

HAJI AROB ALI

Name :

Mohammed Arob Ali

When did you come to London:

Ans: I came to London in 1963.

How you did you know to come to London?

Ans: In 1963 many people came to London, and it was publicised from one to another. There was very little opportunity in our country that time therefore we tried to be better off. We heard that if we could come here than we will be able to do some work, will get employment and earn more money etc.

Where did you first reside?

Ans: First I was with Abdul Bari along with one of my cousin in Flith Street, then I moved to Birmingham. Two months later I could not find any job then again I moved to Westminster to start a job in restaurant, it was an English restaurant and I always worked in English restaurant.

Did you come alone or with anyone else?

Ans: No, I came alone.

Family was not with you?

Ans: No that time family was not with me. That time we were Pakistani. Bangladesh was East Pakistan & other part West Pakistan. I came from West Pakistan.

When you first came in London, where did you stay? With a family member?

Ans: Yes with one cousin.

When you came in this country what did you think? Were you excited?

Ans: I was hoping to have a job and better life, but that time the situation of this country was not as like as now. That time there was often violence and racial attacks therefore, we always had fear in our minds, anytime anything could happen. Especially at night we were most concerned, when we returned from work at night time normally 2/3 would be together.

What did you feel at first in this country?

Ans: Not bad. I came from a remote area where there was not much to be done except cultivation. I had never been in a town area therefore it was new to me and I had a hope to have a good job.

What differences did you see between Bangladesh and this country?

Ans: Completely different. But during that time this country was not like as the current stage, toilet baths were not attached with each and every building. We have to do our bath in public baths. Some households had baths but the lodgers had no access.

Did you bring any memorable things from Bangladesh during that time?

Ans: I bought some photos or later family photos posted to me..

What was your expectation when you came to this country?

Ans: I was not much educated yet had a hope to have a job here for better life.

Why you chose Westminster to be settled?

Ans: I went to Birmingham with a hope to have a job in any factory but some factories were closing down so could not find anything. Restaurant jobs were available in Westminster therefore many people from outside Westminster started to come here. One of my cousins was here and he asked me to come here.

Where most of our Asian people were living during that time?

Ans: Most people were living in Birmingham. Those who came earlier than us they had jobs. They work weekly five days and rest two days.

Did you rent a house or flat here in Westminster or did you share with someone?

Ans: I rented a bed; in one room two beds were available so two people had to share a room. In Birmingham in one room we stayed three people, but in Westminster it was a little bit better as two people were sharing a room.

English was not your language, did you learn English here?

Ans: I learned a little bit of English here as in my work place there were some other Bengali people so I can communicate in Bengali as well.

Did you learn English properly?

Ans: No really, just basic English.

How did you communicate with your doctor or offices?

Ans: Sometimes I have sought help from others who can understand better English. In important issues I took someone with me so it was ok.

How were your neighbours? Did they help you?

Ans: Oh yes they always did. Mostly Bengali neighbours helped me and very rarely I sought help from English neighbours.

What types of dress you did wear here?

Ans: Coats, Pants and other warm cloths for outside, but at home longee and shirt. It was very much cold but in London I feel less cold comparing outside of London. Birmingham temperature used to be below than London so the people of Birmingham had more warm cloths than us such as over coat etc.

Did you face any difficulties in the beginning that you still remember?

Ans: Mostly we faced problems in the street with skin head groups. Once three of us were returning from work, a group of them surrounded us in front of our house. We stood against of them so some other people also joined with us so they run away.

That time what types of food did you eat? Were there halal food available?

Ans: It was very difficult to have halal food in this area. Only Halal were available in Aldgate. So sometimes we bought halal from there on Sunday. As a restaurant worker we only cooked twice in a week. In London we 2/3 people who were working together and residing in a household we shared the food. We bought halal meet for 3/4 weeks from Aldgate and cooked a portion each week.

How did you practice your religion during that time?

Ans: There were no prayer facilities in Westminster, only in Eid day we did our prayer in open air field. Regent Park Mosque was built later on. Most of us also went to Aldgate to perform Eid or Jumma prayer. Mostly people who wished to pray they did at home.

Did you face any difficulties when trying perform your religion during that time?

Ans: Not really, we practiced at home or occasionally in Aldgate so no problem was been faced.

