

This is Your Heritage...

South Gloucestershire Stories of the Indian Community

Interview : Ram Dev Jat full interview Audio Transcription (03-01-2022)

Transcription and translation from Hindi to English by Bristol Transcription & Translation Services and edited by a member of the South Gloucestershire Museums Group, 6th June 2022.

Interviewer: Hardik Gaurav

Recorder: Hardik Gaurav

Location: RooBroo Restaurant, 2 Castle Street, Thornbury, BS35 1HB

Participant prefix key:

I: Interviewer

R: Respondent

Transcript begins 00:01

I: It's 1:29 pm, at this beautiful hotel [restaurant] of Ram Dev Jat.

R: 'Roobroo'

I: It's called 'Roobroo'. It's in Thornbury, and today we are carrying out his interview. Let's start with the introduction. Please introduce yourself.

R: My name is Ram Dev Jat. I am from India, from the Churu district in Rajasthan. There is a place called Kolasar village. I was born there and that is where I spent my childhood and went to school. And after that, after finishing school, when I started working, I went to Delhi to learn the work. I observed it and studied how to do the job. Then I joined a restaurant and got training for some time. After the training, I got a job in Haldiram's. Haldiram's was a very popular sweet shop, with a restaurant. They had a lot of franchises and it is international. I worked for 4 years continuously.

I: So, when you came from the village to Delhi, it must have been a big change for you. How was it?

R: Some of my friends worked in Delhi, in the line of clothes painting and clothes generally. First, I thought I would go there and work with them. Some were close friends. When I left school, I went to Delhi and observed it. I went with them once, working in the clothes line. There is a place called Gandhi nagar. I did not like that work. Meaning, it didn't suit me in my heart, if I would be able to do it in a good way, from the heart or happily. I stayed for two weeks and then went back home.

Then Papa said "Whatever you want to do, you should study for it first. There is time for studies and you can do it in whatever thing you like." So, from the beginning, I liked food, good food. Eating good food, this was my most important interest. After that, many times, I would go out to eat. So I thought "Why don't I study in the field of restaurant?" So, then I studied food. And when Mummy cooked at home, I really liked to help her.

Then I started studies about food and a close friend of mine worked in the same line. He was a chef there. He supported me a lot and told me a lot of things. While studying, I was looking for a job. He recommended the job at Haldiram's, as someone he knew was working there. He recommended that I should go and meet them and talk to them. So, the salary was less at that time, but my real intention was that I had to learn the work, that I should be able to do it well in future. So, I learnt the work there. I continued to work there. After that, I used to go and visit my home. I would go every 2 or 3 months, on leave. Mummy and Papa lived in Rajasthan, my brother, sister, and all the relatives' families next to each other, over there. The work was good there [in Delhi] and I was happy with my work, at that time.

After that, while doing the job at Haldiram's, I got the job at Bikaner. I was very happy because my salary increased from that of Haldiram's, in Bikaner. So, I had also learnt the work by then. So, I joined Bikaner in Karol Bagh. I continued working there for two years. They opened a branch and I was sent there. So, I went there and set it up in Sahibabad and in Ghaziabad. Those were both franchises. I worked there for some time. While working there, the company... until 2006, I worked continuously in Bikaner. In 2005, a little bit... Otherwise, in a year, we usually got leave for a month and a half from the company. Sometimes, if we wanted more, it was unpaid. I got married in 2005. At that time, I took a break, went to Rajasthan as well and I roamed around here and there.

After that, the company offered me a job, saying "You should go to Dubai." They had a restaurant in Dubai. It was a very good restaurant, it was a very busy restaurant. Now they have five or six restaurants. But, at that time, they had only one restaurant in Dubai. So, the company offered me a job there. So I, for once, I thought no. The family was stopping me, telling me not to go abroad, it's all right here. Then, after a month or two passed, the company again said "Ram Dev, if you don't want to work there, then you can come back, but do go there for a few days."

I: But the company wanted you to go there.

R: Yes.

I: Your work was so good.

