't stay behind to care. Once the story is over, you're told to go somewhere else. I think that is a personal problem for reporters.

Q: [1:43:00] Mark, as Delhi correspondent, BBC representative in India, and South Asia correspondent, who did you work for? Was it the BBC World Service or BBC News?

A: [1:43:14] I worked for the whole BBC, there's no doubt about that. Because I had these representational jobs, I had to represent BBC television, I had to represent radio, I represented the World Service when necessary and that sort of thing. And as far as the news side of it was concerned, I did television, I did domestic radio and I did World Service. But as far as the broadcast news went, my prime target was undoubtedly World Service and the language services.

Q: [1:43:54] And which bit of the BBC's payroll were you on?

A: [1:43:56] I was in the payroll of something called Overseas and Foreign Relations, until near the end when I was transferred to News, which was a central department of the government – of the BBC, again covering all parts of the BBC.

Q: [1:44:14] And was that useful in terms of insulating you from overbearing control from News or World Service or elsewhere, other parts of the BBC?

A: [1:44:22] I think it was very useful for protecting me from attempts by the News department to get me out of this job.

Q: [1:44:33] Okay. Talking about the job, you were in Delhi for a very long time, an unusually long time for a foreign correspondent. Why was it

that you weren't moved on to another posting elsewhere? Was that by your design or the BBC's?

A: [1:44:53] Well, there are two reasons for that. The first one was because I was working for Overseas and Foreign Relations and they didn't want me moved because they didn't want any questions asked over why I was not working for the News, so I had that protection. And of course, I had no desire, never applied to go anywhere else either. And, you know, occasionally this was a key position, but overall – I mean, it's not like being the Washington correspondent or the Peking even, or anything like that.

Q: [1:45:36] Reporting for the World Service was a large part of your work and the World Service of course, until 2014, was funded by Foreign Office Grant in Aid. Did you have to engage with the Foreign Office or Whitehall at all in terms of their attitude towards BBC World Service broadcasts, or speaking to ambassadors?

A: [1:45:59] I didn't personally have to. I only once had – came into conflict perhaps with them when I was called by the high commissioner in Islamabad to be told that – during the Bhutto crisis, to be told that Mr Bhutto didn't like me and he suggested I should go, leave Pakistan. And I said to him, "Well, I'm sorry, I'm not going to do that," and I rang up my editor and told him this has happened, and if I remember rightly, he said, "You did exactly the right thing." So – but what did happen, I know, was that the head of the Eastern Service, the service dealing with South Asia, used to go for regular meetings with the Foreign Office when they would discuss BBC coverage. And I remember when I was in London, working in London, [1:47:07] telling all of us that the Foreign Office was very unhappy of our coverage of the Shah because our

coverage of the Shah contained criticisms and the British government wanted the best possible relation with the Shah. But I'm sure that didn't affect our coverage.

Q: [1:47:28] Mark, being a foreign correspondent and working in Delhi required a very large commitment on your part to travel, to be always ready, available to report and gather news. In reflection, was there a personal cost to that professional commitment to being a foreign correspondent, not being able to be with the people that you wanted to be at times?

A: [1:47:56] I think there was always a personal cost, yes, to that sort of life and I think it does affect your family life, it affects your friendships quite often, and of course, it affects you sometimes because you get very tired, you get cross, you get bored. So, yes, it does and, you know, when I came to the end of my career, I was actually – I remember I often used to say to people, "Well, I'm not that sorry it's come to an end because now every evening I can have a bath, put on nice cool clothes and open a bottle of beer and know that no-one is going to ring me up and tell me to go somewhere. And if they do ring me up and tell me that, I can tell them to get lost."

Q: [1:48:51] At the time are you aware of that cost of that commitment, or are you so involved in the job that it –

A: [1:48:59] I don't think you're properly aware of it, no, I don't think one was properly aware of it.

Q: [1:49:08] Moving forward now a little bit, the BBC is a well-established institution, in four years' time it'll be a hundred years old. Nevertheless, it's an institution in a permanent state of change, responding to events, incorporating technological innovations and reflecting, anticipating audience tastes and tolerances. What was it about the changes in the early 1990s that provoked such a strong vociferous and critical response from you?

