M: Can you tell me when you first migrated to Australia?

Ma: I migrated last year in September.

M: What were the motivations behind your decision?

Ma: The main motivation was, like, I wanted to challenge myself. I mean.. Ive been working for 12 years – always in India, or was in middle east for a year. In 2017 I happened to go to UK for a while and then when I came back, and when I wanted to go back to UK, somehow it didn’t end up working out with my employers and then I had a friend over here in Australia. I spoke to them and he was like, give it a shot. If it works out, it works out. I don’t want it to be a situation where in 5 years down the line I’d be thinking – I had an opportunity or I had a chance, and I didn’t take it. So that was one of the reasons. The other motivation was like.. so being married for like 5 years, I was sort of thinking if we plan a family, or whenever we start planning a family, if we have a base in a secure or better environment, well get good benefits out of it. And also the passport advantage that Australia has, or the government benefits that anyone gets over here. I mean like, back in our country, you know the facilities we get – be it education, or medical benefits we get, or the advantage that the Australian passport has – so that 3,4 reasons were the motivations. The major motivation factor for me was my wife. She was like, I think you are saturated over here. You need to try something new and that’s where we started. And it worked out for us, like, the eight-10 months we were. We started the process and within 10 months we were here.

M: That’s very quick. What pathway did you take? Was it skilled migration.

Ma: It was skilled migration. So when we started the journey, my friend was one of the main motivation or motivator for me to try it out. So back in India, I used to trade in stock market as a past time. I made money, I lost money. So the way my friend convinced me was – you would have lost like 50 grand easily in stock market. Why not spend 50,000 for this – do your skills assessment and give a English test – be it IELTS or be it Pte – so why to spend 50k and see if you can score a good, if you can get a good assessment, why not try it out. So that’s how we started. So started collecting all my experience documents relating to it. So then, last – so back in India, I had my 12 years of experience – I worked with like 6 different employers and like fortunately, I had a very good relationship with both of them. And I spoke to them and I said that I need an assessment roles and responsibilities letter from you stating that this is the role that I did, and this is the responsibilities I had and I worked full time – whatever format I need. And we got that letters within 10-12 days. Its like I was fortunate enough that all my managers or managers in that point in time were still there in the organisation. I just had to drop a mail, give them a call and they were like okay. So, the first question they asked me was – what do you want in that letter? I was like I have already given you. You just have to validate that and give it to your HR. If youre fine with the format and whatever I have written into it, then you can go ahead and tell your HR and get it signed and send it back to me, or Ill come to collect it, if theres a need. Since I had a very good relationship with them, they were more than happy to do that stuff. And yeah, as I said in 12 days I got all the letters. The other thing was cracking the English test. I was, like, deciding between PTE and IELTS test. So, I did some search, spoke to couple of friends, went to migration forums, understood which one is easier to crack. Then decided that PTE is the one because one can fool computer algorithm and crack the exam, but.. When I say ‘fool’, its just that, you don’t have to right or wrong – you just have to pronounce few words in a particular way and the algorithm will understand that yes, this person can speak in native English. In IELTS there is a person sitting in front of you. He or she may be biased. He or she may not like what you are saying. Or he or she may judge you based on the way you are communicating, even if you are giving the right answer, they may say that the person is not understanding. Whereas for a computer, you just have to say things in a way that the algorithm wants to hear it. And with some practice tests…and… first attempt, I didn’t crack it, I mean, I didn’t get the score that I wanted. Second attempt, I got the score. Then I did the, by that time I got the ACS assessment done, and it assessed all my working years as a relevant experience. So, I happened to be with highest age points, highest experience points with English score.

M: So, whats the profession?

Ma: I am basically, you can say a BI Analytics guy. So I’ve been working with Data, built in Data warehouse, dashboards – all like, last 10+ years.

M: When you said passport advantage, what do you mean by that?

