

MOHAMMED HIFZUR RAHMAN

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

1965 - My dad came to Bangladesh and he noticed my written work wasn't too good and asked if I wanted to go to London.

1968 – I came to London

2. Where did you settle and why? (If not Westminster where was it? What made you come to Westminster?)

I settled in Chinatown. My Dad had a flat there.

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

I came on my own then I met with my Dad.

UK

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

I know in London people make good money and I came to improve my education. I knew I could make good money.

2. What were your first impressions of the UK?

I worked at first and did not know much English. Working in a shop there was a lot of African and English customers. There were very few Bengali customers. So, I had to speak English a lot, but this allowed me to learn English.

3. What did you find different (to Bangladesh-people/accommodation/weather/transport/built environment?)- (Any familiarities with Bangladesh?)

Bangladesh houses are big. My dad's London flat was small with 2 rooms. 4 people slept in one room and 2 people in another.

There was no bathroom. We had to bath outside on a street name Marshal Street (Soho). We had to share the toilet with other people in the flat.

4. What were your expectations of the UK if any? (Expectations from relatives/people who had been to the UK/images/media/films etc)

My expectation was to save money and live comfortably.

Westminster

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

There were few other Bengali houses. In my flat there was around 10-12 people. In my Dhulubhais house there was around 20 Bengalis.

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

I learnt English whilst I was at school for 9 months and whilst I worked in the shop.

3. If not, how did you communicate with non-Bengalis? Learn English? (Class, course, friends, relatives, neighbors, community groups, TV, radio, cinema?)

Whilst I was at Bangladesh, my teacher said if you're going to London then you will need to be able to speak English. So, I attended English class in Bangladesh for 6 months.

The school I attended in England helped me communicate as well as working in the shop.

Language barriers, cultural differences and religious obligations

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

In the flat there were no living neighbours because the other rooms were offices. The only communication I had with people was when you go to the shops.

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 would wear trousers and my Dad bought me a suit. I would wear this suit to guest's houses but on a normal day trousers and jackets.

3. Did you face any difficulties (What were they? How did you overcome?)

There weren't many difficulties. When you go outside communication was important but I learnt this, so it was not a problem. The main difficulty was a group of people known as 'skinhead' who were racist. When they were outside I would avoid going outside. I was fearful of that.

If Muslim

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

There were halal food. There were two shops I would go to for halal food. My shop also sold halal food. I had no difficulty finding halal foods.

5. Did you find any difficulty in practicing your religion? Did you have to make compromises? How do you feel about that?

No. Working at restaurants I would pray, if the restaurant was too busy then I would not pray on time. Overall, I could practice my religion freely.

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

Yes – I did not face any difficulties.

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

- There wasn't many Eid Jamaats. The main one in London was East London Mosque. My second Eid was at Brighton in a park, there wasn't any mosque.
- The food was different to the food you eat on Eid day in Bangladesh. Slowly my Dad taught me to cook.

8. Do you observe Ramadan? Does your daily life change or do you do things differently during the month? – Pray more or abstain from anything you do usually?

I always fasted. I faced no difficulties with Ramadan. With sehri me and my dad would wake up eat then sleep.

When we had the restaurant, we could close up at midnight, then clean up the restaurant then eat for sehri then go to bed.

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.)

I never really needed to go to anyone for help. But, when my family came I found it hard to stay in the flat with no bathroom. I asked for help from citizen advice. I wrote them a letter with my situation. They then gave me a new flat.

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

I stayed a lot in Brighton. If the weather was good I would go to the seaside.

3. Did you go to cultural or faith events? (Where & Name the events)

Very rarely and if they did they would be in London but I stayed in Brighton.

Children

1. If you didn't come with children when & where did you have your first child? (Home, hospital? What was it like in hospital? Nurses? Doctors?)

The eldest 2 children were born in Bangladesh. When they came to England, the eldest child was 3 and half and the second eldest was 6 months.