How did you do your prayer?

Ans: That time we could not do the prayer during our working period and have very little time to go to mosque so what ever we did at home. Not many of us practiced religion but those who wish to do so they did in their off time at home.

How was your first Eid in this country?

Ans: I remember for the first Eid prayer I went to Aldgate. There were no facilities in Westminster, Regents Park mosque was not there.

What differences do you see in the Eid prayer of today and that time?

Ans: Now more facilities are available than before. Previously there were no families here so had a couple of people to enjoy Eid with, but currently there are more families here. Eid enjoyment is now completely different.

I am sure you always fasted?

Ans: Yes I fasted during Ramadan. But the sehree eating was very difficult for us. Sometimes we eat early and went to bed or sometimes we wait for late night even occasionally we fasted without having our sehree. But it is true; many of us did not perform Ramadan.

Did you receive any help from any agencies?

Ans: No, I never been, It was not necessary. Even I was not aware any of this kind of agencies in this area.

Normally from where did you receive support Bengali people or others?

Ans: Mostly from our own community people. Some people were educated in Bengali community and they helped.

How did you spend your leisure time?

Ans: Normal off days were on Saturdays and Sundays, mostly on Sunday we watched cinemas or met people somewhere and at night we cooked. That time there was barely any TV. To save money, the owner did not allow watching TV all the time. Economic thinking was predominant during that time.

Did you ever took part any cultural event during that time?

Ans: Yes, occasionally music event had been organised in Aldgate and people participated. I was also young that time and took part. People also played cards that time.

When you came to this country your children were not with you?

Ans : No, they were not with me.

Where were the children born?

Ans: All of them were born in Bangladesh.

When you first take your children to school, how was it?

Ans: Yes it was very welcomed by the teachers. First couple of days I dropped them and later on they went by themselves.

Did you receive any help or support from any organisation or agencies for your children education?

Ans: No there was nothing available during that time, so I have not received any support from any organisation or agencies. There were some agencies in Aldgate but we never went to them. Somehow we managed ourselves.

Did your children play with mixed children or only Bengali children?

Ans: Mostly my children played with Bengali children.

Are you ever worried about your children that they have been going out and mixing with other children?

Ans: We always kept an eye on them, our wariness was that they me be involved in fighting with other children.

Did you ever think that they me be mixed with white or other children and may end up worse?

Ans: No actually they never attempt to mixed with white children in outside school, off day they did not have chance go to them only they mixed in school environment.

Did you have any wariness that they could mix with white children and culturally may different?

Ans: No I have nothing like this, I thought, they have to study with them, mix with them otherwise how they will be educated.

Did you realise that your children have to be mixed with other children in this country?

Ans: Yes,I realised that they will not be able to do anything alone living in isolation.

What was your view about the different culture? Did you think that your children would have difficulties to maintain your own culture?

Ans: Yes, this was a big concern. I always thought, how they will maintain and manage themselves in between two cultures. Whether they convert to other culture or anything like that.

Would you accept your child or children to marry someone from other culture?

Ans: We always look after our children to be Bengali and not to adopt any other culture, ever tried to refrain them from bad Bengali children. We always expect that our children should marry according to our tradition. We arrange this for them.

What was the biggest difficulty in raising your children in this country?

Ans: We always worried that if they adopt any other culture than it would be big problem for us. Of course they have to live in this country and have to know this culture but we always told them to respect our culture. Mostly we feared about black children as some of them were very arrogant and would involve in fighting with each other.

What differences do you see in old Westminster and present Westminster?

Ans: Currently we have lots of facilities in Westminster which was not before. Everything is much better than before.

Are the educational opportunities Westminster are more than before or still same?

Ans: not much different.

How much British or how much Bengali are your children?

Ans: I would not tell them to be British, they are Bengali and I tried my best to keep them Bengali. Though they have learnt English in school yet same time we taught them Bengali and Islamic religion as well.

How do you see the future of your children?

Ans: There would be lots of changes in their attitude. Even the children who born in this country they have very little sympathy for Bangladesh so I don't think that the future generation would keep their own legacy or identity. Even some of my relatives has never taken their children to Bangladesh how they could know their own country, relatives or culture, how they will love their country and culture.

How do you see the future of our children?

Ans: I don't think most of our children would be much interested in their own country.