A: [1:49:43] Well, in principle what was wrong in my view is that, a revolution was going on inside the BBC, and I thought that revolution was undermining the ethos of the BBC. I thought the revolution was concentrating on economics and on management, and on finance and all that, and not concentrating on quality and certainly not concentrating on staff morale. And I think also that it was a sort of revolution which was going on in so many other places, and I didn't see why the BBC should simply jump on the same bandwagon as other people. And as I said once I think, I felt that management consultants and people like that were treating broadcasting just as they would treat biscuit making. But I think above all, the thing which really hurt was the way that the new management, and particularly John Birt, denigrated the old BBC. After all, the BBC had produced some of the best programmes in the world, we had established enormous credibility in our own country and in other parts of the world. We were, we were told ourselves that BBC people – time and time again, that we were the best broadcasting organisation in the world, and then, along comes John Birt and says it's all rubbish.

Q: [1:51:24] So, Mark, although the BBC is a well-established institution, in four years' time it'll be celebrating its 100th anniversary, nevertheless it is one in a permanent state of change, responding to events,

incorporating technological innovations, and reflecting and anticipating audience tastes and tolerances. What was it about the changes in the early 1990s that provoked such a strong, vociferous and critical response from you?

A: [1:51:57] Well, I think there are a whole lot of reasons, but I would put the following reasons myself. One was, of course, that the whole thing was conducted with a measure of brutality without any consideration for the feelings of the staff, there was no real effort to explain what was happening, or anything like that. It was conducted as though this was a revolution, it was also conducted in a way that was extremely disparaging of the old BBC. If you read John Birt's biography you can tell his attitude to the old BBC, utterly dismissive of it, and after all, we were proud of the BBC and we were proud of what we'd done in it. Everywhere in the world we went, we were told the BBC was the best broadcasting organisation in the world. And here comes the director-general and says it was all rubbish. Here comes the director-general also, who treats elderly staff with great disrespect. Here comes a guy who when he was in charge of News, walks in and says, "What you're doing is all – lacks basis, lacks punch, lacks reality." What can you expect of people? Do you not expect that they will be upset by this? There was an ethos about the BBC, it was a place really where people were proud to work, where very few people ever thought of leaving until they came to retiring, where there was a very lively social life as well, and all that was put under threat. And I think if you look at the BBC now – I mean, it's not for me to criticise the modern BBC at all, it's not my – I have no right to because I work for them as a freelancer, but I'm not on the staff – but I can't help saying that I think they are part of a general culture now in which sociability, ethos, welfare of staff, not regarding the staff as resources but as human beings, all those things

are common, and I think are very undermining of the morale of people.

Q: [1:54:34] What do you think was – what do you think the BBC management at that time was trying to change? Did you understand what it was that they were trying to achieve?

A: [1:54:45] I think I understood what it was – yes, what they were trying to achieve. They were trying to make the BBC more economical; they were trying to really turn the BBC on its head, in fact. Do away with the independence of departments which I think was a crucial part of the activity of the BBC, centralise everything, and turn it into a modern managed institution without any thought of what it really was and what it had been. And it's so well put by Greg Dyke who succeeded John Birt, when he said something like, "John Birt was interested in making the BBC the best managed broadcasting organisation, not the best broadcasting organisation," and I think that sums it up.

Q: [1:55:51] In 1993 after nearly three decades with the Corporation, you took a very public stand against the direction the BBC was taking under the then director-general, John Birt. And this was a talk given by you at the Radio Academy Festival in Birmingham in July 1993. "What is taking place at the BBC," you said, as you just have now, "is a revolution." You also argued that there was, "A very real sense of fear among the staff that prevents them from speaking their minds." Now, your speech made the headlines, particularly in *The Independent on Sunday*, and created a great deal of critical heat and debate both within Broadcasting and Bush Houses, and in the wider public. Can you explain why you chose to be critical at that moment?

A: [1:56:44] Yes. What happened was that there was a letter in *The Times* I think it was, signed by four of the best paid British journalists, BBC journalists, I won't name them but they were four very well paid ones, defending John Birt and accusing those who were critical of him of leaking stories because they didn't have the courage to speak out. Now, I had been invited to give the Radio Academy lecture which was a public platform, and it happened that I was to give this lecture shortly after this letter. So, I thought – because I've all my life believed a great deal in following what happens to you, rather than necessarily trying to create everything, I thought there must be some meaning in the fact that here was this accusation which needed to be counteracted, and here was I about to give a public speech on a very important occasion for radio. And so, I thought well, I had to take the bull by the horns and do it. And I must say one thing, you know, I'd been invited by Michael Green the then head of Radio 4, to give this speech. So, I said to him – I went to see Michael and I said to him, "You know, Michael, you've invited me to give this speech, but I should tell you what I intend to do." And he just said to me, and I remember his words, he said, you know, "I have invited you to give the speech, I have not told you what to say, all I would say to you is avoid making it a rant and I think you're enough of a professional to do that anyhow." And so, that's how it came about that I gave the speech.

