

This is Your Heritage –
South Gloucestershire Stories of the Indian Community

Interview: Abishek Ravindran full interview Audio (07-09-2022)

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Interviewer: Hardik Gaurav

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Location: At home in Patchway

Interview

Participant prefix key:

I: Interviewer

R: Respondent

Transcript begins 00:00

I: So hello Abishek.

R: Hello Hardik.

I: I'll be interviewing Abishek at his beautiful home in Patchway and today is 7th September 2022. So let's start with your introduction, please introduce.

R: My name is Abishek and I live in Patchway, Charlton Hayes, an area of Patchway, and I work as a Mechanical Engineering Manager in Bristol and also I am a part time lecturer in the City of Bristol College teaching engineering subjects, so that's me. I've got a family, I've got a lovely wife and two kids, the kids are a five year old and I've got a recently beautiful girl, six months old, yeah, that is me.

I: Can you also tell us your date of birth and where you were born?

R: My date of birth is 16.09.84 and I was born in a place called Madurai in India, it's part of South Tamil Nadu, so yeah, I was born and brought up there, so all my life I have lived in Madurai before coming to the UK.

I: So in Madurai there was a...

R: ... Temple.

I: ... there was a place, a particular place where you were?

R: I think, well I can say I was born in, there's a big river going through Madurai, I was born on the south side of the river but I was always brought up in the north side of the river, so a place called, so one of our friend's hospital, Bose Hospital it's called, that was the hospital I was born.

I: So Madurai is divided into two?

R: Yeah, north and south Madurai, so I'm a Madurai, because of the river actually, yeah. So yeah, it's interesting, it's called a temple city, so it's called the Meenakshi Temple, the famous Meenakshi Temple is there and all of Madurai is constructed around the Meenakshi Temple. So all the streets, there's a north street, south street, east street, west street and there are like eight or nine streets around that, so there is all the city there, and I grew up in a new part of the city actually which is the north side of Madurai, yeah.

I: Do you have any memories of your childhood growing up there?

R: A lot, actually, yeah, there's a lot, I think, because I...

I: Would you like to share any fond memories?

R: Yeah, I've always been, because I was brought up in a big town I was always a town boy and I remember days going into, well, Madurai City, trying to run with my friends, try and get my moped bike and well, at the time it was Splendor, I think you've heard of Splendor? You take the bike and you've got a few friends running into the town going for, what do you call? Shopping, you can go for food, sit there, chat around and well you can, I do remember going into lots of book shops there, there are some market stalls, there's quite a lot of places you can visit in Madurai and hang out for a lot of time, so that's something that I definitely remember being in Madurai, yeah.

I: Is there a major festival that is celebrated there in Madurai? Because as you said it's a temple city, right?

R: Yeah, it is called Meenakshi Temple where, Shivan and Durga (Meenakshi) they are the major gods and because Meenakshi is what they, they call Madurai is ruled by Meenakshi, so it's called Meenakshi Town, or Madurai came from one of these trees called Madrum, that's where the name comes in, but it is definitely famous for the Meenakshi Temple and the major festival is marriage between Meenakshi and Shiva, so that is the major festival, so it happens for like almost a week. So they have a big chariot pulled around the city, they've got thousands of people surrounding and the god Vishnu comes in, Vishnu was actually supposed to be the brother of Meenakshi, so he comes towards the river and that's celebrated as a big thing, he comes up to

the river and for some reason he can't attend the wedding. So that kind of procession, he comes to everyone's house, he kind of, even today, he goes to every street in the city and shows okay, I am coming this year, and the colour of his clothes decide how the year is going to be, so everybody is eagerly waiting for what colour of clothes he's going to wear and yeah, it's like a big festival and everybody is out and about, everybody is enjoying, partying, music around, and everybody is celebrating and having fun actually. So yeah, that is a big festival generally going on in the city.

I: Is there a fair that they arrange there, kind of a...?

R: Yeah, usually what happens is every shop in the city knows this big event is coming so they actually put a stall outside the shops, there's like every house, they actually give buttermilk for everyone, so literally they have, because it's usually done in Summer, it's so hot, so they actually have some Paneer or what do you call the liquid? The rose water, they actually have rose water for people who come and visit and want to see Vishnu, they actually pour, because they normally are hot they actually pour these waters, give them for the buttermilk so that it cools them down. So it's not a single fair because he comes up to the river and he's, so he actually dips into the river, so everybody follows him, the whole city follows him up to the river, they see him dunk in the river and they come back and send him off after that.

I: So the whole city is kind of a carnival?

R: A carnival, the whole city is carnival and I think there are like 30 to 40 villages around that, so everybody from those villages comes to visit, so literally the city is fully packed, you can't go in or go out, so yeah, it's normally a big celebration actually, yeah.

I: So did you used to go regularly, every year?

R: I think yeah, it happens in and around you, so I think when you're there, who gets to see the Vishnu closer and who gets to see Meenakshi's wedding, I think that's the kind of thing, so everybody goes to that Meenakshi Temple to see the wedding. The wedding is hard to see because it's within the temple, so not everybody can fit in there, so you do see that nowadays on telly but you do go to the procession of Vishnu which is really, really big. So as long as you see the Vishnu procession, that's, a kind of everybody at least sees the procession actually, so that kind of thing happens, yeah. It's really good.

