

# Durga and Radhika Rimal

[Speaker 1]

My name is Durga Rimal. We came to Australia in 2011. On 8th of February, we landed in Albury airport.

[Speaker 2]

My name is Radhika Acharya Rimal and we came in Albury at the same time.

[Speaker 1]

It was one morning of April 1992. My mother light the candle and left inside our house. Likewise, dad let the cattle go away from the shed attached to our house.

He then carried a wood box that could be filled with important documents, I guess, and started walking with silence but full of tears in his eyes. My mother was also carrying another wooden box and my baby sister on top of the box followed him and we other four children followed them. I still remember we walked continuously two days by forest, hills and grassland and finally reached the border of Bhutan and India.

After staying few weeks there, we were placed in the open loading truck along with 11 other families and total of roughly more than 50 individuals and their belongings. The journey was very hard and tough. After many hours of trip, which was fun to me as a child, but now I realize it was one of the hardest journey in my life, we were brought to the stone part of Nepal in Morang district and the place was called Shanishchare, where the one of seven Bhutanese refugee camp was there and they threw us there like a garbage in an open space and left there.

My parents somehow managed to find other people who were already settled there and begged help and build the temporary hut made of bamboo, thatch and plastic. We started living in there. Rain used to enter the house during raining days, similar the sun and cold and we survived 20 years.

Life was very tough, painful and emotional at the same time. I had days without food, clothe and shelter. I suffered from malnutrition and lot of children died.

Luckily, I survived.

[Speaker 2]

I couldn't remember all the things, but still I remember not from the Bhutan like what my parents said to me. We stayed in India for a couple of days and then we go from there to the one of the camp. 1991, we settled in a Maidar camp with my sister.

She was passed away over there and with my two brother, mom and dad and my little sister. We came to there, but she passed away from us and then after a year, we moved from there to the Belangi camp and we settled there for 20 years and I got three brothers at the moment.

[Speaker 1]

Actually, in Maidar camp, Maidar is a very famous religious river of Nepal and one of the longest bridges in Asia. This is something I heard. After we fled from Bhutan, all the people were brought into Maidar, which was closer to the border of India and Nepal and they were put on the river bank with nothing left.

They used to have a bottle, what do you call it, one litre of rice and they used to share with our whole family. Life was very tough and that's where Radhika lost her sister and a lot of children were killed. Sorry, they were died.

In my case, I was a bit fortunate because instead of placing us in Maidar camp, we were brought into the actual refugee camp where the Nepal government has made that destination.

[Speaker 2]

I started my school when I was eight years old. From the pre-school to year 10, I started, but still I needed to do some housework. Mum and dad, they were going out on money, local Nepal, they went there and I started with my three brothers.

I needed to cook in the morning. I started cooking from six. I was six years old, I started cooking and feed my brothers, my parents, helping them.

I started working from when I was 10 years old to do some harvesting in a local area to earn money. In five days, I earned 10 rupees, which is the first money I earned for my life. That makes me know how to save money.

My parents teach me how to save money, be a good human. We don't have enough money, but still we are saving some from our pocket. It is a harder path, but still we are struggling ourselves.

We got a good education, which is working in here now, so that can help us a lot.

[Speaker 1]

Along with Radhika, we spent 20 years in refugee camp. Radhika's camp was located in Jhapa district, which was and there were three camps, whereas we were settled in Morang district in Senichari camp. As I said, we spent 20 years in refugee camp.

Even though the life was very tough, this lived experience has taught me to appreciate the sense of family and community, coming together and find the strength in one another by being very supportive, kind, caring, and learning to never give up in any high or low point of our life. It also helped me to enhance the coping and adaptation skills by promoting self-awareness and emotional intelligence that we carry, also by building a growth mindset and optimism and increasing confidence and self-esteem within me. And what I try to say here is, you know, growing up in refugee camp, we learned to survive with very limited resources, even, you know, lower than what a normal child needs, but we were happy.

[Speaker 2]

I had my auntie, which is auntie, but is like a friend. We are like a friend. We started school, she's older than me, she started one year earlier than me, but still we're going to the same school.

And with a friend, sometimes we fight each other, but it's not a big fight. In a school way, we fight when you come back home, we just have a good friend. And then need to carry water from the tap, take to the home, and have fight with the stone, playing stone.

