

Hindi transcript:

- हलो आयोती, नमस्ते।

- Hi पारुल।

- कैसी हो?

- बस, ठीक हूँ।

- अच्छा आयोती, तुम्हारे नाम का मतलब क्या है?

- 'आयोती' जो नाम है, my father found it from a newspaper। और इसका मतलब है जो कभी अपने पति को नहीं... you know, somebody who never... who'll never lose her husband.

- OK, so it's a Bengali name?

- Yeah.

- OK. तो आयोती, you're from Calcutta. तो हमें Calcutta के बारे में कुछ बताओ। (अस्पष्ट) I mean, culture, और तुम्हारा... तुम्हारे परिवार, और तुम्हारे परिवार के हिस्ट्री के बारे में कुछ हमें बताओ... कुछ...

- मेरे जो great great-great-grandfather थे, वह एक freedom fighter थे। और हमारी जो family है, हम एक... हमारे ancest... हमारे ancestors जो थे, वे ज़मींदार थे। और मेरे जो great-great-grandfather थे, वे भी राजा राममोहन रॉय और विद्यासागर – इन लोगों की तरह reformist थे। तो ये लोग जो थे, ये बहुत broad-minded थे। इन लोगों ने totally... जो western culture थे, उनको totally ignore नहीं किया। इन लोगों ने जो western culture की जो... जो good aspects थे, वे सब popularize करने की बहुत कोशिश की इंडिया में। क्योंकि जैसे कि – तुम जानती हो – English is an universal language। तो, इन लोगों ने देखा कि इंग्लिश सीखना बहुत ज़रूरी है। तो इसीलिए they actually filtered the good quality, the good aspects, और उन्होंने popularize करने की बहुत कोशिश की। और इसीलिए मुझे लगता है मैं बहुत बहुत attached हूँ अपने roots से।

- Uh-huh.

- क्योंकि my grandfather, he wrote the first Bengali novel.

- Uh-huh.

- और इसीलिए मुझे लगता है कि मैं बहुत ही strongly attached हूँ अपनी culture से, अपनी roots से... और अपनी भाषा को मैं... I don't know... I really like my language.

- Uh-huh.

- मुझे लगता है कि सब... सब... सभी को अपनी भाषा ठीक से सीखनी चाहिए, और nurture करनी चाहिए।

- ...तो जैसे कि तुमने बताया कि your grandfather was a freedom fighter। तो क्या वे reformist भी थे, जैसे कि उस ज़माने में राजा राममोहन रॉय और वि... ईश्वरचन्द्र विद्यासागर इन सब की तरह वे भी इन कामों में ध्यान देते थे? क्योंकि ब्रिटिश के आने के बाद ही... जो है English भाषा भारत में आई, और उसके द्वारा ही Renaissance literature और Renaissance thoughts, ideas के प्रति exposure हुआ, English भाषा के through। तो, आयोति, यह बताओ कि – जैसे तुमने बोला कि तुम strong roots में विश्वास रखती हो – तो उसके लिए तुम क्या करती हो?

- बचपन से my father... he always insisted कि मैं और मेरे भैया – हम दोनों ठीक से Bengali सीखें। तो, not so much English, लेकिन Bengali सीखना हमारे लिए बहुत ज़रूरी था। तो एकदम बचपन से I ensured कि मैं Bengali ठीक से सीखूँ और हमेशा अच्छी grade Bengali में मुझे मिलें।

- Uh-huh.

- तो मुझे लगता है that is one way through which I think I am really attached to my roots, और... I don't know... I think it's very important to learn your language.

- तो हिन्दी... तुम्हारी...तुमने हिन्दी कब सीखी? और हिन्दी तुम्हारे... Calcutta में कितनी बोली जाती है? क्या बाकी सब लोगों को आती होगी हिन्दी?

- हिन्दी सभी को आती है, क्योंकि हिन्दी is our national language, right? तो schools भी चाहते हैं, whether convent schools हो या private, whatever schools हो, सभी चाहते हैं कि basically हिन्दी सभी... सभी को सीखना चाहिए। तो इसीलिए, like, I went to a convent school, like, a Catholic school। तो, मेरा first language तो English था, मेरा second language Bengali था, पर जो third language है, वह हिन्दी थी, and I learnt it for three years, in grade 6, 7 and 8 – that is mandatory। सभी को... सभी... कलकत्ता में सभी को हिन्दी आता है, क्योंकि हिन्दी भी सीखनी बहुत ज़रूरी है।

English translation:

(Note: The person interviewed is a native speaker of Bengali.)