I: It sounds beautiful.

R: Yeah, it is actually, colourful as well, yeah.

I: Your schooling was all in Madurai?

R: Yeah, schooling was all in Madurai. So I was born in Madurai, brought up in Madurai, my father, grandfather all were brought up in Madurai, which means my

grandfather's side, my mother's side, mostly they're from Tirunelveli, so that's south of Madurai actually, but because I was born in Madurai, my schoolings were all in Madurai which means, well I studied in a state board, sorry, matriculation, not board actually, matriculation, and my school happened to be one of the schools, very small school, it was not a big school actually, but usually you do get only 20 to 30 people in a class compared to other schools I've seen like 100 pupils and they've got different sections and stuff. So we've got a small school which is only any people around the city at the time, so you only get people who have big businesses and stuff, so there's only a few people there and you do get a good bonding with your friends. I studied from my kindergarten to my 12 study there, so you grew up with the same sort of friends for over 14 years and the staff, you get a close connection with the teachers as well which is really good, yeah, so it was interesting schooling actually.

I: Are you still in touch with them?

R: Yeah, everyone is scattered around obviously but yeah, whenever I go back to India I just keep in touch, we go out, we hang out and yeah, so it's really, really good. Yeah, schooling, it's been fortunate I've been in that kind of environment actually, so yeah, definitely.

I: Was it an English speaking school?

R: It is an English medium school, yeah, it is an English medium school. So even though I was from Tamil Nadu, it's an English medium school, every subject I learnt was in English and in India there is a second language and a third language and for some reason after six or seven standard actually I moved from Tamil as my second language to French which means I only know a little bit of reading and writing of my own language at the time. So English was predominant in my life and even at that time, even after college, English was something you do need to get the job so it was more convenient for me learning English during the schooling time. The teachers actually came, had training from America, they used to be teachers in America at the time, so they came along, so their teaching system means they don't force everyone to learn anything, so they'll be always relaxed. So if you study, you study, if you don't study, that's absolutely fine, there was no pressure on studies as well, so you sit there, study, you're kind of in a relaxed environment, I can say that, so they let you do anything you want in the class. Obviously they do need marks and stuff but there was never ever big pressure from the schooling to score higher or lower and stuff like that, so yeah, it was really good. I was fortunate to have that, yeah.

I: So when you grew up you did your college there?

R: Yeah, I did my Bachelor's back in India actually, my Bachelor's back in India, so I studied not far from Madurai actually, south of Madurai. So at the time a big engineering drive was going on in India so everybody was looking for engineers, I think there was around 200, 300 colleges open at the time when I was going to scholar, when I actually joined my Bachelor's there, and it was either you are an engineer or engineer, those are the options you've got because that many colleges,

everybody was recruiting. So I always had a passion to do, I wanted to be a scientist at the start, at a young age, I thought a scientist signs had always been in my head, always been my goal. I'm good at maths, I'm not great at maths but I know, I can understand maths, so I'm good at maths and science, so engineering seemed to be the right option at the time. So I went into a field called manufacturing engineering and one of the college, I got into a college close by which was okay and it's around like 20 kilometres away from the city, so you do take a bus to the college. So because there's a lot of colleges, there's only like six or seven colleges around that Madurai city, I can say that, who do engineering and because of a lot of students study there I think they had around 20 to 30 buses going from the city to the college, so like 60 students a bus, it's a big, like everyday morning exercise, and because I go on a single bus you do get everybody in the bus, you do get a good rapport with them and it's like 20 minutes, it's 20 mile, 20 kilometres, it almost takes an hour and a half or an hour to get there, so you do have a good time in the bus and you just chat around. Some of my best friends are in the bus actually, which was really good actually, yeah.

I: So moving further, what got you to the UK?

R: At the time my family, my father got separated from my family when I was young, which means my mother was taking care of us, myself and my sister. So I have a sister, so myself and my sister, so it was me as a boy in the family with the responsibility to earn in the family. So my father's father was supporting us in a way at the time, so which means he was actually giving us money for the studies and stuff which was okay for me to pursue my studies and my mother was owning a business actually, she was owning a shop at the time, and I had a choice whether am I going to invest my life in a shop or business? Because business seems to be the main normal for most of my friends for who had done schooling and some of the friends from the college as well, either I can go the business route or use my...

I: Family business?

