

This is Your Heritage –

South Gloucestershire Stories of the Indian Community

Interview: Nithya Balasubramaniam and Prabhaukar (Prabu) Karuppannasamy Full Interview Audio Transcription (13-01-2022)

Transcription by Bristol Transcription & Translation Services and edited by a member of the South Gloucestershire Museums Group, June 2022.

Interviewer: Halima Malek

Recorder: Hardik Gaurav

Location: At home in Bristol

Participant prefix key:

I: Interviewer
R: Respondent's ID

Transcript begins 0:00.2

I: Good morning. I'm here today from the Indian Heritage Project and my name is Halima Malek, and I'm sat here with Nithya and Prabu. Nithya, could you please introduce yourself to us?

R1: Thank you, Halima – welcome to our home – my name is Nithya – it's spelt as November, India, Tango, Hotel, Yankee, Alpha.

I: Thank you – and Prabu.

R2: My full name is Prabhaukar Karuppannasamy and my first name is spelt Papa, Romeo, Alpha, Bravo, Hotel, Alpha, Uniform, Kilo, Alpha, Romeo. I know you would struggle with that, so you can call me 'Prabu.'

I: Thank you – could you also spell your very amazingly long surname?!

R2: It's pronounced Karuppannasamy – it's a South Indian name – it's spelt Kilo, Alpha, Romeo, Uniform, Pappa, Pappa, Alpha, November, November, Alpha, Sierra, Alpha, Mike, Yankee.

I: I'm really interested in this surname – does it have a meaning?

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- R2:** I'm from South India – from a place called Erode, in Tamil Nadu, so we don't have a surname culture, as such, so what we do – just for legal reasons – we have to add our father's name towards the end of our name, so that's actually my father's first name, and he will have his dad's first name as a surname.
- I:** So, it's very different from the British system?
- R2:** Yeah.
- I:** It's your family – you take your father's name as your surname, ...
- R2:** That's correct.
- I:** ...and is that the same for girls as well?
- R1:** Yeah, we take our father's name before we get married and, after we get married, we take our husband's name, so I'm legally Nithya Balasubramaniam before marriage and, after marriage, it's Nithya Prabhaukar – his name.
- I:** Very interesting – thank you. So, Prabu, where were you born and what year?
- R2:** I was born in 1982 – 27 June. I was born in a town called Erode, in Tamil Nadu – just South India – so, I've spent my time, or probably the first half of my life up until 21 years in Erode, so that's where I grew up – I did my studies, I did my college and, after college, I came in here to the UK in 2004.
- I:** Thank you – and how about yourself, Nithya?
- R1:** I was born in Coimbatore, a city 100 kilometres away from our respective home towns – Erode in Tamil Nadu, which is in South India, and pretty much the same story. I grew up in Erode as well – I did my school, college, everything in Erode until I finished my Undergraduate degree and came to the UK in 2003.
- I:** Tell me, do you have a specific memory for your childhood as a child – any first memory you have, Prabu?
- R2:** All my memories start from school, so there was a culture where, when you're after certain years – I would say after 10 years – we're all naughty kids back in India, especially from my town, so just to get us disciplined, our parents sent us to a thing called, 'Hill Station,' like a convent school, so basically you're just being put away in a hostel or a boarding school, so all my memories started from there. I was very much into sports – that's when I started playing cricket and I still play cricket – I play for a club called 'Bradley Stoke,' so that's when all my sports journey started. So, even the studies and academics, so that's when I fixed a goal for myself in terms of what I need to achieve when I go to college and when I do my Masters, so it all stemmed from my [s.l. loneliness 03:54]!

- I:** Is this normal for South Indian – for your community – to send their children off to school – boarding school.
- R2:** Yeah – boarding school. It's not normal, ...
- I:** Okay.
- R2:** ...but, because I was so naughty, so they sent me away! It's not normal, but the only reason they put me away, ...
- I:** Sent you to boarding school.
- R2:** Yeah – so, it's a bit far from my place, so I don't have to think about my parents and just get on with my studies, so it's not normal, so nowadays, you get boarding schools even in my home town – Erode. If kids wants to visit the parents, they can still be in boarding school and then come home for the weekend so, just to answer your question, it's not a normal thing. I enjoyed it as well.
- I:** You enjoyed it.
- R2:** Yeah.
- I:** D'you think that led the way – like you said – to how you felt about your future?
- R2:** Definitely – because that's where you're introduced into the whole life after school, and so you take little steps during your school, and then you map your career at that young age, actually.
- I:** Did it also teach you how to be independent away from your family?
- R2:** I struggled a bit during the first year or so and then, once you realise you're on your own, so you start to understand what you've been given...
- I:** Okay.
- R2:** ...before your school life, and then you take it on – act like a grow up man, and take life on your own, and just get on with it. So, that definitely gave me my independence, and also a sort of responsibility as well for my friends and for my family as well, so it started with a young age. In a way, I'm actually grateful for my parents – for them to actually put me in a boarding school!
- I:** How old were you?
- R2:** We have something called, 'Standards' – well, like 'First Standard,' 'Second Standard,' so that's how we do it. It's over years – First Year, Second Year. I think it was 'Fifth Standard,' which is equal to Year Six in the UK, so probably I was 10 years old.

- I:** When you went back, did your parents see a change in your behaviour?
- R2:** Yeah! – most definitely. One – I was not being naughty anymore because I was very disciplined and two – I managed to get on with my own things. I didn't rely on my parents – obviously, I was there for three years so, after that, I was into my teenage as well, so I did everything myself so I didn't have to rely on my parents. Even in India – up until the age of 15 or 16, we get dropped off to school by parents – it's still the same but it's probably increased now because every parent is caring for the child, but probably at 13, 14, I was just left on my own – just get on with it – ...
- I:** Oh, thank you.
- R2:** ...it was good!
- I:** I'm glad – I'm sure your parents are glad too. How about yourself, Nithya – any memory of schooling?
- R1:** All my schooling was happy. If I think about my childhood, it was nothing but joy. The school I grew up was in a convent and it was strict, however, we had all sorts of freedom. We were ascertained as a woman – we were taught how not to give into undue pressures from society, or men. We had the moral compass set very intact into our mind, and I even have a funny memory I would like to share!
- I:** Please.
- R1:** I thoroughly enjoyed my school – the convent was fantastic. I was a sports person – through and through I was into sports. I don't remember studying – I always remember running for events – tournaments and different matches. That was a thing – I was always trained to be a sports person. It started as eight years old – my P.T. teacher – as they call in India – it's Mrs Rani. I still remember her – my wedding invitation – the very first invitation, I gave it to her. I still consider her as my mentor – she's fantastic. She literally trained me – she would train me day in, day out, for hours together and 'What are sporting attitudes – sportive-ness that I have towards life?' – she taught it. She ingrained that into me and the school, on the whole, was more about principles, not lying – no stealing – nothing! and I was trained to be a very good person! and, when I started getting into business environment, I was shocked to see that the seeds and the natural outcome of being a business person from a different angle! Once, during a break – a holiday – I went back to my school, and I went and met my principal – my headmistress. We call her, 'Sister' because it's a convent and I asked her, 'Sister, you taught me how not to behave in life, and how to be a person – as an individual – a good person – a God-fearing, kind-hearted, compassionate person, but you never taught me how to handle people who are not like that!' and she said, 'That's a very serious question,' and she was like, 'You're still a very old, naughty Nithya I know!' and she doesn't brush it off – I'm still trying to get an answer for that! I'm joking, but it was fun and – unlike Prabu's family, and Prabu's naughtiness – I was not too naughty – I was after but I

was okay with the parents and we rode to school through autos or Tuk Tuks, and moped, vans and buses. It was very nice – I had a wonderful childhood and, coming back to home, there'd be at least five, six people at home. It's not a nuclear family as it is right now – I miss that...