Q: [1:58:49] Do you think that the BBC management at the time, and that was with Michael Checkland in the first instance, with John Birt coming in as deputy director-general, and then Birt as director-general subsequently, and the team around him, do you think they understood the values and ethos of the BBC?

A: [1:59:08] No, I don't. I really don't think they did. I think that they thought the whole thing needed turning on its head, that it was rotten, really I think that's what Birt thought, it was rotten to the core almost, you know, and needed new people to come in and needed the whole thing to be turned on its head.

Q: [1:59:29] So, it's more than just efficiencies –

A: [1:59:32] Oh, yes.

Q: [1:59:33] It was a cultural shock –

A: [1:59:34] Yes, yes.

Q: [1:59:35] And a culture change.

A: [1:59:37] Yeah, mmm, mmm. And whether we like it or not, and maybe our ethos was wrong, and we were too soft, too easy going, whatever it was, but certainly, I was right in one thing, the ethos of the BBC did change and has remained changed.

Q: [1:59:54] And what gets lost? What did the BBC lose by that happening?

A: [2:00:00] Well, I think it had lost the – all that that ethos meant in personal relationships, in loyalty to the Corporation, in dedication to their work, and in wonderful productions as well. No, not saying the

BBC hasn't done alright since, of course it's survived and all the rest of it, but in a very different way. And I do think that in some ways it is very sad that the BBC more and more is becoming a commissioning house, rather than a producer of its own programmes. Because it was – part of the organisation's pride was the programmes which we made ourselves, our studios, our technical staff, our training of filmmakers, and all the rest of it. And I think it's very much part of the BBC should be to be a programme maker and not just a broadcaster.

Q: [2:01:06] Why did you feel at that moment that it was necessary to make your criticism in a public way? Had you attempted to have discussions about this internally, or was it just seizing the moment?

A: [2:01:21] No, I thought it was necessary to make a public stand because of that letter which had been written and because of the allegations made against us. I thought one needed to make a statement, many of my friends warned me against it, I was told that I would have the might of the BBC's public relations against me, and I did. I was told that, you know, God knows what would happen to your future. Well, in the end I didn't have a future, although I did have a future in other respects or in a different guise.

Q: [2:02:07] I'm struck by the combination in what you said in that speech, and what you've said subsequently about your frustration with the direction that the BBC was taking as a broadcasting institution, and that's clear, and it was a break from the past. And also, your real sense of injustice at the way that staff were being treated and their attitudes and experience being side-lined. Is that what really motivated you at the time?

A: [2:02:35] Yes, I did feel very strongly that. I also thought that radio, which is a medium I love, my favourite medium, the one I would always choose to work with rather than television if I had the choice, was grossly underestimated and under-rated by the management.

Q: [2:03:00] Your speech has since been characterised as an attack on John Birt and his style of management. Is that an accurate reflection, or was your focus broader than that?

A: [2:03:14] I knew John Birt a bit, he'd come to India and I'd escorted him around and we'd had a good relationship. I'd had a relationship with him over the film, *The Pilot Prime Minister*, and we had got on reasonably well together. I do think in retrospect, that perhaps my speech was over-personalised, but the whole thing was so dominated by John Birt, it was – John Birt was the guy who was conducting the revolution. And I think one of the results of it was to contribute to the whole concept of Birtism which became a concept of – in a far wider sphere than just the BBC. Now, maybe that was unfair to John Birt, maybe that was the wrong thing to do, I don't know, but I did it.

Q: [2:04:21] But do you think he had a point that there was a need to cut the size of the BBC in the economic and political climate of the time, and modernise the organisation, so that whoever did it would be seen by programme makers as stifling their creativity and acting against the historic ethos of the BBC?

A: [2:04:40] No, I think that's an over-simplification. Yes, there was a need for change, there was always a need for change and the BBC had changed, it's not as though it was static or anything like that. But I

would argue that change could have been brought about in a humane way, in consultation with the staff, and not in blind imitation of a particular management theory. And I think as I said before, you know, John Birt criticised the BBC as a series of independent baronies. Well, one of the reasons why the BBC was so creative was because departmental heads had a great deal of freedom to decide how they would the run the department, what the programmes would be. They were not – it was not all centralised in the way that it has become. So, that's just one example, you know.