R: ... no, the family business or any kind of business I can get into the business route or my grandfather wants me to pursue law, everybody had a choice of something, oh he can be a pilot or something, you are tall you can be a pilot, okay, there's too many options at the time, and I thought okay, I'm doing my engineering so I do want to pursue engineering. So that was, I always had the passion, so I kind of gave myself a lot of extra courses, I used to go to Chennai all the time to study extra because at the time there is of course many engineers coming out, it's very hard to get a job, you do need to be standing out from the crowd somehow so that was my drive. So I thought okay, and coming to UK happened to be an accident basically. So one of my friends was trying for Australia, so I thought okay, I used to go along with him because he was one of my best school friends, so I used to go and see what, go along with him and see what is the option for him for Australia and slowly driven me, okay, Australia has two years of study, UK is just one year of study, so one year of Master's, we can finish Master's and if you've got a Master's degree in one year come back to India, then he can come back to India and start earning. So at least 10 or 15 thousand rupees should do and I can take care of my family because I do see my career as I

need to take care of my family, I need to get my sister married and all these things with them, so all I need is a job, so I'm trying to do something that can secure my job. So the UK seems to be an option at the time and I didn't intend to stay in the UK at the time for a long time but I didn't know much about the UK because I didn't know anyone in this country at the time, so I thought okay, the study is one year and UK universities are much more well known for engineering generally so you kind of weigh that option and I thought okay, engineering. So that's why I thought okay, go for the UK, one year engineering study, the aim was to get 10 to 15 thousand rupees salary when I come back to India, so that was my objective. There was no drive to go abroad or anything at that time, but yeah, here I am.

I: What year did you come here?

R: 2006. The University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, so I was in Scotland initially.

I: So in 2006 you took the plane from India, from Madurai or?

R: From Chennai, yeah, we used Chennai, yeah.

I: Chennai to Heathrow and when you, so what is your first flight?

R: It was my first flight ever and also because I was going, we kind of convinced my sister to go as well. My sister wasn't at the same university though, she applied and got a placement in London, Westminster University, I got a placement in Strathclyde, so we both came, it was the first flight for both of us, so yeah, it was interesting.

I: So when you first got out of the plane, what was the feeling? What was the temperature, was it summer?

R: I think at the time, because my grandmother and grandfather, they used to travel to America, they'd travel, I think they did a big tour for America, they always tell a lot of stories, so when I grew up always they have stories of oh, America, this is what they have, so they gave us a free hotel, all the stories you hear and everything. So I was all suited up for the aircraft, I thought yeah, there's no travel, I was suited up because I was going abroad and when I landed I was in Heathrow and my sister got off and she went to London and I've got a connecting flight between London and Glasgow. Apparently the flight was 20 minutes late so because I had a lot of stories from my grandparents I just went to the desk and I said I can't go on this flight, can I go on the next flight or probably the morning flight? They said the next flight is in the morning, would you want to take that? I said yeah, that's fine. So they asked me to go out of Heathrow and stay in a hotel, Holiday Inn, that's the first time, I think that one of the Holidays, it literally has a high ceiling, and I thought okay, you are definitely in a foreign country and a big hotel and the buffet dinner was a complementary there and there's a big room with two beds and I thought well, that is good, that feels nice.

I: The flight was paying for that?

R: The flight was paying for that actually, and so was the airport compensating because the flight was delayed 20 minutes, you do get all these perks, and what did I do first? Get out of the hotel, like 20 or 25 minutes, went to a shop, you find an India, to get a card and I said, can I call back India and say I am reached here? Yeah, so yeah, walking through those days I thought okay, yeah, you are definitely in a different country and the first time outside of parents, family and everything, yeah, it was interesting, yeah.

I: Did you arrange everything, your stay and everything?

R: Yeah, I think that the university, I did stay in the university at the time, so the stay was arranged, but yeah. Seeing on a map and coming here was completely different, Glasgow, I thought okay, from the airport all I need is a taxi to go to my accommodation and when I came here I actually got a bus, the bus dropped me in a place which is, I think, oh this is, I have sent the university there, the university which I was it's in the middle of the city, so they dropped me in one corner of the university but I actually have to go to the other corner of the university for my accommodation, literally with big baggage, and I thought okay, I looked at the road, it was steep like that and I thought oh no, this is just typical. That's when I realised a map doesn't justify, because in India you get everything flat, you don't realise, you don't have these ups and downs, so yeah, I carried all along with a big suitcase and stuff, and also there was a shipment coming with a big box as well at the time because they didn't know what I have here or not have here, so they were a bit worried so they had rice and all the things and everything coming in a big container as well. So yeah, it came to my room, it was a big journey for me to come from India to get into the room at least, yeah, it was interesting. I think there was a person I asked for a direction on the way, I said, oh, is it that way to the university? And she was an Indian and she said, oh no, no, you have to go the other way around, and I thought no, the map says this way, I thought okay, she went out and luckily I didn't take her advice or else I would have done a big detour, but it turns out afterwards she happened to be one of my good friends actually after that, so yeah. It was good actually, yeah, the university, it's definitely an interesting change in my life actually, yeah.

I: So you did your master's?

R: I did my master's, yeah.

I: So how would you remember those days of master's? What difference did you find in the education system here from India?

R: I think culturally, I think there's a lot in India are fed, spoon fed, so this is what you have to learn, this is what you have to do in an exam. So I remember in one of the classes I went to the class and they're talking about engineering management or something like that, so we went to class and the assignment is engineering management design or design, three words, you have to write 2000 words on that, go ahead. Is there any kind of? Nope, it's up to you, you have to write three words, you go and research on that three words to write an essay and I thought okay, there

was literally no guidance. Initially everyone thought, oh there's no guidance and stuff, but actually it encourages me, forces me to go to the library, force me to do things by myself, I think that's something the Indian education system is still not. They want scholars but they're not training engineers, they want engineers to finish the course but they're not preparing engineers to face a life, actually. So it's something I felt the universities here actually do, help you to actually do something yourself and face the life of engineering, all the problem solving and everything, you do need to do it yourself, which was really, really good actually.