R2: Yeah.

R1: ...dearly for my children because I grew up in an environment where we had to... Looking back at it, all the sacrifices we do as a family as mellowed down me as a mature person in handling conflicts and relationships, or everything to getting along with people, and I didn't know I was being taught in a family environment because we had different shades of personalities. I was the youngest of the lot – my eldest cousin is 60 years old now, so I was the youngest, so we had different age groups – all were boys, and there was just one girl. It was such a wonderful environment – I really loved it.

I: Did you live in an extended family?

R1: In today's terms, it's called 'Extended family!' but it's just my grand-mum, my paternal grandfather, grandmother – just the four of us. My brother, myself, my father and mother, but my father's sisters – he had two elder sister and a younger one – they were all five, 10 minutes away from this house, ...

I: Okay.

R1: ...so we would have – there's daughters-in-law and their grandchildren. Everybody was in the house – I became an aunt when I was nine years old! because of my first cousin's child, so it was a wonderful time.

I: Thank you. Just one more question – can you please tell me what is your religious background?

R1: Hindu – we both are Hindu.

R2: Yeah.

I: You mentioned you went to a convent.

R1: Christian convent – yeah.

I: Was there also a Christian community in South India?

R1: Lots.

I: Okay.

R1: There are lots of Christian... The funny thing is, the Tuk Tuk I went in – it was driven by a Muslim driver, ...

I: Okay.

R1: ...so I had beautiful introduction to Hinduism at home, Christianity at school, and Islam with him. He would tell me things about Urdu – I was the last person he would drop in his circuit – I will be the first person to get picked up, so we had ample time to discuss things. So, we will talk – I will ask him about Bhagvad Gita and, fortunately for him, he was open-minded, so he taught me a lot of principles that came from Urdu, and the school obviously taught me things from Bible and Christianity and, at home, it was Hinduism, so it was a wonderful blend of introduction to different religion, and also my family was not cut-throat about religion – they were on their own, but my father, particularly, he wanted me to be an independent thinker. He would always push me to think on my feet and think on my own. There were times when I would go to Temple and I would do this because, if I practiced at school, and my mom would make fun of me! but she would never be threatening or ask me to stop it. They would all make fun of me – look at the future nun coming home!

I: Your parents – did they make a conscious decision to send you to a Christian school, or was it a better education?

R1: Yeah – it was the only convent in the town and it was a girls' convent, and my mom's cousins studied there. I did my Reception and Year One in Chennai, actually – my dad had business there, so we were in Chennai, and we came to Erode – our home town – I think it was not the proper academic setting. I remember walking with my mom to talk to the principal – to the headmistress – for nearly one month to get a place of study in that school.

I: Okay.

R1: My mom was very particular that I should study there, and the Sister – she was kind, but she couldn't go past the deadline, so she was like, 'I can't take the chance' and, fortunately, I think somebody dropped off. Some police officer's daughter – police officer got transferred, so she dropped off and I had the place – it was so fortunate – and my mom was very particular that I could get educated. It was not about the religion – it was about being the best place to study – 'Accessing whatever is possible for my daughter.'

I: Thank you. You mention that your father was a businessman, so what was the dynamics of education and business in your household?

R1: You mean to ask, 'Do I have to study to run a business?'

I: No – like, was education very important? Obviously, being in India – I don't want to stereotype, but isn't always the norm to push girls for education, so did you come from an educated background from your parents?

R1: No – both my father and mother didn't study past their school education and, giving importance to a girl's education was not... I would say we were coming off that age. Prior to my generation, or my age group, I would say it was not an important thing – ...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...honestly, it was not an important thing because my dad's elder sister – she actually got a place of study to pursue Medicine in a Merit Seat, which is like a free seat, ...

I: Okay.

R1: ...but she was not sent because it was 50 kilometres away from the Coimbatore. My grandfather wouldn't send, and I knew that – I knew those barriers were there. She was super-talented – she was a school pupil leader – everything – but she couldn't get past that biases, I would say, or mental barriers.

I: Yeah.

R1: However, in my generation – my father was particular about getting good education for me. He was very particular, and my mom was very particular too. They both were like, 'You should get an education,' but they didn't think I would want to get away from the norm. What they thought was – I would get educated and get me married to someone in India. That was their plan but, even though education was not restricted, it came with a restriction that I would get married after educated, ...

I: Yes.

R2: Expectation.

R1: ...so there was an indirect expectation – that's right – thank you – indirect expectation that I would finish and get married, and then things started picking up. IT revolution happened in India from 1999 – no, after the 2000 bubble – 2002, 2003 – the IT bubble picked up and lots of children... lots of engineering graduates, and other stream – I mean, people from Arts and Science – they all got jobs in respected companies, like private companies and tech companies, so education, and then employment became a trend, or became the norm – not the trend. So, women started gradually breaking the barriers, and we are not different, and they started accepting it.

I: The tradition started changing, ...

R1: Yes.

I: ...and, for you, that was amazing.

R1: Yeah! – when I graduated it was still not so popular. I had the option to get married in 2002 – 2001. My dad was like, ‘She’s too young – let her finish her education – let her do something and then we’ll think about it,’ and I let in my cousin’s wedding and someone would come to me and say, ‘Oh, you are so and so’s daughter – how are you?’ and I wouldn’t know what they are talking about, and then they’d go talk to my dad – ‘Can I get...?’ – something like that! – you know the essence!

I: Yeah, the Indian tradition of...

R2: Yeah.

I: ...seeing a girl and then...

R1: Yes.

I: ...going back to the parents and asking if they’re available or for their hand – ...

R2: Yes.

I: ...traditions were still there in your home town.

R1: It was prominent! I had all the freedom that a girl could enjoy – my dad never restricted me. I would drive – it’s illegal! but he taught me to drive two-wheelers at a very young age. I’m talking about 10, 12 – I rode a bike at 12 and started learn driving car at 15 and everything. He was a trend-setter, I would say, however, I knew I wouldn’t have the same sort of freedom that my brother had, ...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...or my cousins had. I knew my restrictions as a woman, so that was that.

I: Thank you for sharing that.

R1: Okay.

I: How about yourself, Prabu – what was your family background?

R2: Unlike Nithya, my dad was also into business, so he did everything from textiles for marketing, but he’s currently 70 years old so he’s settled down with Agriculture. He’s had a couple of mishaps during my upbringing, so his view – and my mom’s view – was always, ‘Business is always risky – go get yourself a job,’ so that’s why

I'm still in a job and she's into business! It's right from a young age, my mindset was actually, ...

I: Yeah.

R2: ...'Go get a job for yourself and be secure.' I went into school, so one of the best schools in Erode, which is actually, [ph. Ohook 19:33] and normally concentrates on getting high grades for the students, so there was exams every day, so you just had to practice for the Board exams and the final exams. I got good marks, I should say – probably about 80 per cent, so that put me in a decent college so, again, when I say 'College,' it's more to do with my Undergraduate degree, so I did my electrical in Electronics Communication – Bachelors of Engineering – but, back then, like Nithya said, the IT boom was just happening. It's not like you can finish education and then go out and look for a job, ...

I: Okay.

R2: ...so, companies have to come into the college - have to do something called, 'Campus interview' but, from my area of expertise, there was probably like one or two companies, and they had to come in from Chennai or other major cities. So, I thought, with my marks in mind... so, I was in a very good academy during my college time!

R1: Sorry to start this – ...

I: Of course.

R1: ...he is super-talented. We both hated Rote learning – we both hated that, ...

R2: Yeah.

R1: ...and we both were like that. I'm trying to speak for both of us here. The kind of education was – like he said – he insisted on the point where he said he was being trained to...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...prepare for the Board exam, but he thoroughly enjoyed his schooldays in Ooty, where he did his three years of education. The type of education that we were introduced to was different.

