

Interviewee : Raul Lei

Interviewer : Rolf Killius, Lata Desai

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SUMMARY

Raul Lei, a British Asian of Indian, Spanish, and Chinese descent, discusses his family's migration history and his role in the Platform for Indian Democracy. He highlights the cultural richness of his heritage and the impact of British colonialism on his identity. Lei emphasizes the importance of community support and the need for British Indians to advocate for democratic values in India. He criticizes the rise of far-right politics and the scapegoating of minorities, calling for inclusive community building and fairness. Lei also reflects on his personal journey, the challenges of mixed heritage, and the significance of language and cultural connections.

Outline

Raul Lei's Family Background and Cultural Identity

- Raul Lei introduces himself as British, Asian, half Indian, quarter Spanish, and quarter Chinese, and runs an organization called Platform for Indian Democracy.
- His grandfather was born in India, moved to Nairobi for work in the Kenyan civil service, and later settled in the UK in the late 60s.
- Both his Spanish grandmother and Chinese grandfather came to the UK in the 60s to work in the NHS.
- RaulLei's parents met in the UK in the late 80s, and he still has family in India, but his biggest source of family is his Indian family in the UK.

Cultural Influences and Family Stories

- Raul Lei grew up with stories of India's Independence, Quit India movement, and figures like Gandhi, Sada, Patel, and Ambedkar.
- His grandmother, born in Kenya, shared her memories of Kenya and the vibrant Indian community there through her cooking, especially Gujarati food.
- RaulLei plans to visit India this year, which he believes will be an important moment for him.
- He recounts his first visit to Kenya for his cousin's wedding, where he experienced the warm community and hospitality.

Community Relations and Colonial Legacy

- Raul Lei discusses the inclusive and welcoming nature of the Indian community in Kenya, where he felt more like a local than a foreigner.
- He reflects on the colonial background of Indians in East Africa and the movement of people related to British colonialism.
- Raul Lei emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical connections and the impact of British colonialism on the UK's demographics and culture.
- He shares his experiences of racist abuse growing up and how learning about colonialism helped him find pride in his Indian identity.

Political Journey and Advocacy

- Raul Lei studied philosophy and was inspired by Indian political philosophy, particularly Gandhi and Nehru, to pursue a career in politics.
- He worked at Citizens Advice and later studied human rights and politics, leading him to work in Westminster and eventually at Platform for Indian Democracy.
- The organization aims to bring together the British Indian community to advocate for democracy, secularism, equality, and other founding values of independent India.
- Raul Lei highlights the importance of community-led activities, such as cultural events and exhibitions, to raise awareness and reconnect younger British Indians with India.

Challenges and Opportunities in Modern Britain

- Raul Lei expresses concern about the rise of far-right politics and the impact of the August riots, which exposed deep-seated issues of racism and xenophobia.
- He emphasizes the need for solidarity and community building to counteract divisive politics and rhetoric.
- Raul Lei discusses the importance of language and rhetoric in shaping public perception and the need for responsible communication.
- He calls for a more inclusive and fair society, addressing issues of financial inequality and civil rights, and the need for political leaders to take a stand against divisive policies.

Identity and Belonging

- Raul Lei reflects on his mixed heritage and the challenges of feeling like he belongs in different communities.
- He shares experiences of being misidentified and the impact of rising Islamophobia and racism.

- Raul Lei emphasizes the importance of language in maintaining cultural connections and regrets not learning his mother tongues.
- He discusses the significance of multiculturalism and diversity in modern Britain and the need to embrace all aspects of his heritage.

Future Vision and Community Engagement

- Raul Lei outlines his vision for a more inclusive and equal society, emphasizing the importance of community building and solidarity.
- He highlights the role of grassroots efforts in creating positive change and countering divisive politics.
- Raul Lei discusses the need for political leaders to address the root causes of social issues and build bridges between communities.
- He calls for a shift in narrative and language to promote understanding and respect among different groups.

Reflections on British and Indian Identity

- Raul Lei values the sense of community and support within his Indian heritage, emphasizing the importance of helping others.
- He appreciates the diversity and shared history of modern Britain, seeing it as a strength rather than a weakness.
- Raul Lei reflects on the challenges of being seen as a foreigner in India and the evolving nature of British Indian identity.
- He emphasizes the need for a clear purpose and conviction in politics to make a meaningful impact.

Support for Democracy and Equality

- Raul Lei discusses the success of Platform for Indian Democracy in engaging young British Asians and building support for democratic values.
- He highlights the importance of reconnecting with India's heritage and the role of younger generations in advocating for equality and secularism.
- Raul Lei emphasizes the need for a collective responsibility to uphold democratic principles and address issues of inequality.
- He calls for a focus on community-led initiatives and the power of grassroots efforts in creating positive change.