Ma: So like, for example with an Indian passport, I have to apply almost every country in the world to get entered or even for a visitor visa. But, with an Australian passport, there are certain advantages. Like, for example, like, every Indian or every sub-continent guy has a dream of working in US, and day by day, it is getting difficult. Australia has an e3 migration clause with the US which has about 10k migrants, I mean, they can take about 10,000 skilled migrants which only gets filled by 1/4th every year, from Australia to US – people applyimg for work permits etc. So, US has a streamlined arrangement with Australia where they allow like lets say, for H1B, they have a pool for 10,000 lets say. In the same way Australia has, lets say, 5000, which, out of it, only 1000 gets filled. So even if you read todays newspaper, US is trying to give that share, or whatever pending quota, to Ireland. So now, lets say. So, Ill give you an example of my friend, who took an Australian passport and applied for a US thing, and hes now in US. He took like 6 years time to get to US, but now he can work indefinitely, I mean some sort of arrangement wherein he doesn’t have to go via H1B or something.

M: So would you like to work in the US, or are you just interested in opening opportunities?

Ma: Opening opportunities. Like, it widens your door. I mean you can go anywhere in the world, and work, or visit, or do anything. I mean like for example – I can give you a recent example. A funny thing happened. My sister and her family were supposed to visit us over here, in 2nd week of May. But their visa got rejected for the stupid reason like, um, there’s no, um, there’s no definite ties with India. I mean they are not going to go back. I mean, they said there is no surety that you will go back. I mean like, shut up. They showed a very good bank balance, they had a return ticket showing that they were gonna go back, they have a settled business over there. But still they didn’t get it. I am literally shocked. I mean my nephews and nicer – they were crying over there. Theres no option of appealing it – in tourist visa. You have to reapply it. So now, with an Indian passport, they struggled. So for example now, if I want to travel with an Australian passport, Ill be taken with arms open. I mean I don’t have to worry at all of getting a visa. I get an on-arrival visa from 100% countries.

M: What type of work do you do currently?

Ma: So, let me put it this way. I was a manager back in India. I was managing accounts of different clients. Right now, I work for an in-house IT team where I am one level below to what I used to do. But yeah, im in my field. The kind of work I used to do, I am doing that. There are people who have to deviate and take different routes. But I didn’t have to do that.

M: How long did you plan?

Ma: As I said it was 10 months. So, the actual planning started when I got my nomination approval or a state sponsorship approval from NSW, and I paid the visa fees. That’s when the pan started when should we migrate.

M: Research?

Ma: I did an analysis. I considered all the various options available, like, coming to Australia was one of them. Going to Canada was one of them because I have my aunt staying over there. So, I can get an additional relative points and I could easily go over there. But I didn’t consider Canada just because it was too cold over there. There was an option of Germany where I can get a 6 months temporary work permit, where I could go over there, find a job, find a sponsor, and I could get a work permit over there. Or a temporary permanent residency over there. Then the 4th option was about moving to the middle east. I mean, it was always open. I mean, twice or thrice I rejected the options that I had – moving to the middle east for a bigger role or bigger opportunity. I didn’t feel comfortable over there because of the restrictions it had. Like, I have to be, like, I was there for a week in Saudi Arabia and I was like, terrified. I cant even take a picture of myself. If someone is there in my background, they might come and just ask me. So, I was there in Dubai. I liked Dubai a bit. The only thing, like I was apprehensive coz lets say one fine day, my employer says I cant, I don’t want you to work over here anymore. I have to again find a sponsor or else I have to come back. Like, I have seen cases where people have worked for 15 years, their kids were born over there but they have to come back. I didn’t want that to happen with me. I wanted something, like wherever we go, we stay. And also the other thing was, the parents thing. I mean, I thought about, like, if we move to Australia, theres a possibility that I can take my parents, which, I don’t think that Canada had that option, there were some conditions. And also weather wise, like my mom has high BP and some sort of heart thing so I thought she might not be able to adjust over there. Like 5 years down, like 2 years down the line, I want my parents to come over here – be it on, any sort of visa.

M: Family and role in migration.