R2: Just to continue my point, then.

R1: I won't let you let down!

I: Thank you!

- R2:** The convent I went to – like Nithya said – so, you were taught to be independent, but then my dad brought me back to my hometown just for me to get my good marks and all that. In this school, it was more like, ‘Study, study, study’ – ...
- I:** Yeah.
- R2:** ...you can’t think on your own but, once I’ve completed school, I went into college, so there was a lack of job opportunities, so I thought the only way I could survive – because my parents want me to go into job – is actually to do a Masters. So, at that time, Masters in India – especially South India – was unheard of, so it was the time when everybody started going into USA, or England, or Australia, but USA – it was a bit tricky for me, so you had to have big scores for that! but England – I was actually comfortable with because, even during my college days, I was very good at English and all that – you had a minimum expectation in terms of the entry criteria back then.
- I:** Yeah.
- R2:** I think now it’s significantly changed, so I got an opportunity with Oxford Brookes College, or University. It’s based in Oxford, obviously, so I came here to do my Masters in Science and Engineering, so the specification was mobile telecom, so that’s how I came into the UK.
- I:** Thank you. Just quickly, and one of you can answer, or both of you can answer – was English part of your education from childhood?
- R2:** Definitely.
- R1:** We were asked to pay fine if you don’t speak in English – they would collect fines. There would be class leaders – monitors – they would say, ‘If you don’t speak English for the rest of the day, we’d have to pay one Rupee – one pence.
- I:** Wow.
- R2:** Just to expand on that – I think, the western culture – when we grew up during our schooldays – was starting to come in, so English was always called as our first language, even though we’re from Tamil Nadu – we speak Tamil daily – ...
- I:** Yeah.
- R2:** ...so, Tamil is more like a second language in school for us!
- I:** It’s amazing.
- R2:** It’s completely changed – it’s the other way round now, but like Nithya says – so, we have to communicate in English because there’s different people – or different community people within the school – so we can’t be communicating in Tamil, but

all our lessons – all the subjects – everything was in English, but we did have specifically our mother tongue, as we call it in Tamil, and you learnt Hindi as well! There was a subject called ‘Sanskrit’ as well, which is related to Hindi, and so we had all those subjects going on in the background but the majority of all the subjects was taught in English.

I: So, you’ve both already had a very good set-up...

R1: Yeah.

I: ...if you moved out of India because you already had the knowledge and understanding, and the English tongue.

R2: Not just us – everybody in the school!

I: To add to that, every state in India will have two mediums of education – one would be ‘English Medium,’ wherein the state language – the regional language would be an option – and the other Medium would be, ‘Regional language option’ – that would be taught in schools. So, we studied in English Medium – we still had Tamil Medium, Hindi Medium. I’m not sure about Urdu, but we do have Marathi Medium – Canada Medium, [ph. Malanum 24:51] Medium based on each state, but there are also choices for English Medium, and one of the reasons why convents were praised at that time was because we had lots of nuns who were Anglo-Indians, ...

I: Okay.

R1: ...who still had the knack for great English. Everybody speaks good English in India but, for the great English – that’s where convents were...

R2: Popular – yeah – telling you that!

R1: ...popular at that time.

I: Okay – I understand.

R2: We had excellent introduction to English. We had second language, as they say. My mom – again, my parents wanted me to pick a different language from what we spoke at home, which was Hindi, because I would get exposure to some new language, and there are other languages. In different schools, they have French, Sanskrit, but I picked Hindi and, during my Higher Secondary, I picked Sanskrit because I was interested to learn about it all.

I: We’re still in the childhood now. Did you two meet as children, or as young adults? because you specifically said you’re both from the same area, ...

R2: Yeah.

I: ...and so, please share – did you, or did you not, know each other while you were growing up?

R2: I'll let Nithya answer that.

R1: No, we met when we were young. I'm not sure if it's called 'Young' – I don't... we were child, I would say, looking at our children's growth at this point of time! We were 15, I think, we met – there's this culture.

R2: All the family were... it's more like family.

R1: Our families knew each other.

R2: My dad is friends with Nithya's dad.

R1: Our grandparents were friends too.

I: Okay.

R2: Yeah – so, it goes back to different generations.

I: Yeah – a few generations.

R1: Both our grandparents' places were literally five minutes away from his.

I: Okay.

R2: It's a small town – everybody knows everyone.

I: Okay – cool.

R2: So, yeah – like Nithya says – it was back when we were 15 years old. We met during a school event and, back in India, because I was put in a school where marks were important, or the grades were important, so there's something called, 'Tuition' that we need to do – like an extra classes after the school. Fortunately – or unfortunately!...

R1: Poor you!

R2: ...we both were in the same tuition, and that's how I first met Nithya.

I: Okay.

R1: Yeah.

- I:** So, you met and I know you're married now but, obviously, at the time you were very young, so how did the process from childhood students then emerge into a married couple?
- R1:** We had a lot of common friends. Unlike my school – I studied in a girls' only school, and his school was co-educational, so I had a lot of friends studying with him, so we had lots of mutual friends, so that day was actually an accident because it was raining and I was not even supposed to sit in his batch – in his class. There were several batches – his batch was named under his school name, and my would be 'General Batch,' but they merged the two because there were not a lot of children coming to the tuition, so I was literally sitting next to him and my friend was next to me, and she was like, 'Oh, that boy – you know that boy,' and blah, blah, blah. You know the teenager talks – we were talking that and she was like, 'Oh, I know him,' and we were just making fun of the fact that they were sent away duly for making [s.l. records 28:36] there, as in the girls walked away and the boys were intact – they were good! We were just sent out and we were making fun of [inaudible 28:45]. Gradually, the friendship developed and we had lots of conference, and there's this system called, 'Lions Club,' or the social event, like 'Lions Club' and 'Rotary Club.' I'm not sure how it happens in the UK because I've never been to one but, in India, they used to have a lot of events every now and then – gatherings, meetings – and they would bring in family as well. I was shocked to see his dad talking to my dad, and he was in there as well – in that gathering – and I was like, 'Oh,' and that's when I was asking my dad, 'How do you know him?' and, 'We'll see' – blah, blah, blah.
- R2:** She started enquiring about me!
- R1:** Yeah – he started to, and my neighbour – that boy – he was friends with them, and he was like, 'You know, that guy – he was asking about you,' and we both literally grew up together – the neighbour and I. Ever since six years old, we grew up together and we would play all the silly games – like bike riding! – sorry.
- R2:** That's fine. So, back in those days – I say, 'Those days,' like 20 years ago, ...
- R1:** 25!
- R2:** Yeah, so we used to call it 'Arranged marriage,' and 'Love Marriage' – marriage based on love.
- I:** Just for our viewers – what does 'Arranged marriage' mean in your culture?
- R2:** In my culture, it's more about a girl – after she reaches a certain age, she needs to be married. I think the legal age of marriage back at those times was 22 years.
- I:** Okay.
- R1:** No – 18, actually.

R2: Was it? – okay.

R1: Even now it's 18, ...

R2: Yeah.

R1: ...but the age gets increasing. Per year, they just extend the age limit to get married to girls again. Legally, it's 18 – even today.

R2: Yeah.

R1: Anybody can get married at 18 but, when we were young, I think it was 21.

R2: Okay.

R1: 21, 22 – they think, 'Okay, let us get them married.'

R2: So, let's say 21 years – so, the parents are under tremendous pressure to get their girl child married so, basically, all it means is they find a boy within their society – within the community – same caste, same religion – it was a big thing back then – slowly starting to change. Just find a good...

R1: Match – so many aspects.

R2: We have something called 'Astrology,' so just make sure the match is perfect and then, whatever best they can do – they try to match it up with our boy and a girl. So, this is what usually happens in an arranged marriage. I've just given you an overview of arranged marriage, but there's so many other things in terms of relations – everybody's...

