

Ratna Ghosh

[Start of recorded material]

[00:59:55:00] My name is Ratna Ghosh. I came to Canada from India in 1967.

An Indian Upbringing

I had a very sheltered upbringing. My parents thought they were doing what was good for me. [01:00:30:02] I have a sister; we were two girls. My parents made all the decisions for us. When I came to Canada I felt that I had never made a decision in my life. How was I going to become more independent? That was the main question when I came to Canada. [01:00:54:07] An arranged marriage is an example of how they thought they were doing what was good for me. Marriages were arranged in India, at that time. They still are but not as much. In the 60s girls did not have the opportunity to meet boys because they were sheltered, they were not allowed to go to parties, which were mixed. [01:01:27:21] I was not allowed to even go to a college by myself in a chauffeur driven car. A female attendant had to always accompany me. I did not know any males, and my mother decided when I finished my undergraduate degree that it was time for me to get married. [01:02:01:05] Many marriage proposals had come, and they looked at the education of the groom and the family background. That's the main thing they look at. They feel that it should be compatible with ours. His father was a doctor and he came from a fairly wealthy, upper middle class family. [01:02:25:22] It was thought to be a good match. He was also good looking, which was a bonus and he had been qualified as an engineer, and that was supposed to be very good. We were brought up to become good house wives, I was taught the social graces, how to give good parties, and carry on good conversations.

On Moving to Canada

[01:03:00:13] When he finished his Master's degree he got a job in a consulting firm. That's when he informed me that I was immigrating to Canada, and I didn't really know what that meant. But I came anyway thinking that I would go back to India. [01:03:23:01] But when I came here, I decided that I wanted to become more independent, and I wanted to earn something so I started going to university. Once I started going to university, I didn't want to stop.

Ratna found a job as a teacher and after a few years went back to school to do a Master's degree in education.

A less than supportive husband led her to get a divorce, bringing an end to the arranged marriage.

[01:03:55:00] At home in India, although divorce at that time was not common, my mother said -- by then my father had passed away -- she said, what is more

important for me is that my daughter is happy. I don't want her to be married and unhappy, so I fully support her. [01:04:24:14] If anybody has any questions, keep them to yourselves. I was very scared to be in an apartment by myself. I didn't have the self-confidence that I needed to go launch out on my own. So I enrolled both my son and I in a taekwondo class, and I have to tell you that it did wonders for me. [01:04:58:20] It psychologically broke that barrier, and I became confident because I knew that I could take care of myself. And that taekwondo class really changed my life.

After completing her PhD at the University of Calgary, Ratna got a job at McGill University in Montreal. Ratna would go on to be appointed Dean of the Faculty of Education in 1998.

[01:05:24:00] One of the factors that helped me was that I was a woman, and the faculty, a faculty which has a lot of women professors, had never had a woman dean. But also the principal was very interested in my international outlook. [01:05:53:09] I think that the other faculties were very well established in that sense, and I think that's what made him select me as the dean. And I was very happy to be dean, but I felt a kind of an obligation to take it on. First, because I was a woman and I would be the first woman. You needed to break the barrier, but also because I was not from the majority group. [01:06:27:18] Neither Francophone nor Anglophone, I was an Allophone, so I thought that this would be good. It would be a good role model for other people to aspire to.

Defining One's Identity

In Canada people have the opportunity of defining themselves in multiple ways because people have multiple identities. [01:06:51:03] I feel very much at home in Montreal. I feel Quebecoise. I have a chalet in a place where they don't speak English at all, in the St. Lawrence River in northern Quebec and I feel very much at home there. My French is not perfect, but people understand that I've made an effort to learn. I took many French courses. I certainly feel very Canadian. [01:07:25:07] I was recognized by the Order of Canada and the Order of Quebec because of my work in multiculturalism and what it has given to Canadian society. But I have a lot of research in India, and I go back every year to India. I feel very much at home there. So that I think that it is possible to have multiple identities, and feel at home in all these identities. [01:07:56:06] Depending upon which identity is important at a particular time.

A word of advice

I think that newcomers to Canada have to think that they're in Canada, they're not at home. Their identities will change. That does not mean that they have to be rooted in their identities to be self-confident about themselves. [01:08:23:05] I think you ought to know where you're coming from in order to know where you're going. That is why I always ask the students in my multiculturalism class to write a cultural biography. They have to know who they are, but they must also

remember they're in Canada. They must respect the democracy and the equal rights, and fight for these rights when they see that something is going wrong. **[01:08:55:23]** And they have to be confident that they are Canadian but they are also from different cultures, and have come from different backgrounds.

Ratna is Professor of Education, and former Dean of the Faculty of Education at McGill University. Her work is in comparative and international education and she is the immediate past president of the American Comparative and Education Society.