FULL TRANSCRIPT

Raul Lei 00:14
My name is Raul Lei, and I am a British, Asian. I'm half Indian, quarter Spanish and a quarter Chinese. And I run an organisation called Platform for Indian Democracy. My grandfather was born in India, in Nadiad, in Gujarat, and my grandmother was born in Kenya. And when they married, my grandfather moved to Nairobi to be with my grandmother, where he worked in the civil service, and through his work in the Kenyan civil service, he came and settled in the UK in the late 60s. On the other side of my family, my both my Spanish grandmother and my Chinese grandfather came to work in the in the NHS in the 60s. So my grandfather came over from Singapore through India, and took him three months and my grandmother came from Spain as part of a programme to support the NHS.

Rolf Killius 01:09
And your parents met in this country?

Raul Lei 01:10
My parents met in this country, working together in the late 80s. Yeah. So I still have, still have family in India, but in the UK, my my biggest source of family is my Indian family. So growing up that community, that culture, was very much central to my to my upbringing and to my development as a as a young adult and as a young British Indian. And you know my when my grandfather left India, it was a very different time. But the stories of Independence and the Quit India movement, stories of Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Ambedkar, is kind of the India that I grew up listening about, and the amazing food, culture, this kind of tapestry of India, of the diversity that makes it amazing. And then they took that to East Africa, and our family in Kenya. We had some family in Tanzania, Uganda as well, and seeing that culture and that links to India evolved through their life in East Africa and again when they came to the UK. So my grandmother, like I said, was born in Kenya. My grandfather came left India, probably in in the early 50s or mid 50s. I'm not exactly sure. My grandmother didn't tell me. So my grandfather died before I was born, and my grandmother didn't tell me many stories about India. But what she did tell me about India, or through India, was through her cooking and her food, and, you know, especially good Gujarati food. And you know, that's where my connections to India really came from was these messages of love, support, hope through food and the different different dishes that she would cook. She's a woman of few words, but she said a lot through her food.

Rolf Killius 02:56
Did you have a chance to travel to India as well?

Raul Lei 02:59
No, that's that's something I will be doing this year. It's something I've always wanted to do. And I think, yeah, it'll be an important moment for me.

Rolf Killius 03:10
And what is your relationship to East Africa? Can you say this again?

Speaker 1 03:15
Yeah, so I went to Kenya for the first time last year for my cousin's wedding, and we still have some family who live in Nairobi. And it was, you know, when my grandmother reminisces about Kenya, she talks of it as if it was a paradise, and like her memories of Kenya were just so beautiful and how much she loved it, and the really vibrant Indian community in Kenya. And when I went it just completely lived up to the stories that she would tell me and how kind the people were and the thriving Indian communities there. It's, you know, my my my uncle, my mom's brother only really spoke Swahili, even in the home, so coming to the UK, that was a bit of a shock for him as well. So our family ties to East Africa really still run deep and still somewhere that we visit as a family. I just the sense of community because we drove across Kenya, we spent a good amount of time, then we drove from from village to different towns, and just the sense of community and supporting one another. And just this kind of life where you support the community, everybody is there together, that warmness as well, to tourists and that kind of hospitality as well, I was it's not something I've experienced before. It was really quite powerful.

Rolf Killius 04:42
What do you think is a relationship between the different communities? Of course, the majority population are black, African and the Indian is quite a small minority nowadays. Did you come across this? Or is it not?

Raul Lei 04:55
It's not something I really noticed. But you know when, when, when we would meet local Kenyans and they'd ask us where we're from, and we say the UK. And I would say I was, I was a British Indian, and that my mother was born in Kenya. You know, they were like, oh, so your mom's a Kenyan national, or you're one of us and like that kind of boundaries between communities, it's not something I experienced at all in Kenya was actually quite the opposite that, you know, learning that we were East African Indians and that my mum was born there suddenly it was like we were even more like one of one of them. And yeah, so I didn't, I didn't experience those boundaries in a way that I wasn't quite prepared for. It was really inclusive and welcoming.

Rolf Killius 05:38
But of course, you know about the know about the colonial background. You know that Indians were in East Africa is related to the colonial empire. What is your take on that?