I: Families.

R2: ...invited. Yeah, families – wealth.

R1: Wealth is also an aspect.

R2: Nowadays, there's something called 'Background checks' happening as well.

I: Well, marriage is a big thing.

R2: Yeah.

R1: Yes.

- R2:** Because we were from a small town, everybody knew each other. That's – in a nutshell – what arranged marriage is but, even in those days, people were against arranged marriage.
- I:** Against though.
- R2:** When I say, 'The people' – it's not the parents, but it's just the children.
- I:** Yeah.
- R2:** So, they've found somebody in school, or college, and they wanted to marry different caste, so they get rejected for various reasons. Fortunately, Nithya and I are from the same caste, so ours... because we studied in the same school, we knew each other – ours wasn't termed as an 'Arranged marriage' – it was 'Love/arranged marriage!' because our family knew each other.
- I:** Yeah.
- R2:** So, when we raised it with our parents, they were comfortable with our individual choices! Going back to your original question – just to prove ourselves because of the lack of opportunities in India in terms of job market... so, I had to personally come here and then make a living for myself, so I did my Masters and got my job, and the parents were comfortable then, and they were like, 'Oh, he can lead his life on his own.' Nithya was comfortable on her own, so that's how we got married, basically.
- I:** I feel like we've missed a few pointers out – so, who asked who to get married?
- R1:** Go on.
- R2:** Big silence! It was probably me – ...
- I:** Okay.
- R2:** ...yeah, it was me.
- I:** So, you approached Nithya?
- R2:** Yeah. So, even during the college days, we decided, 'It's not gonna happen if we just finish our Undergraduate.'
- R1:** He was asking about marriage.
- R2:** Yeah – so, I'll come to that in a bit!
- I:** Give him a chance!

R2: It was decided back during our Undergraduate. We went to the same college – we went to different school, but same college, ...

I: Okay.

R2: ...so, we decided back in college that, if we stay here, our parents won't even agree to us getting married because there's no opportunities for us over there back in India – at that time – back in 2003. So, we decided we have to come here and then, once I got into Masters... I finished my Masters – she did her research – I got into job and then I said, 'Okay, I think we're ready – now, we should get married,' so that's how it happened.

I: So, this was discussed between you two...

R1: Yeah – we...

I: ...and then you told your parents?

R1: No – we were an ambitious lot – ...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...we'll be very honest!

I: Good.

R1: We both were very ambitious – we always wanted to do something. We were discussing business, even....

I: Okay.

R1: ...when we were 16, 17. If somebody had tapped their conversation, it would be very boring as a teenager because we were discussing about businesses and ideas, and helping [inaudible 34:56] – things like that. We are still doing that – ...

I: Yep.

R1: ...we're still making an effort – we've not improved ourselves any better! We're not just studying – we were discussing that – and it was very clear from Prabu's perspective that he was the one. At the very end, someone else inspired me to study abroad, but he kindled that inspiration further, and he was the one who pushed me to think, 'Let's go abroad – let's study abroad – let's not be here,' and I was the homebird – I'll be honest with you. I had everything – I was very comfortable! I wanted to study abroad, but I wanted to come here with a purpose to learn how businesses work here – ...

I: Okay.

R1: ...to understand how this country works. My idea was to learn businesses in the western world – take those principles, go back and start a business on my own, and I did that, and then he changed his approach and he said, 'It's not possible to be in two countries and I don't want to go back – this feels more like a home to me,' he said, and I adapted to that change, so that's how it happened, and we were discussing this for a very long time and we continued pursuing a higher education abroad – doing separately – and it has got nothing to do with discussing with my parents about marriage – we were just saying we wanted to study abroad.

I: Yeah.

R1: That's it – and I came in 2003, I think – yeah, 2003 – and his visa had some issues.

R2: My visa got delayed, so I ended up working on a temporary basis back in India, so that was my first job in India – first and last!

I: At this point, you were not married?

R1: No.

R2: We were not.

I: So, you moved separately to England for your future...

R1: Yes.

R2: That's correct.

R1: Masters Degree, and we both were supposed to go to the same university, but I didn't quite like that university for some reasons – I didn't like the course, actually.

R2: It's more about the course and the university.

R1: The programme – not the university or the city – it was more to do with the programme, and then I switched to a different university, and I studied in Wales, and he came to Oxford and he studied in Oxford – he was put up in Oxford and I was in Wales, and we would catch up every now and then.

I: So, what year and date did you come to England?

R1: I came here on 5 August 2003.

I: At the age of...

- R1:** 21 – I finished my Undergraduate on 5 April, I think, 2003, and I applied for my [s.l. Year Intern's 37:23] Examination Visa and then came – four months after my Undergraduate, I came here.
- I:** How did your family feel about you doing that?
- R1:** That's a funny thing – the whole extended family were sending me off from my home! There was a big Tempo traveller full of people – they call it, 'Tempo traveller' – big van.
- R2:** As big as SUVs.
- R1:** No – it's a mini-van – minibus.
- R2:** It's even bigger than an SUV.
- R1:** Yes – a minibus kind of stuff.
- R2:** It was more like a Bollywood movie!
- R1:** Yeah – they all were sitting... Until I came to the UK, I was going through this decision-making process. It was really very difficult to convince my dad – my dad was like, 'What are you going to do – how are you going to study?' – blah, blah, blah. Too many restrictions and, until I got my offer letter from the university, I didn't tell them that I was doing this!
- I:** Okay.
- R1:** He knew that. I was giving him hints and bits and bobs about the stories, but I didn't tell him exactly what was the plan, and I also got a job offer in India. Because of IT, again, there were lots of companies recruiting there, so I got a job, so I was protecting that until I got the offer letter! and, after I got the offer letter, I came for the final step wherein I had nothing to do beyond his approval, or his financial support, because we needed his support for my visa. So, I told him, 'I want to go to the UK.' I think it was £10,000 - £12,000 – the university fee, and my living expenses... I said, 'I can manage my living expenses – I don't want your money! – I just want you to give me money for my university fee,' and he said, 'Are you sure?' and I said, 'Yes,' and then, 'Are you sure you want to go to the UK?' – 'Yes.' In his mind, he was like, 'You are not gonna get your visa anyway, but I don't want to stop you – you want something,' and then he went to the bank, and I was very persistent – 'I want a bank loan' – 'I don't want your money – I want a bank loan,' and he applied for a bank loan. I still remember we were sitting at the dining table, and we were supposed to go to the bank – meeting the bank manager after 2:00 and he was having his lunch, and we were discussing... I was having lunch with him, and I was like, 'Papa, let's go.' I called him up – 'Papa, let's go to bank after lunch,' and he's like, 'Yes, we'll do it,' and then he was eating and he, all of a sudden asked, 'Are you sure you wanna go?' and, before he could lift his head, I was in his feet! – I

was standing his feet, 'Please let me go! – I want to do it – I want to do it badly!' We went to the bank and we got the bank loan, and I collected the visa, and I still remember... I've even written a book about this, and I've shared the story – this very precious moment with my dad, and I was very particular – 'I don't want their help to go apply for visa' – because I told them, 'If I can go to the UK, I can go to apply for my visa on my own – don't come with me,' and so I had to pick a bus because I couldn't get any train, or anything else then. So, I sat on the bus and my dad dropped me and he sat next to me on the bus and he said, 'All these years, I thought you were going to finish your school – you were going to finish your college – and I was prepared to get you married to someone' and, all these years, I was prepared to do that for you – I never thought you would have this ambition, and then he said, 'When I was young, I wanted to be in navy and I even got selected but my grandparents...' – his parents wouldn't let him go because he was a precious child – only son – 'However, I don't want to stop you.' I want to go, but see what you want to do but, coming from a man who's never seen a place beyond India, he said that from a very small town in Erode then, and he said... this is something – I mean, don't treat it like a... I couldn't paraphrase it, but I would tell you this...