I: So was the professor there to guide you?

R: There were, if you go, if you have to fix an appointment then go and talk to them and they will help you but they don't give you the answers, they guide you and say, this is what you should do, and now it's my turn to go and do things, which was really helpful. So during my work it helped quite a lot, so you don't wait for someone, you don't always ask things, you are a do-er rather than just a follower, so I think that's the kind of difference. I'm still seeing Indian, some of my friends are do-ers rather than, sorry, followers rather than do-ers, so there's a good difference of that one, yeah, definitely, that's one good thing about education in the UK actually, yeah.

I: Apart from academics at the college, did you find many friends? Did you find your group?

R: Yeah, we were in accommodation where, luckily I was in accommodation where like the floor had eight separate rooms and out of eight, six were Indians, so you do get into an Indian group and I was a south Indian and I'd never known Hindi in all my life and I was in a group of Mauratis and Punjabis and there was one south Indian which was good, but everyone speaks Hindi fluently. They do know I don't speak Hindi so they were kind enough to translate in English but yeah, they always say oh, you can't do anything with, like we can't talk anything freely around the Ferengis, you always have to translate to you and everything. It has always been my thing but they kind of accepted and we had a blast, a lot of good times actually. We'd go out together shopping, I don't think we partied that much but we enjoyed a lot, we travelled, we had fun, we played games every evening, we watched telly together, if one got sick everybody comes and helps you and we found jobs together, we go to jobs and yeah, you do find that these are your family and stuff. So yeah, it was really, really good during my university days and those are some of the best friends as well actually, yeah.

I: Especially I've seen that lots of people to go out from your country and go somewhere else and if you find your own country's people then that's the one thing that will make you connected to your country, it's very different.

R: It's quiet different and emotionally, because you know they are in a similar situation as you and the bonding you get is much more stronger actually and much more special, I can say that actually, yeah.

- I: Okay, so you did your master's and then did you come back?
- R: No, I managed to get a job while doing my master's. So I applied because I was in a rush to earn in my personal situation, I needed to get earning. Once I started my parttime job, I asked my mum, because my mum was running a shop I asked her to okay, stop running your shop, I can provide from here, because my sister also was here, so we got time to earn, so we thought okay, now is for me to earn. So I started applying for jobs, I kind of applied for like a thousand jobs during half of my, because I did a lot of studies in India, I thought okay, some of my qualifications back in India should help here, so that is why I kind of applied. Luckily enough I got two interviews and I got selected in one of the interviews which was really good and I started as a draftsman in a manufacturing company.
- I: Okay, where was that?
- R: It was in Glasgow, I have to travel like an hour and a half outside Glasgow on a bus everyday but it was a part time job so the job was much more practical. So all the stuff I've learnt, all the theory before, and I went into a practical environment, that's when you apply engineering which was really eye opening, okay, this is what you do. You kind of didn't know these other things and what other things you learnt, how can be applied in engineering, it was much more, well what do you call, interesting for me at the time, and it was more Scottish people, I was the only Indian in the company I think, and it was trying to understand the language and trying to get to know the culture, how they deal with it, and their way of banter and their way of talking, it's hard to get to my head. They were all friendly, initially it was like hard to understand how things worked, but once I got to know them, once I'd worked with them quite a while, I get to know they're all friendly and still they've been good friends actually so far and really, really caring, a lot of people really caring actually.
- I: How much time to do you think it took for you to get...
- R: Get to know these people?
- I: ... get to know that kind of banter, integrating?
- R: I think it took almost a year, a year and a half easily. Initially I didn't understand the jokes, I didn't understand what they were saying, the language itself is not English, it's Scottish, that was a big barrier initially, and I had to watch a lot of TV shows, I had to watch a lot of, I had to go and speak to a lot of people. I think I did, during Uni I did some part time jobs which helped me a little bit but I had to learn a lot on my own, speak to a lot of people, get my communication sorted and you do get lonely during those times actually, and I think that when the redundancies started, the recession started at the time, in 2008 and 2009, and I lost my job at the time, the company shut down and it was really hard. Initially I'm trying to do all these things and it was really hard and there was two choices either for me, because I either stick in this country, I only had like six months or one year left in my visa at the time, so

either I try for more jobs there or go back to India. So I came back to India to see whether I could try jobs and stuff here in India.

I: And how old were you at that time?

R: At the time I was 24 I would have thought, 24.

I: Still young.

R: Still young, well, now thinking about it, because at the time I needed to save money, that was always my intention thing, engineering is something I thought I need that, if I'm person with a career it's going to be in engineering. So when I went to India I thought okay, apply for a job there, I went for an interview, I think it was Bangalore, funnily enough they paid for the flight as well there, I don't know how that happened, but they paid for the flight, I went for an interview and when I was in interview there was like 200 to 300 people in that vicinity applying for the same jobs, I think there was 50 jobs on offer and there were 300 or 400 people standing around filling applications, and I thought okay, this is really going to be hard, and the guy who looked me said, oh, you're overqualified, you studied in the UK, why are you applying here? And he said, no, don't apply here, you're overqualified, I can see under overqualified and realised it was basic level engineering and that's when I realised okay, I do know where I belong because when I was in this country I can go to a job, I can get a job there. So I managed to do something from nothing which was really good so which means I have to try a little bit harder.