[Speaker 1]

And also, we used to, you know, every Saturday, we used to have a ton and we used to clean the carpet that we used to use in the class. Also, I think, similar to Radhika, we used to go

out, you know, with the children after class and used to play soccer. Mostly, I used to, you know, go to riverbank and catch fish.

Also, after work, sorry, after school, I used to go to riverbank and break stones with my brother to earn money. Yeah, I started when I was probably seven or eight years old. That's how, you know, I used to afford the pen and pencil.

And in Radhika's case, I guess it is similar. And even in the school, I was quite different, I think, tricky student, actually, I still remember. I was kind of person who used to socialize and want to learn those things, you know, out of school curriculum.

So, I used to get punished a lot from my teacher as well. But from the very young age, I started writing poems and stories. That's where I find myself and I used to, you know, present in front of the thousand students.

And we used to, you know, have those poetry and other competition. I used to write the plays, dramas, and we used to present in the stage. And also, personally, I used to organize a lot of soccer tournament, you know, within the classmate.

And we used to, you know, play those kind of, yeah, those kind of tournament together. And the prize was the page of books.

[Speaker 2]

One paper of the book sometime.

[Speaker 1]

And we used to get the books, sorry, copy, you know, I think notebooks, probably, you know, once a three month, they used to provide one notebook. And we used to play the soccer competition. And those who win will get the notebook.

It was interesting. And as Radhika said before, after school, you know, when I get into teenager, similar to her, I used to go out in the village to harvest the rice and carry those, you know, what you call this, hay and make some money to afford for our study. Life was difficult, I guess, but it was a very happy life.

[Speaker 2]

I was, I started teaching when I got married with him. Before that, I didn't do any teaching. But I did a lot of out work.

[Speaker 1]

Yes, similar like me, Radhika also started her schooling from the camp. We started in the camp. And after we get married, as she said, I encourage her to be a teacher because I was working as a primary school principal.

So yeah, I recruit her. She hasn't paid me back yet. The education in refugee camp was comparatively good quality.

I'm taught in English medium, other than two subjects in native language, which was Nepali from Nepal, and the Junkha, which was from Bhutan. I started my education there till I finished my year 10, which was free of cost because of the selfless volunteering from our educated elders. I started working as a primary school teacher.

Well, I finished my year 12 from local private college. Yeah, I started working as a primary school teacher. Well, I finished my year 12 and later work as a secondary teacher.

Well, I was continuing my Bachelor of Art by distance learning. But even though we were allowed to work on, you know, in the teaching out of refugee camp, we were considered as a stateless and we had to report back to the camp every few months. We have some legal obligation imposed there.

And I started my teaching when I was around 16, 17. And when I was 22, sorry, 21, I started working as a primary school principal. And then we decided to take this settlement.

And I think when I was 22, we took the settlement and came to Australia. Yeah, I was working as a secondary school teacher while I was doing my Bachelor final year. And my parents when they said, hey, we have to take the settlement because all of the educated figure in the community has already settled to different part of the world.

And my dad, whose family were supposed to go to America and my mom's whose parent already been to America. Both of them said, let's go to Australia because Australia is more safer. So I thought they have done a bit of research.

So we should take this settlement to Australia. And there was interesting, you know, rumors going around. People used to say like, if you go to Australia being single, you have to work so much and have to pay so much of tax, right?

And it is good to get married. And I was a little bit frustrated with my love affair with someone. So I was thinking to do arranged marriage of my choice.

It was my parents. And I said to my mom, look, the girl who you think would be a best daughter-in-law. And with her friendly connection with Radhika's auntie, we know that Radhika was there, was looking to marry with a decent guy, I guess. I don't know. And then my dad approached Radhika's dad.

They make the connection. And then we met. And what happened?

[Speaker 2]

And then we talked for 20 days, I think, I guess. We talked on the phone for 20 days. And we didn't see each other before that.

And then when my dad and his dad had a chat and my dad asked me, and then I said, if the person is good from the heart, I will. Otherwise, I don't want to do it because I need to look after my parents as well. And he said he's from this camp and he's near from my uncle's house and things like that.