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

When I was going to school in Bangladesh, my dad was in London, so he could not take me to school. So, I felt very excited to take my children to school.

3. Did you get any support provided from the local community, schools, health centres, and community organisations? (If yes what kind of support did you receive?)

The doctors were very helpful.

4. Who did your child play with? Who were his/her friends? Other Bengali kids or mixed?

When I moved flats, my child went to gateway nursery. There were a lot of Bengali kids. He kept contact with his best friend throughout primary school and during secondary school his best friend passed away.

He had other Bengali friends who he still kept in contact with; they see each other during different functions and events.

I don't know if any of my children had any English friends.

5. 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 eldest child failed his GCSE, I did not put any pressure on him. I told him he would not be able to have a good life if he does not do well in his education.

Then, he put effort in his education and did BTEC national and did a degree in design construction which I was proud of. Now he has a good job and is in a good position in life.

I had to go back to Bangladesh for 6-7 months due to a family member being ill. My other two children diverted off education.

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

I signed up to be the school governor, so I understand the education system more clearly which would help my children. Once my children went to QK secondary school, I was also the school governor. I took this position because the more I understood about education, the more I could help my children. I had 100% commitment in raising my children maintaining their own culture. I taught them Bengali and Arabic.

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

I am very open with my children. If they want to speak to me about anything, we speak freely.

My child asked me 'if I like anyone from another culture and I want to get married, what would be your answer?' I replied 'can you go a bit further because this is something I would need to know a bit more'. My child said if they convert to a Muslim would you be ok with this.

It depends on how far you feel for this person, but if your feeling is so deep then I cannot say no, but then you will lose touch with my gradually.

I tried to explain that I am not accepting this but I was trying to explain it nicely. I gave various reasons:

- If I and your mum go to his house we won't find a prayer mat.

- Would find it uncomfortable to eat in his house.
- His parents would feel the same in my house.

So, the situation would not be nice. The relationship I have with my other two children's in laws family won't be the same with this family.

Settling in Westminster

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

When I had the St John wood flat, the downstairs neighbour was an English couple. The flat was wooden flooring. My children was young, they made a lot of noise which the downstairs neighbours could hear. They gave me a lot of problems about this and there were a lot of complaints.

I told the council that after 9pm there should be no noise and I put my children to sleep before 9pm.

I found my downstairs neighbour's were racist but the council removed them. I had good relationship with all my other neighbours.

2. What role did you play to educate and raise your child/children between two cultures (British & Bengali)?

The role I played taking my children to Bangladesh and also marrying my child in Bangladesh. My children were very good socialising with people in Bangladesh and I also gave them a tour of Bangladesh. This caused them to love Bangladesh.

3. Did you do anything specific (i.e. take them to Bengali/religious class/school/cultural events/Christmas parties/street parties/birthday parties/White friend parties)

My children attended Marylebone society Bengali class. I taught them Arabic at home. Sometimes they would attend white friend birthday parties for 30 minutes. My daughter wanted to stay over at her friend's birthday party. I said she's not allowed to stay over but she can go and visit and give a birthday gift.

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

My oldest child got a degree. My youngest child did her A levels and now she got a good job. Outside of education, I am very happy. The way I wanted them to socialize

with others, my children are good with socializing. They keep in contact with each other and still stay in contact with their family in Bangladesh.

Future

- 1. What is Westminster like today compared to when you first came in ...? (biggest changes you have seen, how has it changed)?**

When I first came I never understood Westminster council. After I got the St John Wood flat, I met someone who told me to come to meetings. I came one day and got put into the community. Now, I am very involved.

- 2. How British are they? (How integrated are they? How British do they feel? Do they have many White friends?)**

My children are very highly religious. We celebrate birthdays just with cake. We don't celebrate Christmas where we eat good food on Christmas day. My children are British but they are not entirely involved with the British culture. They are more involved with the Bengali culture.

- 3. How do you see their future? Would you be happy or disappointed?,**

I am very happy with my children. Everything I taught my children, they would teach their children.