R: Yes. So, the company gave me a visa for Dubai. My stay there... it's a good life, working in Dubai. It's a good life style. I went there and, for a month, my heart was unsettled and I didn't feel good, as I was very far from my family. Then, after that, slowly, many friends who had been working in Delhi, who used to meet, they too were working here and there in Dubai. They used to come too. I went back on leave after seven or eight months. It felt good at that time. Then it became a routine that I would go back home on leave and then back. Just as I used to work in Delhi, I started working in the same way.

There were many friends in Dubai who used to find people for jobs in England. And two or three friends of mine went to Canada. I was aware that I was working in Dubai and, after this, I would go back to India and I would set up something of my own there. About three or four years passed. I

had a close friend. He came here, to England. I used to talk to him and he used to tell me that it was very nice here. "The work is good and there is a time table. The weather stays good as well." So, he told me to come and see it once, saying "You will get a job as well. You should try." At that time, I rejected the thought. "No, I don't want to do it. I am fine here."

I: In Dubai.

R: Because my company in Dubai was very good. They took good care as well. And they gave all sorts of support, too. The staff were very good. My circle of friends grew as well, in 3 to 4 years. So, it felt very good to stay there.

I: How long did you work in Dubai for?

R: I went to Dubai in 2010. Sorry, I went in 2006 and stayed until 2010.

I: OK. It was long enough.

R: For 4 years I worked.

I: 4 years.

R: I kept going back and forth to India. Then, in 2010, when I went to India, this friend had also gone back to India.

I: OK.

R: So, he told me to apply for a job [in England] once and see. "If a job comes through, you can go and check it out. Otherwise, you are already doing the work in Dubai anyway." So, just like that, I was finding a job, and I sent my CV online, and I was looking for a job. I registered on some websites. I was offered a job in Leicester. In London, there is a place, Hotel Garden. I was offered a job there. But I didn't have confidence in it because, on the website, there were lots of fake IDs, and there were many such comments written on it. I did not reply to it. I received emails 3 or 4 times as well. They called once or twice as well but, every time the phone call came, the conversation seemed different. So, I didn't do it.

From Leicester, a place called Milan Sweets, which was a long-established sweet shop, I got a job there. I worked on sweets and curries, Indian. They used to do small-scale catering, like for 50 people, 20-30 people. They did small-scale caterings, because they didn't have very many staff. They didn't have any chefs. They had one chef for sweets. Their sweet shop was good.

I: So they offered you a job.

R: They offered me a job. I talked to them, then I discussed it at home, talked to them. Papa said "Just see if you like it. It's good in Dubai as well." I talked to my wife and she said, "Whether you stay in Dubai or England, it's the same thing, for home."

I: it's far from home, anyway.

R: "If you like it, then go and see it once. And, if you don't, then come back." So, then I applied for this job.

I: When was this?

R: I applied in 2010, in April.

I: In April 2010.

R: Yes. I applied in April and in June the embassy asked for my passport for my visa. So, when I deposited the passport, they refused my visa.

I: OK.

R: So, I thought that now it wouldn't happen, but, at that time, my mind was made up to go once, as I had applied and found a job, and I should try it once. I inquired about it, on what basis it had been refused. I asked the solicitor, and they said, "Your papers are all correct. It has been refused due to a misunderstanding, so you should make an appeal and you will get the visa."

I: OK.

R: I said to him, "All right, you should appeal". He did not take anything from me. He looked at my papers and took them. Through the solicitors I had applied with before, they made the appeal. He said "It's possible it takes a month, it takes 28 days, for the result, and we will tell you." After about 16 – 17 days had passed, he called me and said "You have to deposit the passport again at the embassy." I was nervous then. The first time I went for it, I was very excited. But the second time, I had fear in my heart about what would happen, even though we were doing it. When I was going, someone told me that they would probably return my passport in 3 – 4 days. So, as I went to the counter, they asked for my name and my details, took my passport and asked if I could wait and come back in one hour. And I said, "Yes, I can come." I went outside and for a while roamed around and then came back. They had stamped my visa within an hour. Because it had been all cleared and, hence, they asked for my passport. So, I got the visa. I called everyone at home and told them and they were happy. Then I made plans to come to England.