And then we talked to each other. And after that, we got married.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I think after 20, probably 22 to 29 days of seeing each other, we decided to marry. It was quite a tough decision. But knowing the beautiful culture Radhika has been adopting and the lifestyle she has been adopting has really inspired me.

I have seen that when I met her and the honesty within her, the way she communicates, it really inspires me. So I said, OK, if you are happy, let's get married. I gave her the option to think for another month or so before making a decision.

But immediately she said, OK, I want to marry you. And we married. And now it has been 14 years.

We married together. And after we got married, we decided to have a baby. And I always dreamed to have a daughter.

So I said, please gift me with a beautiful daughter. And we ended up being pregnant. And I was, you know, working as a school teacher in another school, which was closer to the camp, probably two hours riding a bicycle.

He's lying that time.

[Speaker 2]

Now he's telling the truth. But he said he's just half an hour from home to there. And he come back home in the evening after he finished school.

He came home in the morning. He goes. So, yeah, he's doing so hard.

[Speaker 1]

It was just to support her during her pregnancy. And she was finding so hard to disclose to family. And I said, OK, it was like riding to our bicycle and coming back to support her.

And as I said, she ended up having pregnant. And then the process started. And she was around eight months.

We were given the flight. And in Kathmandu, in the IOM office, we were told whether we can come to Australia. Well, she was pregnant on this, you know, eight month or you have to wait.

And we said, let's go. And we ended up coming here. I still remember the journey in the plane.

And she used to vomit. Right. In my one hand.

My nephew was around two years old. He came with me. He used to sit next to me.

And I was holding her eating. I was hungry. It was like interesting journey.

But now I think it has given that, you know, strong memories. And then we came to Sydney. We were given fries.

And then one of the interesting thing, you know, that happens in Sydney was from the Sydney International Airport to domestic airport. We were brought and left there. And I went to the counter.

I asked them, we want to go to Al-bury. And these people were like, what Al-bury means? And then finally, one of the guy next to me said "Awl-buh-ree".

And he said, OK, so they put us in the airport and sorry, in the plane. And we came to Albury on 8th of February.

[Speaker 2]

He came to my place with his uncle. I was in a local Nepal with my mom. I was living there because we just do some harvesting thing.

And he came with his uncle and he's my mom's brother-in-law as well. And we have a good relationship. And I was just doing something.

And he tell me, would you be able to talk with my nephew? And he said to me, and I was looking at him.

[Speaker 1]

You were shocked, right?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, I was shocked. And who is that person? And then I know like mom and my dad and his dad already talk each other.

And we know probably that is the person who came to see me. And we talked a little bit and he asked me. And I said, in that day, I said, yes, I will marry with you.

And he gave me the time. He said, I will come tomorrow. And again, next day, he came in the same place.

I think we have already make a lunch and I make a little fish pickle. He loved it. After that, we share our phone number.

And then I just had a Nokia phone, a small phone. And we just share the number and we talk on the phone. And one day he came to Damak, which is, maybe he came to do some shopping or whatever.

I don't know. But he just rang me and he came. And we just met twice, two weeks.

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Like in background, you know, I had already done a lot of research about Radhika and the lifestyle, you know, because being in collective culture, you have that opportunity to know one another and you can get a lot of info from different people. And already, you know, I was very inspired by her uncle's family and the way they used to live. But I never seen Radhika and the family in my entire life.

So I had already done this. And after both parents, you know, they agreed to made us meet. I came to her camp in Belangi and she wasn't there.

And I met this woman who said Radhika is in the local farm doing a bit of farming work. And, you know, I, me and my uncle followed this lady who now I realize is my mother-in-law. And Radhika wasn't there when I went there.

And Radhika, she was, I think she was looking after goats. So someone called her. So she came back.

And, you know, the way she was wearing dress was so kind of unusual comparing to those, you know, girls in their twenties. You know, it was very simple old clothes. You know, she was like such a normal looking girl.

And that really attracts me. And I said to her, like, we had a bit of chat and I said, hey, yep, yep, yep. If you are interested and if you don't have any boyfriend, because, you know, a lot of time, every youngster used to have their partner.

And I said, if you don't have any boyfriend and if you are interested, yeah, I'm happy to marry with you, but don't make the immediate decision. Please take time. But before you make your final decision and disclose with your family, please make sure you have to come with the right one because it will, you know, there is a high risk in dignity.

