

ALHAJ MOHAMMED ABDUN NOOR

1. When did you first come to Britain? (What was the reason, why choose Britain?)

March 1964, I was studying and my father admitted me to college but I when I see that many people are coming to London then I decided to come. My elder brother came earlier but he advised me to stay in Bangladesh and continue my study but I did not listen to him. That time people would to fly from Karachi.

2. Did you come on your own? (If not who were you accompanied by anybody? With relative? With your children?)

I came on my own, there was no one with me. I joined my brother here in Westminster Soho.

UK

1. When coming to the UK what were you thinking? Were you excited (about?) or fearful (of coming to a new country-environment?)

When I start to London I was excited but when I reached here it was completely opposite. My brother asked me to stay in Bangladesh in continues my study and go for a good job. Even he said if I come here it will be for only 5-7 years than have to go back. Same thing was in my mind that couple of years I will be here, earn some money and will go back. Still I have been keeping this in my mind and wish to return in my country but what shall I do. I was against bringing my family here, thus why my family came very last. I had no intention to stay here, so what point to bring children here. But my family members and relatives create pressure on me to bring them here.

2. What were your first impressions of the UK?

I did not feel comfortable and in the beginning I decided that within a short period of time I will return. The country is nice, no doubt about it but I missed my country. Weather was very different, very cold where as my countries weather is hot. Food was available; we had money to buy things. There would have been only one toilet in a whole building in ground floor and everybody has shared it. There were no baths inside of the house so have to go to public bath once or twice in a week.

WESTMINSTER

1. How did you find Westminster at the time? What was it like?

Big difference in Westminster now, lots of development has taken place within this period of time. Such as there were not so much buildings or so big and modern buildings in Westminster. When we came to this country we have seen some of the places and houses which were smashed during Second World War. In the Center Point there was big blast hole from a bomb. Later on the big building was built. There were quite a few bombed buildings In Garad street as well.

2. Were there other Bengalis settled? Asians, Blacks, other non-Bengalis (their numbers, single men, women, children, families?)

Five/six people were in the same building with my brother and 2/3 Bengali families were nearby. That time many people were there.

3. Did you know English? (Level-fluent, to get by, none?)

After completing my matriculation I came in this country. I was able to speak a little bit, in spite of that to improve my language I was admitted to Putney college, not sure whether it is still exist or not. Same time I was working, so I managed to go to college about 3/4 months and I could not carry on any more. However, I had sufficient English to manage myself.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS

1. Were your neighbours helpful? (Who else?)

I did not have much communication or interaction with the neighbours, but they always say hello or hi whenever we faced each other.

2. What clothes did you wear (for women was sari a problem-how was it viewed by English people?) How did you cope in cold weather coming from a hot country?

I always wore a shirt, pant and coat along with overcoat, no Punjabi or Bengali clothes.

3. Was halal food easily available? No – What did you eat?

There was halal food in Aldgate, old Crompton Street, we went there to buy meat from Mr Noor Miah's shop. People usually pronounced 'Noor Miar shap'. An English woman also run a live chicken shop so every Sunday we would bought chicken from there and slaughter by ourselves.

4. Did you find any difficulty in practicing your religion? Did you have to make

compromises? How do you feel about that?

Mostly people did their prayer in own home, there were no mosque during that time. I had longee with me and sometime I did my prayer with those longees.

5. Do you feel you are able to freely practice your religion in the public sphere in the UK?

No we did not have any problem to perform namaz. In the beginning we had very less concentration on prayer. I did not perform Ramadan in the beginning. Nobody was known when Ramadan starts or when going to be end. However our father informed us about the dates comparing with English months. Instead of that always it was not possible to observe Ramadan.

I never prayed in my workplace. I remember once I performed Eid Prayer nearby Commercial road in the house of Haji Taslim Ali. I went there with some of my friends. It was not a mosque, it was his house, so many people were there so we squeezed and performed Eid prayer.

6. What was Eid day like when you first came here, and has it changed now?

Couple of Eids has gone in the beginning I was not aware of, so after three/four Eids some of my friends somehow got the information that the Eid Jamat will be held in Haji Taslim Ali's House in East London, I went there with one of my friend, so this was my first Eid in this country.

EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE PROVIDERS IN INTEGRATING THE BENGALI COMMUNITY

1. Were you able to go to any agency for help? (From Whom? - CAB, Council, GP, library etc.)

That time we helped each other. Whenever we received a letter from our country, everyone would ask about the content of this letter. In the letter, our relatives normally asked for money to buy a land or build a house or anything else. While there was not enough money to be posted then everyone gave a loan.

2. How did you spend your spare time? (TV, radio, films, newspapers, hobby, visiting friends-who, relatives-where, park, museum, places of interest?)

Once a week we went to cinema. One or two shillings were the ticket price. We didn't have any TV at that time. We also visited parks and relatives.

CHILDREN

1. What was their first crèche/school like? For yourself, your child? How were the teachers? Other parents?

2.

My eldest son was almost grown up when he came to this country but I sent him to language school. Rest all went to school. School was just opposite of my building so they went by themselves. Teachers were very good, I met them on many occasions. They normally called me to have a meeting for my children. They called parents to report about the progress of their children.

3. What were your greatest fears (if any) in allowing your children to be integrated within the mainstream society? (your thoughts/feelings) What factors predicted their successful integration? (What would have made you proud?)

My children came late in 1987, during this time most of our family came in this country; however, I had some fear. My eldest son may go to college but I just allowed him to learn some English and go for employment. My daughter went to primary school and then went to secondary school and competed her A level. She wished to go for further education but I did not allow her as I was worried that she may damage the reputation of my family, might lose our culture and family tradition. She was frustrated, cried and even broken our utensils at home to go for further education but I totally disagreed. After her marriage she obtained her degree.

4. What were your thoughts (if any) about raising your children maintaining their own culture within the mainstream society?

I was completely against of bringing my children in this country but later on because of pressure from others I decided to bring them here. But still I believe that I did a mistake to bring them here. Still I feel that this was a wrong decision for me. It would be better if I didn't bring them.

5. Would you allow your children to marry outside your culture?

Definitely I would not allow them to marry someone outside of my culture not even on other faith. But the situation is different now; it would not be possible to stop them.

SETTLING IN WESTMINSTER

1. What struggles and obstacles did you face in adapting your life in raising your new British born child/children?

The main struggles were to look after them, how were they behaving, how they are going to schools and coming back home, whether they have been following their

faith and culture? I tried utmost to educate them on our religion and our language. Fortunately three of my girls can read and write Bengali. They can speak Bengali very well.

2. How has your child/children turned out to be? (as expected/not expected)

I am happy what they have achieved but I am not happy on them as they are not as like as I was expected. First of all they almost lost their religion, their language and their culture.

FUTURE

1. How Bengali are they? (how much are they in touch with the Bengali community/Bangladesh/Bengali language)

They are only Bengali because of their blood connection, their skin and colour but rest are completely different. They lost their identity; they are neither Bengali nor English, something different. There is a river near of my house. One the shore of the river there are some shoe maker family (Musi). My father said they have been residing there more than hundred years, they have their own language. One of the boys of their family was my class mate. Once I went to their house. He called his sister to make a cup of tea for me. He used his own language and told her not to give the same cup they have been using. They did not lose their language or identity but my children lost their language and culture. That means my children are worse than Musi's (Shoe maker's) children.

2. How do you see their future? Would you be happy or disappointed?

Their future may be fattest with English lifestyle but not with ours. They are not bothering about their culture or religion. Our Islamic priests are not good enough to guide our children, they just opening Islamic schools just to create employment for themselves, only for their bread and butter.