

## Between Two Worlds, I Belong

I was born in India, but I don't remember it. I was just a baby when my parents carried me across oceans to America — the place where I learned to walk, talk, and dream.

For me, home was the smell of pancakes on Saturday mornings, the laughter of friends during recess, and the sound of my mom saying, "Good job!" when I showed her my classwork.

Then one evening, Dad said, "We're moving back to India for a year because of my job." I was in first grade. My heart sank as I wondered, Would I still belong there? Would I fit in at all?

When we arrived, India felt like a colorful whirlwind. The air buzzed with honking horns, scooter engines, and the smell of samosas and bajjis from street stalls. The sun felt closer, and the sky seemed painted brighter.

Everything was new — school started in April instead of August, and I wore a crisp uniform, shiny black shoes, and carried a backpack filled with thick notebooks.

On the first day, everyone chatted about their vacation trips. I sat near the window, staring at a tall mango tree outside. No one talked to me. I missed my old friends, my teacher, and my playground. I didn't know the games they played or the words they used.

For the first few days, I stayed quiet. Words swirled around me like birds I couldn't catch. I wanted to join their laughter, but my voice felt stuck in my throat.

Then one lunch break, a boy named Rishi dropped his lunch box. Food scattered across the floor. His face turned embarrassed.

Without thinking, I said softly, "You can share mine."

His face brightened. "Really?"

"Of course," I said.

That simple moment changed everything. We started talking — about our favorite games, foods, and lot more. The next day, he introduced me to his friends.

Soon, I wasn't the quiet boy by the window anymore.

At recess, they taught me Kho-Kho, a fast, dusty, laughter-filled game where we sprinted and tagged until our shoes turned brown. In return, I showed them Gaga Ball, which they found exciting. We ran, shouted, and laughed until the bell rang.

At lunch, we traded food — my mac and cheese for their spicy biriyani, my pasta for their sambar rice. Sharing food made the flavors even better, because friendship was the best spice of all.

During Tamil class, my friends helped me sound out new words. In English class, I helped them pronounce tricky ones. We became a team, cheering for each other's victories, big and small.

Day by day, the strange started to feel familiar. I wasn't just visiting anymore — I was belonging.

I began to love the rhythm of life there. Every morning, I rode my bike to school, waving to shopkeepers who smiled and called out, "Vanakkam, Thambi!" — "Hello, little brother!" Their warmth made my heart glow.

In the evenings, I played on the streets with neighborhood friends, chasing kites and licking colorful ice pops from street vendors.

On weekends, I went to temple festivals with my cousins. Drums beat loudly, decorated chariots rolled through the streets, and people danced and clapped to the music. I wore traditional clothes and joined them, feeling the pulse of celebration through my feet.

During Pongal, we decorated the porch with colorful rangolis, cooked sweet rice, and thanked the sun for the harvest. During Diwali, we lit rows of oil lamps that flickered like tiny stars. I laughed with cousins I had just met, but it felt like I'd known them forever.

In those moments, my heart whispered, I belong here too.

One evening, I sat on the terrace, watching the sunset paint the sky orange and pink. Grandma brought me a plate of hot bajjis.

"So, do you feel at home now, kanna?" she asked gently.

I thought for a moment and smiled. "I think... I have two homes."

She nodded. "Then you are blessed. You belong to both."

Her words stayed with me. I realized belonging wasn't about choosing one place over another. It was about carrying both worlds inside me — their languages, their smells, their sounds, their love.

When it was time to return to America, I felt a lump in my throat. My friends gave me a handmade card that said "Come back soon!" and glued photos of us playing and laughing together. I tucked it carefully into my backpack — the same one that once felt too heavy but now carried memories that made my heart full.

Back in America, my teachers and friends asked, “How was India?”

I smiled. “It was amazing. I have another family there.”

Sometimes, when I smell spices from Mom’s kitchen or see a picture of a mango tree, I remember India — the warmth, the laughter, the belonging.

And when I talk to my friends here, play Gaga Ball, or see snowflakes fall outside, I remember — this is my world too.

Now, when someone asks, “Where are you from?” I don’t hesitate anymore.

I’m from India, where my roots began.

I’m from America, where my dreams grew.

Between these two worlds, I don’t have to choose — because both make me who I am.  
Between Two Worlds — I Belong.

**தமிழில் (In Tamil):**

*“நான் எங்கு சென்றாலும், என் மனசு இரண்டு உலகங்களிலும்  
வீட்டைப் பறிமாறுகிறது!”*

*(Wherever I go, my heart carries a home in both worlds!)*