That's what I said. And she said, OK. And I said before I leave tomorrow, I'll come and meet you.

And next day, when I come back, you know, the interesting thing was she was on the same dress. You know, she did not do any makeup or she wasn't doing anything. She was a very normal looking girl.

And that really touches me. And I said, OK, this is the right girl I should marry. And I took that risk to make the decision from my side.

And now I realize, you know, I'm this is one of the best decision I ever made. And I'm one of the luckiest, I think, guy among few. This woman has inspired me so much, honestly.

[Speaker 2]

You did to me.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, we arrived in Albury Airport on 8th of February at 4.25 p.m. And there were, you know, more than 150 people, you know, who were ready to welcome us like a VIP. And there was this white looking lady who put, you know, khada in our khada to us and welcome us. And there were a few other people among, you know, some of the witness community who already resettled.

And this one of these ladies said, "Svāgata cha" which means welcome. And it really inspired me, actually. And I feel that, you know, sense of kind of belonging.

And later we realized she was our case manager and another was our volunteer. And this lady, you know, drive us to North Albury in one bedroom unit. That's where our real feeling started, you know.

Personally, I feel like, you know, I came to a different planet with new culture, new lifestyle, new people. You know, we used to be very friendly with one another. We used to chat with neighbors, you know, community.

But the people seem very isolated here. No one used to talk with us rather than you, sorry, other than the community member who often used to visit. And Radhika was already eight months pregnant.

And, you know, one of the weird thing I did was, you know, she was in that period to give birth. But I left her alone in the unit after three days and started supporting other vulnerable community members, especially to bridge that language gap. And I think, yeah, you start from there.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, he went to help other people. And then he tell me I will come soon. But sometimes it took from 10 o'clock till 2 o'clock or 4 o'clock.

And I need to ring. I feel like, oh, where I am? I feel too much hard to stay by myself at home.

There's no one around. And there's one granny, like she's my dad's cousin's auntie. And she came to my place.

She helped a little bit. And she asked me to come and stay with me if you are alone. And I went there.

So it is pretty good. She's a lovely woman.

[Speaker 1]

This woman is mother to everyone in our Bhutanese community. I think hopefully we'll meet her.

[Speaker 2]

And our volunteers, Sue and Korsi and then Irene, the caseworker, they did a lot and a lot for us.

[Speaker 1]

We were linked with the local volunteer from our mainstream Australian society. And her name was Susan from Jindera. And her husband Korsi started, you know, supporting us as well.

And these wonderful volunteers during, especially during the pregnancy, you know, after arriving here, they have done everything. They supported with appointment. They supported with, you know, buying some grocery.

They used to care like, like, you know, like grandparents caring their grandchild. And I still remember we had Rowena on the morning of, you know, 14th February 2011, around 11am.

[Speaker 2]

She was born at 11am.

[Speaker 1]

But I rang the volunteer around 5am. And within 40, probably 30 to 40 minutes, she came from Jindera to Wodonga Hospital to support. So you can see that, you know, supportive nature this volunteer had.



And with, you know, like with mingling with the local community. Personally, I have beautiful memories. People were very welcome in the street.

They used to say hello, hi, even though they used to struggle with our accent. But they used to, you know, try to support us wherever we need. And they used to be very friendly, chatting.

The society was more Anglo-Australian on that time. Even there were a lot of people, you know, they used to slow their car. Even some used to stop on the side.

And they used to, you know, ask about our dress and where we come from, our lifestyle. So, yeah, it was an interesting mixed feeling.

[Speaker 2]

I had like, it was a 13 hours live. So it's a totally hard time. I feel like I was missing my parents and my in-laws as well.

Because we just came ourselves and brothers, in-law family, three of them and we two came. But I left my family. There is not any process for my parents when I came in Australia.

And my in-laws are coming after two months, but still I feel alone. I say, I have no one in here, no parents. Without parents, I feel so homesick.

And after that, they came in 7th of April. Parents-in-law arrived in Australia. And then in 14th of April, Rowena was born.

[Speaker 1]

We were blessed, right? Yes.

[Speaker 2]

After, when Rowena was 11th month, they arrived in Australia with my little brother.