Raul Lei 05:52
I think it's different. I you know my family is from the three parts of my family, two of them are from former colonies. And you know, when you look, when you look at the UK now as well, in terms of the demographics of the UK, it's that we're here because you were there. And yeah, in terms of the Kenyan context, it's not something I know, know too much about,

but it's interesting seeing the movement, and still to this day, the movement of people is directly related to British colonialism. When you think of why, the two main reasons why asylum seekers say that they come to the UK is because the English language is the most easily, widely spoken across the world, and because they feel safe, because they have communities already established here, both of those are a direct consequence of British colonialism, but also the food that we the culture that we're exposed to, the people, the people from different backgrounds that we meet, is only, you know, is a huge reasons because of British colonialism. My grandparents would have never met my my Chinese grandfather in Singapore would never have met my Spanish grandmother, you know, my my family would never have left India to Kenya to the UK. So I'm very much a product, product of the British Empire. You know, for all of the atrocities that happened this kind of blend of people and culture, I think it's something that we can we can take pride in. My school chose as one of the modules for history A Level to teach about the British Empire. And so if I hadn't chosen history, and my school hadn't proactively chosen to teach the British Empire, I would have known nothing about it. You know, the only things I heard about the British Empire growing up, before I did my history A level, were good things. You know, rural Britannia, strongest Navy in the world. We gave India the railways, which is something that really, really, really frustrates me. Or, you know, saying that we spread civilization, and then when you have political leaders like Boris Johnson in the early 2000s still saying that Africa needed to be colonised, and that, you know, and you see Neo colonialism in the world, it's just so apparent how much of a lack of education there is around colonialism. And my my, my teaching of colonial, learning about colonialism in school was really powerful for me, because when I was at school growing up, I received a lot of racist abuse from peers, friends, people who weren't my friends, and even teachers, and it was specifically targeting my Indian identity, and, you know, saying that I smelled of curry. That was from the third world. I even had somebody who would brag and be like, Oh, we slaughtered you in your 1000s. That's why I'm better than you. And that was actually somebody was a good friend, and they thought it was funny and a joke. So for until I was about seven, between the ages of 14 and 17, I would actually pretend that I wasn't an Indian. So when people ask that inevitable question, where are you from? I would say, Well, I'm half Spanish, half Chinese, and you know, as I was saying earlier, that my Indian family and the Indian community was played a central role in raising me. So then to spend three, three years denying that part of my personality, all that about that part of me, my heritage, you know, took a huge toll, and, you know, would lead to an identity crisis. Who am I or what? What am I? And then learning about the the we focused on the decolonial movement in my A levels, and I started for the first time, like I only knew who Gandhi was and stuff, but I started really understanding about the levels of colonial atrocities in India, what India was before the Empire, and the strength and resolve of the Indian community. Fighting an imperial power through non violence, the ideas of the political philosophies that came out of the Quit India movement, or the independence movement, the formation of the Constitution, and I got this really fierce sense of pride that was just thinking, actually, why am I telling people that I'm not Indian? That should be the first thing I tell people? And so through that colonial, colonial teaching that I got in school, I actually found my identity as a British Indian, and really it shaped the rest of the trajectory of my life and my career, getting me into politics. Because, you know, by learning about India's

history just really inspired me to, you know, take that forward and keep draw on that legacy, that as Indians, as East African Indians, and as British Indians, we have

Rolf Killius 10:52
Entering into politics, you said...Did you study politics later on?

Raul Lei 10:56
No, so I did, I did philosophy for my undergraduate. I was really interested in the big questions and thinking deeply, but it was learning about colonialism that really thought got me thinking about politics. So actually, I spent a lot of my time reading Indian political philosophy written by Gandhi, by Nehru and other leaders of the independence movement. And then when I was at university, I started, I started dabbling in political philosophy, and that's where I started to think about, you know, what society is, for example, moving from the state of nature to a social contract, to who society works for, what is good governance and things like that. Because I wanted to go into Law, and then I worked at Citizens Advice after I finished my philosophy degree and realised that I wanted to, I didn't want to defend people from the Law. I wanted to change it so that, you know, the clients that I had would never fit future generations, would never face the problems that my clients did. And that's when I went back to university and studied human rights and politics as a

Raul Lei 12:04
Masters. But still that, you know, when I was getting politically disillusioned at various points, I would always go back to the Indian political philosophy that first reminded me why politics is important, or why it was something that I wanted to get into. So, yeah, it was a journey. So after my masters, I went into Westminster, and I was a staffer for a London MP, and that was fantastic. I thought my MP that I worked for was very she was very inspirational. She was a great leader. And it was a fantastic opportunity. But for me, it was a great time in Westminster. It was an inward an interesting time, an interesting place. And you know, a lot of the people there are doing some really inspiring work, and are there to make a difference and make a positive impact. And I thought, if I wanted to get into politics, I should be learning from these people. I should be in that environment. And then for me, again, my focus shifted towards India, and that's where I ended up at Platform for Indian Democracy. So Platform for Indian Democracy is a community led independent organisation that is trying to bring together the British Indian community for those founding values of an independent India, for secularism, for democracy, equality in India, and for the last decade or so, we've seen growing civil unrest, persecution, backsliding of democracy. And as British Indians, you may remain very much connected to our home, to our homeland. It's about, how can we use our voices to to advocate for those, those values that we carried with us from India to East Africa, some of us, and to the UK, and that we also fought for when we got to the UK looking at like the Southall Black Sisters, Southall Monitoring Group, Asian youth movements, you know, fighting for those same values. It's just saying that as a community we want we remain committed to those values.