Ma: So, my dad is a very hard working guy. We used to stay in like what, a 100 sq foot place. I was born and brought up in Mumbai. Me, my parents, my grandmother, my sister – so 5 of us staying in 150 sq ft place. They struggled hard. My mom and dad ensured that me and my sister gets the best of education. So because of my dads learning and experience, he played a key role in terms of deciding the way I think about things, or the way I see things. And my wife, like, last 6 – yeah we will be completing 6 years years in a few weeks. So yea in last 6 years she has played a very important role in terms of calming me down or, asking difficult questions to me, like whether you want to really do it, whether youre happy. Shes been a very good support system for me in the last 6 years. Even for coming over here – I was a bit scared, so she was like do you really wanna do that? I you don’t want to, you don’t have to do that. And then she was like, lets take a chance. Lets see what things has in store for us. And were here – in 7.5 months we have a job – both of us have a job, we bought a car. Wife’s into day care. Because she likes being around kids. By the way, shes an interior designer by profession but she didn’t want to study over here again. So, last work she did back in India was working with a day care. So, she was very comfortable with the kids. So, she was ready to study about day care and getting cert 3 in daycare or diploma in child care. But not about interior desigining because she was like, Ive given up. She worked for like 4 or 5 years as an interior designer and she was like im pissed off with all of the clients. Im better with the kids.

M: Friends/community

Ma: So, I had a childhood friend in Melbourne – the one who motivated me to try for it and one of my ex-colleague used to stay in Sydney. So, those 2 – and there was one more friend of mine who used to stay in Melbourne but before we moved, he moved to US. So, there were the only 3 people in my entire circle that I knew. During the process I did make good friends, in terms of via PR whatsapp groups, Expat forums, theres a community, or theres an app called discord for gamers but there was a guy – he has created a discord channel wherein..So discord has all these channels, and one can ask questions about the assessment, so this is not only for people asking for PR related questions. So we have a channel for jobs wherein people can share the jobs. If people have some location specific or state specific questions. And there theres just some interest groups wherein people are just talking about banking, or news or media – event we have a GOT spoilers channel.

M: Where did you find this app?

Ma: So, this is, within the PR whatsapp group, we had this guy. So, basically this discord is for gamers. So gamers across the world create some channels or create some shared space where they can play different games. So, he modified based on the requirements of this PR group, or the requirements of the people. Like, say for example, for whatspp, the topics can get diverse anytime, and one cannot keep track of things. Like, one can ask about PR processes, so you ended up having these different whatsapp group. So, this is one channel. Log into it and you get different access – you can ask different questions, you can tag people.

M: How did you come across whatsapp group?

Ma: Via expatforum.

M: What type of different visa options did you consider.

Ma: I explored various – I mean I explored 189, the independent visa, state sponsored. I also evaluated 489 – the regional one as a last option. But yea, I explored all these various options. But yea, first thing that I got was the state sponsorship so I picked it up and went with it.

M: How do you consider yourself to be a skilled migrant?

Ma: I mean, I am skilled migrant. Even if there was no pathway and if I had given an interview and someone was willingly ready to sponsor me, I would’ve got through that way as well.

M: Mapping

Ma: I think theres no stage in my case, because everything was done in like 10 months. Skills assessment was done by ACS. Its fresh in my mind. I can put the initial thought as well. Started collected documents for skills assessment from December 2017 and then I applied for ACS in December 17 and then I did my PTE. I got results in Feb 18 from ACS – positive assessment. The document certification, I did everything when I was submitting for ACS. I did PTE twice in Jan 18 within the span of 10 days. First time I gave it, I didn’t get the required score. I wanted a 79+ - I didn’t get it. So, second time I decided let me try again because, at that time it was a tight race. And as we know that the doors are closing. So I had taken a – PTE, has a PTE gold test kit. Its like course, but its like, how the actual exams pan out. So, they have silver, gold, and platinum. So ,silver is one test, gold is 2 tests and platinum is 3 tests. So, 3 practice tests and it does a similar evaluation – how the actual test is evaluated. So it gives you an idea how one applicant stands in terms of their oral communication, written communication, or understanding what the speaker is saying, or be it reading.

M: How much did these services cost you?

Ma: It was about $59. Test was about $235, ACS was about $500, [document certification] was free. You just have to go to a district magistrate or local legislator and they just. They do it for free.

M: Was any of it challenging?

Ma: Not really.

M: Role of technology.