Q: [2:05:51] In July 1994, almost a year to the day since your Radio Academy speech, you resigned from the BBC. How over those 12 months did you arrive at that point?

A: [2:06:07] Well, you see, what happened was I had left the staff, but I was on contract as the BBC South Asia correspondent and so, there's no doubt that I had an official position, but it was a contract position. I had argued that it would not be a good idea for me to work from the office because it would be very difficult for me, very difficult for my successor. I was ordered to work from the office. So, one problem which emerged was I had a bad relationship with my successor David Loyn, who I'm very happy to say now is a good friend of mine, but I thought, and maybe it was wrong to think this, that Loyn had been told, "You come out, you put the boot in Mark Tully, you tell everyone that I'm the BBC now and Mark Tully is nothing." That was the impression I got, and so our relationship was very bad. So, that was one problem which I had. Another problem which I had was that I quite often was asked for my opinion of what was happening [inaudible 2:07:26] etc, and particularly when troubles over the World Service also came up. And I said that – I gave my answer, and then I

was told by the head of news gathering, Chris Cramer, that, "You have to keep your mouth shut." And I said, "I can't keep my mouth shut, because I had already spoken – if I keep my mouth shut – I'm not going to seek opportunities, but if I'm asked questions I have to give my honest opinion," otherwise people would think I've lost my bottle, if I could use the phrase, or that I'd changed my mind, and neither of those I hope were true. And so, that was what bust it in the end, 'cos in the end I got fed up with these conversations, and I said, "Let's break it, let's finish it," you know.

Q: [2:08:19] In the subsequent 20 years or so, since the introduction of Producer's Choice which established an internal market, the marketisation of the BBC with business units and the bimedialism of the BBC, the creation of BBC Broadcast and BBC Production as the dominant parts, as opposed to historically distinct units that did a particular type of job, do you think that your criticism of all of that has been vindicated after 20 years?

A: [2:08:59] I'm often asked that, and I have difficulty in answering, because a) I'm living in India, so I don't see a great deal of the output; b) over the years all my friends have left the BBC. I think it's interesting in view of what I believed what I said that not one of them – no, no, that's not true, one of them lasted through his retirement date and beyond it, but so I'm really out of contact and I don't want to run the risk of appearing to be like I was described by John Birt, "an old soldier polishing my medals," or something like that. So, I really don't know the answer to that one.

Q: [2:09:48] But it was an important moment for you to stand up, put your head above the parapet and say what you think, for the institution that you felt so much about.

A: [2:09:57] It was an important moment for me, it was one of those moments in life when you either have to do what you think is right or feel pretty rotten about not doing it [laughs], you know.

Q: [2:10:16] What was it like in 1994 to say goodbye to the BBC? To no longer be the Delhi correspondent, South Asia correspondent.

A: [2:10:26] Well, of course, it was sad in one way, but a great relief in one way, out of the office away from all that unpleasantness which had taken place, and for which I was in part responsible, you know. Away from that. It was a relief to be able to live one's life without having the chains of being a correspondent, being on 24-hour call, and all the rest of it. But, of course, there was a big sadness about it. I realised – a funny thing, you know, that I suddenly realised how much nicer it would be to leave the BBC or leave any organisation after a good long time, get a gold watch or something like that, a pat on the back, and be sent out into retirement or whatever you want to do next. It is not nice to leave with a sour taste in your mouth and leaving a sour taste in some other people's mouths too.

Q: [2:11:30] But it was important to you that you did what you did.

A: [2:11:32] Well, I thought so, yes.

Q: [2:11:34] So, Mark, what did you do after you left the BBC, beyond working with the BBC?

A: [2:11:40] Well, I thought of doing completely different things. I thought of social service and perhaps working for organisations like Oxfam or helping the poor people in India in some ways. I thought of trying to become more of an academic and I thought in particular of trying to formalise my Hindi. I thought of doing nothing very much, I thought maybe that would be a good thing to do. But in the end, I remember a friend of mine said, "You know, you're fixed, you've got to go on doing journalism otherwise those people who are your critics will say you could only do it under the umbrella of the BBC." So, I decided, yes, I would have to go on doing journalism and I stepped almost straight into making a very expensive documentary on ten years after the Bhopal gas disaster, for ITV of all people. And then, I also moved from there to doing a television show, it's called *The Lives of Jesus*.