Rolf Killius 14:13

And this is a kind of grassroots organisation?,

Raul Lei 14:16
Yes. So we, we mainly work in communities, building, building communities, and so we do cultural activities that we've done, cricket matches, cultural balls and all and exhibitions. And it's about raising awareness of what is happening, and also reconnecting, especially younger British Indians with India, and saying, Why? Why do we need to be aware and involved with what's happening back home,

Rolf Killius 14:44
Right... You said back home, but you live in the UK, isn't it? Is it important to do something in the UK?

Raul Lei 14:52
Yeah..I think for the Platform specifically, or for British Asians,?

Raul Lei 14:57
yeah. I think, you know, I. The politicians, policy makers, talk about the living bridge between British Indians and Indians in India, the Indian diaspora is the largest in the world. There's almost 2 million British Indians here in the UK, there is a real powerful connection people to people, and it's a historical connection as well, with Britain being a formal colonial power in India, and like there wouldn't be so many British Indians here in the UK, if it wasn't a former British colony, there won't be those deep you wouldn't see Indian jewels in the Monarch's crown. So there is that deep historical relationship, but also that people to people. People still go back and visit India, still have family there, still have property, they still worship in the ways that their families did in India. They still practice cultural dances or festivals, and that remain. And so it's such a large part, you know, chicken chicken tikka masala is now the English national dish. So there's such a deep connection between the two countries. And I think it's really important that we build the solidarity across people living in the UK and in India.

Rolf Killius 16:17
But you know, you say for democracy in India is a big topic. Is that not? Democracy right now,

Raul Lei 16:26
I think there is democracy in India, but it's hurting, and it's not the responsibility of any one person or any one political party. When you live in a democracy, everybody has the responsibility to uphold certain tenets of democracy, for free speech, freedom of religion, and that is wavering in India, and for us as British Indians, we want to use our support, our voices, to be a source of support and our accountability, to say that those important values that India fought so hard For to get off the British and that we fought so hard for in the 60s and 70s and 80s are valued and upheld. Democracy is is always been in India, a part of India. You know, it's not something that has been given to India. Our ancestors fought, sacrificed so

much to create the world's largest democracy. Nobody thought that we could do it. You know, Churchill said that any Indian leaders would be straw men. The idea that Indians could govern themselves was laughable, but through non violence and a huge national struggle, Indians were able to create the world's largest democracy that is still there when you look at before, pre colonial in the way the villages were set up and that, and there's always been this democratic kind of pulse in India, and it's just honouring that and upholding that commitment. The good constitution was a was a radical document that promised fraternity, equality, justice, and how it was birthed was just so inspirational, and it's just remaining true to that.

Rolf Killius 18:14
What's your identity? How do you feel?

Raul Lei 18:18
I'm ,I feel British. II think that's that is something I've always struggled with. You know, when I go sometimes, if I go to the Indian community, they go, Oh, you're not really Indian, you know, you're a mix or you go, I go to my Chinese family and be like, Oh, you're English. You know, I've never when you're mixed heritage, you never quite fit in anywhere. And it's something I really struggled with. And there's at times where I felt more closely connected to my Chinese heritage, or times where I felt more connected to my Spanish heritage or my Indian heritage, and I always thought, I always saw that as a weakness. I didn't belong anywhere. I was floating between different community groups, and didn't have a base.

And somebody, somebody once asked me, Raul, do you feel British? And I was really angry at that. And I said, Well, no, not if you're gonna not have people like you ask me if I am. And I took, took a big offence to that. But as I've, as I've grown up, and I've been bouncing around my different my different communities and different heritages. I've I'm British, but I'm not the British that they that they were thinking of when they asked that question. I am not, you know, that kind of rural Britannia, white British. I am the multicultural, diverse, inclusive Britain that we've become, and part of that is drawing on all of my, all of my family backgrounds and my heritages to create me. You know, everybody's unique. Everybody is individual. So I take strength from each of my each of my family backgrounds, each of my culture cultural heritages to create myself. And I think that is, I think that is an innately British. You know, when you have your national dishes, Tikka Masala or and you have the diverse communities in major cities across the UK, and that, like I said earlier, I am a product of British colonialism, and that's the British that I feel that kind of coming together of different cultures, different peoples, and drawing strength from that, rather than having that be something, I run away from

Rolf Killius 20:26
How other people see you, did you come across that anybody says, Oh, you're foreign, or do you really belong to this place? Or where do you really come from?