I: When you came to England, what was your first memory? How did you find it different from India and Dubai?

R: When I came from India, at that time it was warm there, it was the month of July. But India has all weathers, cold, warm, and it feels good too. When I came here, there was good greenery and very good weather. The sunlight stayed till late. It would stay light till night, till 9 -10 pm. And when I saw that, it seemed different, that it stays light till late, and the weather was nice, with full greenery. When I initially came, I didn't know much about here, just that a friend lived here, and I used to talk to him. So, when I came out of the airport, my boss had come to meet me.

I: From Milan Sweets?

R: Yes, the boss from Milan Sweets, Manish Patel, he had come to meet me. So, I was meeting him for the first time. I had only talked to him over the phone before. So, I went with him and he told me about here. I felt very good and I was happy in my heart that it was such good weather and living. Then I went there [Leicester] and met my friend. For a day or two I didn't work but just rested in my room. I went out with my friend. I explored for a week. After a week, I thought "I am here for a job", so I asked someone and was told that I had to apply for National Insurance and after getting the NI number, I could work. So, then I applied for NI. In 4 or 5 days, I got my NI

reference, and then I started my job there. They really liked my work, because I had been working since 1998.

I: OK.

R: I had worked for a long time, hence I had enough experience. So, they really liked my work. For four to six months, I continued working there. After three or four months, when winter came, I realised that it gets very cold here. In 2010, there was a lot of snowfall as well. It was my first year in so much snow. In our weather there [in India], we don't have snow. After four or five months, I planned to go to India. I went to India, met my family. I got 4 weeks break. Then I came back. I thought, "Okay, I work here, and I go to India and I'll come back. When I came back, the boss from Milan told me that I was a good Indian artisan. "You are a chef, and I want to expand the catering work. So, will you work for me if we set up a unit?" because the kitchen they had was very little, it couldn't handle big catering. So, they started catering. Initially, they had small-scale catering, but then for 200-300 people, for weddings and parties. There were lots of weddings and parties and big events. We cooked many types of food there. We also made food in the halls. People liked it, and many orders for catering started coming to them. And their work started to grow. So, then he said "I will get a place for a kitchen, let's set up the unit." So, he bought a place. He made a big kitchen, a big unit. And from there we did the catering, for 1000 people, all together.

I: What year was this?

R: This was in 2011.

I: 2011... so, it had been a year for you.

R: Eight or nine months after I'd come. So in 2011, in March, April, there was very good catering. The weather, too, opens up in April, and the time in June, July and August... The business was very good.

I: Was catering only for Indian food or English and Indian both?

R: No, at that time only for Indian food. I used to cook food there only. I was happy and the boss was good too. Everything was good there.

After that, I got another job offer for a restaurant. There was a restaurant opening in Bristol. I knew someone there who recommended my name. They have many Dominos in the UK as well. They have more than 200 franchises. They had opened a huge restaurant in Bristol, on the harbourside. Zaza Bazaar is the name. So, they offered me a job. The salary was good too. And a friend was also moving to it. So, I was close to him. The job where I was working was stressful as well, because of the large-scale caterings. In this one, I thought that it's a big company and it would be easy to grow in future. So, I talked to the boss [at Milan Sweets], and he simply refused, saying "Ram Dev, you cannot go." No, he said, that I cannot go, and asked what support I needed. "If you want, I will increase your salary." I said "No, it's not about the salary, I have made up my mind for a change. So, I want to change." So, a friend of mine worked for him in Wellingborough. I talked to him in my circle of friends. So, he [the owner of Milan Sweets] had someone he knew. So, I told him "You should take him, move him to you." The man didn't have a visa at that time. And then I moved to Bristol.

I: So, you arranged for a substitute for him.