I: You realised your worth when you went for that?

R: Yes, in India. So I thought okay, then I came here, did my studies, I pursued other studies, master's degree, there was another master's in Brunel in London.

I: What year?

R: It was 2010 actually.

I: So 2010 you decided to come back?

R: I actually came back and did a master's. I think I had been for only a couple of months to India and I came back.

I: What was the name of the college?

R: It was the Brunel University in London. So I came here and I did a master's, again, before finishing the master's I got a job but that was in Edinburgh, so I had to travel back and forth to finish my master's degree.

I: What was the difference between the master's you did before and this one?

- R: Initially I did my manufacturing as a Batchelors, came here and did my computer design, so CAD, and this new, the last one I did was advanced manufacturing, so it was kind of going back to my manufacturing background, which was good. I got a good proper job after that which means I kind of – you already go Edinburgh, it was a new city and again, you do meet a lot of people, you settle there and I was saving, I was a contractor, I was saving a lot of money, so money was not the issue at the time so it was much easier.
- I: The good thing is you were already familiar with the Scottish...
- R: ... the Scottish culture, which was another good thing actually, and Edinburgh was beautiful, Edinburgh was a beautiful city, and everybody was friendly and compared to Glasgow you need to know the Glasgow but Edinburgh, anybody can go there and have a good time, so that was a completely different culture there, that was really good.
- I: Anything more Indians?
- R: I don't think there was more Indians, I can say that, yeah, even though I did stay with a few Indians there but you do have a mix of Indians, you do have a mix of UK friends, and at the time I was thinking okay, I'm in this country, I will stay with, mostly I stayed with Indians after that, but I always tried to make friends with localites there and what's the point of being in a city where I can't know the city? So being friends with some local people and then go out with them and yeah, being out and about a lot actually. I used to go to Rotaract, one of these, Rotary is one of the Indian, I think there's worldwide there's a Rotary club, there's a younger version of things with Rotaract, so I used to go to that club and they used to have a lot of evenings, like voluntary evenings and stuff happening there, so I used to go with them, so yeah, trying to somehow manage to meet people, which is something I like to do anyway, so yeah.
- I: At that point of time, what was your sister doing?
- R: My sister had finished her degree because we came together, so she finished her degree, she got a job in London, so she was working, but she didn't get a proper fulltime job, so she was doing the job and at the time when I got to Edinburgh she left back to India, so she left back to India. So because an Indian family, they were looking for a groom for her, so yeah, she was working in India a little bit here and there but finding a groom was...
- I: Is she older than you?
- R: ... she's one year, two years older than me, two and a half, two years older than me, yeah, so I needed to get her married first before I get married. So she was in India with my mum and I was here earning. I'd moved on a few companies since then, been in Edinburgh, then from Edinburgh I moved to Wales, Pembrokeshire in Wales.

I: What year was that?

R: Sorry?

I: What year was that?

R: That was 2012 I think, 11 or 12, 12 I think, 2012 I was in Pembrokeshire in Wales and then moved to Sheffield and Pembrokeshire, I could take that, I did have a good time in Pembrokeshire, it was a beautiful place, yeah. Have you been to Pembrokeshire, yeah?

I: Yeah.

R: Well it's beautiful there and especially the accommodation I had from the company was a five bedroomed mansion next to the waters, from my balcony is like, the balcony is that big and once I go on the balcony I can see the ships coming in the docks, Pembrokeshire docks and stuff.

I: Were you sharing it with someone?

R: I was sharing with five other people but those people only come on weekdays, mostly, sometimes they don't come on weekdays, they're all in London, so which means I get the whole house at the weekend. So I've got a five bedroomed mansion at the weekend and I've got, I had a car at the time and I used to go and take photographs, go for surfing, all these things, but it's wonderful for some time but then you get bored. Pembrokeshire is far, far away from anyone, the population, you don't see any people, you get really, well, lonely there, easily. So I thought okay, that's enough for me and then I moved to Sheffield, I got another job there and thought okay, move to Sheffield, and Sheffield is a beautiful place, I met a lot of local people there, loads of fun and that's when my sister got married. So my sister got married and then things...

I: When did you move to Sheffield?

R: ... I think it was 2013, I think, 2013, one year there and moved to Sheffield and I think after Sheffield I moved to Lincoln for a brief time, for six or seven months, and then after Lincoln, then I came here to Bristol. And yeah, I joined here.

I: What year was that, that you moved from?

R: 2014, end of 2014.

I: End of 2014. So you applied?