R2: How would you say it in Tamil?

R1: He said, 'This is an opportunity for you – make the best use of it.' There you go – 'This is the opportunity for you – make the best use of it and set a good example and so other girls could follow you.'

I: That's beautiful

R1: I was thinking he would ask me to come back after finishing your grad so I'll get you married, or give the money back because he got the bank loan. He mentioned nothing of that kind – he just said, 'Make the best use of this opportunity and set a good example.' That's gonna stay with me forever.

I: Of course.

R1: So, that's how it happened – my story! – and I came to the UK.

I: So, you came to the UK with your parents of Prabhaukar, ...

R1: Yeah – and the whole family sent me off!

I: Very Indian!

R1: They came from Chennai – like, 600 kilometre – no, I think 400 – 600.

R2: Something like that – yeah.

R1: They travelled like six hours from Erode and they came to the airport in Chennai. Chennai Airport was [inaudible 42:19] – it was so celebratory, and they all waved goodbye. Nobody cried – I was like, ‘Why aren’t they...?’ I couldn’t cry too – I was like, ‘I’m gonna feel the first air of freedom!’

R2: That’s just saved for the movies, I think!

I: So, when you arrived in England, what did you think?

R1: Honestly? – I was shocked. You know what – I was used to Hollywood movies – I thought it was going to be very colourful, and fabulous! and different, but it was so traditional. I felt it was no different from India – the modern version of India is what I saw in London at that time, and it’s good.

I: So, you arrived at Heathrow?

R1: Yep.

I: What was the weather like?

R1: It was cold – not too cold but, compared to where I was from, it was cold.

I: Were you prepared?

R1: Absolutely.

I: Did you have friends, or anybody here that you knew?

R1: One of my distant relatives was in London – he picked me up from London!

I: Okay – so, you didn’t come and have to just start up by yourself – ...

R1: No.

I: ...you had a support system?

R1: Yeah.

I: Did you like it?

R1: Like what?

I: Like England.

R1: I loved it – I still love it. I have no qualms about England at all – it’s just that my parents are getting older and I want to be with them. Other than that, I love this country – absolutely – no change in that right from day one.

- I:** So, you made a good decision, and you didn't find it difficult coming from a complete different culture to a British culture?
- R1:** No – not at all. If at all anything, I was even more comfortable here. I like the anonymity here! and I like being different as well. I had a lot of things to learn – I was so curious. I wanted to learn how businesses work – how people interact – and I was shocked to know that people in Wales – the dialect – the way they speak – English is different, ...
- I:** Yeah.
- R1:** ...and I started observing that. In London, the accent is different – Oxford is a different accent – things like that. All of those things get me going – I was very curious and learning every day.
- I:** So, you came to Heathrow, London – from Heathrow you went to Wales for your education?
- R1:** No – I went to London, ...
- I:** Okay.
- R1:** ...and then I stayed there for a couple of weeks – no, one week, I think – and then I went to Oxford – that's where I initially got my Masters Degree and then, from there, after a month, I went to Wales.
- I:** Okay – and which part of Wales did you go to?
- R1:** Newport.
- I:** Okay, so we're gonna just move over to Prabu.
- R2:** Yeah!
- I:** So, same for you now – how did your family take it when you decided you wanted to move abroad?
- R2:** Unfortunately – unlike Nithya – so, we applied for the visa at the same time back in 2003 – that's when I finished my Under-graduation, but I probably left it a bit too late, so I didn't get my visa on time, ...
- I:** Okay.
- R2:** ...so I had to end up in a job in Chennai back in India just for six or seven months because I know for sure I would be getting my visa the following year, and then I'd just move my course to the following year. The university was very helpful – they

moved it – so, come 2004 – September – I think it was 13 September 2004 – so, that’s when I came to the UK.

I: How did you feel?

R2: Unlike Nithya’s parents and relation, mine was like a quiet send-off, basically! So, I really wanted to come to the UK – obviously, Mom and Dad – they were a bit upset that I’ll be leaving for the short-term! – back then, that’s what they had in their mind – but I did tell them, ‘It’s a couple of year course – I’ll be coming back to them.’

R1: That’s the promise he’s been giving everybody, including me, and that two years never happened!

R2: Finally, everything – just like Nithya – bank loan. To be honest, UK education fees... it’s still very high compared to Indian Uni, ...

I: Of course.

R2: ...so, back in those days, so – for the amount of money you spend doing a Masters, you could probably do four Masters back in India. So, the parents didn’t have that kind of money, so you had to go approach a bank for loan, so everything was sorted – my flights ticket booked – but, fortunately, for me, my cousin also joined me, so he had a job in the Hilton, London.

R1: Front-desk – something.

I: Hilton – the restaurant – hotel?

R2: Yeah – so, he did Hotel Management, so he did his MBA back in India so, fortunately for me, I was not alone, so that’s my first flight, basically. I found it really cold as soon as I stepped out of the lift – out of Heathrow – so, I was freezing, so I didn’t know what to expect – I didn’t bring my jacket, and probably had a shirt – probably had the slippers on, so a pair of jeans – that’s it – I didn’t have a jacket. It was freezing – honestly.

I: You was not prepared.

R2: Nah – not one bit! Fortunately, for me, there were other students who I know from India so, back then, there was something called, ‘Yahoo Messenger’ – ...

R1: Yahoo groups.

R2: ...there’s no ‘Google’ – no Facebook – nothing, so Yahoo was the email. I still have my Yahoo email by the way, so that’s when I got in touch with other kids – or other students back then, and then they booked a shared accommodation back in Oxford ‘cause, obviously, the university halls would have cost me a lot, ...

I: Yes.

R2: ...so we were seven when we came here, so I know exactly where I was going, so I planned it very well except for the weather! and the food, obviously, so everything else was okay, so my brother – or my cousin – he went off to London, and then I took the London to Oxford £1 bus! – can still remember that – I think it's called, 'Megabus,' so pay £1... because it was previously booked months in advance. I went to Oxford, took a taxi, went into my home, so got settled down.

I: Okay – so, you're already here in Wales and you're in Oxford. How did you get married – how long later did you two get married after that?

R1: Yeah.

R2: After the graduation – after both the universities – so we were still in touch. The first thing I came here – I went to the Oxford High Street and I got myself a mobile phone, so I had a phone – it was a 'SIM only,' so that was completely new to us. Back in India, there's nothing called, 'Mobile phones' – there is mobile phones, obviously, but no 'SIM only' contracts, ...

I: Yeah.

R2: ...or anything like that. So, basically, you get a mobile phone and you get a number, and that's it and you go on, but it was different. So, I got... and she got a mobile phone and we exchanged numbers – through our friends, obviously. Our seniors were also here – so, emails, Internet – school Internet mostly... the college Internet, or the university Internet, because we didn't know how to set up the utilities, for example – the Internet, the rent – all that kind of stuff, so it was all very new to me. I'm hoping – or I'm assuming – it was the same for you as well! We just kept in touch – she would travel into Oxford every now and then – I would go to Wales every now and then, so it was just constant communication.

I: How long did this go on for?

R2: Up until we finished our graduations.

I: How many years?

R2: I graduated in 2007, so I extended my degree by a year because I had some issues with my visa, so my graduation was April 2007 – I think yours was before that.

R1: No – I took two years' break from my education because I was very sickly. I was having very poor food routine – health routine here. I used to be a very sporty person, and I completely stopped sports, ...

I: Okay.