R: Yes. Because I was on very good terms with him [the owner of Milan Sweets]. Even today I talk to them nicely and the families have a good relationship. We meet up and everything, and there's a lot of support from them.

I: They started the catering with you as well.

R: Yes.

I: Their work must have grown.

R: Yes. We still talk and it's very good. I take my family to Leicester for an outing, I take the family there, we meet them, and stay like a family. In 2011, I moved to Bristol. It was quite a big operation. In the beginning, it seemed that I had never worked in such a big restaurant. When 750-800 people come inside together in a restaurant, that is a huge rush. But the organisation was quite big and there were lots of workers as well. There were different sections and the duties were divided.

In the beginning it seemed like this, but after two to four weeks I had a little bit of difficulty. The shift was long, from morning to evening. Sometimes I would come in the morning till night, till 11pm, 12. I had to clean up properly, and it took time. But all the people who worked there, some were from here, some had come from India. I had met many friends from Delhi. So, I had a good circle of friends there. My family was not here. They were in India. So, we rented a house together, in Kingswood. We used to come and go in a bus. Then, on the 2 days off, we used to go out and sightsee. When I saw Bristol - I have seen other cities, like Birmingham, I have been to London as well, I have seen a few places in London, Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham, Manchester, but - when I saw Bristol, I felt good in my heart, that the weather stays good here as well, and it is quite a warm area, too.

I stayed for six or seven months, then I went on my leave. That company also was very supportive. It gave a holiday of 4-6 weeks as well. Six weeks holiday is quite a bit, and usually companies here do not give it. They usually give 2 weeks, but that company gave me holidays so that I could go home once a year. If I went twice a year, then I would go 3 weeks each. Up to then, I had no plans of settling here. It's just that I had a good salary. Otherwise, we worked in Delhi and Dubai too, the same work as I am doing here. For some time, I would come, and work, but in my mind, I always knew that I had to go and settle myself in India, and do something of my own. I would do something with a restaurant. That was my plan from the beginning and the ambition was this only, because I worked in one field from the beginning. I like cooking food. You could say "Just do the job" but when I am cooking food, I am totally engrossed in it. Whatever else is happening around is not that important, so, in my mind, I only had this thought, that I would create a good restaurant in my city, and would set myself up there.

Three to four years passed here, while doing this work. The team was good with me, we used to do good work here. When I went on leave in 2014, my Mummy, Papa and my wife urged me that she should at least come to visit once, and it would feel good. But, at that time, my wife had a gastric disorder. My wife's medicine came from Jaipur. Our main hospital is Jaipur. For a long time, we kept her on medicine from the local hospital, but she never got better by it. So, then, we started getting the medicine from Jaipur. It helped her to sleep better, as she didn't sleep well, and had headaches. She used to be upset about it. First, the plan was that she would only come for sightseeing. Then I thought: Why shouldn't I bring her here and get her treatment here? The doctors and care are good here. Her diagnosis will be better here. When I discussed this with my wife, she said "All right." She

said "I am ready to go. We will ask Mummy and Papa". Mummy, Papa also said "It's up to you. You should show her once, that's good and, if she gets better, that is very good for everyone."

So, I applied for my wife's visa. My wife was not educated, so I worried whether she would even get it or not. So, I deposited all the papers that were required in the embassy and applied for the visa. So, something very good - I believe in Hari Dev and start with his name. Whenever I begin something, I start with Sham Baba's name. There was a belief in my heart that now the job would be done for sure. So, this happened, and I still remember the date, even. I applied for the visa in March, on the 25th of March we deposited the papers, and on 27th...

I: Which year was this?

R: in 2014. No, in 2015, sorry. In 2015, March 25th, I deposited the papers, and on 27th we got the message for passport collection. I was wondering what had happened - in two to three days we got the message - this cannot be for visa. So, we went and when we collected the passport from the embassy, the visa had been stamped. In two days only, the visa had been issued! It was great happiness. Then my wife came here with me. I got her the ticket about 10-15 days after the issue of the visa. At that time, I had gone to India for my holidays. So, my wife came here and at that time we rented a flat in Clifton, we lived there. The weather was good too, and Clifton is a good area. On my day off, we would go out on an excursion. After duty, we would go out, if the weather was good. Then summer came.