Ma: First and foremost it was google.com, expat forum, immitracker.com. So immitracker.com is not but just a free site where people put in when they have put in an application or when they have filed an expression of interest, whether they have got an invite or not, if they have got, when, or if they have lodged the visa. So, it just gives you an idea about the trends. But expat forum was like – THE platform for me – where I could find – all the answers were available on that. So, within expat forum, I happened to meet – I happened to be a part of whatsapp groups. Then from whatsapp groups we got the discord community wherein right now, about 300 people are there.

M: Were you using any social media avenues?

Ma: I did join a few groups after I got PR. Like, theres a group for Indians in Sydney or something like that, when I was initially looking for accommodation, jobs – flatshare, things like expat accommodation something.

M: Were these helpful?

Ma: Indians in Sydney, a bit. Because a couple of flatshares were available and I contacted them or they contacted me, and it might have worked out but then we found a place for ourselves within our budget. But yea, Indians in Sydney – a bit. But yea, its become a piece of a joke. I mean everyone on it is cracking jokes. People ask a serious question and people are just making memes of it. So telegram is also an app wherein one can post in different groups. So, theres couple of clients that I know. They were running like 5 different types of preparing groups – one was only about preparing for IELTS or PTE, one was only about preparing for pre-PR process, documentation and helping people with documentation, one was only for post PR wherein after getting the PR what should one do about migration checklist and then there was a jobs group. Since whatspp has a limitation of 256 people, telegram doesn’t have any limitation. One doesn’t even need to know the phone number because it can be based on email ID. One does have to get a link to join a group and then they can join it. Even discord is something like where no one knows your mobile number or email ID. Its your discreet identity, whatever you want it to be, because people think about the security point of view as well. I don’t want to share my mobile number with anyone so Ill tell you – this whatsapp group became a problem after I migrated over here because people were calling on whatsapp. I happened to be an admin of one of the groups that I was a part of initially. People were giving me a call at night at like, 2 o clock, 3 o clock because back in India it was like 9 or 10 in the evening. They used to give me a call, like, Mithun, we are at so and so points, do we have a chance, or people who already got the PR – did you get a job, do we stand a chance, do you have someone you can recommend us. But I couldn’t… so I left that group and said that I am part of this discord community so if anyone wants to have a question, I am free to answer over there. Whatsapp – So I was part of 3 different groups. Each had about 150-200 people. One was only specific to my skillset. It was defined only for business analysts and systems analysts. They had about, like, 150 people. There was a generic group only for people applying for 190 or state sponsorship for NSW. It had about like 200+ people. And there was a generic 189 group where everything was there. On an invite day – or when there is an invite round, there might be around 200-300 messages within an hour. Like 12 o clock Australian time, the invite round starts. So by 1 o clock Australian time, there would be like 300 messages. People might be asking questions like did anyone get an invite. If one said I got an invite, there would be 200 people saying congratulations. Or if one gets a PR, there would be 200 people saying congratulations, you got a PR.

M: Did you ever meet these people – or this was all online?

Ma: Yes – yes, I have met. I mean we have – so all my friends right now in Sydney are because of this group. So, we have a group of 15 people over here. All the people I have met over here are via this discord/whatsapp group. So yea, they are like a part of my family, or extended family. If I have a turmoil, or if they have trouble well be there for each other.

M: Social connections

Ma: So my college friend in Melbourne played a significant role. They were like, became my manager after I started my process – what stage are you at, where are you now? Then my colleague over here. I mean, I happened to train this guy when he was in pressure and he was the one who took care of me when I was here. We stayed at his place for like 15 days and he and his wife took very good care of us. And now this social media group. I didn’t know anyone and now we are a community.

M: Significant life events?

Ma: Yes – So, as I said earlier, I wanted to go to UK – get a tier 2 visa and go for a 5 year thing and come back, and probably come back because in UK they don’t allow you to indefinitely remain. When my employers or ex-employers ditched me that we cannot sponsor you to UK – that was a significant event. So that happened in Aug-Sept 2017. One of the major events which triggered me to start thinking about other places.

M: How did this affect your family?