- R1:** ...and I started eating junk food, I should say! and lots of frozen food, and tinned items that I was not used to. I was pretty badly hurt – my body was not in a good shape and so I took at least two years’ break, and then I came back and finished my research, so it was in 2007 and eight, I think. I mean, I submitted long before, but it takes a lot of time.
- R2:** With the universities, you have to submit your thesis and then the dissertation, as they call it and once that’s done... so, that’s the final bit of your graduation, and that’s when you get ‘Pass’...
- R1:** All the same time.
- R2:** ...or graduated.
- I:** Did you go back to India for those two years?
- R1:** Yes – I was undergoing a lot of treatment because it was quite a lot of issues. They couldn’t pinpoint it – exactly what it was – and there was a lot of hormonal imbalances and food issues – acid reflux – so, my parents were like, ‘Come back and take...’
- I:** Yeah.
- R1:** ...a break.’ I didn’t think that was possible, but I went to the university and they said, ‘Yes, it’s possible – take a break,’ and then so I went back to India and stayed home. That’s when I was running business – I said I’ve got business – ...
- R2:** Yeah.
- I:** ...I was running my own technology company.
- R2:** I think the UK universities are really flexible in that respect where you can actually extend your course dates.
- I:** Oh, brilliant.
- R1:** Not too sure about it now though.
- R2:** I’m hoping it’s the same.
- I:** Yeah.
- R1:** Yeah but, back then, the university... even though it was difficult time for me and, even though I knew I could do it – I could be better than that – but I wasn’t able to...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...because of my health, but they understood that perfectly and, because it's research, it involved a suitable dedicated supervisor and I had to write about 60,000 words of dissertation, and it had to go through a waiver and, for the waiver, we need an external supervisor, so it was quite a tedious process.

R2: Yeah.

R1: In my head, I finished long back, but all these process took long time, ...

I: Okay.

R1: ...and we got married after that – to answer your question.

I: No, it's fine.

R1: Once he'd got a job... his mum, I think – she was...

R2: Even these days, the tradition, or the saying is, 'A man has to get a job for him to get married, and he's the head of the family, so he needs to support the family.' As soon as I got my first job – my first job after my graduation was in Bristol. So, I got an opportunity with 'Alkatel-Lucent,' so their client was 'Orange Telecom' – now, they're 'EE' – so, this was back in 2007 – July-time – after I'd graduated. So, I graduated April – I had to look for a job very quickly because of my visa restriction because you were only given a year visa back in those days, ...

I: Okay.

R2: ...so you just have to find very quickly something just to keep you going! otherwise your visa will get exhausted, then you'll have to end up going back to India. So, I just wanted to stay in the UK, just to get the job so, fortunately for me, I found the job and parents were okay with it.

R1: I had gone to India at that time after finishing my thesis and everything – I thought, 'There's no point – let's just take a break – go there. Anyway, I'm gonna get married – let me be with my parents,' kind of stuff, and I went...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...back and, at that time, there were three prospective boys – my boys! – from my parents. My parents had the pressure to get me married because I was already 24, 25, and that was the news thing for them, and my dad – he showed photographs of three boys, and he said, 'These boys and the families were interested in you,' and one of them I knew because they saw me from five years ago! I was like, 'Is he not married yet?' We had a very light-hearted conversation and Dad was saying something to the tune of, 'They will be suitable for your kind of personality –

ambition to be running a business and everything, and I had all the stops – I'm okay with all three.' My mom – she was like, 'Okay with all three,' and then, 'What are you thinking?' I said, 'I have a wish!' and I told him, already collected the photos and put it in his pocket! It was like, 'Okay, tell me about it,' and I told about them, and I mentioned so and so's family, and my dad immediately asked... then, I said, 'I have a wish' – he immediately asked, 'Is it the same community?' – that was his very first question.

I: This was important?

R1: That's important to them, ...

R2: Yeah.

R1: ...and second question... we both are very... we don't like actually being community oriented and caste oriented and things like that, so I stumbled over the dialogue and said, 'You are fortunate that he belongs to his family – belongs to your community' – that's what I said, and then he asked who the family was, 'What is he doing?' and everything, and the next question was, 'Your birth charts match.'

I: Okay.

R1: I said, 'Yes, I did check that – it's all fine!'

R2: Like I said earlier – the Astrology element was very important.

R1: It's very important.

I: Just for people who don't understand these traditions – is this a very Hindu-orientated....?

R1: Yes.

R2: I'll let Nithya answer that!

R1: Hindu – religious.

I: Concept – yes.

R1: Yes.

R2: Yeah.

R1: Astrology – Vedic Astrology. There are two kinds of astrology, I think – Western Astrology and Vedic Astrology. In Vedic Astrology, they check birth charts and planetary... A birth chart is basically your chart that displays the planetary position when you were born – the minute you were born on this earth, so they would

compare the charts. It's basically constellation of energies – they would say, 'If the energies match – if they get married, will they live a happy life?' It's not that it's fool-proof or 100 per cent success!

I: Bullet proof.

R2: Yeah.

R1: Yeah, bullet proof – sorry! but it does work in most cases, ...

R2: Yeah.

R1: ...and my father truly believes in that. As a matter of fact, he learnt Astrology when I was in my mum's tummy to get me out to this world in an auspicious time because my elder brother was born out of C-section – Caesarean – so, by default, my mom's second pregnancy – delivery was gonna be C-section so, because he had a choice, my mom would still make fun – 'The only time I saw him reading Astrology books, and that was to bring you to earth on good time!' So, he truly believes that and it's a normal scene in my family – sitting in my family when there was a big decision to make... they would consult an astrologer. It's not everybody's family – many people don't believe it – they think it is fanatics – the people who believe them – but, in my family, the way I grew up, I see this happening a lot, so the next question he asked was, 'Does it match?' and because he understands that, and I do learn something about it through him – I told him all these things – 'These are the planetary positions – I think you'll be happy.' 'Okay – fine.'

R2: And, most importantly, I had the job at that time, ...

I: Exactly – yeah.

R2: ...so I think everything fell into place.

R1: But he had some conditions.

I: Would you mind sharing those?

R1: Yeah, no problem – he just said I should stay back in India until I get married, and he wanted six months' time because I was the youngest of the lot and the marriage would be a big celebration – he wanted to save some money for that. So, he just asked very fair demands! – 'That's fine – I've been waiting for so long – six months, it's not a big deal!' and then he didn't say anything at all. I don't know if our daughters come and tell us something like that...

R2: It was unusual – so, every time we say to our parents back in those days that 'We want to marry so and so,' there's always some kind of opposition, so there's always struggle, especially from the place where we are, so people don't accept 'Love marriage' as a thing.

I: So, how was your family? – I mean, her family was fine – how was yours?

R2: My family was fine too because it was more like family friends, ...

I: Okay.

R2: ...so my dad and my mom – they knew Nithya’s dad and mom, so they knew...

R1: The family.

R2: ...what the tradition and the history behind this family. So – like Nithya says – the Astrology – the charts matched and everything. I had a job, so my dad was like, ‘They’re not gonna suffer...

I: Yeah.

R2: ...if they’re left alone,’ so my parents were okay with that as well.

R1: The problem is – at that time – not now – the families were looked down upon if they had ‘Love marriage’ – ...

I: Okay.

R1: ...that was the crucial factor. In that sense, I would consider we both are lucky, ...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...and both our parents were not concerned about that, but boy’s family wouldn’t mind that much. The girl’s families actually looked down upon – very badly – ...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...so, in that sense, I would say my father was trend-setter – ...

R2: Yeah.

I: ...very much.

R1: ...in that. He didn’t mind at all – he asked me another question – he asked me, ‘What would you do if I don’t agree to this?’

I: I’m glad – I was just about to ask you that.

R1: Yeah, he did ask me, and I said, ‘I’m not gonna elope – I don’t want to do that.’ I could have – we could have done that. If we are able to travel to the UK and we could have...

