# HOME FROM HOME & HERE TO STAY!
South Asians in Britain - an Oral History

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Introduction

This oral history compilation is the result of a number of projects and contains a large amount of previously unpublished material. The first two studies were commissioned by the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit. The oral history for the first study was collected entirely in Bradford during 1993, and was compiled into a national touring exhibition and accompanying book of oral history and photography called ‘Here to Stay’. This documented the history of the development of South Asian communities in Bradford. The second oral history project formed the basis of ‘Home from Home’, another book and touring exhibition that focussed on British Pakistanis in Mirpur. All the material for ‘Home from Home’ was collected during a fieldtrip to Mirpur in 1996. The third study, in 2002, was commissioned by the People’s History Museum in Manchester, and formed the basis of an oral history and photographic exhibition, Moving Stories – South Asian Communities in Manchester and Beyond, which was shown at the People’s History Museum during 2002-2003. The most recent study, during 2006, involved conducting life story interviews with people in the Punjab (both in India and Pakistan), as well as the Chach region of Pakistan. These interviews will form the basis of a forthcoming exhibition on the Grand Trunk Road, the longest, oldest and most famous highway in the Indian sub-continent. The road travels through the homelands of over 90% of British Pakistanis, and the vast majority of British Sikhs and Hindus from the Indian Punjab.

These projects involved extensive interviewing programmes. People were interviewed in their homes, at their places of work, at places of worship, in schools, in cafes and restaurants, as well as at social gatherings – weddings, shrines or melas. Interviewees were encouraged to relate candidly their life stories along with anecdotes of their expectations and experiences of migration, and life in Britain. The majority of the interviews took place on a one to one basis. A few were paired, and interviews at crowded venues, for instance, wedding halls and shrines, were conducted using a vox pops format. Some interviews lasted two hours or more. Many were even longer and a second ‘sitting’ was occasionally required. Interviews were conducted in a number of languages - Mirpuri, Punjabi, Urdu and English - most preferring to speak in their mother tongue, and often switching between mother tongue and English.

HERE TO STAY - BRADFORD'S SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITIES
(Oral histories compiled and edited by Irna Imran, Tim Smith and Donald Hyslop, Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, Arts Museums and Libraries, 1994)
http://www.bradfordmuseums.org/altmain/bhru.htm

All text from Here to Stay, organised by chapter, can also be found at

All pictures from Here to Stay can be found at
http://www.bradfordmuseums.org/bradfordmuseum/index.php
Search under ‘Here to Stay’

HOME FROM HOME – BRITISH PAKISTANIS IN MIRPUR
(Oral history by Irna Qureshi, photographs by Tim Smith, Bradford Heritage Recording Unit, City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, Arts Museums and Libraries, 1997)
http://www.bradfordmuseums.org/altmain/bhru.htm
1. Leaving Home

My father came to England in 1950 just after the war actually, and he came like many others. My great-uncle was here, and he came to live with him. He’d been here since 1945 and he came here to work, came here to help the family back home. Just a normal farming family in the Punjab. Basically the idea was to go abroad and to earn a better living and send money home to help the family. We weren’t exactly poor but in order to raise the standard of living, he had to go out, and he was the eldest so he was sent to England. [Bradford, 1993]

When someone left our village and sent his first letter from England or some money, that in itself was an advert for England. You’d receive a money order or a letter or a present, or when he returned, he’d bring his baggage from England, and that would create charm among our people. Then we wanted to go as well. There was so much interest that I know people who sold their houses to try to go to England. [Mirpur, 1996]

You can’t imagine how much these people were in love with the idea of going to England. That was their dream. You won’t believe this - when they introduced the visa, then we couldn’t send grown ups easily. Children could go easily though so some young men would say to me ‘Send me as a child’. Now, when they reached the airport a man would look them over, you know close-up, to make sure they didn’t have stubble. Now, can you imagine how much it must hurt when you have your beard plucked out - each hair one by one? It’s very painful! For the sake of being able to go to England, these men would have their long beards plucked out, so they could get away with looking like a young lad. One young lad I saw - he tied a scarf around his eyes because the pain was making his eyes water, and the barber was refusing to pluck the beard because he could see how it hurt. But the young lad persisted. They couldn’t shave you see - the stubble grows back the day after. Plucking gave a smooth finish you see. That’s what they were willing to do! [Mirpur, 1996]

I was working as a spinning supervisor in the Fauji Textile Mill in Jhelum. I applied from there to come to England. The voucher system was already in place, which meant you could come over - only with a voucher because even by this time, there was already a flood of Asians coming to England. So they introduced the voucher system to control the numbers. I went to the Employment Exchange to fill in the forms. The man sent the form from Jhelum to Lahore. The Lahore Employment Exchange forwarded my form to the relevant ministry in London. Then after two or three months, I got a letter from the Queen telling me I could come by April but that they could not find me work - that I would have to do myself! So I then resigned from the mill. In our country [Pakistan], the wages were quite low although I was a supervisor and I had a good salary. In fact, the manager was happy to give me a pay rise to stop me from going, but I had set my sight set on England. I realised there were better chances of getting ahead in England. [Manchester, 2002]
At the age of ten, I suppose the image I had of London would be the Queen, and the pageantry, and the cleanliness. We used to hear stories like if you were walking through the streets of London and you actually spat, they would stop you there and then and make you wipe it with your shirt. That’s what you imagined as a child. [Bradford, 1993]

He wrote and sent us money obviously, and he sent pictures of himself and he looked very healthy and he looked very smart. I remember that! And our material circumstances changed in Pakistan when he was in England because we had a lot more money. You know he sent things, presents, when somebody went to Pakistan. We had clothes which were made in England of good quality so materially things changed, but it got a bit harder, I think, not having him there as we missed him as children. [Bradford, 1993]

Before 2nd World War, my father in law used to work the plough on somebody’s land. He didn’t have his own land. When he got married, he borrowed 200 Rupees from somebody to pay for the marriage expenses, but years after that he was still paying the loan. He had no income apart from working on that land so he would keep a little money for something to eat and the rest would go to this person he borrowed the money from. But it was a lot of money in those days. So my father in law’s friend came back to the village [Ghurghushtie in Chach] and said, ‘How long are you going to plough this person’s land? There is recruitment going on for seamen and lots of people are going to Bombay’. You see, in the war time there were so many British ships so they needed people who could work in the ships. He said, ‘So and so has already gone there and you will meet so and so there, and he will tell you what to do, and you can become a seaman. And wherever you go on the big boat, you can jump ship and start labour somewhere. You can do some work and you will get a hundred times more than this! You can save some for your loan and you can send the rest of the money to your children. They will have a better life!’ [Chach, 1996]

In 1921 I went [from Mirpur] to Bombay and through my brother got recruited on a ship called Somali. The ship got caught in a hurricane as soon as it left Bombay. I started throwing up. Someone got me a bucket and looked after me, then he brought me some food and I said ‘No! I think I’m coming down with something. I’m ill’. And he told me it wasn’t an illness. It was the hurricane which was making me ill. He said once the ship stopped I’d be fine. The passengers on the ship were all soldiers and I started a little business selling them tea. My brother used to speak to them in English, ‘Two penny cup, three penny cup for tea’. So the soldiers would buy from me. The ship stopped in Saudia Arabia to pick up some fuel, then went down the Suez Canal, through Malta and Gibraltar, and finally docked at London’s Tilbury Dock. The ship took 22 days from Bombay to London and all that time I sold cups of tea….I jumped ship in 1942. I had to leave my country you see, and you couldn’t get passports. My country was poor and I wanted to be in a rich place. I saved up and got my own fish and chip shop in Manchester – two pence fish and six pence chips, then a second shop, then another. I was lucky! All my kids and family are in Newcastle now – our headquarters. We own a grocery shop, a takeaway and a taxi business there. [Mirpur, 1996]
Divided Families

