

Of ages and names

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Owen in China

Hello, I'm Owen and this is my podcast for Friday 10th May, 2019. How are you all at remembering names? In general, I think I'm pretty bad with names, but when it comes to Indian names, I feel like I have no chance. Most of the names I come across here in India I've never heard before and it's almost impossible to remember names you're not familiar with [1]. I carry a little notebook when I'm here in order to write down people's names. I'm not sure I would remember anyone's name here if I didn't write it down.

Today, I'll be talking about why Indian names aren't just causing [2] me problems. But, first, I'll tell you a little bit about my great-grandfather and why I've been thinking about him.

You might remember me talking about my 100-year-old grandmother a few episodes back. Well, before I left for India, she was telling me all about her father. He led a very interesting life. He spent a lot of his life at sea. He left home at a young age to become a sailor and worked as a crew [3] member on large cargo ships [4] and passenger ships. His last job was on the Olympic. The Olympic was the sister ship of the Titanic. He, like many others, applied to work on the Titanic apparently. The Titanic was the grandest [5] ship of them all, of course, but, fortunately for him, he didn't get the job. He did get the job on the Olympic though. I had heard lots of stories about my great-grandfather before but my grandmother mentioned a detail this time that I hadn't realised. My great-grandfather first left home when he was 12 years old. This was in 1892. He went off to sea when he was 12 and didn't return home for three years. As she was telling me this, I commented: 'How crazy is that? Just imagine, these days, sending off your 12-year-old child like that! And not seeing them for three years!'. Well, in the meantime [6] I've come to India and I've listened to people tell me stories that are not all that different. Except, of course, that they're not talking about their great-grandfathers. They're talking about their own life stories. These stories are not set in the 19th century. These stories happened far more recently. There's a tailor [7] here that I go to called Devang. He's an excellent tailor and an all-round [8] nice guy. He was born here in the Kutch region in 1964. At the age of 13 – so in 1977 – he got a one-way ticket on the steam train from Bhuj to Mumbai. In his pocket he had the address of a tailor in Mumbai. He spent three years learning the trade in Mumbai, then caught a boat to Muscat in Oman where he continued working as a tailor. From there he moved around the Middle East, then to the Seychelles and finally back to Kutch in his late twenties. He left home at 13 and didn't come back until he was in his late twenties. Atul is another acquaintance [9] of mine and he has a similar story. Atul is a goldsmith, he makes beautiful gold jewellery. In 1998, when he was 12 years old, he, too, bought a train ticket to Mumbai. He got a job in a cramped [10] workshop making gold jewellery. He worked 12 hours a day with 30 other teenaged boys, working and sleeping in the same room. When the boss refused [11] to pay him for three months of work, he ran off. With no money to his name, he jumped on a train with no ticket, hiding from the conductors for 24 hours until he arrived back home in Bhuj, hungry and tired. He's told me that child labour is very common in the jewellery industry in India. Child labour seems generally quite common in India. Where I am at the moment you see many kids working on construction sites and in restaurants and shops. Those, it's worth remembering, are just the visible ones. India can really serve as a reality check [12] sometimes.



We're in the middle of the 2019 general elections [13] here in India. Voting started on 11th April and will go on until 19th May. The vote happens in stages. Not everyone votes on the same day and the results of the vote will be announced on 23rd May. Why, you might

wonder, does it take more than a month for everyone to vote? Well, let's start with the numbers: there are 900 million eligible [14] voters, 543 seats in the lower house [15] of parliament are up for election and in the last election there were 464 different political parties. Those numbers don't actually answer the question, but they are impressive. In the past, general elections in India took much less time. The reason it's taking so long this time is because the government doesn't trust the local police forces. Instead of having local police secure polling stations [16], the Indian government is moving federal forces around the country to ensure people can vote safely and freely. There are two major political parties in India. The governing party [17] is led by the current prime minister, Narendra Modi. The main opposition party is led by Rahul Gandhi. Rahul Gandhi is contesting a parliamentary seat [18] in the southern state of Kerala. And this is where Indian names complicate [19] things. On the ballot [20] in Kerala there is another candidate with the exact same name and a further candidate called Raghul Gandhi. The other Rahul Gandhi is running as an independent, meaning he's not a member of any political party. Is it a coincidence that two people with the same name are contesting the same seat? I don't think so. I've been told that this is not an uncommon electoral strategy in India. In the last election five years ago, a politician from the other major party running for a seat in the north faced a similar problem. Shortly after he announced his candidacy, ten people with the exact same name as him also announced their candidacies. The candidate from the major party accused the opposition of paying people with the same name as him to run against him. The idea is simply to confuse the voters. Imagine trying to vote and being confronted with a ballot that includes 11 candidates with the same name.

That's all from me for this month. As always, thank you for listening. You can listen to all our episodes by downloading our app or by visiting our website podclub.ch. Remember that you can also download our vocabulary trainer and you can find us on Instagram. I'll be back on 7th June. Until then, take care everyone and goodbye.

Glossar: Owen in China

[1] **to be familiar with sth.:** to know about sth., to have experience with sth.

[2] **to cause sth.:** to make sth. happen, usually sth. bad

[3] **crew:** the people who work on a ship, airplane, etc.

[4] **cargo ship:** ship that carries goods rather than passengers

[5] **grand:** here: impressive

[6] **in the meantime:** during the time of two events (in this case hearing the story and telling the story)

[7] **tailor:** so. who makes clothes

[8] **all-round:** here: in every way

[9] **acquaintance:** so. you know a little but not so. who is a close friend

[10] **cramped:** small and crowded

[11] **to refuse to do sth.:** here: to not give so. sth. they ask for

[12] **reality check:** sth. that reminds you of how things really are and not how you think or hope they are

[13] **general election:** an election in which everyone in the country votes for the people who will represent them in parliaments

[14] **eligible:** allowed by rules or laws to do sth.

[15] **lower house:** parliament consists of an upper house and a lower house. The lower house is the larger, more representative part

[16] **polling station:** a building where people go to vote in an election

[17] **governing party:** the party that is in power and has the right to governs

[18] **to contest a parliamentary seat:** to stand as a candidate in parliamentary election

[19] **to complicate:** to make more difficult to do or understand

[20] **ballot:** the paper that you write your vote on