R2: Yeah.

R1: ...done whatever we wanted to, but we're not going to do that. He asked me, 'Why?' – we were very clear – we discussed that. Our children don't want to be... not that way – something like that. We want to respect...

R2: We still want to respect.

R1: ...our parents – we want our children to respect us, so we want to set a good example.

I: You wanted their blessing.

R1: Their blessings – yeah.

R2: So, we still wanted to...

R1: You're making it easy!

I: I understand the Indian tradition – you still want that...

R2: We still...

I: ...blessing from your parents.

R2: ...wanted all that relationship even after a marriage – our kids deserve the as well, ...

R1: Yeah.

R2: ...so it was more like – back in those days – if you oppose your parents, you're on your own, and then the kids are like, 'We have to start our own generation from our lives,' so I didn't want that to happen – we have a very big history.

I: Yeah.

R2: The whole point of coming to the UK was we had a plan in terms of...

I: Yeah.

R2: ...'This is what we're gonna do, and this is what we're gonna settle down.' Like I said, I think everything fell into place.

R1: And then, I answered to him saying that, 'I won't get married until he's getting married,' knowing very well that he won't get married! I just told him that – 'I

won't get married until he gets married – you cannot force me to get married to someone...

R2: Yeah.

R1: ...until I am sure that he is married to someone else happily!

R2: It wasn't that serious conversation, but I think Nithya's dad was like, 'Okay.'

R1: We had this conversation, Halima, and we talk every other day. I talk to my parents almost every day – sometimes thrice a day, or twice a day – and my father and I... we have this good relationship as friends and everything. I can go back to him – discuss everything, right from businesses' problem – problems in the businesses – with problems in bringing the children up, or putting them into a good school. Everything I discuss – he's got a different perspective – he respects women – that's what I would say.

I: I feel like – listening to you – it's very non-traditional. Your father was very non-traditional...

R1: Yeah.

I: ...to what we imagine coming from an Indian community of what fathers are like, and I feel that you've almost flourished...

R1: Yes.

I: ...because of your father's support.

R1: True – there will be complaints coming home from other fellow mothers. Not my mother or father – fellow mothers, or sisters, cousins – uncles and aunts – and they would come and say, 'She's like a boy,' and my father would probably say, 'I'm bringing her like a boy – what is your problem?' In college, there was this professor who would call my mom and say, 'She's always in the sports ground – she's not in the classroom,' and my mom would say, 'She's studying there on a sports scholarship – if she's not doing justice to that, tell me about it. Don't tell me that she's not in the classroom!'

I: That's beautiful.

R1: That's the sort of [inaudible 01:03:42].

R2: It was unique.

I: Yeah – very different.

- R2:** It was different, but that wasn't the norm – every family – but, fortunately, for me, Nithya's family was different, so it was easy for our parents to actually convince for us to get married.
- R1:** He's like that – he's just like my dad. Everybody thinks I'm the feminist in the house, but I'm not. I sometimes feel insecure – very weak and let down by the society – so-called 'Failures' and everything. He's the one who would push me back – pull me out of it and push me back on track. I'll tell you an example – for instance... I don't remember exactly which one was it – it was too heavy for me to lift, and I said, 'Prabu, can you help me lift it?' He was like, 'In our household...' and he was like, 'Why do you want me to lift it?' – I said, 'I think it's a man's job.' He said, 'In our household, there is no gender-bias – there is no role-based jobs – why do you want me to do that? – go do it!' I was so proud and angry at the same time, so that's how he is – he's just a lot like my father, so it was easy for me to settle down with him! and his children – sorry, our children – having him as a father – they are lucky as well.
- I:** That's beautiful – thank you. So, everything's approved – did you have a traditional Indian Hindu wedding?
- R2:** Go on.
- R1:** Absolutely! – I think we had two days of events.
- R2:** We got married back in 2008. So, after our parents agreed – before wedding, we used to do something called an 'Engagement ceremony,' so obviously I couldn't go there, so it was just my parents mingling with other parents, and getting that confirmed. So, our wedding happened 18 February 2008 back in Erode! – our home town.
- R1:** I'm surprised you remembered that!
- R2:** Unlike English wedding – so, Indian weddings are huge, and it's more than two or three days. In total, we had about 2,000 – 3,000 people – visiting, easily.
- R1:** 5,000...
- R2:** Yeah – 5,000.
- R1:** ...for two days, even.
- R2:** Yeah.
- R1:** Event then for two days – it started on... I think it was Sunday, Monday – right? – February 17 and 18.
- R2:** I think it was a Sunday.

R1: We were in the wedding hall on Saturday afternoon – we went there on Saturday, and the girl's family first, and we had some function on Saturday evening and, on Sunday, the reception happened – wedding reception.

R2: We had two receptions as well because we had a tradition where we get married, as in the Indian tradition, ...

R1: Yeah.

R2: ...we just have the...

R1: Mangalsutra.

R2: It's a chain. Unfortunately, the boys, they don't get anything as a sign of marriage!

I: You get the what?

R2: The women – well, in terms of...

R1: When you...

R2: ...you're wearing it in our body.

R1: No, I'll change the telling – I would like to deviate a bit! We got a platinum – my mum gave us the platinum rings.

R2: Just to...!

R1: Let me put this, please and [s.l. he wouldn't married 01:07:01]!

R2: So, that tradition – our culture – so, there's a...

R1: Mangalsutra.

R2: Yeah, so that happened in the morning and then, only after that, the wedding reception happens, so ours was a bit different because our wedding was on a Monday, so Nithya's dad and my dad invited every religion on a Sunday!...

R1: No, I was the youngest, Halima.

R2: ...because Sunday was a holiday, so there was loads of people coming in and, again, even from a wedding perspective, it was completely abnorm having a reception first and then wedding the following day.

I: Absolutely.

R1: We had a family lunch, and then wedding reception in the evening, and then dinner, followed by an early morning [s.l. Muhurat 01:07:50] – the auspicious time when we would get married and then for a short reception – breakfast and then lunch – and then we'll go back to our respective homes. So, that was the core marriage function, but the wedding parties would be in the hall for nearly two to three days – ...

I: Okay.

R2: Yeah.

R1: ...three days at least, if I'm not wrong, and the food would be served for all three days. I was the youngest in the family – why I'm insisting this is... my grandparents were no more – my paternal grandparents were no more, and my parents had the sentiment that, 'What might happen afterwards?' The next baby in the family was like, 'It's a boy,' and the next girl in the family was 21 years younger than me, ...

I: Okay.

R1: ...and grandchildren – grandchild for my aunt. Everybody in the family was like, 'Let's all have fun.'

I: It's a nice way to celebrate.

R1: Yes.

I: So, you're married and how long after did you both then come back to England?

R2: It was pretty immediate, I think.

R1: You left straightaway, I think, and...

R2: Yes.

R1: ...I came after a month.

R2: After the marriage, there's still some tradition that you need to follow based on our Hindu culture, so I think I had about two weeks holiday because I was still working with 'EE' – 'Orange' back then – so, I got my holidays pre-booked. After two weeks, I came back and then, because we were married, so my expectation was... my family's expectations – her family's expectations – that I would actually have a shelter for myself – my own. So, because we were all living in shared accommodation previously before marriage, so I got a job in Bristol, even before marriage, so I had to actively look for a place to rent whilst Nithya was still in India, so I came, first, to Fishponds. So, that's our first home in Bristol, so we looked for certain other places, but I think Fishponds was a quieter area, so I found a place and I think, after that, you came to the UK.

R1: I came a month afterwards, and that's it – we came here.

R2: In terms of living after wedding – I mean, we didn't find it any different because we knew each other.