- R: I applied, I think I applied for a lot of jobs, I think I applied for Lincoln and a lot of things at the same time. So I got a job in Lincoln, in Siemens, because I applied for this and got selected but nothing came back because they have to do a background check and a lot of things, it didn't come back for a lot of time, so after eight months they called and said, oh we've got a job for you, can you come and join? Okay, and I came here, and yeah, it was history then. Eight long years now, it is really good actually, yeah.
- I: So what's the best thing that you've found good about this job?
- R: I think Bristol, well I got married in Bristol, well I had my kids in Bristol.
- I: So did you meet her here?
- R: Yeah, I think, no, I didn't meet her here to be fair.
- I: Was it arranged?
- R: It was an arranged marriage at the time. So because my sister has got married, now I am off the hook, it's my turn to get married, so because I moving a few jobs at the time, my mum was waiting for me to settle. So once I got this job, either I find a girl myself or my mum is going to find a girl, so it was arranged between me and my mum, so obviously my mum won and it was a marriage of convenience. So I was literally it's the case of not seeing the girl before marrying, so I think I flew to India and surprised her, a friend, I spent a couple of days with her, in terms of talking, I think we went to a few places, get to know here, and then yeah, a couple of months we got married actually and then brought here directly, so yeah.
- I: She's also from Madurai?
- R: No, she's from Mumbai actually, she's from Mumbai.
- I: How did this happen?
- R: It was matrimonial sites basically, yeah. So my mum went to Mumbai and saw her and said okay, she likes the family and everything, so then I went and saw her and I kind of...
- I: You went to Madurai?
- R: ... no, Mumbai, and saw her, I spent a couple of days with her and okay, everything is good, and also want to know whether she likes me because I don't want the marriage of, I don't want a forced marriage, yeah? So we both like each other and then, okay, let's start the life and then we got married in Mumbai.
- I: What year was that?

- R: It was 2016, it was the February. So my marriage was on 12th February, her birthday is on 13th February and Valentine's Day is on 14th February, so I made sure that there was a, like they do see astrology and there was a date on 12, I was thinking we are getting the 12, there is no other way.
- I: Every year a three day celebration.
- R: Three days celebration, three days in a row, I don't have to forget remembering, it's close to Valentine's Day, yeah, it's much easier, so yeah. It's convenient, one gift for three days, well that didn't happen, but one gift for three days, but yeah, we got married and we came here.
- I: So how much time after marriage did you come here?
- R: I think within a month actually, within three weeks and stuff, so yeah, I was working here so I think that reason it was much faster, so I took her here. I wanted to come with her anyway, I didn't want to go alone, and initially we didn't have a car, so even sometimes I get the office car which I can take her for shopping or anything, apart from that we didn't have a car so we used the bus and we used public transportation or you walk somewhere. So far as the new place, she has never been abroad as well so it was very interesting for her to see the country and everything. I didn't have many Indian prior to marriage, which is good, because we started making friends as a couple and we've met a lot of friends now which is really good actually.
- I: So were you living in Bradley Stoke?
- R: I was living in Bradley Stoke at the time, yeah, Bradley Stoke.
- I: In the same house?
- R: No, Bradley Stoke, it's in Winsbury Way. So I was alone, I was in shared accommodation before marriage, so I got a one bed house in Bradley Stoke, so we moved to the one bed house there. So we lived there for like almost a year I think, almost a year, and then almost a year and then she got pregnant and then we kind of looked for a two bed flat and we moved to somewhere in Bradley Stoke and then we looked for houses and stuff and then we moved here after that actually, so yeah. So living in Bristol as a couple, we managed to find loads of friends and they were all helpful and then during pregnancy, the Tamil community, I think because I kind of got joined into the Tamil community at the time, so the Tamil Community Association, so that's when I thought okay, new to the country and my wife was new, which means she needs to have some people to talk to, so I kind of got involved with the Tamil community, so you met some good friends actually, they're good friends until now. Here, especially in a different country, I actually got depression and I couldn't talk for a few years, literally I could say, if you say something I can't reply to you, I can say oh yeah, if somebody asks me if I can do something, but I got stuck, my voice, I couldn't speak at all which actually this was for a year and a half actually it happened, my voice was like that. That's when I came back to India to look for jobs and I couldn't

Speak to anyone, everybody thought you can't speak in your own language now, and the recession happened.

I: Was it because you were feeling lonely here?

R: I was lonely, I had a pressure, I had to get my sister married and the job is gone, I've got nothing to do here, it's a lot of pressure from everyone and I went to the doctors and they gave me a pill or something, antidepressant pill, I took for a couple of days and I thought okay, I'm not going to stay on antidepressant pill, that's something I don't want to do, I'm still young, 23 or 24, I don't want to be living on antidepressant pills for the rest of my life. So I kind of changed, well I was stuck in that scenario for a while and that's why I thought okay, either I can live in India as a failed person or something or go back to the UK again, do my studies, get back to the world.

I: That was then it happened that you applied for the job there and he says you're overqualified?

R: Yeah, that's when I was overqualified then I pushed myself and came back here, okay, I'm doing another study there, this time I know that I'm not going to get an extended visa, but it gave me a different environment, a completely different environment, I've got some new friends and that gave me a breath taking] – fresh, okay, now I can deal with things and have a completely fresh start again. Then I got a job and everything which was really good actually but it can take people into bad places actually, yeah, a lot of depression in this country.

I: Yeah, if you don't push yourself.