[Speaker 1]

What happened was...

[Speaker 2]

They did, after I came here and then they start their process because they are missing me too much. I'm the only one daughter from the family and they are missing me too much.

[Speaker 1]

My in-laws, they were thinking not to take settlement. But after she get married and we decided to come to Australia and they started thinking to come to Australia because as Radhika said before, all the responsibilities, looking after younger brothers, looking after family was on her head and she used to do all those work. This is one of the reason, they also, I think, miss Radhika and decided to come to Australia.

And they came after one year.

[Speaker 2]

I was starting working when Rowena was three months old. I start with family day care, that what he encouraged me to do that one too. And then I did my Certificate III in Child Care.

Plus after five years, he encouraged me to do study and I did individual support in aging from Albury TAFE. And after that, I started working for a couple of hours. And one of the company, I applied and they gave me a job.

And they said in a couple of time, I went from here to one, for one hour job, I went, it take one and a half hour to drive. But still he encouraged me, need to do hard work while we doing before. And when that company, there's something wrong.

I don't know what's wrong with other co-worker, but the client, they just claim me. And then the manager, she called me and say, need to go to English language and learn more. They said one of the company from Bendigo.

And then after that, I was so much frustration. I feel like I don't want to do anything, any work. And he encouraged me to apply more and more.

And I was starting with disability, based disability from 2019. And then in a couple of months, again, I start with the Northcott. So where I was now is a Northcott disability service.

And it was been five year now. So it is good company. I was working and I did my Cert IV in the back of him, because I said, I don't want to do it.

I already got my job. I don't want to read, but he said, need to go, need to upgrade yourself. And he put his study for part-time.

He worked for full-time plus helping me with the goals and then with the family as well. So he's such a good person in my life, which I am here now.

[Speaker 1]

You know, as Radhika said, having language as a biggest barrier and limitation in language, this world always judge you with your language, but they don't see the capacity. But with Radhika, I have seen that, you know, caring nature on her and the capacity she has. I encourage her to continue some certificate and work in disability field because I was already working in disability field and it was such a rewarding job.

So one of the incidents she encountered was, you know, she was working in this company, everything was going well. And in six months, the manager told her to go back to TAFE, learn English, learn how to speak well and come back. And I said, that's okay.

We have the discrimination, we have the racism here, but you have to prove yourself. And then she find another job and she used to do one hour shift every week and she has to drive one and a half hour. And I said, I'm happy to pay for the petrol.

Just go and do your work, learn. And because, you know, the God is, you know, planning to give better for you. So after probably a year or so, she got the job in another company, in BASE Disability, which was a bit flexible and then get into Northcott.

And with the Northcott, like she has been working there for five years in full-time capacity, doing so well. And she has received a couple of awards from the organization as well, which was rewarding.

[Speaker 2]

In between, before I start with Northcott, we did for cleaning job as well. And he helped me sometimes. Sometimes I took my dad to help me to do the cleaning job.

So before I start with Northcott.

[Speaker 1]

Just to support her mental health, because she was, you know, thinking too much. And she was blaming about, you know, not having that, you know, I think level of English, which she was looking, I guess, but I have seen that. So I said, before we get another job, let's do this cleaning, because job is job.

So after my, you know, work after five, I used to go and support her. With my work experience, you know, back in Nepal, I was working as a high school teacher, as I said, and coming to this new place, you know, I had the aim to work in health or community sector. But it wasn't easy here.

But I never gave my hope. And I said to myself, I have to start from somewhere from the scratch. So in 2013, sorry, 2011, 2012, I did a couple of certificates, because there was no one to tell me like I can go straight into diploma or uni.

But anyway, I did a couple of, you know, Certificate III and Certificate IV. And in 2013, I did my placement in Aspire Disability Support Service, where they offered me a job. And I started my job as a disability support worker.

And before working there, I was already working as AIN, Assistant in Nursing in Albury Base Hospital as my first job. And probably I was one of the first AIN working there. And I used to work as AIN.

And then I used to work in disability. And also I used to continue my study plus my family responsibility, which I carried. Also, you know, continuously volunteering in the community.