Raul Lei 20:37
Yeah, I get that question all the time. I mean, I look, I don't look, you know, some people don't think I look Indian, or I don't look Spanish, or I don't look Chinese. A lot of people think I look Middle Eastern. So I had once I was, I was in Camden with somebody, and they'd gone to another stall, and I walked into the shop, and this guy goes, You're Middle Eastern, aren't you? And I was like, No. And he goes, Yeah, you are. Why are you lying? I said, I'm not Middle Eastern. And he actually stood in the doorway of the shopping guys, you're not leaving until you tell me you're from, from the Middle East. And I was like, Well, I'm not. I'm Spanish, Chinese and Indian, but he just wouldn't have it. And I said, okay, yeah, I'm, I'm from the Middle East. Go see, that's all you had to do. Or when, you know, with rising Islamophobia, when I was in Birmingham, I would have people come up and shout terrorists at me, or, or, you know, say, call me an Arab or, like in a derogatory way. And so, so I get that a lot as well, and a lot of other mixed race people that I know and speak to have a similar thing where they get misidentified with different places. But yeah, I mean, you always get the question, Where are you from? It comes with being an ethnic minority in this country, and it's an exhausting question to ask, so I would just say, Oh, I'm from Woking. They're like, No, where are you really from? I said, No, look, you're absolutely right. I was born in North London, and it's just like, I don't mind being asked that question. If you are, if that's the first thing you ask me, if you, if you look at me and you you see, aha, they're not British. I'm gonna go ask them where they're from. If you've come up and introduced me, started talking, having a conversation, and you ask about my family heritage, and that's completely different, but having that kind of the colour of your skin is the first thing and the most important thing I need to know. That's when I think it's problematic question.

Rolf Killius 22:32
Was it anyway important that your upbringing different languages?

Raul Lei 22:36
No, no, and maybe I'm fairly, I blame my parents, but I only spoke English at home. Most, most, if not all, of my Indian cousins only speak English. Don't speak Gujarati or Hindi. When I'd go to Spain, see my family there, they want to practice their English so I could be lazy. And now my Chinese family live in Singapore. English is a national language. I've, I've, I've had the opportunity to be lazy in terms of languages and and now I try to learn now that I'm older, but it's something I deeply regret not learning, especially my my mother tongues, all three of them when I was younger. I think it's such a beautiful way to remain connected to that culture and and also, when you visit these places, and you can, you can speak the language, and I think it's a really lovely and important connection. That's why I think, you know language classes, or you know the way they're trying to bring back the Welsh languages and schools in Wales. Or, yeah, I think it's so important to remain connected to that. And I would like to say it's something I would do, that I am going to do, but I struggle with Duolingo and my my brain for languages is no longer there, so we'll see. But yeah, I think it's really important.

Rolf Killius 24:00
Yeah, looking at further and the future, what would be your wishes for? It could be for yourself, particularly for the society.

Raul Lei 24:09
My biggest concern about the country and society at the moment is the rise of far right politics, and I think the riots in August really put that into perspective. That where you have a Merseyside, they had checkpoints set up where any brown drivers were stopped and not let through. I would speak my partner had a friend who was driving in Merseyside and reached one of these checkpoints, and she just picked up her young daughter from school, and her young daughter wears a hijab and her mother doesn't so they were seeing this checkpoint come up, and she was like, You need to hide in the boot. So her young daughter is hiding in the boot whilst. you know, these groups that have created these blockades, and they are asking, Where are you from? Where are you going, you know, not, where you from? In Merseyside, where you from, well, and she was terrified of what they do if they found her daughter wearing a hijab. I mean, that was in the UK in 2024 it's terrifying. And I think, as we've been saying, this kind of strength in multiculturalism, different cultures, different people, different religions, different backgrounds, is so important, and it is modern Britain. You know that kind of we are here because you were there, and that's the legacy of colonialism, and I it's the only is, the only silver lining to colonialism is the kind of connectedness of different cultures here in the UK, if you're really going to try and look for one and to see xenophobia, racism, anti immigration rhetoric being whipped up to distract from economic failures as a way to divide communities, I think, is really dangerous, and our politicians should be taking the heat out of these debates and speaking honestly about facts, about how immigration actually keeps our society running, about the strength of having different cultures within our cities, within our towns, and putting forward that positive case, not fear mongering, not, you know, accepting and adopting the language of the far right. And I think so much in the last few decades, whether that be austerity, the hostile environment has been done to divide our communities, when really we should be building solidarity. And I think that is the most important thing that we can do at a grassroots level, is come together. I mean, in the wake of the riots, you've seen some beautiful spirits of community. You have Imams opening the door to the rioters, saying, Come in, ask us any questions, and then becoming really good friends with them after or you now see more multi faith meetings with community leaders. You know, mosques handing out free food to members of the public. And you know, there's been so much shows of solidarity and love, like in Walthamstow, the 1000s of people that gathered, and that's what we need, bringing community if our politicians are going to be divisive and not make that positive case, not bring communities together. And that's what we need to do at a grassroots level. We need to come together, show that somebody said that we need to remind people of our common humanity, that we're we're all one, we're all the same. We may come, come in different packages, speak different language, practice different faiths, but we are all you know together and remind of that unity. And in a world that's becoming increasingly divided and increasingly violent, I think that's the most important thing that we can do.

