

Govinda Sapkota

Hello, Namaste, Jai Sriman Narayana. My name is Govinda Sapkota. I was born in Nepal and I moved to Australia when I was one years old.

I'm currently studying in high school, year 11. Growing up, I grew up with the other Aussie kids and my parents used to tell me like stories about how they went to school and stuff and how life was like when they lived in the refugee camps and how life in Bhutan was different as well. So they would share stories as in like how they would go up the mountain and then go to school.

And then my grandma also tells me stories about like how she looked after the calves, the cows and the sheep, and then how she would like sing songs. And then like she would explain how life would be back then. It wouldn't be as like, I mean, it's kind of simple right now, but it wasn't as complex as right now.

And then through the struggles that my parents felt during the refugee camps, like reflecting on those struggles that they've shared to me, I can see that I'm really grateful that we have come to Australia and being grateful, like I can see, like I can just perceive everything around me as in like, like I'm so fortunate and grateful for that. So even in school, right, I try and work my hardest because I can see that this is all because like we're just lucky to be here. Like if I was still in Nepal, I wouldn't be able to be this fortunate and go to school and have some good education.

So I just try and try my hardest and do my best. From a young age, my grandma's always lived with us. Even when my parents would like be busy, we would always be with her.

So she would always like, I don't know, she would teach us more about our language and our cultures. Nowadays, right, like she just sits at home. And then when I come towards her, she's like telling me, do this, do that.

And also through that, I'm like seeing what life would have been back then for her. Also our interactions is like she goes to the garden, I sometimes go over to her and then she tells me to do some work. We do it and through that connection that we have there, we like sing songs together while doing work.

And also if she wants me to cook something, we'll cook something. And then her palate, right, is very different to the palate that we have in Australia. The foods that she used to grew up with, it's a lot different.

So then I also grew up with that palate alongside my grandma. So through like the foods that we ate, the songs that we sang and the text, scriptures that we read. So she also reads like this old scripture called the Ramayana and that's of God Ram and just his story.

And through that, we like connect with each other and laugh, sing, also dance. So the gardening is like, we buy fruit from the store, right? But then my grandma, she's like, oh, we can just grow it here. So there's tons of food in the backyard.

So then when I go to the backyard, I see all of this greenery. My grandma goes to the garden every morning. She's like, oh, it's good for your eyes to see the green.

So then I go to the garden and look around, you know, observe all the greenery. And then I'm like, oh, this is all good things, all this like value. And then my grandma grew up with all of this value.

And when we garden together, right, all of that greenery, that all of that value is like telling me the worth, like it's telling me that we're worth a lot. You know, we need to through this gardening that we're doing, like it's showing all the worth that we have. As we do the gardening, we say all of that service is towards God.

So all of that service is towards God. So we grow this food, we cook it, give it to God, and then we give it to ourselves, saying that all that service that we do is towards God. We can also have an interconnection there, a religious connection.

It just makes us one with nature as well. Anything in the garden, so the pumpkins, the long melons, it's part of our natural diet, I guess, because of our vegetarian diet. So the potatoes and the different types of curries, sauces, chutneys, just a mixture of everything.

So one time we had a harmony day at our school and I attended in my cultural clothes, like traditional clothes, and I would get a bunch of comments from the teachers and students saying this is amazing. I could see the appreciation about our culture. And even in primary school, like I grew up with a lot of support.

Even though I was different to everybody else, I was also accepted and involved. When I would bring food to school, it was like different cultural foods, I would get a lot of questions saying, where is this food from? And I would just say, oh, this is my cultural food. I would get a lot of questions about my culture.

Even like we have a hairstyle in our culture, like with this at the back, and I would get a lot of questions about this. And I would just say, oh, it's part of my religion. And I could like see the curiosity in people.

And I would really like to, even growing up in Australia, I would like to learn even more about my culture. When I learn more about my culture, I can say and express it to all the other people who are curious. That would be a good thing to have.

So it's a mixed situation, like I have a variety about my friends group. I do have some Aussie friends. In my school, I don't have much like Nepalese, it's only like my cousins.

My friends, I don't really go to their houses much because like, it's not like, my parents never let me since I was little. So with my cousins and stuff, like we're just close. I can sense like my friends and me have like some differences between me and my friends is like their level of vocabulary and their behaviours around other students.

And then my behaviours and my vocabulary. So like at home, I'm speaking Nepali because that's what's like, it's good for my, it's good to preserve my culture by learning my language at home. And when I go to school, like there's a lot of phrases and a lot of words and like slang words that I don't know.

So then that's like some clear differences I can see between me and my friends. Also some things that I say maybe not make, like it might not make sense to other people. So I have to explain it in a weird way, I don't know.

So there's a lot of things that I could learn from my friends and they could learn from me. And it's just like a really, it's a really mixed situation at school. Through my parents' experience and my grandparents' experience, like I can have this inner empathy so I can kind of understand what other people are going through.

When like I can see my friends at school, they would talk about this topic, immigration or something. And I would have like this deeper connection with that. I would try and explain to my friends about like my story and they would just be like, oh really? So like I can tell that this story that I have behind me is really like some importance and significance.

In our language, it's called a Sri Tilak. It's like a, this white bit is called a Tilak and this middle one is the Sri. So this one represents Lord Vishnu, which is Narayan and the middle is Lakshmi.

This middle bit just here above the nose, this is the base and then these ones, these whites on the side is the Lord's feet and in the middle is representing Lakshmi. In the background, there is Lord Vishnu on the left and on the right is Lakshmi. So every morning, my parents have like taught us we need to put this on, respect our culture and do our prayers.

And this is a form of surrendering to our God and showing devotion. And wearing this every morning is like an endurance to our own religion, making sure that we are connected with our religion and culture. Even growing up in Australia, following through my parents' footsteps and what they say and the cultures that they teach us, I can make sure that I'm like holding my ground and making sure I don't forget my culture and religion.

I want to make sure that I preserve my culture and history and my parents' history. I want to communicate to like my family and others about our religion. So I want to make sure that it's not lost just in between us.

We can incorporate our religion to everything that we do. I'll teach my like little cousins that we need to do this. I would kind of tutor them in our religion, generations of teachings through my parents' teachings.

I would try and interpret that like to the kids that grew up in Australia, even like my little cousins, like they might not have the knowledge. They probably wouldn't understand because they're still young about like the difficulties that their parents might have felt like experienced. So then I can ease that trauma maybe, pass down the knowledge and pass down the cultural traditions, teaching them prayers, teaching them how to like cook good and pure food.

Because even through the food that we eat, it really affects our like mental and physical state of being. I really want to preserve our culture and traditions through everything that we do.