I was in executive board and a few other organizations as well. So I continued from 2013. In 2017, I did my diploma, whereas I was working as a purely disability support worker in two different organizations.

I left my AIN job in 2015. And from, you know, through my diploma, I took my pathway to uni. And in 2018, I started my university.

I did my Bachelor in Human Service and then Master in Social Work doing part time. And I was continuously, you know, working to provide for my family. And in 2020, I get this beautiful opportunity to work with Red Cross supporting the newly arrived refugees.

And myself, you know, having that lived experience as a first migrant and now supporting this vulnerable community, I feel blessed every day. And I have been working with Red Cross for last five years in complex case setting as a social worker there. And yeah, I have been enjoying.

Personally, what I believe is, you know, our culture, which is Nepali culture, and our nationality as an identity, which is Bhutanese, like, you know, protecting our nationality, which is Bhutanese and preserving our culture is part of our identity. And it is very important. I do acknowledge that we have some of the, stereotype side of our cultural and traditional lifestyle, which we need to avoid and which we are working there.

And there are a lot of beautiful cultural side of Western world. So, we try to balance both to provide those, you know, cultural sense of belonging to our girls. So that I guess when they grow up, they will have that, you know, more, the way they see the world will be more different.

And I guess they will learn to appreciate other culture while preserving their own culture. And in regional area, especially, it is very tough. And in Albury, was very, very hard to preserve own language and culture because there was not multiculturalism when we first settled here.

But we started, you know, organizing some linguistic events and cultural events. And I used to involve heavily, even in my own initiative, we organized our big festival called Dasain Diwali, Teach Festival for Women, Buddha Jayanti for those who believe in Buddhism. And also, we organized different poetry events, as well as I run the radio program from local to REM community radio for four years to preserve this language as well.

And in 2017, in my coordination, we started Nepali Ethnic School. And it went for three years. And because I was so busy with my study, I handed it to someone.

And due to COVID, it has to stop. But now it is continuing as well. So yeah, we are working, we are trying our hard to preserve that, you know, cultural and linguistic side of our identity as well.

And personally, I'm so much passionate on literature work. I have been writing my own books, I have published two books and edited a few books featuring the Nepali writers all over the world. So yeah, we are still working.

And not only in local level, in whole Australian state level, and you know, with the different country wise, we come, we always come together in Zoom. And we, you know, we always organize different programs. And we also, we have been advocating in different parts of the world to preserve our own language and culture as well.

Personally, our both girls, they were been heavily influenced by the support from my parents. And that's where they learn, both studied, they learn Nepali language. And they speak so well in Nepali and with English, like because they born here.

They are so good with both. I think.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, be a good human. And don't like, don't do any bad things or whatever. Like make a parents be a sad, make a good person in a life and be a honest, kind and caring person in your life.

We also support them to be a good person.

[Speaker 1]

I think we have a lot of opportunities here in Australia, and even in the regional areas like Albury, where, you know, girls has been getting a lot of opportunity to connect with different sports, different social activities. And Radhika and myself, we have been encouraging them to, you know, to participate. They are also, they are getting, you know, better quality education here, as well as the, you know, the different way of lifestyle.

And it is it is working really well.

[Speaker 2]

I said by myself, I'm the Bhutanese-Nepalese-speaking human who live in Australia and got an Australian citizen. I'm the Australian citizen as well, but I can't tell, like, without telling my birthplace and when I was struggling in my childhood, I can't, without that, I can't tell I'm Australian.

[Speaker 1]

Simple. I'm a Nepali-speaking Bhutanese-Australian. That's how I want to identify myself.

To me, home is somewhere my family feel very safe and have that, you know, sense of belonging. And it is the place where we live rather than where we survive. The lesson I want to share to the broader society is, you know, the suffering and the struggle we all go through may be different, but the pain we all feel is the same.

So try to be kind to one another before anything else, you know, try to accept individual as a human being. And as a forced migrant individual, please always open your heart, open your arm to support the people from refugees and other cold background, because these people are honest people. They just want the opportunity to thrive.

And indeed, we are very grateful with Australia and the people here, the First Nation people who have given the land to live, as well as the government who brought us here and give and given this beautiful opportunity. More than anything, I think our family is so happy. We are very happy here.

So thank you.

[Speaker 2]

Thank you very much.