When I came here and registered with the GP, I filled in a form about the medicines that she was already taking. At the time when she came from India, we had brought her medicines, because if the medicine here did not suit her or the weather did not suit her, it might be a problem. I had already brought her enough medicines for eight weeks. When we talked to the doctor here and when they examined her, they gave me an appointment in which they talked with my wife for a long time through translation. They understood her whole story first, how and when this problem started. So, I felt they examined her in a lot of detail. So, I felt something good would happen.

Then they recommended me to a doctor, Dr Dane in Southmead. He was a neurologist. So, he kept 3 or 4 appointments for me, sometimes after 2 weeks, and sometimes 3 weeks. How was her mood, whether she was staying happy or not. They cared very well for me. From there, I started feeling that over here people are taken care of, and life is good and better. My wife started liking it here as well, the way people and their manners are over here. And how they support each other. There were many family friends here, who supported, because before this we didn't know... my wife was alone here. We didn't talk much to anyone. Also, there was no circle of friends. Initially, we thought: How will we pass the time? But then there became family friends, then we started meeting them.

When they started the medication, at that time my wife was pregnant. So, then, the medicine she was already on, they stopped it at once. And then they started a medicine from here, as the other medicine could harm the foetus. So, they really took good care at that time. Every week, a nurse, what do you call it?...who supported the team of doctors... so the nurse would phone twice a week and inquire about her and her mood. On Monday and Friday. And, on Wednesday, she would come to the home and check, herself, how everything was. If there was any problem, we should contact them. It was good support. After two to three months, when they scanned, we found out that we were having twins. After that, every one to two weeks, we got a scan at the hospital. The system is very good and we were lucky that, from the beginning, we had the same doctor until the end, and he would give me a time for a day he was on duty.

I: Dr. Dane?

R: No, the children's doctor in Saint Michael's. Dr Dane was the neurologist. His nurse would come to check her mood and everything. He used to give us an appointment every 4 to 6 weeks. To see how it was going and looking for changes, whether the sleep cycle was all right. But it was all linked with the doctors in Saint Michael, and they were aware of the medication and everything.

Yes, everything was connected. At that time, I was on a work permit. I hadn't got citizenship, and it seemed critical, how it would happen. It was difficult for us. Firstly, we were having twins, then my wife's condition was such that she was on medication.

I: You were far away from home.

R: We were away from home, hence, at that time I felt nervous as well, with the thought of what might happen, how it would happen. I was depending on God, but we had the support of many friends. The doctors gave us good support, too. After that, it wasn't critical, but the doctors thought that she was having twins and she was finding it hard to breathe and that was upsetting for the babies. So, they admitted my wife, and told us that she would have a C section, and they made the babies be born in the 33rd week, premature at 7 months. At that time as well, we had difficulty. There was no bed space in the ICU, in Bristol. Saint Michael's is a very good hospital, the care was very good, but as it happened there was no space then for 2 babies. They sent us to Taunton, it was close to our hospital. The babies were born over there. I have never seen such good care in my life. The care for the babies and my wife was excellent. They kept us there six or seven days, then we moved to Saint Michael's.

From that time, I really started liking it more, that the people were from here, were locals, but how they get together and support one another. I really liked it. My wife liked it as well. I had applied for a visa for Mummy, for a visit visa, so that we could get some support from her here, in the household, when the babies came home. How would my wife do it single handedly? Mummy and Papa have always been a good support. So, at that time, Mummy got the visa, and she came four days after the babies were born. The due date for their birth was in December, and they were born in October. So, the visa we had applied for was according to the due date and that Mummy would come about 2 months earlier, but the babies were born much before that.

I: Which year is this?

R: 2022 is the year right now.

I: No..

R: In 2015.

I: OK, in 2015.