Rolf Killius 27:58
Do you have the feeling, does this far right political agenda moved a bit in the centre of the society,

Raul Lei 28:04
and it's really scary how this kind of legitimization of far right politics and how it's entering into the mainframe mainstream, is kind of giving a legitimacy to sort of awful like some of the things coming out of the racism or the debates of Rishi Sunak is English. I mean, I guess we've spoken about here today, but there's actual podcasters who are debating whether Rishi Sunak is English or, like, there was videos. So a word that I heard a lot when I was younger, that would really cut deep, was ' Paki'. That was what we were referred to as. And I, nobody has called me a 'Paki' in a very long time. And during the riots, I was seeing videos of rioters in the UK, and there was this mother and a young girl, and they're both just screaming 'Paki' at crowds. And I was like, I can't and they were doing it so proudly in front of the police. And I would never just was shocked that that is happening in 2024 on on just so casually in public with no consequences. And yeah, it's definitely, you know, the fact that people were burning down, trying to burn down hotels with asylum seekers. You know, if you burn down a building full of men, women and children, you know that there's a possibility of them dying. So when you when they say, Oh, they were just frustrated and were just destroying things. No, they went to a hotel full of vulnerable people and tried to burn it down. And I do think, you know, I was asked this question a lot of, do you hate the rioters? And I said, No, I don't. I don't think all of them are racist. You look at the areas they come from, the levels of deprivation, I think they were racist. But I think they've been told that you can't get a GP's appointment, you can't get social housing. There's mould on your ceiling. Rents are skyrocketing because these brown people, essentially are coming into your country. Not that public services have been gutted from inside out with austerity, not that political priorities have shifted, not that so, yeah, the NHS is chronically underfunded. Not that landlords are given more protection than renters. It's these unnamed, unfaced people who are coming in and stealing your jobs and and your places on the NHS waiting list. And they've just, they have real economic grievances, but so have working class communities that are from ethnic minorities. So I think more needs to be done, like I was saying, on a grassroots level of bringing people together, because if we're not going to be told the truth from our leaders, then we need to try and bring people together and build that solidarity and say we are not. You know, migrants and ethnic minority communities in the UK are not the cause of these social ills, and to be honest, we're facing them as well, and it's about how we build that solidarity and come together in the way that communities have done in response to the riots. So it breeds hope, but yeah, the only way you can hate defeat hate is with love.

Rolf Killius 31:27
Who's responsible for this rhetoric? Is it new?

Raul Lei 31:32
No...and I think, I think, like what I was saying earlier, that in a democracy, in society, everybody has a collective duty to uphold democratic principles. So it's not just politicians. It

is journalists, the media, it is the judiciary, it is community leaders. It is individuals that have this duty to protect one another be part of you know that community and respect human rights even on a daily basis. You know it's, I think it's a collective it's a collective duty and responsibility. And of course, there are instigators. There are people that make the problem worse. There are people in positions that could fix the problems and don't. But if in our communities, even within the Asian communities, we're not treating each other right, or, you know, you saw the scenes in Leicester in the riots in 2022 if we're not treating others in our community with respect and being inclusive and diverse, then, you know, with that's where we need to start.

Rolf Killius 32:46
But still, there's , there's a rhetoric blaming minorities for the problems in the society. You know, I like to hear your position for that.

Raul Lei 32:58
Definitely, it's, it's scapegoating.

Rolf Killius 33:01
It's not just the fringe.

Raul Lei 33:03
No, I mean, it was a real source of pride to see Rishi Sunak become the first British Indian, when first ethnic minority Prime Minister of the UK. That you know, no matter what, especially with the colonial relationship between the between Britain and India, to see an Indian Prime Minister outside Downing Street was really emotional. And as even though politically, I disagree with him, it was a really emotional thing to see him outside of Downing Street, and then a couple of weeks later, you hear him at the dispatch box about why we need to send refugees to Rwanda. And that was really painful, and you're just thinking, why what? You know, these are some of the world's most vulnerable people, and we're sending them to Rwanda, you. And it's just become normalised that the Rwanda policy wasn't actually didn't seem as crazy as it could have been, because we've just been jumping for like, if you thought 10 years ago that we'd think about sending refugees to Rwanda, you wouldn't have dreamed of it. You know, the nationality and borders bill, or the crackdown on peaceful protests. You would never have thought that a British government would would crack down on protests like that, or the systemic and institutional racism and sexism within the Met Police, you know, the people that are there to protect Londoners. And it's just, it's just jumping further and further into a rabbit hole that is really scary. And where, you know, started with Theresa May in the hostile environment, and we arrived at Rwanda, the Rwanda policy. So, yeah, and you know, when you look at like border crossings, the channel crossings with refugees, saying that our borders are being invaded. And, you know, I think Philip Hammond, the former Chancellor, called it swarming, swarms of people coming over and invaders. And you know that language has been used since the Cameron government, but then you actually look at why they're crossing the Channel. You know, everybody has a right to claim asylum in the country, but there are no safe and safe and legal routes to climate claim asylum in the UK if you you can't