My aunt was leaving for England and I was incredibly close to her. I was only about 12 or 13 or something. I knew she was leaving because everybody was talking about her visa coming through. Everyone imagined that it was a far off land, everyone knew that. My grandma often quoted this Punjabi saying, and you’d hear her saying it whenever someone came round to ask about the plans for her departure. My grandma used to say, ‘Off you go my beloved daughter to the other side of the River Ravi, to where no-one goes and from where no-one returns’. England just seemed so far away that it was somewhere nobody could go to, and nobody returned from there either. Everybody thought my grandma was so courageous to marry off her daughter to somebody in England. She was never going to get to see her again!...I remember we all went to drop her off at the airport. There wasn’t any security then - we weren’t declared terrorists back then - so it was just an open airport and you could see the planes in front. And you could see passengers being ferried on the bus to the aeroplane, milling around on the tarmac, and getting on the aeroplane as well, so you stayed till the very end, until the plane had taken off because you knew your loved one was on that plane. And then you watched the plane up in the sky and you kept watching until it disappeared out of sight. And then you thought, ‘It’s gone now and it’s taken our relative with it!’ I remember we watched that aeroplane with wonder, and with sorrow too. You felt that a part of your life has gone with that aeroplane. Now the world has shrunk so much that we’re living in a global village and you think nothing of reaching the other side of the world in a matter of hours. Back in the 60s the world felt so big. If your loved one left in an aeroplane, well, you just didn’t know if you’d be able to see them again in your lifetime. [Rawalpindi, 2006]

The first priority was for the people who had been in the British army, and the British government allowed them a voucher. So in that category my father went from Alibeg to England. I was very young, like seven or eight years old. We were thinking, ‘Right, he’s going to England, we are going to be rich because he’ll send some money to us’. For us it was a really enjoyable time, but for him and my grandmother, they were crying because he was going away. The thinking of the local people was what we always call ‘Saat Samandar Paar’ – Across Seven Seas – it’s like going somewhere you can’t reach. [Mirpur, 1996]

My aunty was a very charming woman. I remember when I left, she gave me this bag and she said, ‘Listen, I know you are clever, you are good and you won’t forget. I am hoping that when you come back, you bring this bag full of money. You bring this back!’ And actually she died about 3 years ago. I wanted to go back and I had all this money. I could have filled that bag many times. I really had a wish that I wanted to go to her and say ‘Listen, I’ve done it’. And she was over 100 years old when she died. I just kept putting it off, you know ‘I’ll go next year, I’ll go next year’. It’s been 3 years now since she died and now I don’t feel like going back! [Manchester, 2002]
2. First Impressions

All I can remember is my mum saying that we’re going somewhere to join your dad, and, obviously, she must have mentioned England, but it just seemed to me like another place in India. I never knew anything existed outside India at that time. I didn’t realise it was going to be such a long distance, but my mum did explain something about an aeroplane and I knew what aeroplanes were at that time, so I was quite thrilled, yes. I was quite thrilled at the thought of flying in a - we call them flying birds, you know. I remember boarding the plane and some air hostesses and they were in blue. It was a BOAC aeroplane and they were very friendly and they looked very nice as well. I kept looking out of the window and I just saw little specks and my mum said that they were villages. It looked like a jigsaw and it was amazing, and I remember asking my mum at one time if she could open the window and I could stick my head out . . . We were waiting for ages and ages in the queue to get our passports stamped. It immediately did strike me that it was cold, because the first thing I really did notice I suppose is people wearing big coats. And my dad came towards us as soon as we came out of the customs. I was in front of mum and I was staring at all these people and I was looking at the kids, you know, the English people, and they were white. To some extent, I was used to seeing white people before in India, but there were so many of them this time and it was a total change. I felt different, because there were all these white faces all around us and very few dark people. I remember telling my mum, I said, ‘You know, they’re all gora here’. That’s our phrase for white, and she said, ‘There’s lots of English people here’. I remember her telling me, she said, ‘You’ll be white like them one day you know, our colour will probably change or something,’ and I remember looking in the mirror. [Bradford, 1993]

It was more about an ideology rather than anybody saying exactly what is was. People would make general comments like it’s great there, there’s lots of money, and you can have what you want, and there’s machinery that works for you. That sort of thing! And you had an opportunity to make a better life for yourself. There was a whole euphoria built up about how good England was…I think a lot of that probably still happens now. I don’t think that’s any different because people still think that this is something that they can’t describe. And yet, a few months later once you arrive here, you face the reality and you think, ‘Why? What was all the fuss about?’ [Manchester, 2002]

It wasn’t the first time I had been to Britain and it wasn’t the first time I was experiencing cold or anything but you just don’t realise! You think it’s so clichéd how profoundly nature affects you, and the whole idea of the sun going down at four in the afternoon. Darkness for an Asian, for somebody brought up in the tropics is associated with danger, you know. You feel insecure. You are on your guard. You go into the library at one in the afternoon and to come out in darkness suddenly, although it’s only five in the evening! I’m walking down Rusholme to get the bus home and I’m thinking, ‘this is not right, you know it’s only five o’clock’. You need to double check! [Manchester, 2002]
First impressions, I didn’t like the buildings, they looked right black, and weather was right dark, and it was cold. We came on Sunday so I felt like everything is dead, no-one is there, and very cold. I felt right miserable, first day. I knew no-one and everything’s like this, and so I really didn’t like it. After a long time I started knowing some people and started talking to them, and I knew then, I have to stay here so I’ll have to mix with people and start getting used to this place and everything. And in two weeks’ time I found a job. You know what it’s like when you go to work, you have no time to get bored or anything, you’ve no time for anything. You just go to work and come back, and weekends you have to do the housework and washing and cleaning, everything. I just thought, ‘Well, this is it’. I was so involved in work and home, and with my daughter, and I just forgot what it was like first day. I started enjoying myself then. Money started coming in, I started shopping and everything, and so that was my excitement, end of the week. [Bradford, 1993]

I got married in Smethwick Gurdwara. And I went up to Derby as a newly married bride to my husband’s house and I got a shock because there was no bathroom. Well, there was no bath and the toilet was even more primitive than anything I’d seen in my life…So my husband took me to the public bath the next morning! We went on the bus – we didn’t have a car! And I’d never travelled on the bus before. So we changed the bus because we were two bus rides away and we got to the public baths. And two shillings it was. For that, the lady there handed you a towel and a small bar of soap, and then you were allotted a time, you were in a queue – and then you got your time and you only got so much water. And you had to be out by a certain time. And you had to have a bath, get out, dry yourself, get out and stand at the bus stop, change two buses to get home – all that just to have a bath! I don’t think I was very impressed! [Jalandhar, 2006]
I had a friend in Rochdale and sent him a letter saying I was on my way. The poor fellow came
to collect me from London Airport but as it happened, I did wait for him but couldn’t find him.  
Only when I was sitting in the coach to take me to Victoria did I see him on the street and I
realised that was my friend coming to pick me up, and I thought ‘how will I find him now’. 
Anyway, I got to Victoria and found out that I had to go to Euston to get the Manchester train. 
So I got a taxi to Euston. From there I got a ticket for Manchester. I had a fiver on me – that’s I
think what we were allowed back then. I think the ticket was £1 or £2, something like that, I
don’t remember. Then from Manchester I got a taxi and showed him the address I wanted to
get to – it was Manchester Road in Rochdale, something like no. 63. I got there at about 2am.
The men that lived there let me in. They all knew me from Pakistan anyway. We were all
football players from Pakistan so we knew each other…..When my friend got back to his house
in Rochdale from London in the morning, he was really pleased to see me. We hugged each
other. Then he said, ‘Look, we all work. Here’s the flour, here’s the butter, here’s the bread,
everything is here. Eat drink and be merry, and then we will try to find you some work.’ I
stayed there for a week and a relative of my friend’s took me to the Employment Exchange to
have my name registered. There was a mill called Turner Brothers, an asbestos firm. I went
there and they took me on. I worked in carding as an operator and I think my earnings then
were about £5 a week. [Manchester, 2002]

My dad was the very first Asian to arrive in Stalybridge. He came in 1956. You know the
British wanted people to come over to work. It was like indentured labour. They went round
the villages banging drums, telling everyone how great it was to come here. My dad was took
in by the propaganda, you know the streets are paved with gold and all that. What he found
when he got here was totally different really. He was quite a creative bloke back home. He was
a graphic artist but he also studied engineering so he was an engineer. He came here and
ended up working in a cotton mill and he never really broke out of that. He worked in cotton
mills and then became a bus driver. He couldn’t get the work that he was trained to do which
is probably true of our parents that came here at that time. [Manchester, 2002]

