



UNIVERSITY OF
WEST LONDON
The **Career** University

Summary of an interview conducted as part of the South Asian Heritage Project

Funded by the Heathrow Community Engagement Board (HCEB)

Interview conducted by interviewers from the University of West London.

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HCEB South Asian Oral History Project Interview 5

Date: Monday 14th March 2022

Time: 15.00

Place: Online

Interviewers: Anne-Marie Purcell and Jane Rae Ross UWL

Interviewee: Pooja Makol

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I found out about the project because I am part of the diversity group which considers issues around diversity, disabilities, and inclusion.

I wanted to apply because of the current situation in the world and I agree with the idea of inclusion, that every community, every individual is important. I did not apply simply because I am part of the target group.

2.48

I am from India and have been in the UK for 11 years, which is not a long time compared to some people! It is different community, different culture, everything is so different to India. A different world to me. I had challenges though I feel blessed to be here in the UK.

My husband has been in the UK for a long time, he came to study and then settled. I got the opportunity to move to join him in the UK after we married. I had a choice to move back or stay, I gave myself some time to see if I could blend in with the culture and feel comfortable. Things went well with friends and work, everything worked out, so I decided to stay in this Country, and I feel happy now.

04.28

My family is in India, I have a little family here, two children, a 7-year-old girl and 3-year-old boy.

My immediate family is in India, we visit them whenever we can, we have some distant family here, we often go to see them when we can, technology has made it easier to see and talk to them.

I have friends here, work colleagues have become good friends, we see each other once a month so we can get away from our families to have our own time. Also, we celebrate Indian festivals with family friends. An old English couple are our neighbors, they are wonderful people and we look after each other. They are an old couple, so they like to see children around and we do not have parents here, so we like to see them too.

06.16

I have worked for Heathrow for nearly 6 years. To be honest I joined Heathrow by chance, I always wanted to join Heathrow but I thought because of my employment and visa situation there would be criteria of a British passport or indefinite leave to remain however my friend advised me and encouraged me to go for the job.

When I started working as a security officer, the Company were so nice, there were lots of opportunities to progress.

After I was blessed with my second child, a son, I moved to the ID Business Centre, and now I'm working as an Intern and getting trained as infrastructure project manager, different path for my career, I have no technical or engineering background, but

Heathrow introduced a new programme of colleague internships. I feel blessed to have been selected.

My current role is quite different to security and it is ongoing training process.. In my current role there is a lot to learn, it is a completely different world to me. Initially I thought if I will ever get to understand this , however my line manager and colleagues are supportive and good at explaining. I have my own projects now, I cannot disclose much information about the projects, enabling me to do something live rather than assisting with projects.

10.45

Travelling experience from Heathrow – good experience, helpful people, information for departures and check-in displayed, so smooth, no negative, no bad history. What is it they say 'making every journey better' - they prove it!

When I first came to the UK it was my first trip abroad. I understand English but I struggle with accents. I flew Virgin Atlantic and the staff were helpful. Border forces were helpful with visa and medical examination because I was coming to UK for the very first time. It was exciting because I was joining my husband after 6 months of getting married. I found it a smooth trip.

My husband and my cousin from India with partner met me at the Airport to welcome me with happy faces, my husband had a candlelight dinner for me that evening. It was summer and the days were long, the airport was clean, facilities clean, people were helpful, staff in purple vests were supportive and gave me directions to immigration and baggage collection, welcoming people who have travelled 8 hours.

14.43

It was a lengthy process to get the job as Security officer, there were certain requirements such as DBS and background history. A friend used to work for Omniserve who used to supply ambassadors to the Airport to manage passengers. A close friend from Kenya advised me to apply for the security officer role, I thought I was not eligible. The process consisted of a telephone interview, online test, assessment day at airport, further exams, role play activity, face to face interview, online tests, lengthy but transparent. I was blessed that I got through the process easily. There were 50 people but only 5 moved on to the next stage and I felt proud of myself. I did not wait long to hear about the outcome of the interview which worked in my favour. I then went through background checks and DBS; I had my interview in March (exactly 6 years ago) and started job in May so a couple of months later. Between 2016 – 2020 I was a security officer. I was off 1 year for my pregnancy during this period. I had flexibility with shifts, I could manage childcare as my daughter had on going health condition when young with hospital admissions, but my colleagues and manager were supportive, and I could take time off easily. I had support from management about progressing career, I

did a few interviews before getting this role, ID management officer management had belief in me, I did projects on my own and I enjoyed it for 1.5 years.

19.54

I was super happy to get a role at Heathrow, it is not easy to get a job at Heathrow or any job, I feel blessed as was the start of my career journey. Slowly and gradually grew in my career path, never a workplace where I would feel racism, very inclusive, lots of memories coming here to work, good exposure.

I have come across nice and understanding people, I helped passengers their smooth journey through security lanes. I tried to be supportive to parents with children as it is not easy to travel with little children. UK requirements of liquids outside the bag can be overwhelming especially when going through security as this liquid rule is not applicable in all the countries. I always try to be helpful, especially with parents as they need extra support or older people who do not understand or cannot hear properly.