get a visa to claim. So the first rule is that you have to be within the UK to claim asylum. Okay, so how do I get to the UK? Get a visa. They don't have an asylum visa. I get a tourist visa. You then break the break the rules of your visa, and you get deported because you've defrauded the visa system saying you're coming as a tourist. But to claim asylum, the legal schemes that are open are for there was Afghanistan, Hong Kong, and there was a Syrian one, I believe. But again, three countries in the world. So when you're left with the only way to get into this country to claim asylum is the channel. It's no surprise that criminal gangs are exploiting that and making it into a business model. But you don't hear that. You don't hear that there are no legal ways for somebody from South Sudan to claim asylum here. You hear that there are military aged men invade who are really economic migrants invading our southern borders. That's just not true. And political leadership is not actually saying that not explaining the asylum system, or not explaining or challenging that, but instead feed into the rhetoric of that we need to smash the gangs that you know we need to be that now no asylum seekers who cross the channel to get into the UK can ever claim citizenship is punitive, rather than actually addressing why people are crossing the Channel. So that kind of just political deception that's been going on for decades, and it's why people are so disillusioned and so angry at the government, and people like Faraj, who has a Coults account and is a millionaire, is seen as like a hero for the working class, because he is telling truth to power, because there's been so much political deception, people are so untrusting of politicians, and also the ability for Westminster actually to make a change, and it's that kind of deception and scapegoating has undermined politicians ability to actually bring people together to create change so and you don't just see it here. You see it in the US. You've seen it in India. You see it in the rise in Germany, Italy, France. And I think we really need to think about how we language is so powerful as well. You know, when Elon Musk took over X, and then suddenly you see a rise in trolls and hate speech and things and people. Oh, it's only an online platform. You know, it was used to mobilise people in the riots in August. You know, you saw offline violence, but offline speech becoming no sorry, online speech becoming offline violence, and it's really terrifying. We need to really think about the way that we use our words, like calling those across the channel illegal immigrants. There's nothing illegal about claiming asylum. Our own Supreme Court said the same thing. But if you keep telling people that they're illegal, they're illegal, they're illegal, you're going to build resentment and hatement and hatred for a community you've probably never met. So I think rhetoric and the responsibility for those who can, who have the ability to shape the narrative, is very important.

Rolf Killius 38:37
You briefly mentioned the conflicts within for instance, the Asian community. Leicester, what is your take on that?

Raul Lei 38:48
It's it's bringing the same kind of divisions that are in India, here to the UK, and you know, they're still with social media, WhatsApp, that kind of division can cross borders now. So it's well known that a lot of online hatred comes from India to the UK and stirs tensions here. But I would say, you know, when I listened to people who were right in the thick of fighting for social justice and equality in the 60s and 70s and 80s, they had no understanding of

separating the community into Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, who were British Asians or politically black, and it was much more inclusive. And it was only in the last, you know, couple of decades that we started dividing our communities further. And I think a really, really powerful thing is so Tommy Robinson is become really close within before he was arrested, was really close to Indian media, and there are actually Hindu groups marching with the EDL outside Downing Street a couple of weeks before the August riots. But then when the riots kicked off, they just. Or, you know we, I know countless people who are chasing the streets, spat at and nobody stopped to ask, Are you Muslim, or are you Hindu? Or it was just they saw a brown face, and they chased you, beat you, stopped you at a checkpoint. And I think that kind of reminds us that, of that reminding us of what the struggles were for the generations before us, in the 60s, 70s and 80s and the community as a whole, and why we need to have solidarity and build harmony and reduce tensions within our own communities. Because we again, we all share the same struggles, and in the in the face of racism and xenophobia and the rise of that element in the far right. It's something that is going to be a battle that we all share together. And I think we need to remind ourselves of that in the community that you know. So you look at Leicester, it's Indian Muslims predominantly, and Indian Hindus. You know, we've we come from one country. We have that shared history, our journeys, our patterns of migrations, you know, are combined, are together. And I think we should remind ourselves of our similarities rather than our differences. And like I said, we start in our community. We build Cross Community solidarity, you know, and we build an inclusive society?

Rolf Killius 41:24
Yeah, maybe a final bit of Outlook. What you would you wish for?