Q: [2:13:02] And what other activities did you undertake? You have a lifelong love of the railways. Did you – did that take you somewhere?

A: [2:13:11] [Laughs] Well, I've always been – I've loved the railways and I became Vice-President and I still am of the Indian Steam Railway Society, and I travel by railways, and I made two railway films, one before I retired called, *A Great Railway Journey* for the BBC this was, from Karachi to the Khyber. And I made another one which I'm even more fond of called, *The Last Summer of Indian Steam*, marking the end of steam on railway, and we went on the last steam goods train down to the Rann of Kutch, and that was entirely our own enterprise. I made it with a wonderful news cameraman called Nick Lera who knows about a hundred times more about railways than I do, and he

did a deal, he said he would shoot the film, I would present it, and we could share the proceeds. Well, the proceeds were not enormous, but we did get on Discovery and then we found that Discovery was playing and replaying the film, but we did not have much success in protesting against this, and asking for more money, 'cos they played it many more times than our contract. But I was very proud of that film, and I loved making it.

Q: [2:14:41] Do you have – it might be a silly question – a particularly favourite locomotive?

A: [2:14:46] Well, yes, I'm split really because I'm a London, Midland and Scottish railway man by my childhood, London Euston, Manchester, and their magnificent Pacific locomotives are very much a favourite of mine. But I'm also a member of a society which owns the Sir Nigel Gresley who was of course the great LNER engine designer, and this is the engine which holds the world speed record after steam. Before steam, it was The Mallard – before that it was The Mallard. I think ours was not as fast as The Mallard, but it was after steam the fastest. And I'm a member of that society. And right now, I'm engaged in trying to bring that society and the Indian Steam Railway Society together.

Q: [2:15:53] I want to talk a little bit about a programme that's now been running for over 20 years called, *Something Understood*. It's a really unusual programme on BBC Radio 4, an odd hybrid of genres. Could you explain how it came about and what it is, because it's become a staple of British broadcasting in a way perhaps you didn't expect at the beginning.

A: [2:16:18] I certainly didn't expect it. When I originally got an offer to present it from an independent production company called Unique, I wrote back to them and said, "A) I'm not prepared to come back to England to work on a programme which goes out at six in the morning and six in the evening – 11 in the evening, I'm living in India, and b) you must be mad to ask me because I'm in the doghouse with the management." Then I got a message from these people saying that Michael Green, the same man who had asked me to make the Academy speech, had said to this company that, "If you can get Mark Tully to do it, you can have the programme and you can go to India three times a year to record programmes with him, and he can come back to England two times a year to record programmes." Well, that was a wonderful deal which I could not resist, and it's been an absolute – I can't tell you what a joy that experience has been. It's a joy making the programmes, it's a joy with the wonderful producers I've worked with, and the audience research is a joy. And the interviews, the people I've met, the archbishops, the rabbis, the atheists, the agnostics, philosophers, scientists, all – a huge range of people. So, it's been a tremendous thing for me. And if I may say so, I am proud of being part of the team that started that programme, and which has kept it going.

Q: [2:18:10] Could you explain the format of the programme and what its objectives were? What was – for those who have listened to it, they know it very well, but what originally was the purpose of it?

A: [2:18:22] Well, the purpose of the programme I think – and it's difficult to describe, but I'll explain why. It's difficult to describe because we're talking about Something Understood, but also some things which can only be Something Understood, that's the crucial thing. So, the whole

programme [laughs], can only be partially understood. And it's a programme with – definitely charged to be – have a Sunday feeling about it, but it's not a programme which is directly religious although we discuss religious themes sometimes, but by no means always. But it's a programme which is – we hope to allow people to reflect on things which as I said, are not, you know, things that there are definite and final answers to. And the title comes from the last line of George Herbert's programme, *Prayer*, and if you read that programme as I read it, it's an attempt to describe prayer and what is prayer about, which doesn't reach a final conclusion. And all this fits in very well with my own personal belief in the concept that it is very important to remember in life that there are many things which are partially mysterious and not to get stuck in doctrinal grooves, in fundamentalism, in anything like that. And that openess I think, has been very much part of *Something Understood*.

Q: [2:20:17] Are you able to describe the journey of your own spiritual or religious belief? You started, am I right in saying, as a High Church Anglican –

A: [2:20:28] Yes.