When we arrived at London Airport, there was barely an airport there, just one man who
would stamp the passport. Certainly not all the palaver you have to put up with nowadays –
who are you, where have you come from, what brought you here, what are your plans? At that
time they were desperate for labour and they were pleased that we were coming. They had this
man in a kiosk and he never even looked up, just had his head down and stamped away at the
passports. Two men from labour firms approached me at the airport about giving me work
because they needed workers so badly. The average wage for a labourer in my village was one
Rupee at the time, and they said in letters they were earning £7 or £8 per week. Now it doesn’t
take an idiot to work this out – that if the value of the pound was 20 Rupees then you’d be
earning 20 Rupees a day! [Mirpur, 1996]
I do remember living in Satin Street in Castleton, where there’s now a huge Tesco, so that’s all changed. We had to move out of there because the houses were being demolished. And I remember there being a barber’s on the corner of our street. And my mum would give me one of these huge pennies. I was only little and I would go down to the shop, and I would hang around in there because my mum and dad worked at the same factory. My dad was on nights and my mum was on days. It was so carefree in those days, you know there was no fear like there is these days. And I was able to get the penny from my dad’s pillow, and go and buy myself a lolly. I’d sit there and eat this lolly, and when I felt sleepy, I’d just get up off the counter, come back home. My dad used to be asleep in bed because he worked nights and I’d just cuddle up next to my dad and go to sleep! [Manchester, 2002]
4. Group Houses

The house we lived in belonged to a friend and his cousin. They had bought it between them. We paid them rent for the bed. We had our own bedroom. We also paid our share for the week’s food – that used to be divided between the people living there. The system for food was that we all took it in turns to do the cooking. I couldn’t cook, but then my friend taught me to make curries and he showed me how to make chapattis so I got used to cooking as well. You had to, because you had to work and you had to eat! There were eight men and the landlord’s sister living there, nine of us altogether. There was no bath so we had to come to the public baths for a bath. We used to come to Castleton Baths once a week for our bath. It would cost 1.5 or 2 shillings but there was plenty of hot water so you got a good bath. Because Pakistani men were coming here since about 1958, there was an established butchers in Tudor Street where you could get halal meat. It was a bus ride away. The community had also taken over an old hall and were converting it to a mosque. When I first came here, it seemed like such a chore to have to heat up water before I could perform ablutions for prayers! How should I wash my feet because I couldn’t get them in the sink! [Manchester, 2002]

The house adjacent to our house in Oldham had about 25 or 30 men living there. I was growing up at the time but I remember they were working in mills – some working days and some working nights. It used to be like – the day shifters, they’d be at work and the others guys would be asleep in the house. And they’d wake up, get ready to go to work, they’d go to work and the day shifters would come back and they’d sleep there. So it was just like in every room, in the front room, the living room, just single beds or double beds. There were no women in the house, just men living there. [Manchester, 2002]

The accommodation is unimaginable in this day and age! There were three families living in a house plus there were about eight single men in a three bedroomed house. The room I used to sleep in, there were three double beds there and there was six of us in one room. They had another two rooms and a small box room. The three other families were living in them. So altogether I can say, there was probably over 20 people living in that house. There was one bathroom and a kitchen. I tell you something, I look back and I don’t know how we used to manage but we never had a problem. The routine was that I would wake up by 8 o’clock. The rest of the adults used to start work very early – some of them 6 o’clock, some of them 7 o’clock. I think in them days they used to start early so there was nobody in each other’s way and that was a good thing. I think the people had patience as well and they could live together and co-operate with each other. [Manchester, 2002]

This house was well-known because we had lots of people staying and they were from all different areas back home. People didn’t know street names then - they’d learn house numbers off by heart - and that’s how they got by you see, because they were illiterate. When I first came to Bradford and lived at 10 Bowland Street, that address was well known. Then we bought Number 4, so that’s how everyone knew our house as Number 4 - char number. At one point we had between 28 and 30 men in the house. With the cooking, the men were all in groups of four, and each group would decide what handi [curry] to make - so each group took care of their meals. We only had one cooker, but don’t forget it had four burners. [Bradford, 1993]
I remember very vividly the system which used to exist in any particular house. Say if you had ten individuals living there and you had one unemployed person who would be entitled to very basic unemployment benefits, that person didn’t pay any rent, didn’t pay for any of his food - it was like the communal system. He would have whatever was available there. All of them would cook together and so forth, share everything as a means of supporting him. [Bradford, 1993]

He [my father] lived in rented accommodation and he tells us stories. Thirty years ago it wasn’t uncommon for thirty or forty people to actually share a house and take it in turns according to their shifts with sleeping arrangements. So, people would come in the morning leaving their shifts and stand over the guy who’s asleep, and asking him to wake up so he could get into the bed. They remember those times with mixed feelings, in a way they reminisce and they think, ‘Oh, wasn’t it good that we were all together’. There was unity et cetera which you would expect from people who came here. To them it was completely alien because they didn’t understand the culture, they didn’t speak or understand English, and there was no family. It must have been very, very depressing for them leaving all their families in Pakistan, a lot of them hadn’t possibly ventured out of their village, let alone go to a city or town in Pakistan, and coming here many, many thousands of miles away must have been a very, very lonely period. So I suppose to some extent they had to be all together to comfort each other, which they did. So they reminisce with mixed feelings, but they do say that those were very, very difficult times. It was hard working in factories; long hours, difficult conditions, and the tales that are often told are that they used to cook once a week, a big pot, let it stew for so long, and leave it and eat from that pot for the whole week, because otherwise they wouldn’t have time. It was a case of going to work, coming back, sleep. One of the things that is said jokingly, but it was true, that a guy actually said that he works from seven in the morning till seven at night for seven days, and he was complaining that there was no overtime! [Bradford, 1993]

The pattern in those days [early 1960s] was that there was very few people who were devoted to the religious side, mostly people were basically concerned with their own survival. They were very conscious of not eating meat from English shops or poultry - they relied very heavily on vegetables - cauliflower, peas. The basic spices were not available because there weren’t any Asian shops and in those days there was the Jewish shops, the Polish, the Latvians - they had similar sorts of foodstuffs to what we would eat, in terms of some of the spices. Now for meat initially there wasn’t any. Then one individual discovered a process whereby he could go and buy a sheep, have it killed at the farm and then bring it over to a house and we would share it - and this sheep would obviously be slaughtered in the halal fashion so that everybody was eligible. And you basically chipped in to buy a sheep.....There were various farms which existed where you could go and buy and kill the animals there or alternatively you would bring them live and kill them at home. Because you had the open fire you would burn the guts and the feathers in the fires. There used to be a chicken farm just behind Retford Place off Grantham Road, run by a Polish family at the time. And I used to come all the way from Manchester Road with this other young lad and we would buy chickens for some of the people in our place - three or four at least. And we would come on a Friday night after school, look for the chickens, buy the things and then take them back. Then the following day my father, or whoever the chickens belonged to, they would kill them and that is the only meat we used to eat. [Bradford, 1993]
There was nobody to look after us or do our washing, so we thought if the family moves here, it would make life easier. You had to sponsor your family and then you applied for the visa from British Embassy in Islamabad. It’s not really right to live apart for years while you’re away from your family. The kids were getting educated there but education standards are better here. There are good facilities here. But you want your wife with you - you finish work at the mill and you’re tired out and you’ve got to start work in the kitchen. So in that sense it’s useful having your wife around because she takes care of all that. [Bradford, 1993]
5. Work

Textile Mills

My friend’s younger brother, he was very open, he said, ‘Don’t wait for any posh jobs; all Indians and Pakistanis they work in factories here, so you’ve got to work in a factory, you’ve got to accept this fact. Don’t wait for any special jobs. If somebody is telling you that, because you were a solicitor and you have degrees and all that you will get any special jobs, forget about it’. So, after two days he told me that this is the rule, this is the road, just keep on walking. There are factories and factories and factories. [Bradford, 1993]

I remember we used to get mill owners coming and knocking on our door to say ‘Have you got any labour or anything?’ And even the policeman used to come around and say ‘Well, as soon as you get someone who arrives and if he is looking for a job, we’ll try and get him one’. [Bradford, 1993]

My father came at the end of 1950s. He was working in Karachi and they were doing the railway tracks. He was working there for a few years, and suddenly these opportunities came up for moving to England. I don’t know what system it was then, but anyway, he decided to come here to try to better his employment chances. He came here and originally settled in Derby, worked in steel foundries and cleaners, you know launderette places. And then someone said that there was good money around here in Oldham, and there was at that time! So in 1970 my father moved here and he worked in a textile mill till 1987 – Knoll Spinning in Greenfield. He was a spinner. He never talked about it much. He didn’t talk about it in the sense that it was a good job or a bad job. It was just a job. And plus we didn’t really see much of him in one sense because he was working nights, 12 hour nights. We’d see him in the morning before we went to school because he’d take us to school. Then he’d sleep obviously and then we’d see him half four, half five, when he’d get up to get ready. And sometimes at the weekends because sometimes he’d work six nights, sometimes he’d work seven nights. I can remember that. [Manchester, 2002]