R: In 2015, in October, the babies were born. So, at that time, I had support from my company as well. There was support from my co-workers. If there was some work, or I was at the hospital, or when Mummy came there was no one to receive her from the airport, my co-workers went on their own to pick Mummy up. And, I mean, it was good in those days. We got all sorts of support and we didn't even feel that we had any difficulty. When everything went off well and they were born,

there was no problem with my wife and babies. And, at that time, they kept their focus on the disorder as well, so that she wouldn't be insomniac or something else that was upsetting.

I: Without complication.

R: Without complication, so that that shouldn't happen as well. But the way this hospital worked was very good. At that point, I thought in my heart that we should live here and the life was better here, because they think: This person is important and we should help each other. So, I and my wife decided that we should live here. Then we stayed for 2, 3, 4 months. When it was time for Mummy to go back, we also went along for some time. My wife had come for the first time, and she had been separated from her family and friends, so she said: "I will go to India and come back." So, at that point we went to India for some time. The children stayed there too. From that point, we decided we wanted to live here permanently. The residential aspect was rather expensive though. At that time, I did not have enough money to get a house and live, so I rented. I got some support from Papa, so I bought a house in Bristol. We started living there. I did my job and then my wife returned, we started living here, and slowly the children grew up.

I: Where was the house?

R: In Withywood, Bristol, I bought the house. Near the airport. We lived there and I had a job in Bristol city centre. I did not drive at the time. Earlier, I'd had no plans of living here, so I didn't get a licence. Then I learned to drive and got the licence. After doing all this, everything was set and everything was going just fine.

But I felt that my free time was short and the children also needed some time. The children needed time to be taken out on excursions. So, sometimes I used to take days off and the job was flexible too. We used to go out on trips, here and there. But I knew in my mind that I had to create a restaurant of my own and set up my own little business. Because, initially, I had planned to do it back in India, and now the plan was for here. So, slowly, I started saving money. I saved some money from the job. Then I talked to Papa. He said "If you want to do it and if you can, then you should do it, but why do you want to do it, because your job is going fine?" I said that job is going fine but, for the future, it would be good if I could get some free time. I did not know how it would happen. In the beginning, I wondered "How will it happen and where will it be?" At that time, I was looking for a place. Gradually I saved some money, and I was looking for a good area because that was very important, that I find some place in a good area. I used to go here and there on my day off. I had some friends in Birmingham, Leicester. I have many friends in Leicester. Some have their own business, some have jobs, but I talked to some people there as well. So, one friend said that you should come here and we will do something together, in Leicester. But in my mind, I really liked Bristol city. So, at the end of the day, I looked for places here.

I would go to look for places. In Thornbury... Initially, I did not know about Thornbury. I came to Thornbury... A friend had told me about Almondsbury. A friend of his family had a house there. So, there was a party there for the family, and they invited me. I came there, saw the area and I liked it. On my next day off, I and my wife came here. We came, looked around, we saw Thornbury as well. We had been to a Thornbury restaurant before, but then I started to explore the area, in Thornbury, in Patchway. I looked at some places in Bath as well. After exploring around there, when I came back here, I felt that this area was suitable. I talked to people and questioned them.

Then my wife said to me, "You make such good food, why don't you do something in this area?" So, I started to look for a place here. I asked someone, I talked to some friends. Someone told me about a place in the city centre, but that place was not suitable for me, because it wasn't within my budget. It was very expensive there. My budget was less. Then I talked to Papa and he said that he would support me if I wanted to do something. He said "I will transfer you some money." Only, then, I found a place here, in Thornbury.

So, to open this restaurant, it took a long time to get the lease transferred. It took 7-8 months, because there were 2-3 people involved in it, the owner was different, the seller was someone else and the buyer was another person. So, it took quite a long time. I got this place in August, 2019. So, at that time, Papa and Mummy were visiting as well. They were here for a visit. I brought Papa here a few times as well, before we got the place. He liked the place too and said that it was a good place. He used to come and sit here. He would explore around and go to the restaurants. There is a restaurant here called Casa, Italian. There's a Prezzo here.