Q: [2:20:30] Within your family. But you've ended up in quite a different space.

A: [2:20:35] Yes, but I would say that my home is Anglicanism, my heart is in Anglicanism, I love the Church of England, I'm shocked by the disrespect which so many journalists and other people show to it, the complete ignorance about the heritage of the Church of England. Its

doctrinal, its ritual, its music, its achievements as well. So, that is my home and I still go to church regularly. But in a funny way I managed to keep that as my home, but at the same time I have been much influenced by Indian religions which I think see things very differently, and they don't believe in the same certainties that Christianity does. But in a way that's a help, because that enables you to say, well, I may have some difficulties with a specific Christian belief or doctrine, but if I look at it the right way and say, I don't have to be certain about exactly what happened at the Resurrection, but if I look at what the Resurrection meant to the people at the time, what it meant in the church fathers and later on and everything, then you get to the heart of the matter. And you then put aside this concern about did the Resurrection actually happen. Now, it's very difficult to explain that and many theologians and many Christians would say I'm just – it's just a cop out, but for me it works.

Q: [2:22:26] It's a kind of equivocation that is not a weakness but a strength. Do you think that your religious identity reflects your wider identity, having started out as a Britain in India, you're now an Anglican in India and you draw on a wide range of influences from your Indian setting?

A: [2:22:51] Well, until this present government in India, I have never felt any difficulty in being an Anglican in Britain, I have frequently gone to Roman Catholic services, I have frequently gone to Hindu services, Hindu celebrations, I visit down the road here the dargah, the Sufi dargah Nizamuddin, I had never had any problem about that. And nobody's ever said to me, "You're British," or "You're Christian," or anything like that. And I don't, you know, parade my Christianity, the last thing I want to give the impression is that I'm a very devout or good

Christian, or anything. In many ways my life has been very irregular indeed. But I've never found that a problem in India, no.

Q: [2:23:44] Is that approach to the secular state changing in India?

A: [2:23:51] Well, you know, maybe I will find the problem as this [inaudible 2:23:56] ideology grows, maybe I will find it, but I haven't found I yet.

Q: [2:24:06] Reflecting back as a whole on your time as a BBC correspondent and representative, has the job that the BBC does in India and the role it plays, changed significantly from when you started?

A: [2:24:28] I can say some things about that, I can't say all completely because I've not been enough involved in it, but I can say certainly that the competition has become much greater for listeners, television has spread much more extensively, there are many more – large number of independent channels now, so I think the radio listening habit has probably declined. I do get a sense that what the BBC says doesn't matter as much as it used to. I mean, I could give you an example, when Rajiv Gandhi did badly in the 1990 election, the Congress went about the place saying, "It was the BBC factor which did for us." Now, I don't really hear that sort of thing going on now. And I think also that the BBC has changed its priorities quite a lot. It's just made a recent news change, at one stage the language programmes were felt to be under threat, now they've suddenly expanded into I think, seven languages, most of which are new languages to broadcast in, you know. But I think it would be true to say, although I say this with hesitation, that the BBC doesn't have the

same presence now as it had when I was working for it. But I must repeat, that's not entirely due to Mark Tully or any ridiculous idea like that.

Q: [2:26:16] A curious question, but what role does shortwave versus FM or online broadcasting play in the way that you engage with audiences?

A: [2:26:25] Well, shortwave was hugely important and I believe still is important, because shortwave gets – FM has such limitations of coverage, shortwave is the medium which is used by those people who don't have – who live in villages and places like that, who don't have the same opportunity to listen to FM or digital or anything like that. Yes, of course, shortwave's influence and importance is declining, but I think it's still important as long as not every Indian is wired up to a computer and all that sort of thing, and able to listen by Wi-Fi and all the other ways you do listen. I think, you know, shortwave is important, yes.

Q: [2:27:25] And what do you think is the essence of BBC news reporting? What are the enduring news values that need to be protected for the future?

A: [2:27:38] Well, I think the enduring values of a news reporter for the BBC is to tell the truth as he sees it, to be well informed in telling that truth, and to not get his own person involved too much in the stories he might tell. And to do his best in the difficult task of balancing or reporting accurately two sides of a question and leaving the listener or the viewer to make up their mind.

Q: [2:28:22] Mark Tully, thank you very much indeed.

[END OF RECORDING – 02:28:34]