Just about everyone from Glodwick worked in either Knoll Spinning in Greenfield or the mill surrounding it. There was a lot of people from the Asian background worked in cotton mills at that time. Everyone in Glodwick – there might have been about 2-4% or 5% who weren’t, but in the ’70s, definitely in the ’70s, something like 90% of the Asians were working in textiles in one place or the other. I can remember seeing one or two Asian taxi drivers but it was very very rare then in the 1970s. Other people would come round and fix your TV or something, you know TV repairmen or whatever. But besides that, the majority were just textile workers. [Manchester, 2002]
It was quite common to see vans in the evening, six, half six, with men because they would all go to one mill and you had one guy who’s got a van. He used to pick ’em all up and charge ’em so much. He’d go and do a drop-off at one mill, and then pick the next up, drop off at the next mill, then pick them up, drop them at home. It was quite common to see eight or ten different vans in the area. [Manchester, 2002]

I spent five or six years working in the mills in Bradford so I had work experience. I had experience of spinning, as draughtsman, so I knew what sort of work was done in the mills. I worked in Oldham not only in Maple Mill, but also in Royd Mill, in Asia Mill and other mills whose names I have forgotten. I remember there was Grape Mill in Royton town, I worked there as well. Then I went to Maple Mill where I worked for 16 years because the manager there really respected me because I was multiskilled. [Manchester, 2002]

**Foundries**

….He (my father) worked in the mill but didn’t like it because of the dust and everything so he went out and worked in a foundry . . . It was ideal for him because he was a bit of a tough nut so it was probably the best place for him to be rather than stuck in a factory messing about with pieces of cotton. [Bradford, 1993]

I went in 1957. I just got a passport made and half my village was in England then so it was no problem finding someone that I knew. They were all from Wesa. The problem was the work was short. Five or six months in one place before you had to find something else. I started off in Burnley, then Bury, Keighley, Bradford. Then I had a friend from Bhabootian in Sheffield and he invited me to go there for work. He put me to work on a rolling mill in a foundry. It was Jessops in Sheffield. God, that was such tough work. Definitely not for the softhearted. He said, ‘Are you happy I’ve fixed you up with some work?’ And I says, ‘Not exactly! But I’ve got responsibilities. It’s hard finding a job and I need work so I’ll just get on with it!’ Well, that evening I just ached everywhere. I was in so much pain that my friends massaged me with this oil and that oil. And I was so worried that the foreman is going to sack me if this is the state of me after one day. But my friends reassured me I would keep my job. They’d all been through this stage themselves. We got notice from there as well after six months. About 500 blokes in all got notice. So I went back to Bradford to my relatives and got work there at Tyersal Spinning Mill. There were lots of people from Wesa in Bradford then. [Chach, 2006]

**Buses**

I remember once I used to hang out on the streets a lot. My dad was a bus driver at this time. I was just chatting to this girl. We were teenagers. And I was smoking. My dad was driving past on the bus and the bus was full of people. He just stopped the bus, got off. I didn’t even notice but he got off, gripped me, dragged me on the bus and drove me home! That has got to be the most embarrassing moment of my life because I was trying to get in with this girl, I had a fag in my hand, and my dad was ranting on the bus as he was driving, and it was a bus full of white people. [Manchester, 2002]
At the time, on the buses you needed to have qualifications. They used to have really tough tests, and it was a similar test to the police at the time. And it wasn’t easy to get in and not everybody got in. People that started there actually had degrees and high qualifications. I remember there were three people there that really stick out in my mind. One of them was a qualified solicitor, one of them was a qualified teacher, one was a barrister. Now these people had come from abroad and gone into the buses, so it was that type of highly qualified workforce from the Asian community. [Manchester, 2002]

After being in the job 20 years, he (my father) still gets those comments, the racist comments you know. Like, ‘Why don’t you go back to your bloody country, where you come from? You’ve taken up our jobs’ - the normal routine. When he became bus driver people commented on his driving, making horrible remarks. ‘You’re not in your bloody country, like you’re driving a cart,’ things like that. He says when people made racist remarks at him, he felt like giving up everything and going back to his home, to India. He didn’t want to work here at all. Now he laughs about it, he says ‘I’ve developed a thick skin’. He says ‘I’m used to it now, I just laugh, I just laugh back’. [Bradford, 1993]

I started on the buses as a conductor in Oldham in 1979. There was quite a large number of Asians at the time. But most of them were only interested in keeping themselves to themselves whereas my approach and my upbringing was quite different. I was quite interested in talking to anybody and everybody. I didn’t have any bias towards anybody and I’d fit in all sorts of groups. Most of the other people that were there were elderly and relied on being separate, if you like, from the other groups. They used to sit together on one table and talk about Asian issues more than they’d talk with other people. And if the other people said anything, they just sort of ignored it. They didn’t challenge it. Whereas with me, it was slightly different. If somebody tried to make jokes at me, I’d challenge them. In the first few weeks, people that used to sit at this table, other white staff would walk past and make some kind of derogatory remarks. And if those people when they heard it, or whether they didn’t hear it, they didn’t respond back. I mean, in the first three or four weeks, when I heard somebody making a remark – it was about food and smell and that kind of thing. I challenged that person and said, ‘Hey, come here, what did you say?’ And he was taken aback. He said this is what I’ve said. And I said, ‘Well, nobody talks about your bacon. Why are you talking about this person’s food? If you’ve got something to say, say it to their face. Don’t say it like this!’ And as I got into the rhythm, I found out that industry, even as late as five or six years ago, was very very racist and sexist. That’s the norm and unfortunately I didn’t know at the time. When I heard this, I wasn’t going to let it go on! ‘Manchester, 2002]
6. British Asian Cities

When he [my dad] arrived, he had a cousin living in London and he’d been here since the 1950s, maybe earlier I think. And he was actually supposed to meet him in London but he didn’t turn up to meet him. So while he was stood at Victoria Station, he said to somebody, ‘I’ve just arrived, I’ve no idea where I am, basically I’m supposed to be meeting my cousin’. And I think at that time the cousin was living in Southend, and this porter at the railway station said, ‘Well, the best thing for you to do is get on a train and go to Bradford, because that’s where the majority of the Asian community is’. And believe it or not, that’s how my father ended up in Bradford. [Bradford, 1993]

The first time I went was in 1988. I was asleep when we left Gatwick, and when I reached Bradford my brother-in-law said ‘Dr Sahib, get up! This is Bradford’. And I opened my eyes and I read some signboards of shops. These were written in Urdu, and said things like ‘Kharri Sharif General Store’ and ‘Sufi Durri Shop’ and I said ‘Oh, you’ve brought me to Mirpur, this is not Bradford! That was my first impression. [Mirpur, 1996]

In the 1970s, my mum and dad didn’t have a car then. So there was five kids, mum and dad, and we were all little. We weren’t big enough to look after ourselves! And we’d all get on the bus from Bradford to Manchester. In those days it was much further away than it is nowadays for some reason. It took longer to get anywhere. But we’d get on the bus to come and eat at ‘This n That’ which is a very very famous old curry house. They did traditional Asian food at weekends, you know like haleem and nihari and all that – you know, the Sunday foods! So we would come just for that. There was also Sanam in Rusholme. We used to go there as well. We would come for the day and then we would go back on the bus. And then, I think we got a car and we’d fit in as many families as we could – my family, some other family who we call uncle and aunty but they’re not really uncle and aunty like Farid uncle and aunty, the Butts, the Shahs, and we’d all try and fit in all the cars and drive over to eat in these places! [Manchester, 2002]