When we got the place in August, we gradually started the work inside, painting it and putting everything together. It needed refurbishing so we painted it and put together the kitchen and set it all up nicely. We decorated it to reflect our Indian food. When we started it, the problem was the same, that the budget was low, so it was a problem how to market it. Marketing requires a good amount of money. But I met up with the small local businesses, and when I talked to them, they suggested: Don't get into marketing, just keep marketing on social media and we will support you. We will 'like' your page, we will share and recommend it. There is The Swan pub here, they really supported me. People at The Swan gave me a very good recommendation: Don't waste your money on media and advertisements, and you don't even have so much of a budget. Local people really support you here. So, they will support you well. They also guided me in a few things. They have Bed and Breakfast there, so if there were Indian guests staying there, they would recommend me for Indian food. They kept some menu cards there as well. People used to come here to eat, people came to try the new restaurant.

So, before opening the restaurant, I had this thought in my mind, that everyone makes food, but they make something and keep four different names for it. That is not real food, I believed. I kept a small menu and I keep a small one. My motive and plan was to cook every dish individually. So that it can have its own flavour. And every day we cooked fresh with local meat and of good quality. And to use good quality ingredients. I buy spices myself and I mix them and grind them according to my recipes, and use them.

I: So, it is very authentic.

R: Yes, I try my best that it should have a taste of its own. Flavour. So that the people can feel that yes, it is real. And they feel happy after eating it. There are some customers who know about food. There are many customers who know about food. Customers came and I would ask them how they liked it, and people gave a very good response, the feedback was really good. And then customers would come and recommend to 2-4 others that they should give it a try. People would comment and tell me that this thing is really good, and give me suggestions. Some people wished... in the beginning, the menu was small, and options were few. Then, people expressed the wish that there should be more options. There should be 2 or 3 different types of options. The way the customers demanded, I enhanced the menu. But the customers who were the local people, they gave me good support. They became the routine customers of mine.

Now it so happened that in 2019, we opened the restaurant in September, on 10th September, the month just passed in setting it up. In October, it started to become a little suitable, it was all set. It was very busy in November and December. January is usually quieter for restaurants, and also February. But I felt that I didn't know where January and February went. It became a routine that I came in the morning and did all my preparations, did the chopping up.

There is another chef who works with me, he is much older, he has more experience than me. He's a respectable person. His name is Mohammad Ansari. He worked much more in restaurants than me in Delhi, for 15 years. He worked in a five star, and, in the UK as well, he worked for 20 years. He has a lot of experience and I've learnt many things from him, like how people used to cook food in India, when there was no five star and there were desi roadside cafes. How they cooked food when there was no fridge or freezer. How to cook fresh meat and how to store it etc. All this I learnt from him, which I had not learnt through education. This is the truth, and I started working. I try doing new things at times. I try new things and sometimes some things aren't good so I leave them, thinking no, I shouldn't do this. For something which I feel is not made 100%, then I stop making it after trying for a couple of times. Then I don't do it anymore after that. But I got to learn a lot of things from him, about when, in former times, people cooked food, when there were no freezers and machines. Even then, such good food was being cooked, when there was no hotelling. I am talking about 30 years ago, he used to cook food. He learnt to cook from his Papa. His Papa was a great chef, in the times of the Nawabs. He's a chef from Lucknow. About food, his cooked food is very different, but he taught me many things and he is still doing so.

So, in January and February, we had a very good routine here. We thought that our business, our restaurant, was well settled. People started coming, there were a lot of visitors, and in Thornbury there were a lot of visitors, they would come and eat here. They would say "We've eaten your food and we feel it's very good, authentic." Then this problem of Coronavirus arose. So, initially, in March, when the problem of Corona erupted, no one understood. We kept hearing that the cases were going up in that country, in China.

I: March 2020.