Ma: My parents were like why? – BIG why! Because I was doing well. We bought a house. We were looking for a new house, bigger house basically. We had a stable life, everything was going well and my parents were like why! Everything is going fine. Why do you need to go? First question was, are you going for money? I was like money is never the question for me because I am. So I can say that I was earning aplenty in India where I could afford a house, a car, a pleasant lifestyle, don’t have to worry about anything. So, I was like, money is not a factor for me. Im going for our future. When I say “our” – it was about my, my wife, my kid as well as you – you guys – you have struggled all your life and need a peaceful life, or deserve better and I don’t think India would give that justice to you guys. And I want to really make you go around the world and.. then the other thing that I asked them was like if 5 years down the like I don’t want any regret, so would you allow me. So I guess, when we were taking a decision, it was a collective decision. So first one was why – but I wanted my parents as well as my in-laws - my wifes parents to say yes about it. They need to be in a positive mind, they need to support us, they need to say yes. If they said no, we wouldn’t be over here. It was, plain and simple – in my and my wife’s mind that if our parents – all 4 of us agrees, then we’ll go to the next step.

M: Was it hard to get them to say yes?

Ma: No! We manipulated a bit. Laughs. Emotional thing – I made them explain. So, like 2 or 3 days was enough to convince them. So yeah, from that day till the day we got the visa – my dad and my mom did have a few questions, few apprehensions that we are just running away from our responsibilities towards our families. But that was not the case. That he realised when we got the PR and within one month we were planning to move over here – he realised how much prepared I was for taking that decision. He almost thought that, Im this way, Im just taking my time here. He didn’t realise that me and my wife were pretty much prepared for it. I said to my dad when I got the visa that I am arranging funds for you guys for a year because my dad has an income or its like, hes more of a retired guy. So I was like I am making arrangements for the funds for you guys which you can survive for a year and if need be, I can also arrange for one more year – if I don’t get a job or of either of us don’t get a job in Australia. So, you don’t have to worry about it. You don’t have to stay or do cost-cutting, live life in a shallow budget and all. That made him realise that we have planned and we are it just talking in the air. He realised that my son is going his pathway.

M: Tell me about regulatory aspects?

Ma: So there was a police clearance certificate that I needed – the character certificate which was easy. I mean, me and my wife – we had renewed our passports a month, a year back so all the checks were done. This was – PCC was like April 18 when we got the nomination approval. So, as I said February – I just give you a timeline as well. So, March, I got an invite from NSW as well as Victoria. So March 18 is when we got our nomination, the invite wherein we had to submit all the documents. So, NSW approved me and within 5 minutes I got rejection email from Victoria. So basically, either of state only will approve my nomination. So, that’s where the PCC, then we did the medical in April 18 along with all the other documents like income, job or employment proof, tax returns along with the payslips.

M: What are our thoughts on current policies?

Ma: Yes, so it has changed a lot. So, when we started the process – it was like 190000 people they were inviting. Now its 160000. So 30,000 people have dropped down. And out of that 160, was about like, 20-30k more are allocated to regional and not to the metro cities. So we consider ourselves lucky that we just got in in time – just in time. Otherwise, I mean there’s one of my friends who is trying now and is struggling. Because he has to get like 80 points in skilled migration to get inside, and he’s struggling. I mean he’s tried for PTE, and lets say, if it works out, he might get his points.

M: Do you find yourself providing guidance and information?

Ma: Yes. So as I said Im still part of this group where people ask questions, people ask queries. She gets angry at me.

Wife: Its like, they give a call at night, 2:30 and like, Im not expecting to help you at like 2:30 at night.

Ma: So yeah, I still try to give back because I am where I am because of people who were ready to help me at that point in my journey. So, I still try to help people or guide people. So, there are, like my school friends who I had not spoken to for 15-16 years. Right now, they reach out to me and say that we need your help, we need your advice.

M: Obstacles/Challenges - assistance?

Ma: Did we have any challenges apart from parents? Parents were a challenge.

M: Any social support?

Ma: No!

M: Significant advice?