Our community have settled in Rochdale in Tweedale Street and King Street and Castlemere Street, all around those places. And basically, when you go there, it’s spot the white person. So they’ve all settled in those places and they’ve like made it their own territory. Whereas my mum and dad had bought this house just a few miles out from there, but there were never even any Asians in our street. We grew up not having any Asians let alone in the schools, not even in our street! But there, there is loads of Asian people. And when I got to Alderhill High School, there were a few more Asian people in the school – maybe 40 in well over 2,000 pupils, that’s very minimal. But now, I’ve been there and it’s absolutely heaving with Pakistani children. It’s just amazing because it seems as though there are more Pakistanis as opposed to whites. [Manchester, 2002]
I can remember during that time as well in Glodwick, in the area that I was brought up in, there was a mixed community. There were a lot of people from Europe here – Ukraines, Polish, Hungarian. There was a rich Polish community, and Afro-Caribbean community. And the Asians were a minority in the early ’70s, people mainly from the Mirpur side…In the whole of Latimer Street in Glodwick, I’d say when I was six or seven or eight, there was about three or four Asian houses in the whole street. Out of a possible maybe 70 or 80 houses, there was about 4 Asian houses. By about mid ‘80s, there was two or three non-Asians living there. So in the space of about 10-15 years, it became obvious that everywhere you went, Asians were moving in either from abroad or from other areas like Bradford or Derby or whatever. They were moving in and the whites were moving out, until the late ‘80s where you had a predominantly Asian community with a very small Afro-Caribbean community. Then we had a riot in 1981 between the Asians and the Afro-Caribbeans. It was a big riot on Waterloo Street here in Glodwick. It was a big kick-off, yeah. Then they moved out. Now Latimer Street is all Asian except for one house at the top which is still Afro-Caribbean. [Manchester, 2002]

It feels like home because the village I’m from, Chathro [in Mirpur], there are nearly 300 families from the same village living in Cheetham Hill. They are all from the same village in Kashmir. On our weddings, we must invite them before we think of inviting others. We have to because of our community and our culture, we have to invite them 300 families. So when we have a wedding in Cheetham Hill, the minimum is usually 450 to 500 families invited to our wedding, especially these Kashmiri weddings. There’s no way we can leave any of them 300 people out because they are from the same village. [Manchester, 2002]

In a lot of the Asian communities, that’s the way they like it. They like to be close together. Obviously, when there’s a need you can call upon your families, can’t you. They don’t really end up living out of each other’s pockets but they’re always there when you need them and they’re only a stone throw away. It was nice because if you had problems with friends you always had your auntsies and uncles to go to. You weren’t always stuck at home. You could always go to your auntsie’s house if you were feeling hungry and your mother wasn’t at home and you’d just come back from school. There were times when my auntsies were in hospital having a child or something, and their children could come to our house and we could do the same. So it worked both ways. [Bradford, 1993]

I was born in 1969 at Royal Infirmary and when I was born they (my parents) were still living in the same place, Cornwall Terrace. It’s all terraced housing mainly populated by Bangladeshis, a few Polish who came during the war, quite a few houses with Pakistani people. Most of the people here lived most of their lives on the street. It’s a very popular place with Bangladeshis. The town centre’s only a minute’s walk away. There’s a mosque here, they’re getting produce from Bangladesh in the shops. And that’s what puts the house prices up, about £60,000 for a four-bedroom terraced house, and people are willing to buy it, mainly Bangladeshis that is, ’cause of the amenities. [Bradford, 1993]
7. Establishing the Community

I was born in Rochdale in 1965. There were very very few Asian, Pakistani people around, and the ones that were around, you sort of clung to – ‘oh wow, you know, they’re Pakistanis!’.

Because there was nobody around. But I’m talking about what my mum and dad have told us because obviously I was too young to know then. But when they came here, it was literally about 5 families in total in Rochdale. So whenever they did meet up by chance, they wanted to go and talk to that person and try and you know, make friends with them – you know, ‘we’ve seen a Pakistani, we’ve seen one of our own!’.

My mum said to me that they met at the clinic when she was there with me. That’s how the first three families met – at the clinics, with their little children! They would recognise them by colour obviously, and then they spoke and that’s how they could tell whether they were Urdu speakers or Punjabi speakers, where they’ve come from, and that’s how friendships would begin! [Manchester, 2002]

I think I knew that this was like a downward spiral, like quick sand. You just get deeper and deeper and there’s just no way you can get out. And I realised that very early on. I was seeing people around me and the sorts of things they were doing, and I was seeing no way out of that. There were people that were working for two years, going aboard and coming back two years later with nothing. So all their earnings that they had, they’d go abroad and spend it, then come back. To me, they were starting from scratch again and that wasn’t getting them anywhere. I could see, especially in 1976, when people came from Uganda and Kenya, these Asians people came with a lot of wealth and background, and a lot of experience. And these people adjusted really quickly. And here we were looking at the Kashmiri community. They were coming and going, and they’d been in this country since the ‘50s, and they’d not been able to establish themselves. And that was the pure reason – that they were spending more time going forwards and backwards, and not accepting this as their country. People that arrived from Kenya and Uganda actually played a major part in that. They were able to establish themselves fairly quickly, therefore other Asian communities like the Kashmiri community were able to say, ‘Well, if they can settle in and take advantage, why can’t we?’ We started to then think about it but we took quite a long time still thinking about it. We didn’t start to actually implement anything until maybe ten or fifteen years later. [Manchester, 2002]

When I first got here, it was extremely cold. It really was unbearable! I cried! I thought if I had stayed over there, I would have been saved from this cold weather. I was quite upset for about 6 months. I was working by now but still I didn’t like it here. I kept thinking that if I’d have stayed there, I probably could have improved my chances in my field. Apart from the cold, it was also very lonely even though I had one or two friends. You came home after work and you couldn’t go back out again because it was that cold so you also felt very lonely. There was nowhere for us to go anyway. After six months I was getting used to it. I had earned some money so I called my wife and child over to join me, and that’s how we settled here. [Manchester, 2002]

From the age of twelve onwards my house would be full of people at weekends, people wanting me to fill their forms in, insurance forms, taxation forms, because I was one of the few who could read and write. [Bradford, 1993]
8. Religious Life

We had religious education in the mosque but it was just sipara [reading the Quran], there wasn’t anything else. We weren’t told about Islam or our faith, and I do feel that is a part that I would have liked to have known about. Because I don’t know about it and I can’t educate my daughter about that now either. I remember along the way there’s these nice little stories my mum and dad told me about the prophets, and little things that have happened to them, like the hardships they had to go through, so that’s nice to know. I’d like to pass those things on, the only things that I do know, onto my daughter. [Manchester, 2002]

It’s so difficult because my daughter sees all her friends getting Christmas presents and she wants Christmas presents as well. So I have to say to her, ‘Well, it’s not our Christmas. They’re celebrating the birth of Jesus. We don’t! We have Eid!’ But I still try and get her a couple of things just for her to open so she doesn’t feel totally left out. Because she’s at such a young age and if I didn’t do anything for her and she went back to school, the children would say ‘well, I got this and I got that’ and she’d think, ‘well, I didn’t get anything, I wonder why!’ Because she’s not at the age where she can understand fully. [Manchester, 2002]

When I came to Manchester, they had a mosque in a house which was not far from Cheetham Hill in Bignor Street. They had a big house which was used as a mosque. Then after that, they moved to another house which was in Ballard Street. They used that as a mosque. And then they got this land where there is North Manchester Jamia Mosque now. But at that time it was in a house. [Manchester, 2002]

I think what’s happened with a lot of our parents is that they came here and felt threatened. So they went deeper into their religion or into their culture. Anything the kids got up to that might steer them away from their culture, they got really reactionary about it. I think that’s what’s happened with my parents. [Manchester, 2002]

At South Manchester Cemetery, there is a piece of ground there which is used for burials. And I think just recently, this new place came up in Swinton and somebody told me that North Manchester Mosque have bought a plot of land there which will be used as a cemetery for Muslims. If I look back, first in the beginning, they always chose a piece at an English cemetery, probably on the end of it, or slightly away from it. That’s how they used it in the beginning. Then I think in some towns the authorities had provided them with that sort of thing – you know ‘right, that end of cemetery you can use’ or ‘this end’. I think this is what they did in the beginning. [Manchester, 2002]
My parents used to have poojas a lot which is like a religious ceremony, so things like that would happen on a weekend. Basically they had their own little shrine at home. My parents are up at four everyday and they’re praying from about half four, five o’clock till about eight or nine o’clock. And then on a weekend they’d extend it and include us in it. So that’s how the day would start off on a Saturday. I’d just sit there and listen really. They’d try to get us to sing hymns. If I was being perfectly honest, I didn’t like it. I’m an atheist now and I think I’m an atheist because I had religion pushed down my throat. Not just at home but at school as well. At school they pushed Christianity down our throats. There was a conflict of interests going on in my mind. It was like one set of people are saying this is how it should be, and one set of people are saying this is how it should be. [Manchester, 2002]