R: In March 2020, when the government announced that Corona was having a big impact... need to avoid going to restaurants and not have parties, and to distance ourselves from people. At that time, my bookings in March were as good as it normally is in December. As soon as I heard the announcement, gradually all the bookings were cancelled. Then we had the lockdown. At that point, I started thinking: How will I afford it? The rent, all the bills, people who are the workers, it seemed like a problem and I was worried. I used to think that I had only just started my work and as soon as it was picking up, this happened. So, at that time, I found it a bit difficult. At that time, I didn't do take-away. All my focus was on the restaurant. The people knew that I didn't do take-away. So, at that time, when we had the lockdown, I shut the restaurant, for 2-3 months. Then, gradually, the government allowed take-away, and delivery too. So, at that time we were scared of the effect and the disease as well. For a few days, I came by myself and I cleaned the restaurant alone. When the government gave us support, I felt satisfied that our staff would stay on.

I: Which scheme was it?

R: When, in the beginning, the government gave the Furlough scheme. When they announced one grant, I was at peace, that it would cover our rent and bills. This crisis might end some time. At that time, we never thought this disease would go on for so long. We thought it will be normal in a

couple of months. The government announced that they would give Furlough. There was satisfaction when they announced the grant. I told my staff that we would take this month off as a yearly holiday and when we got the money from the grant, we would pay. In a month or two, it would be all set and we would start work again. The staff were locals and I had had to teach and tell them all about the food and the menu. I would cook food and make them taste it, the waiters who serve inside, I would make them taste the food. I had told them all about the ingredients and the amounts that went in it. Because they were locals and didn't know much about Indian food. The staff had been trained, and then it seemed that the staff would be changed as well. And then to find new staff and train them again would be a problem. But when the government brought out the Furlough scheme, I felt that the staff would not go anywhere. The staff would stay as they were. The furlough that we got, they got their salaries as well.

Two to three months passed. It felt that it would go on for a long time, because there was no difference happening. They controlled it a little bit but it went up and down, so we thought we should start doing take-away. The customers would message and call me and ask if I did take-away. So, I thought I should have take-away. When the restaurant was open, it was then. So, then I got a leaflet made, because people didn't know. I delivered leaflets myself to houses. Every day in the morning, I would spend 2-3 hours delivering leaflets to houses, stating that I did take-away. Gradually, people started coming back, and then our expenses were met by the take-away. Then, when we opened up in August 2020, in August, the government introduced a scheme, 'Eat out, help out'. At that time, many people started coming out, and many new customers came too. So, at that time I got many customers, ones who had not been to our restaurant before. Those people also tried the food, in that scheme. After that, gradually, I got new customers, and it started growing. Then, the second variant came and the restaurants were closed again. But then the take-away kept working. So, now we are doing take-away and inside as well. The inside is slightly less now, since December, due to Omicron. People are avoiding, and we were also fearful. But we have kept the tables far apart and there is space. But the routine customers have given great support. And people advertised, by telling one another, and it was great support for me. Just as people had said that they would support me, they really did. And they liked it as well. I liked it too, it's running and we're doing it.

I: Now, if you are given a chance to go back to India, and fulfil your dream of having a restaurant there, would you do it? Or will you do it after a long time?

R: The dream of having a restaurant has come true, because the way I had thought of setting up a restaurant, it has happened the same way. The place I have found for my restaurant, I feel that it's a really good choice. So, I and my wife think that, for our children's future, their education, even our future, it is better over here. I keep going there for holidays, because my family and relatives are there. My cousins, my Mummy, Papa, my sister and brothers are all there. I go there once a year, a couple of weeks, three weeks, with my family.

The plan is to reside here and stay here. I've felt good living here and with the support of people. The children have very good care over here, the schools. We do not have any plans of going back and having a restaurant there. I have dismissed that intention because I have already established a restaurant and I plan to improve it more, so that when people eat food here, they remember that they had something good here. Just as I like a few things, and I am fond of food, when I like something at some place, I go back again and again to eat there. I try it and see, and try to make it as well, whatever it is. So, the plan for now is to improve this, any way I can, however I can. This is

my thought, I should try to make it better, and people will keep coming with love, and support one another.

Transcript ends 60:00



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