R: Yeah, it's very hard, it's very hard, you do need to come from that, I think in this country they do, their folks they call, well their families are generally close by, people do get depression but they do have some support with them, but here, you're far away, and it's very hard to get support, yeah, it's hard, but it's lucky I got through and talking also got better a little bit and that's when after moving I kind of talked to a lot of people, trying to improve my communication as well, which helped a lot and now I'm trying to stop talking, but I can't stop talking.

I: Yes, and joining groups helps as well.

R: Joining a group, that's one of the reasons I joined a lot of groups. Initially I've never been socialising at all but once I came back in Edinburgh I met a lot of Rotary people, local people, that's when I changed my mind to okay, I do need to integrate with a lot of people and get to know them because if you're not comfortable in this country, in India, wherever I go I know someone, you know where to get to, you do know people and if I'm in this country I need to be in that kind of scenario. If I don't know I just go and find out, I go and speak to them, even though my language, obviously I've come from India, and especially from southern India, it was really not that fluent, so then I had to speak to a lot of people to improve the language and yeah, it was a struggle initially. Especially in Glasgow when I was there, nobody understood me at

the time and literally trying to talk to them, I kind of toned down my language, broken into words so that they can understand a little bit. At one point in time I was getting fluent and I kind of acted as a mediator, we had some clients from Saudi Arabia came here to Scotland and there was Polish builders there who were doing a lot of building and making the machines, so I was kind of a translator for guys who came from Arabia to Scottish and to Polish, at the time, this is what he's saying, this is what he's saying, because you have lived with people in the university, you have lived with people from Arabia, people from Nigeria, you do get a lot of people, you kind of understand what sort of, the way they speak, and it kind of helped me in a certain way but the language I've never seen, even though people don't understand, your attitude towards that is the key, people sometimes take it personally. If I was in Madurai and some, what we call, not white person but even like a black person came in and tried to talk mother Tamil, it's going to be hard for them, they're going to be struggling, they're going to be different, so I see myself as the reverse and say okay, I'm from a different country, obviously, so I do need to learn all these things one by one.

I: Do you think when you're talking about fluency, it's not only English but the accent as well?

R: Yeah, the accent was thick, I do speak so fast, even though I do speak so fast now, but at least I don't stress on some words now but I do speak so fast, my accent was a proper Indian accent. Even now, being a lecturer, I do teach students and even though they pick up on some of these words, I've always used this when I was young so why would they change unless I use it suddenly in a sentence? So yeah, it's ever changing, unless somebody tells you, oh, come on, correct it. The one thing I find, at least in engineering communities, the more you talk a simplistic line, so stick to the point, keep it simple and stupid, that was the kind of mantra, so you kind of keep it simple, you don't have to use big words. All my words have always been small words, no complicated words or anything like that, so that kept me going for a long time, but always I found at the end of the day expressing your emotions and what you have to communicate with the other person, as long as you have done that, that's pretty much your job, so yeah. So it has been quite an interesting journey in terms of language, I can say that, yeah. People are still searching for words actually, because always, because I came from a time where I needed to fit in to survive, so I always try to improve what place I am, even with the Indian community, I have to do that, so what sort of words I use, because people come from different backgrounds as well.

I: Are you a citizen here like second generation, third generation as well, so they're [inaudible 0:48:22].

R: Indeed yeah, and during my studies in London, I've seen people from India for the first generation who came for studies all sat in one corner or one group, people who were born and brought up here, Indians, are sat in another group in the same class. I get along with both because I do, for them there is obviously subtle differences or something, I get along with them all and I ask them why don't you? No, but they don't understand things themselves. So there is definitely a divide, I can see that, I've seen it in other places as well but definitely a divide, but everybody has the same emotions

in a way, so once you're genuine to them or genuine to them, everybody will accept you, that's something I've always found actually, yeah.

I: There are helpful people in this country? yeah.

R: There are people always, it doesn't matter where you are, people will always help, that's something every time, you're not alone in this place at all, anytime and being part of this Tamil Association and later in my office there is a Race and Culture Network, I've joined that as well, being part of those you do get new people, like the new Tamil people coming to the community or coming to Bristol, we're kind of being the focal point for them. So we don't know what to do, there is a WhatsApp group and all the things, everybody, it doesn't matter where they are, always try to go out of my way and help as much as I can.

I: At the moment you are a part of Tamil Association and how many other associations?

R: I am part of Tamil Association and a part of the AICA now, thanks for Alka and Shiv, recently, and I was part of the South Gloucestershire Race and Culture Network and internally within work there is a Race and Culture Network, so I was part of that as well. So yeah, I can call that as a close, there's quite a few there.

I: So what other if you can tell, a few things that these organisations do?