The culture of that era was one without prayers and without Ramadan! At that time, all everyone wanted was to be able to work. The mentality was I’m poor, I’ve come from my homeland so I can work and send money back home to feed the family. They could only eat if you earned something, so everybody was preoccupied with working. As far as observing your religion was concerned, well, there was no mosque here then anyway. Nowadays, there’s a mosque on the corner of every street. There were none then! The other problem was that you’d been working all night so you needed to sleep in the day. So, with all this going on, we just didn’t have the time. We had seen poverty back home, we had left young families behind, so earning was our priority. [Manchester, 2002]

Initially what happened was, people used to have gatherings. We used to have families and friends over and have a religious day. It used to be every Saturday evening. We used to have a list, and everybody used to be included, say perhaps twenty families. So fifty-two weeks in a year, twice a year [each family would act as hosts]. The family in whose house this celebration would happen, they would cook food for the people who were coming, the congregation, and two certain families would take on board to do the prayers. We would all do the prayers and then eat. I felt that was really important because before the temples were made and the institutions were there, then it was still important to keep contact with the community, and that was the only way we could do that, and actually introduce other people within the community. [Bradford, 1993]
9. Racism

In those days, East African Asians considered themselves different from people from India. I think we East Africans always thought we were better than the people from India. India people we thought ‘ooh, they’re from India, they don’t know very much, they’re uneducated’. We thought we were better educated, better knowledged, and we had higher standards than people from India. You know, we considered them as village people, that they’re not modern enough. There was that difference and it was dwelled in me as well because of that talk around me. [Manchester, 2002]

Secondary school was when I met racism. That was awful! A lot of us Gujarati girls used to walk together and there’d be a lot of white English girls, and they just used to pick on us. We used to have pigtails and they used to pull the pigtails or whatever. I remember that. We used to be scared of actually walking in a certain direction, or if there was a gang of white girls, then actually crossing them over because we knew we would be harassed by them. We kind of just tried to avoid them but we never retaliated at all or fought them at all. And there was a word called wogs at that time, that really came out as well – wogs! We just felt inferior and we felt as if we were intruding in their country. [Manchester, 2002]

The usual things – ‘go back to your country’, ‘why are you here’, ‘you smell’, things like that! Because we had lack of knowledge of history, we couldn’t fight about it, about why we were here. It wasn’t spoken about. We came because things were hard, that’s all we knew! We didn’t ask why we were here! [Manchester, 2002]

We tried to mix with the English girls but somehow it didn’t work at all. But then I’m not saying they were all hostile to us. I mean, the first friend I had was an English girl and that was when I was in primary school. She was so good that she invited me for tea. You know, they call tea as their main meal here and to me, tea was like a cup of tea and a biscuit at that time because we don’t have our meals until 8 o’clock. They were so good, they offered and invited me for tea and that was like a privilege to me at that time. It was very nice and I invited her back as well. [Manchester, 2002]

We recently had a big debate during the football and they were saying ‘do you support England or don’t you?’ And I was saying ‘well, I’ve never supported England even as a kid simply because I don’t think they play good football’. So we’re having this debate, and half the guys go ‘well, we support Brazil’ and the others guys go ‘no, we support England’. I was saying let’s rationalise, let’s work this out. And they said, ‘yeah, the very system that feeds you and the very system where you’ve been brought up, and this and that, and I support England and I’m proud.’ And I said ‘yeah, you support England, you’re saying that, but they won’t say it! They won’t recognise you as an English supporter! The white young male guy won’t see you and say “he’s Abdul, he’s alright, he supports England” No! To them, you’re a Paki!’ [Manchester, 2002]
I grew up with this lad who lived opposite. He was actually born 2 days after me and his mum was in the bed next to my mum [in hospital] and we actually lived opposite. So I grew up with him, best mate, blah, blah, blah. I think I was about 14 and we’d decided to go into Ashton on a Saturday afternoon. Didn’t have a clue what was going on that day but there was a National Front march through the town centre. We turned this corner and there’s this throng of people coming at us. I didn’t really know what it was. You know, I was still quite innocent then. And as I got closer, I could hear what they were chanting and I got really scared. I turned round and Brian was gone. I saw him walking away and I started to follow him, and he said, ‘No, no, don’t come with me!’ And that’s when it really hit me. I thought, we’ve grown up together, we’d been in battles together and we’d had allsorts, and then suddenly when I really needed his support, he wasn’t there! That really affected me and made me question white people. You know even the ones that were friendly towards me. It made me suspicious of who they were and why they were talking to me. I wasn’t asking him to get into the fight with those people. I just wanted him to be there. You need someone when you’re scared, don’t you! And I was really scared because I’d realised what it was because I’d seen pictures on the TV. I’d had racial abuse before that and I’d been beaten up, but that was like having a brick thrown in my face. It was actually worse than someone kicking me in the face because this was someone I really trusted! [Manchester, 2002]

I think around about when I was eight or nine and we went back to Jalandhar. That really changed me. It had a profound effect on me and I think the seed was planted then that someday I would return to live in India. I just felt a sense of belonging that I never felt before. I loved the smells. I loved the sights. I felt Indian for the first time in my life. For the first time in my life I didn’t feel that feeling that I felt back in Ireland which I hadn’t focused on, but I knew that I didn’t belong there. I mean the sheer fact that they had a very very narrow knowledge of the world outside of Strabane or Northern Ireland. They didn’t even know where England was...Tarzan was a serial that was on every Sunday, you know Tarzan in the jungle, this big white man you know, cleanly shaven but lived in the jungle. And there were all these Africans beating drums and making these sort of uncivilised gestures and noises, dancing round camp fires tying up white men you know. These sorts of things were on every Sunday. And Monday morning people used to say to me, ‘Is that how you live where you come from?’ So that used to bug me a lot! [Jalandhar, 2006]
10. Education

Because there were so few Asians, as we started going to nursery and then school, from as far back as I can recall, there were all these white people in the classrooms. I remember being at St. Edwards in Castleton, and being the only Asian person in the class. That’s 30-odd children and then one Asian person, and that was me! So I was treated [well] and there wasn’t that racism that there is now either. So I was treated as one of them. I behaved like one of them. As I was still in this school, you know I loved my sport, and I liked my rounders and I was in the rounders team and in the netball team. Obviously I used to come home and I used to ask my dad, ‘Can I play? We’ve got a match.’ And he’d say no, I couldn’t! And on a few instances, he wouldn’t let me play because I must have been 10 or 11, and it wasn’t the girl thing to do. Because girls should come straight home from school at that age, they shouldn’t be out playing matches, visiting other schools. And I remember one day, my teacher had to come home and ask permission for me to play and then my dad gave me permission. And also like these after-school matches that we used to have, other parents used to come and watch the kids play and the team, but my mum and dad never did that. I do feel as though I missed out on that. I feel they thought that it wasn’t of any importance really. They didn’t recognise it as being an important part of your child’s life, whereas now if my daughter was participating in any activity at school, I want to be there, you know for support. They didn’t think like that!
[Manchester, 2002]

At middle school, there was a policy that it was a uniform and it was a skirt. Even then, tops I think there must have been about five Asian people maximum I think in the whole of the school. And I didn’t want to wear pants. I wanted to be like everybody else you know, so obviously in the morning I’d get dressed and it was one of those – wear a skirt and then pants underneath. And I’d go out with my friend and I’d get changed in the ginnel, our little pass way! I’d take my pants off in the ginnel and I’d go on to school with my skirt on. And on the way home, I’d have to go into the toilets first, put my pants back on, and then come home because my dad didn’t want me to wear a skirt. I used to hate it! You know, ‘we’re Muslims and we don’t show our legs’ and that’s the only reason that he wouldn’t let me wear a skirt. [Manchester, 2002]