- Hello Ayoti, namaste.

- Hi Parul.

- How are you?

- [I am] just fine.

- Tell me Ayoti, what does your name mean?

- The name 'Ayoti'... my father found it in a newspaper [story]. It stands for [a woman] who will never lose her husband.

- I see, so it's a Bengali name?

- Yeah.

- Okay. So, Ayoti, you're from Calcutta. So, tell us something about Calcutta. (Indistinct) I mean, [about it's] culture, and about your ... your family, and the history of your family ... something...

- My great-great-grandfather – he was a freedom fighter*. And our family... our ancestor ... our ancestors belonged to the landowning aristocracy. And my great-great grandfather – he, like Raja Rammohun Roy and Vidyasagar**, was a reformist. These people – they were very broad-minded. These people totally ... did not totally ignore*** western culture. These people tried hard to popularize the good aspects of western culture in India. Because – as you know – English is a universal language. So, these people saw that it was very important [for Indians] to learn English. So they actually gleaned it's [useful] aspects, and tried hard to popularize them. And that is why I feel that I am very, very attached to my roots.

(*Here, as in the rest of these conversations, the speakers say 'वो' instead of वे (or, for that matter, वह). Given the close relationship of Urdu to Hindi, Hindi speakers routinely say 'वो' for both वह and वे. **'Reformist' means social reformer. ***The speaker should have said जो Western culture था, उसको etc. 'Culture' is singular; the speaker treats it as plural.)

- Uh-huh.

- Because my grandfather – he wrote the first Bengali novel*.

(*In other words, Ayoti is a descendant of the venerable Pyarichand Mitra.)

- Uh-huh.

- And that is why I feel that I am very strongly attached to my culture, [and] my roots... and my language ... I don't know ... I really like my language.

- Uh-huh.

- I feel that everyone ... everyone ... everyone ought to learn their languages well, and nurture [their respective languages].

- Hm, so, like you said, your grandfather was a freedom fighter. So, was he a reformist as well, such as, in those days, Raja Rammohun Roy and Vi ... Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar were; did he also, like them, devote his attention to these issues*? Because, it's only after the British arrived ... that the English language came to India, and it was through [English] that [Indians] were exposed to Renaissance literature, thoughts and ideas. So, Ayoti, tell us this – you said that you [have] strong roots [in Bengali culture] – so, what do you do for that**?

(*The speaker actually says something like “these works” – काम here denotes reform work. **The speaker's question amounts to “how do you maintain your ties to your culture?”)

- When [we] were children, my father ... he always insisted that my brother and I learn Bengali well. So, not a whole lot of [emphasis was placed on learning] English, but it was very important that we learn Bengali well. So since early childhood I ensured that I learnt Bengali well and that I got good grades in Bengali.

- Uh-huh.

- So I think that that is one way [in] which I think I am really attached to my roots, and... I don't know ... I think it's very important to learn your language.

- So Hindi ... your ... when did you learn Hindi? And how much Hindi is spoken in Calcutta?

- Everyone knows Hindi, since Hindi is our national language, right? So the schools too ... whether they be convent schools* or private, whatever kind they be, everyone wants that basically everybody ... everybody should learn Hindi**. So, that's why, like, I went to a convent school, like, a Catholic school. So my first language was English, [and] my second language was Bengali, but my third language was Hindi, and I learned it for three years, in grades 6, 7 and 8 – that [was] mandatory. Everyone ... everyone ... everyone in Calcutta knows Hindi, because it is also very important to learn Hindi***.

(*‘Convent schools’ are schools run by Christian missionaries. **हिन्दी... सभी को सीखना चाहिए is incorrect. सीखना should be replaced by सीखनी. ***Wrong gender again. The speaker says कलकत्ता में सबको हिन्दी आता है”. She should have said हिन्दी आती है instead.)

About CultureTalk: CultureTalk is produced by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and housed on the LangMedia Website. The project provides students of language and culture with samples of people talking about their lives in the languages they use everyday. The participants in CultureTalk interviews and discussions are of many different ages and walks of life. They are free to express themselves as they wish. The ideas and opinions presented here are those of the participants. Inclusion in CultureTalk does not represent endorsement of these ideas or opinions by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages, Five Colleges, Incorporated, or any of its member institutions: Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

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