Raul Lei 41:31
I wish for a kind of politics, more inclusive community building. And fairness equality, I think, is so important, whether that be financial inequality within our civil rights, within treatment of police, within representation, having more fairness and equality is Yeah...

Lata Desai 42:03
I was just asking very fascinating to understand about your mixed heritage. But I wanted to know what is the best thing you value about your British identity, and what is the best thing you value about your Indian identity.

Raul Lei 42:19
With my Indian identity, I think the lesson that was imparted to me, and what I learned very early on, was really the importance of community. And I think growing up, whether that be within our family or within the wider community, the importance of supporting one another, being active in your community, building, building, that group that you know people rely on each other and help each other. And I think always from a young age, that is what that was my main thing that I was taught, and they like whatever you do, you help you help others. You look out for other people. You are only as strong as the people that are with you. And I think you can, you can see that, you know, throughout, like I was saying, for me, the political

kind of movements in India, but I think within a lot of diaspora communities here in the UK, that kind of needing to support and be part of your community. And my British one, I think, is the diversity. Like I said, I see myself as British, but not the old kind of Imperial nostalgia British, but as a modern, diverse fluid, accepting British. And the fact that I can walk through London and pass Lebanese food, Indian food, Italian food, that there's so much culture. And I think you know the best of British really, is when when people come together and that kind of shared history.

Lata Desai 43:57
I wish I had met you after your visit to India because you said you, you, you never been there, but you were there at the end of this this year. Um, just wondered if you went to India, do you feel that people would see you as a foreigner?

Raul Lei 44:21
I think so. I think I've, I've met, I've met many different Indian citizens who've been over here. And some have seen British Indians as not real Indians anymore. Some see us as brothers and sisters that remain very much connected. And if that does happen, like I said, for me, it's not nothing new somebody with mixed heritage, but I think it's different when you've left your home country, even down to the food. So I was speaking to some Indians from South Africa who were telling me about how their daal is different because of when they came to South Africa, the some of the ingredients weren't readily available, so they had to mix and adapt. And now their daal is a completely evolved dish. That's, that's very different than what you would have in some places in India. And I said, that's the same as our identity as British Indians. It's, it's different. We're living in a different society, exposed to different cultures. Of course, we're not going to be the exact same as Indians living with within India, but I don't think that invalidates our identity as British Indians, and being able to remain connected to our homeland and to our country, it just means we experience it differently.

Lata Desai 45:40
Have you ever considered going into politics full-time, like being a MP or something like that?

Raul Lei 45:47
It's something, it's something I've thought about. But for me, when the best MPs that I've met, and there are a good, very good number of them, the best MPs I met, have a specific reason why they entered politics or why they're in Parliament, whether it's a specific issue within their constituency, or a vision then that they have for the world. And I made that decision to go into politics because, like I said, I wanted to. I didn't want to defend people from the law. I wanted to change it. And if I find that I have a real purpose, or there is something that I think as an as an MP, I can do to make that change, then, of course, I'd be open to it, but to go into politics without a real like public office, without a real conviction or a real direction of what you want to change and why, I think, leads to the wrong people going into politics and forgetting why you're there, and what that office is. It's, you know, I remember I gave a talk to local school kids, and I was saying, you know, in a few years, you're going to have the

most powerful tool at your disposal that you will ever have. And they thought they meant that they were going to be able to use power tools or whatever, but I said, No, your vote. You know, MPs work for you. You get to decide whether they keep their job. You're their hiring committee. And I think knowing that and making sure that you're connected to the communities you serve and represent, and reminding of why you're there and what you want to do is really important. So if that, if that clear purpose and opportunity arises, then then, yeah

Lata Desai 47:28
How successful is your movement for democracy in Britain? Do do the young British Asians connect with your ideology?

Raul Lei 47:36
Yeah..I think there's, there's a lot of support for what we're trying to build. And, you know, we did polling and surveys and but just get, you know, I think the most important test for me is going into communities and and speaking to people. You know, there's people I there's people that support our work who are from completely different political parties, political preferences, but I think that one common thing that we can all agree on is the founding values in the constitution of democracy, equality, secularism, and it doesn't really matter. Is the same way in the UK, I have friends that are Tories. I have friends who are Labour, Green, Lib Dems, but we all have that kind of common found like foundational values, and it's the same for our work. And there is a lot of support, and especially younger British Indians who are looking at international relations, foreign policy, in a completely different way. When you have what is happening in the genocide in Gaza, or the way that Russia invaded Ukraine. And it also we have young British Indian volunteers who joined our work for the more community, the more exhibition side of our work, but stayed because they learned something about India, and for them, it's a way of again, reconnecting with their heritage. So yeah, there's all sorts of people that support our work and are involved in our movement. All come from different from different backgrounds for different reasons, but we're all there because we love India. We remain connected with India and and we all share those, those foundational values that built an independent India and built the world's largest democracy