Not eating meat! You know, that was horrible really because I liked school dinners. I remember being young and I just used to eat it, but then as I got older, I was told that you’re not supposed to eat meat. I think my dad had actually said to me that we don’t eat it because we eat halal meat, we drain the blood, and their meat is not halal. That’s why we’re not allowed to eat their meat. They don’t recite the Muslim prayer over it, that’s what he said! I think I understood what he said - that they don’t kill it the same way, and we read qalima [Muslim prayer] before we kill ours, and that’s what makes ours halal. But who’s to say the one that we buy from the meat shop now is halal, but that’s something else! But anyway, by then, I’d acquired a taste for it and I liked it! I think even till middle school, I carried on eating it. Because I thought, well nobody’s going to know so I’ll just carry on eating it so I did, even though I was told that I shouldn’t. I didn’t like it because I liked my dinners…No, I didn’t like that! I wanted to be like everybody else was. [Manchester, 2002]
I came over here on a weekend and my father went to work on Monday. There was another kid in that house where we were living, and I asked him in the morning. He said he was going to school so I just went with him. Nobody took me to the school but I just went with him. I said, ‘right, I’m going to come with you’. He was the one who took me to the office in school and told them that I just came to this country. The next day they asked me to bring the passport so I took the passport. So in other words, I came over here on a weekend and started school on Monday! [Manchester, 2002]

Even though I spoke Punjabi when I came home with my parents, when I was at school speaking English, dressing just like my English friends, I never felt any different. It was actually when I was at junior school, I was about nine going on ten, and for the first time, you know you get student teachers coming in on teaching practice, and we had an Asian gentleman coming in. And he took our class and we had a discussion afternoon and he chose a topic of discussion which was about different backgrounds of people and different origins, and he highlighted me as an example in the class. And my friend instantly jumped up off her chair and she said, ‘No, she’s not different, she’s just like us’. And it was actually - I know it sounds strange now - at that point I realised I am different. Even though my skin was a different colour and I went home and I ate different food, and I spoke a different language, I never ever thought I was different. I was never consciously aware that I am different to my white friends, even though I had a different name. But after that incident I became consciously aware that I was from a different background, and it did start to change my thinking then. [Bradford, 1993]
11. Language

Although I speak to them [my children] in English, but it’s more comfortable to speak in my own language. My mother is living with us, and I think it will be easier for them to communicate with her as well because she doesn’t speak English. Then again, if ever they decide to go there [Mirpur], then they’ll have their own identity as well — in other words, who they are, where they belong, where their parents came from and all that. So that’s why my own language is important, as well as English. English is a language which is really their need and my own language is their identity. [Manchester, 2002]

We spoke in Gujarati at home. Outside the home we always spoke in English. I’m ashamed to admit it but I used to get embarrassed if say my mum came to pick me up from school, she’d speak to me in Gujarati — because the white kids would just take the piss out of you — you know give it that ‘butt butt ding ding’ sort of stuff. I think it was pretty rife in Stalybridge because there weren’t many Asians there. Language identifies you, and to be confused about language at that age affects your life in a way. [Manchester, 2002]

We were always forced to speak Urdu, you know, amongst my brothers. It was always a lot easier to speak in English, so we did. But whenever my dad heard us talking, it was always ‘Speak in Urdu because that is your mother tongue and you’ll obviously learn English outside the home anyway’. Which is true! I mean you don’t understand those things at that time. You think ‘I don’t know why! They’re just getting on my nerves’ but you wouldn’t say that. ‘I can speak faster in English than a can in Urdu! Why are you bugging me?’ type of thing. I always remember thinking that. But now I’ve got a child of my own and it’s true because I do the same thing to my daughter. I say to her, ‘Speak in Urdu’ and I remember those days when my dad used to force us to speak it and we used to hate it when he used to say ‘Speak in Urdu’. But I do it the same and she doesn’t like it either, and she screws her nose up! [Manchester, 2002]

There were very, very few educated people around [in the ‘70s] so they had great difficulty in terms of getting people to translate or interpret for them. Basically, the problem centred around income tax, filling forms, dealing with queries. Or if someone came from Bangladesh - people more or less got a job straight away, but sometimes it involved some delay of three or four weeks - and they had to go to the Labour Exchange to register unemployed. Some people were illiterate even in Bengali as well, and in terms of getting someone to write letters, they had difficulties finding people because everybody was working, and you won’t want to spend the weekend writing letters for people. Language barrier was a problem. I remember, if you like, my community work started at the age of about thirteen; I remember filling forms for them and then it would be wrong, and it would come back, and you’d do it again and send it back. And they were grateful. Those people who were educated, they obviously lived on the outskirts and they weren’t very easy to get hold of, so it depended on people like me really to help out or translate for them. [Bradford, 1993]
I was amazed when he said that he’d been living here in England for thirty or forty years and he didn’t speak English. And he said he didn’t have to learn because he could manage with his own language because wherever he went, there was somebody who could speak his language. If he was travelling on the buses, all the bus drivers were his own language speaking. If he went to shops or wherever, he said he didn’t have any problems so that’s why he didn’t bother to learn. [Bradford, 1993]
12. Returning Home

Burials

They have two funeral prayers nowadays. The first one is read there [England], then the body is sent over [to Mirpur] in a coffin, the English people phone us in the village that a body is coming. Someone goes to the airport with a wagon to receive a body, then all the families are told here, they gather and we have another ceremony here. There are funeral services in England now that can arrange all the paperwork and running around at that end. [Mirpur, 1996]

In Islam we are told that the moment a person dies, he should be buried as soon as possible, and that no particular place is reserved for the burial of anybody. Wherever a person dies, he should be buried there. Now people have actually made it a matter of prestige. They think that if you shift a dead body from England to Mirpur, people will say, ‘Oh, his son, his brother, or his wife, they have done a great thing, they are good people, they have brought back the body,’ but actually I am not in favour of it. It is more a show of wealth or affluence than religious rites or other human considerations. When a person dies, he dies! It’s an extravagance! [Mirpur, 1996]

We feel very sorry about the gentleman who is buried over in England, that he could not be buried on his own soil. We feel for him. He kept on working very hard, he created wealth for his family, but the family ignored him at the time of his death and buried him over there. [Mirpur, 1996]

We’ve received many dead bodies from England. My two cousins, they died in England and their dead bodies were despatched to the village and they are buried there now. In one case, my cousin – his wife is in Birmingham, his sons are in Birmingham, his daughters are in Birmingham, his daughters are in Birmingham, but his grave is here. Had he been buried there, I think they would have visited his grave off and on, but they are living in Birmingham and his grave is over here. What is the use of it? [Mirpur, 1996]

I’ve had people order gravestones to be taken to England. They can’t get them with our religious verses there! I don’t know how they get them over there! They ask for smaller sizes to help get them through customs. Some people want the name of a particular English town where the person lived, to be inscribed on the gravestone. And I’ve just completed one where I had to inscribe the name of the deceased in English. Apparently her children are coming soon from England and they don’t read Urdu and the relatives wanted them to be able to recognise the grave. [Mirpur, 1996]
Marriage

Mostly the people from Saleh Khana get married here. The boys come back from England and get married here. And the girls educated there, in that British society, some of them really bright girls, are forced to marry someone from their village who has not seen a school in his life. So that is an unfortunate aspect. Of course it creates problems. The girl is educated. She wants to watch television and whatever. And a boy from here! He knows mosque and house and other social places. So how can the two of them live together? It is so difficult! She speaks in English but he doesn’t know English, and he feels that she speaks in English. She is a little too forward, too modern for him. The way she dresses he doesn’t approve of that. So there are problems. For the parents, the attachment is so much there that they would rather get their daughters married with this illiterate man from their village rather than get her married to somebody who is outside the family or the village circle. The parents just want to make sure they do not lose respect in the society and that they are not looked down upon that their daughter got married to someone who is outside their own social environment. [Saleh Khana, near Peshawar, 2006]

This tradition of making marriages with people from Wesa is slowing down now. It went on for so long because to begin with, there wasn’t much family in England. There weren’t any cousins in England that you could marry so you had to look to Wesa. Now I’ve got my cousins in England so if my children wanted to, then they have cousins in England that they can marry. We don’t need to look to Wesa because there is family in Oldham, Bradford, Bury, Sheffield. [Chach, 2006]

I was happy my sons went to England. They married girls from England. Around 80% of people from Wesa are now living in Bradford. Bradford first, then there’s Oldham and Burnley as well. You can make a good living there. Pakistan is a poor country and there’s nothing to do. It’s hand to mouth here even if you can get work. My sons are living comfortably now. They’re sorted! [Chach, 2006]

Most people from my village usually finish after primary school or middle school. They are all in Bradford now. When they were in school they were hoping they will go to England because their uncles’ daughters were growing in England. And they thought, “Oh, what’s the point of studying? I’m going to England anyway!” Once they see there is a means, they don’t study.” [Leeds, 2006]
Property