R: Initially I started the Race and Culture Network within the workplace and I was not part of the Tamil Association as well at the time. When my child was born, well when my wife was pregnant, that's when I realised okay, I do need people in this community, that's when I thought okay, I'm going to go out of my way to help the Tamil Association so that I get a lot of people, to know a lot of people, so that when my child grows up he has some support system around that. So we got a lot of people, quite a lot of people helped us and it's good to have the Tamil Association at the back and we kind of, once he was born and he was growing up at the time, and I realised quite a lot of racial problems currently in this country was going on and one thing, I don't want my son to grow up in a world where he still has issues with race and culture, trying to adapt, because I had to do a lot of work to adapt to this culture and this kind of community, I don't want my son to go through the same thing. This small thing I can do in an organisation, if I can change a little bit, okay, that will help, at least it will have a ripple effect in the community, that's what I was hoping for at the time. So the main intention was raising awareness of different cultures, so not just my culture from Tamil Nadu or Indian culture, from Spanish culture, from Chinese culture, from Japanese, wherever they come from, just to accept the fact that there are different cultures, not just while mate or the white dominated country anymore, it's from different cultures. As you can see a lot of people are coming into the company at the time so this kind of got a little bit famous, that's when I got a link with Shiv. Shiv came to my organisation and he was part of, the President of AICA, at the time he is still a chair of the SGREN, I think he came as a speaker and Shiv and another person came in and he saw me and we exchanged contact and I came, joined the network which was in South Gloucestershire Race and Equality Network, so I

thought okay, not just doing within the office, he kind of invited me as a keynote speaker in SGREN. So I went there and did a keynote speaking and then we got involved in that one and worked with South Gloucestershire on various issues and stuff. So we used to meet with councillors and try to give them these other issues and it was quite intensive, good work was going on at that time, and that's when I started, I think, the Race and Culture, that's when it all started. The Tamil Community quite like organising events, so Diwali, there's a Tamil New Year, there's a Pongal, so these three are mandated, so we can organise events, we organise sports events where like local cultural sports form Tamil Nadu which all these games you play, we found a place they gave us for free, so we get like 20 families there, we all played kabaddi there and all these things, it was fun actually so we did a lot of things like that. We organised cricket outside, we got like a walking challenge, there's quite a few things we do, so it's good for them to integrate the community and get the feel that you are part of the community. So this is all happening and then when my second child was born I thought okay, my second child was about to come, I think I can dial down a little bit and then coming now the AIA, I'm part of the AIC now. So I think you've been into the independence day, so there's quite a lot happening now, so hopefully we'll get on with the funding. You do need people and it's always coming to the new city not knowing anyone, it's very hard for anyone to survive, so that's where you need to pull everyone together. I know there is going to be friction, there's going to be politics, everyone comes for a different reason, but as long as you are genuine and you don't have any intentions, I think you should be able to pull people together actually, yeah. So one of the reasons I came here, I think the good thing about meeting all these people is I managed to find a place here, my first time of buying a house, this place, a couple of doors after, the guy who is my friend, he works in the same office as me, then a couple of doors after, he's one of my friends, he works in the same office, one street away is another friend who works in the same office, there's one street away there's another friend. So you've got like eight or nine families literally surrounded by you and during COVID I initially thought okay, this is something coincidence, and it's good to have families around, but during COVID we actually formed a bubble and everybody helped around each and stuff, so bonding actually, as well and my child and everyone didn't have that much lonely time, so you already had sometime to look after which is not the case for a lot of people in this country. A lot of people didn't come out for three months, I know a few people who didn't come out for three months, didn't know who to talk to and everything, but yeah, I think it's good, one of the reasons for community, the need of community, is that's the thing actually yeah.

I: How much do you miss India?

R: India? In terms of missing India, I do miss the food, I do miss my city, I definitely miss my city, how the city was, the places I go or the places you can, the freedom of being in my city. Recently I've been there for two months in India, I had a holiday for two months there and I went there and I kind of enjoyed all these things. After that it felt okay, that's it, I don't want to be living there for all the time, you had your time, but missing India has gone lower and lower now actually. All the friends are so far away so it's not going to be the same life when you grew up in India, everybody lives in

different areas, everybody has their own family life, even if I'm in India I'm going to visit them once in a while, so instead I call them most of the time and stay here anyway, so yeah. Home is definitely, well, Charlton Hayes in this case is Bristol, Bristol is going to be my home for the foreseeable future or the UK will be my home for the foreseeable future. I can't see anywhere else, I can't see myself going back to India.

I: And for your kids as well?

R: For my kids as well, because I lived a double life, even though I grew up in India, my known life, all the struggles, all the friends I made from scratch, not put in a society where you're bound to be friends, friends I made on myself all are from the UK. So I've never struggled in India, if I even never go there I need to start from scratch, that thought came from me a long time back, I thought okay, that's not going to happen anymore. So UK, where I can be here, I'm going to make myself a home, so I'm trying to do, so I can't see myself anywhere, not Bristol, but the UK. I think in this case Bristol has definitely been, or Bradley Stoke or South Gloucestershire has definitely been a home in a way because you make it into a home. So I'm trying to make this as my home as much as I can, yeah, rather than stuck here at the moment, yeah.

I: So you prefer Bristol from Edinburgh?

R: Currently, yeah, Bristol has its own life, it's got its own culture and because my son is growing up, I've had a lot of thought about it at times, how to make him integrate into the society because he going, like last year, all the school birthday parties, you have to go to all the birthday parties, all the people, you don't get mixes of people in the school and everybody has an issue and you do see that, yeah, you are part of the community, they have similar kind of children problems, they've got a similar type of, well they have work, drop off kids, come back, they take to the same place we take them. So yeah, it's definitely getting homelier than before, it's just getting into that sort of area at the moment, yeah, it's definitely getting better, yeah.

Transcript ends: 58:46