Ma: Yea – there were a couple of guys that were struggling and they were not decisive. So theres this guy from Melbourne who used to give, he was on 457 and he was thinking aboit applying for skilled migration visa and just when he was thinking about it, Victoria decided that… there used to be a pathway that 457 could directly convert into a state sponsorship. They were about to close it and he tried, he was scared, he wanted to do it but he got a bit complacent and didn’t do it. And one day is a day when finally it stops and Friday people started floating news that its closed, its closed. He got panicked and he gave me a call. He was like, Mithun I don’t know, I mean I didn’t do it yesterday and now they are saying its closed. I was like, are you able to log into your Victoria site? He was like yes. Would you be able to do your application right away? Yes yes, Ill do it, ill try but already it is closed. I was like, just give it a shot. Leave everything to destiny. And he applied for it. He was the last person I think to apply because they shut it down on Saturday morning and Friday evening is when he applied, and after 2 or 3 weeks, Victoria didn’t get back to him. Generally, for 457, if they are approving it, they get back within a week. So, even close to a month, they didn’t get back to him and after a month a reply he got a reply that his nomination has been approved. He gave me a call. He was so happy, he was like Mithun, you helped me a lot and you are the one because of who I was able to do otherwise I would have given up because he spoke to like 4 or 5 people and they all say – you can’t apply, you can’t apply. I was the 5th person who he gave a call and I was like you give it a shot. And I’ve seen people misguiding people on this process, or scare people, or what I’ve seen is people who have already moved over here – they try to manipulate people who are still in the journey. They see them as a competition and they try to… If you go to Harris Park or somewhere – they say that ‘bhai tera zaroorat nahi hai yahan pe’, you are not required over here. They feel like they are the rightful ones and we are the ones who are not required.

M: Living?

Ma: We didn’t have an option, or you can say we did have an option but my friend used to stay in Auburn and he was like, very adamant that you come to my place, stay with us. So, there was a different aspect when we stayed with them. This is the guy that I barely knew. We were just work colleagues and he was like more than welcoming us to stay at his place. They are Islamic but they were like, you come to our place. We were vegetarian so they didn’t cook anything non-vegetarian at their place for like 15 days – the number of days we were staying over there. They had a toddler and even he used to have, like, egg omelette in the morning. They didn’t even cook that for him. After 10 days we came to know that he used to eat that and we had to tell them – ofcourse that, its fine. We don’t have that restriction or anything. We are fine with everything. You do not have to cut your intake just because of us. So yea, They changed our perspective one more time. So since then, what we try to do, anyone from their PR journey, or otherwise wants to come over here, who is planning their initial move, I try to reach out to them and say if you need any assistance, we are there for you. I mean, if you want to stay at my place, you could stay at my place till you find a place or few of them, who wanted to come and they were pretty much unsure what to do. So, me and my wife – well tell them that you can come, and more than happy to host you till you can find a place. These are all people from social media.

M: Next steps?

Ma: Citizenship – 4 year’s time. We are thinking about it so it’s still a long way. Maybe a couple of years later we will start preparing. So, for parents there are like. So right now only visitor visa is the option. But once we are here for 4 years time, we could sponsor one set of parents for 5 years + 5 years. And theres this long one, I think like 864 or 143 – contributory and non-contributory parent visa. So at the end of the day whichever option that allows our parents to stay with us for longer time or permanently, that’s the option. So yea, this requires funds and we are already planning to put funds away in order to have our parents over here.

M: Would you consider migration anywhere else?

Ma: It’s too early to think about it but yeah, never say never. After coming over here, its like never say never. After 5 years, 10 years down the line, after getting a passport, if we get an opportunity somewhere else in the world. Or some remote place where we could spend our time and do nothing. Laughs.

M: Any final thoughts?

Ma: So before migrating to Australia we were thinking of buying a house in Mumbai, which is about 400k Australian dollars and we were planning to buy a house and we had to stop that plan and tell our parents that give us time of one year. If we don’t get through this process of PR, then we will buy a house. Otherwise we will go to Australia and buy a house here – maybe next year.

Wife: next year!! In 3 months he said he wanted to buy a car. I was like, are you kidding? Getting a car over here in just 3 months. We started with a 20k budget. It was like 23k, we got the smaller versions, not the higher end versions. Then we went to our friends place and saw a better version, better technology and everything and he was like ok, we can increase. We can go to 30, max 35. Then he came up directly to 45 and ended up at 50.