It is necessary to have a house. We have our links with our village and family because we bring our dead back and have weddings here. You can’t do all these things from someone else’s house because you lose the respect of your family and of the area. A lot of people will say to your back, “What was this person doing? He couldn’t make a house, and he’s living in someone else’s house!” Without your house you are nothing. [Mirpur, 1996]

A lot of people have come back to Jalandhar to sell off their land because they are very well settled in England and they want to take that money back with them. So they’ve just come back to get rid of the final link with Jalandhar. A lot of people have come to invest also now. They want to buy land because it’s appreciating like anything, and that’s because of the NRIs. Well, see, if somebody wants to sell a piece of land to me, well he can’t get good money out of me because I would probably ask five people to help raise the capital and go to a real estate broker and try to negotiate the price and this and that. But an NRI would maybe have double the money that I would like to invest. And people are actually hiking up the price of their land because there are a lot of real estate companies for NRIs, and they pay you handsome money! I have had a lot of people who have made their homes here because the parents are still here, the brothers are still here, the sisters are here. And now they even want to show off to their families that, “Yes, we have gone abroad. We have earned money, we have made good, and you can see that because now I am able to make a house”. So that is ego satisfying! [Jalandhar, 2006]

You know everyone’s well off in Ghurghushtie now because people in England send money to their relatives. Those relatives depend on that money actually. We know they’re not very well off so we try and help them. There is still no industry in Ghurghushtie, that’s our misfortune that we didn’t bother to build any industry there even though we made so much money. We just spend it on houses, grand houses costing hundreds of thousands. My house is lying empty. My sister’s house is empty as well, and we are sending money to somebody to look after it! You know why? We have no education. All of us old timers are not educated, people like me, you know the first generation that came to England. We just thought we have to earn some money, buy some land and make a house back home. Never occurred to us that there must be some industry. If we made some industry, then at least the people who are still in Ghurghushtie would be well off in their own right. They would be on their own feet. They would have their livelihood right there. There would be no need for them to think I must go to England and earn some money! Even after 40 or 50 years of migration, people in my village are still looking to England for their livelihood. Either they will to England and earn or someone will earn and send money back. No other route. It’s not just my village, it is same all over Chach. We are all in same position because there is no industry anywhere in Chach. [Bradford, 2006]
Why don’t you invest it somewhere! You see, had they invested money here [in Saleh Khana] there would be attraction in coming back and settling down here. But they have no source of income here. That’s why they are living in Birmingham all their lives. Personally, I am sure that with all the material comforts that they have, they still would like to come back but there is nothing to come back to. You see, even in this day, they bring their dead bodies from England because they want to be buried in their soil. They miss the soil. Had they invested what they make in England, which is good money of course, in some business, in some property, that would make them come back! I don’t know of a single person from Saleh Khana who has invested anywhere in Pakistan. [Saleh Khana, near Peshawar, 2006]
Identity

I like those boxes because it goes British, British Pakistani, it goes on and on, there’s so many! There’s Bangladeshi, British Bangladeshi, British Indian, and I like the ‘none of the above’ or ‘any other’ box. I always think which am I? Well, I was born in Saudi Arabia, I’ve done some of my growing up in Pakistan, my parents are from Pakistan, and I’ve spent more time living in England than anywhere else. I feel very Pakistani and I feel very British. I would say I’m equally both, and I’m proud to be both! [Manchester, 2002]

People like myself, we’re brought up in two cultures. We’re trying to mix with the English culture. You’re working - I’ve worked since the age of 18 and you’re trying to mix with your colleagues. You go back home and you go back into your role there. You’re surrounded by news, media, TV, everything is English. So you’re in between two cultures. I think this is the main thing that’s hit me as I’ve been growing up – which side? We’re torn between two! I don’t know much about my culture and I don’t fit in much with the English. I think that has been significant in a lot of people that were brought up in the ‘60s and ‘70s. Where do they turn? [Manchester, 2002]

I’m definitely not English even though I was born here. I’m definitely not English and I’m not patriotic. I’m definitely not a Pakistani and I’m not a patriotic Pakistani. So that leaves me in a new sort of mould, I don’t know. Some people say we’re British Pakistanis. Some people say that we’re Muslims but we’re British Muslims. Some people say, ‘no, we’re Pakistanis’, we’re born here but really we’re from Pakistan. I think they’re all hypocrites because I was born in this country and my parents came from Pakistan. I believe strongly about this. My views are really strong. No matter what I do, or no matter what I say, or no matter how I dress, the mainstream white society will never ever accept me for being English or British, and that’s the truth! And it’s not just me, it’s anyone and everyone. We don’t fit to that mould. The first time I went to Pakistan was when I was two. I can’t remember nothing but after that, I went when I was 16. Since I was 16, I’ve been going over every two or three years simply because I wanted to know more. And I don’t just go for two weeks or four weeks, I stay about 6 months, and the longest I’ve stayed is about a year and a half, which was from 1991 to 1993. I want to know what my parents went through, what happened in Pakistan and what the lifestyle is like, and who we really are. And I’ve come to the conclusion that we’re not really accepted there either, and that is the truth. Because you go to the airport and you get off, and the first thing you see is your relatives. They’re not even looking at you! They’re looking at your suitcases thinking ‘what’s in there for me?’ And as soon as you get home, they’ve opened them and it’s like, ‘is that for me? Is that for me?’ There’s no real love there even though I’ll always assume there was. But it’s just a fantasy. But you know them people, the Pakistani Pakistanis talk about us British Pakistanis like, ‘oh yeah, they can’t speak our language, they come over and they don’t understand nothing’. They always slag us off, and they always will do. So, really, they don’t accept us and that’s the truth….We’re definitely not one or the other. We’re a mixture of both but we’re definitely not one or the other. That’s my identity! [Manchester, 2002]
How would I describe myself? British Asian! There’s a lot of things about the British way of life that I like. And there’s a lot of things about the Asian way of life that I like. You try to live both, don’t you, and I think it’s pretty seamless for me. I can slip into either quite easily. I say I’m a British Asian, but I feel like a conscious Asian living in Britain. [Manchester, 2002]

I think it’s important for my children to know that they’re Hindus. Whether they want to carry it on, it’s up to them. I think you need some identity, you need some culture behind you apart from work, home and enjoying yourself in the pub or going out for a drink or whatever. You need some kind of identity and it’s important for that identity to carry on, and what you stand for. If I know, and I can embed it into them, hopefully it helps them in life as well. [Manchester, 2002]

Reflections

Out of 35 years, I’ve been back to Kashmir only 3 times. If I put all that time together, I must have spent about 3 months there altogether – 4 weeks, 6 weeks here and there. So realistically, if I look at it, I’ve spent most of my life here and this is my home. But it’s very hard to accept it but I don’t know why. At the back of my mind, I’ve still got this…I would love to go back and spend some time there or whatever. But now, the way I look at it, this is our home. Whether I accept it or not, that’s a different matter - probably it’s not in my control! [Manchester, 2002]

I have a photo of the family – that’s the four children and my mum and dad. We didn’t have a camera in those days but it was a tradition to get the children together and have a photo taken with mum and dad. We always had it hung on the wall. That was in Africa before we all migrated from East Africa to India and then here. It was in our living room in Leicester all the time and then my sister’s been passed on this photograph, and then I always wanted a copy of that so I had it reproduced so I’ve got a copy of it as well. So that’s my memory of Africa. I had a moving life in a way – from Africa to India but I can’t remember it. To me, it’s a hazy dream because all I can remember is coming into this country. To me it says, ‘yes, I born there, and I was brought up there, and this is the picture that was taken at that time’. [Manchester, 2002]

It just happened. When I first came, I didn’t intend to live here such a long time, I was just thinking that I’ll live here for a couple of years and then I’ll go back and live with my family. But it’s just like a trap once you start living in a country, your children went to schools and then you didn’t want to interrupt their education once they’ve started. And then when they finished their education, they got jobs in this country, and I’ve got a job myself. So I just keep going and visiting my family whenever I can. I feel this is my home, I’ve lived here more than I’ve lived in Pakistan but it’s still different when somebody’s born somewhere else. I still feel love and sympathy with Pakistan, it could be because I have such strong family links there. [Bradford, 1993]
The next generation will practically have no links with their motherland. For example, my children are all born here. They go to India because their grandparents are there. But I’ve lived in this country so for my children’s children, I’m the grandfather, so they have no reason to go to India because their grandfather and everybody is here. So the link with the mother country will be discontinued. [Bradford, 1993]