People get really upset when they are limited to what they can take on the aircraft, a gentleman had been nice but when I told him about legal requirement about liquids he started to empty to bottles there and then which was against health and safety, when people travel different airports and countries and all countries have their own requirements about what they can and cannot take with them,

26.45

I have not travelled for the last two years because of Covid but usually when I travel to India I use Heathrow, and I use Gatwick for European destinations (cheaper). Heathrow is friendly, people have been helpful when I travel, additional requirements and questions answered, airline staff very good and helpful, good airport to travel through with kids play area in departure, good restaurants to have food, quite expensive so rarely it is ok.

I am from Bhilai lived most of my life there, moved to Delhi, worked a few years then got opportunity to move to uk

My town is not very popular, in Chhattisgarh region, central part of India.

Prior to covid in last 3 years, I have not travelled outside of the Uk at all, went on holiday to European countries or to India to see family. Covid situation and with small children, and working in an operational role, if I go and travel and get stuck there are limited numbers of leave to be approved, causing an awkward situation and I would need extra support, so I have avoided travelling. We have travelled locally and explored lots in the UK. It became an opportunity to explore our own country now rather than travelling outside. Not being able to see family this pinches me but atleast I have social media so I can have face to face conversations.

I try to go to India once every 2 years, trips to India are expensive, I used to go on an Indian holiday one year, and next year European holiday. My mum visits too, she can

spend good quality time with my kids as she can stay 2-3 months, when I go to India, I can only spend 2-3 weeks.

I live close to the airport, 15 minutes away from terminal 2/3, in Ashford Surrey. I do not feel I live close to the airport, I have not seen aircraft close and it does not disturb me. With new carbonisation every company is reducing fuel emissions. Living close has affected me in a good way as I can travel to work easily. Guests from India always come to my house because it is close to the Airport.

I travel via Heathrow whenever it is possible and my kids like watching aircraft. There is a place nearby where you can view the aircraft, so I take my children there. That is the only reason I go there – either work or for my kids.

36.30

When I had first child I used to work in a city. I was heavily pregnant, lots of tube strikes etc no flexibility for pregnancy extra time or space.

When I informed Heathrow of my pregnancy they were so nice and welcoming, everything they could do they did. I have not worked in many companies in UK Heathrow looks after working mothers, time off flexibility, reduced hours, cannot stand for long hours so have resources for this, they do everything they possibility can. My pregnancy at Heathrow - I had anxiety problems and panic attacks, Heathrow looked after me with sickness and leave. After I had my little one, they proposed the idea of job share, 2 shifts on and 4 off instead of 4 shifts on and 2 off – not every company will offer this flexibility. I could choose my shifts. Heathrow look after employees with medical conditions or pregnancy, thing staff are important to them. On my maternity leave I was off for 11 month and then job shared for 7-8 months and then changed the role. I had childcare arrangements then.

My new role is non-operational - I have flexibility to manage my own hours, my manager appreciates family time, they advised I can do school runs etc., it is more about getting work done rather than time. Weekly review meetings where we review each other.

42.10

Time has flown away; I was so happy when I got a new job at Heathrow such as my new role - overall journey has been productive.

Impact of covid – now we have booster and vaccinations, covid considered normal cold and flu now, hope it does not affect people so severely. I cannot go anywhere this year as my husband's parents are staying in the country to visit and I want to spend time with them, though I am flexible from October to travel. Workwise Heathrow look after their employees by supplying hand sanitisers, face masks, proper deep cleaning of workplace, job security of workplace – Heathrow did not make anyone leave there was voluntary redundancy, the company did not ask anyone to leave.

I am thinking of calling my mother to come over this summer or later this year. She has had a booster, we are moving closer to reuniting everyone again. All the time we could not see anyone, all we had was laptop, teams etc. Life is getting back to normal. I took 5 ½ months old daughter to India via Heathrow on my own. I know some people there; staff support single parents travelling through the airport. Understanding I had a little baby, helping me through the scanner. My requirements are not like everyone's requirements. The staff treated me very well. My daughter was a particularly good baby and would go to everyone.

48.40

My daughter enjoys travelling though we have not travelled recently. We are going to Birmingham this weekend. She is engrossed in our culture, my sister-in-law is getting married this weekend so she has gotten her ethnic clothing out, matching earrings, make up – it is like a holiday for her. She likes flying, she last flew in 2019 when we went to India for my brother's wedding in 2019. She loves that she can watch as many movies as she wants during the 8 hours flight. My daughter is a nonstop chatterbox, she loves talking and trying different food, she kept pressing the button to ask the airhostess to bring snacks. Boys are challenging work, I found raising a daughter easier than raising my son. He has mood swings, terrible 3's - it takes longer to convince boys.

Last 6 years have been good I did not feel the years, I have had good managers which has encouraged me to grow and stay motivated.

The interview ended at 52.48