R1: No, you didn't find it [inaudible 01:10:10.9]. I'll be honest with you – marriage is a big thing for a woman. I don't want girls watching this... think it was easy transition from being a girl to a wife. Being a wife is a different ballgame all together – men take it easily, and somehow they transition easily but, for women, it's a big deal to...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...come face-to-face with it. I knew him from 15 – ...

I: Yeah.

R1: ...even then, sharing a home, sharing the bedroom, bathroom – everything was a shock. It took me a few months to adjust to it.

I: Yeah – somebody's in that space.

R1: In the space.

R2: Especially coming from a traditional family background, so yeah, we're not used to this.

[Over speaking 01:10:55]

I: But you got settled.

R2: Yeah.

I: So, now you're in Bristol, in...

R1: Fishponds.

I: ...and have you been here ever since you...

R1: Yeah.

R2: Yeah.

I: ...moved?

R1: Looks like it is.

R2: Yeah!

I: You've always been in Fishponds?

R1: And Kingswood.

I: Okay.

R2: We had a very friendly landlord back in 2008 – that's when I moved into Bristol. So, his name was Andy – Andrew Cartwright – so, he had loads of other properties within Bristol.

I: Okay.

R2: So, if we didn't like a property within that area – if the neighbours are noisy! He's more like a English father to us.

R1: Yes – he still is.

R2: We're still in contact with him, so he would always find us a property.

I: Okay.

R1: Or an office properties!

I: So, you're now settled – you've been here – you have two daughters of 11 and...

R1: 11-and-a-half and seven-and-a-quarter!

I: Okay – and you mentioned before how they don't have the language, but they understand it, so have you kept your Hindu traditions? Are you part of the Hindu community here in Bristol, actively, or generally?

R2: Go on – I'll let you answer!

R1: Thank you! We don't trust our belief system with the children, ...

I: Okay.

R1: ...but we follow it – we go to temples. We offer prayers – it's our thing – and until three years ago, our elder one asked if we are Muslims. We both were very proud, but that she doesn't even know what we were, and it's not something to be ashamed – I felt those barriers should end with this, and then I told her – sat down and told her – 'Why d'you want know it?' and then we both sat down and told her, 'No, we are not Muslims – our family is Hindu, but it's up to you to do whatever you want in your life,' so that's what we do.

R2: We do have communities here in Bristol, so it's more like a Tamil community, rather than a religious-based community but, in terms of religion – yes – like Nithya said – we still practice our religion – we go to Birmingham Temple every month.

R1: We fast on...

R2: We offer pujas, we offer...

R1: Homas.

R2: [ph. Homums 01:13:13] and the fire rituals. We still do that, and the girls get to watch it, and so that's all we can do, so it's up to them to actually take it up.

I: That's a nice, comfortable place to be. You also mentioned the food, ...

R1: Yeah!

I: ...which is a very big part of...

R1: Yes.

I: ...your culture and which you are building up as a legacy, almost, for your children, ...

R1: Honestly – yes.

I:so, are you still very traditionally South Indian – food is your big thing?

R1: When it comes to food, we both are foodies – we eat everything! So, we cook a lot, and then we cook Chinese, Pasta too, Italian too, and we try North Indian – something. When it comes to food, there's no...

I: Okay.

R1: ...caste, creed, religion – nothing – ...

I: Brilliant.

R1: ... we eat everything!

R2: The kids love Indian food.

I: Okay.

R1: Spicey.

- R2:** Because they get to have their lunch in school, they're used to English food, and they're used to fish and chips, and spaghetti, and all that but, when they come home, we cook three meals a day, regardless of them being in school or not, so we have breakfast, lunch and dinner. So, they know for a fact that, if you come back home, there's always Indian food waiting but, if they need something else, ...
- I:** Yeah.
- R2:** ...then we still do takeaways – we still go out, and we still cook other kind of food.
- I:** You've become part of England. What's the next step for your life – what are you planning of doing or achieving?
- R1:** I run a company called, 'Lurnable,' and Prabu's a part of it as well on a non-executive way – not directly. I would like to establish 'Lurnable' as a good British AdTech company. I would like to say, 'Unicorn,' but I'm not sure – I don't want to be audacious about it! but I would like to position 'Lurnable' as a very good and successful British AdTech company. Like you just mentioned, we invite ourselves into this culture better than in India, and it's a curse now. If we go back, we cannot relate to the girls I grew up with – the family I grew up with – because they're totally different.
- I:** Yeah.
- R1:** There's about 18 years of vacancy – I cannot fill it.
- R2:** Yeah.
- R1:** It's difficult for both of us to fill those vacancies, and so we've decided to look forward to our life here.
- R2:** Even from our girls' – kids' – perspective, they can't go there. Of course, we can, but they would struggle as well.
- I:** Climatized here now.
- R2:** Yeah – so, they've been here 11 years – seven years – so, even the language they speak is gonna be completely different to what kids in India speak. Same English, but different accent, but sometimes you might get bullied – sometimes you might boss other kids. We've kind of settled down here.
- R1:** Yes – we love Bristol, so we want to be here.
- I:** Okay.
- R1:** He works for a company that's not even in Bristol. Except for his first job, nothing is in Bristol.

- I:** What's your future plans, then?
- R2:** I've been in employment since 2007, so I've been working for someone else. Obviously, like Nithya said, I'm working closely with Nithya and 'Lurnable' but – from my perspective – I just want to go into senior management role very soon, so I still see myself in the UK for the longer term, up until the girls grow up, and it's basically up to them if they have to go back to India, or...
- R1:** I don't think that's going to happen!
- R2:** ...whoever they marry! We don't know – I don't think five years – 10 years ahead – so that's probably me first job! So, I just think a couple of years ahead so, in the immediate future, I still see myself in Bristol. If anything, I will be moving or travelling in and around the UK, but we're very much UK-based.
- R1:** We've made this our home.
- I:** Brilliant. I'm gonna still ask this question, but I think you've already answered it – Indian or British?
- R1:** In what – food?
- I:** How d'you count yourself – as Indian or British now?
- R1:** I can't say that, Halima – I'll be honest. I can't say I'm one – ...
- I:** Oh, cool.
- R1:** ...it's neither Indian or British.
- R2:** I was gonna say 'Indian-British!'
- R1:** We can't... it's because...
- I:** Okay – British-Indian, or Indian-British?
- R1:** That's really unfair! Growing up, it's not under your control when you grow where you were born, or what your entry is to, but that was beautiful – I have no qualms or complaints – ...
- I:** Of course.
- R1:** ...it was beautiful, so I can't just take a decision and give up on what I enjoy, saying that I'm going to be more of this.
- I:** Yeah.

R2: Yeah.

R1: At the same time, this country has no reason to give me so much opportunities and so much happiness, and so many great memories, but this country still gives me that, so I can't give up on this or that.

I: Very nice.

R1: I'm gonna be both!

I: How about yourself, Prabu?

R2: I thought you were not gonna ask me! I'm 50/50 as well because the reason I say that – I've spent literally half of my life back in India, ...

I: Yeah.

R2: ...and that's where my base is, and the other half in the UK. UK's given me job – we got married here – we got kids here – everything – so, compared to life in India, we're still a young age, but still love the family tradition. If anything, the only concern being in the UK for my perspective is for the kids – they would miss out on the big...

I: Exactly.

R2: ...family surroundings and gatherings but, apart from that, kids love it here – I love it here. Even during any sporting events, I still support England, except for cricket!

I: Oh, you just took my question away!

R2: When it comes to India and England, I'll always go with India! So, you can probably see I'm slightly leaning towards India...

I: Yes.

R2: ...because of my background.

I: And so you should be. Thank you so much – I just wanna say a 'Thank you' for sharing your beautiful story with us.

R2: Our pleasure – thank you.

R1: Pleasure is on us.

I: Thank you.

R1: Thank you very much.

Transcript ends 79:29

