



English: Language of opportunity

Speaking English in the U.K

NARRATOR

Raghavendra, his wife Nandini and their young children now live in Bangalore. But like many Indians they have strong connections with the UK and have had two spells of residence in England.

The family's relationship with England and particularly with the English language goes back generations and is an integral part of their history and identity.

Nandini's grandfather, Gururajan learnt it under Colonial rule and recalls one English poem that had particular significance for him.

GURURAJAN

Where the Mind is Without Fear.

When the world had not been broken up into fragments
let my country awake.

RAGHAVENDRA

He's called Rabindranath Tagore so in Bengali he's Rabindranath Tagore. He's a Bengali he's poet and he's a great freedom fighter in one sense because he used to write the poems that would instil that, the patriotism in each and every Indian.

PRAKASH

That was written during the pre-independence period. And English was the language, unifying language to reach all the Indians then. And probably Rabindranath Tagore wanted all the Indians to come and fight for the united nation. Nation as a united force. Probably that is the reason he wrote it in English. To reach all the Indians at a time. English was the language, which make, made all the Indians united to fight against the British and to get an independence. That was the reason.

RAGHAVENDRA

Probably

PRAKASH

So language was a unifying force then.

NARRATOR

Raghavendra's family also speaks both English and the local language Kannada. His parents both English teachers made a particular effort to teach him English when he was growing up. Because they felt it would give him more opportunities for the future.

NAGAMANI

I want my children to, to be well versed in English in future also. To go with the other people and to, what to say?

PRAKASH

Actually we wanted our children to have foreign exposure with the outer world. And we thought that English was the convenient way to give them an exposure to the outer world. And therefore we decided to teach them in English along with the local language.

RAGHAVENDRA

I really did not feel that I made any conscious attempt to learn English. Most of the schools and colleges in India, English is part of the curriculum. So why I said there's no conscious attempt to learn this languages we were learning this language as we were learning my local language, the regional language.

We started with all these alphabets of Kannada and the words, the grammar of Kannada. Just like the way we also started English. Like the learning grammars, the alphabets and signs and then the words. How to make sentences. So it's, it's basically the learning process of whether it's English or Kannada, it was very much similar.

So and also there was no stress that English was a foreign language. So we never find out it was a foreign language because it, it got embedded in the early stage itself.

NARRATOR

Raghavendra also recalls that as a child he watched television programmes about Britain.

RAGHAVENDRA

When we were kids we were watching some fairy tales. And that used to come in the televisions. So those fairy tales, most of the fairy tales they were, the bedtime stories for the children. And then they were, I mean it was from England. So probably, to me, going to England was something like, I wanted to be there for some, some day I'm going to be there. That also was always there in my mind, probably that also subconsciously pushed me to take the decision.

NARRATOR

Raghavendra and Nandini first moved to England when he was offered a job in the IT industry.

RAGHAVENDRA

I work as a Technical Architect so I, I'm basically a techie guy. So I had the necessary technical competency. And, and I thought that it was the right time to move to a different part of the world and make some impressions.

NARRATOR

When Raghavendra and Nandini went to live in Reading in England his parents had very mixed feelings.

NAGAMANI

It was a bad experience. I felt very, what to say, I, I, about, I cried very much.

PRAKASH

She is very much attached to her son. And therefore when he decided to go to another land first and then UK, then naturally.

NAGAMANI

I never wanted him to go from there, my place.

PRAKASH

I was not surprised when he went for the UK. Because I was certain. I was certain that, that certainly he would go. Knowing English was an added advantage to my son. And certainly probably knowledge of the English helped him a lot, when he was in UK.

NARRATOR

Given that Raghavendra and Nandini had grown up with English they did not feel that they were moving to a completely alien country.

RAGHAVENDRA

I had heard a lot of pluses and a lot of minuses about Britain. So but I wanted experience on it. I wanted experience on my own on this. Because I was sure that I would have a good life over there. And that expectation did not go wrong.

NARRATOR

Despite this they found it hard to adjust to life in England.

NANDINI

Everything is different. The place is different, people are different, language might be because of the accent we speak here and we, we should speak there. And conduct. That was a bit a worrying factor but now since I have been to UK it shouldn't be a problem at all. I could manage somehow.

RAGHAVENDRA

I had fears because its not that I couldn't, I cannot manage at all. I knew English but I was fearing because basically I'm, I'm coming from the same culture and I'm trying to adjust. I'm trying to be accepted into a new culture. So there were obvious fears that, I don't know the sensitivity of the other person who I'm talking to. And may be there are so many issues probably I may talk India or unknowingly I may talk something which may offend the other person.

NARRATOR

When they were in England Raghavendra and Nandini were both conscious of speaking English with an Indian accent.

NANDINI

The first few days I was very shy to speak about because I was just thinking like, how will they come to know my English. So will I be able to understand their accent and the few visits to the city centre and I was able to converse nicely.

RAGHAVENDRA

It's not about understanding the word it's about understanding a word with that accent. Being technically competent is not enough to be in one country. See that's, that's my, personal experience. Because doing the work and then completing the work is different and being a part of the society is different. You need to be accepted by society and you need to understand the laws of the land to, in order to live a good life.

So if you don't understand, if you, if you don't have proper control over the English then definitely you're going to have very difficulty, a difficult situations over that.

NARRATOR

Raghavendra and Nandini also found that there were cultural differences. As Indians they sometimes found it difficult to be direct as they didn't want to cause offence.

RAGHAVENDRA

When we come from India and then we are trying to get accepted in the society with the English accent we know expectations are different from the other person. But we are trying to meet that but at the same time when the other person, you know, is co-ordinating it then you

will be thinking let me not offend this person in any way. Because my way of speaking English could offend sometimes and he may think something about me. So in order to protect our goodwill we'll be thinking too many things at that time. So it actually hinders the direct impression, direct intent. So we'll be delaying our real intent and then we'll try to make it our, try to put butter over it and then trying to give it a nice form. So that probably is one of the factors which I personally felt that why the other person feels that we are indirect on someone, at times.

NARRATOR

When the job ended after 18 months Raghavendra and Nandini returned to India. But one year later they decided to go back to the UK on a more long term basis. It was good for his career and the couple felt comfortable living in England and speaking in English.

RAGHAVENDRA

So that personally came in terms of like, being a Consultant, , to a particular telecoms solution providing.

Then we moved to Bath Spa there. And again we rented a house there. So we were near the Queen's Square.

With our life, I mean we had a good mix of work and life balance, in the UK. When you're, when you're working in a particular country you should feel more than likely at home. Its, I really felt like a UK's home away from home.

NANDINI

Even the language was a known so it was not a language which we don't know. So we were very comfortable with English. So England is a good place to be.

RAGHAVENDRA

Yes and we also have so many people from India who live in the UK. So that's also probably one of the inspiring factors to move to the UK.

NARRATOR

But Raghavendra's mother became ill and the couple were forced to return to India.

RAGHAVENDRA

I was forced to come back to our home town and then start working here. And that's fine. I mean I, what, the, bottom line is as long as I was there in England I enjoyed my stay. And I'm staying here as well and I'm enjoying too.

NARRATOR

How important is it for them that their children speak English?

NANDINI

In modern India it's very much important to speak in English and every parent in India, everybody they want their children to speak in English so that they can converse with other countrymen. And they could get good jobs.

RAGHAVENDRA

I don't mind if they want to migrate to any country. Especially if they are there to do something good for the mankind.