

LALA MIAH

Your name please:

My name is Lala Miah

When you came to Britain:

1964

Why did you choose Britain?

Ans: I was studying during that time and my father was in this country. Once he came to Bangladesh he decided to educate me in this country. I came with my father as during that time, rarely families were coming together. First I went to Birmingham, then I moved to South Wales. In 1968 I moved to Westminster and I was approximately 22 years old.

What did you think when you first time stepped in UK?

Ans: I felt it was very hard to adjust. First of all the weather was completely different even it was not like the present climate. That time mostly it was foggy, dark and full of snow etc. very rarely we have seen sunny day.

When you came in this country were you excited?

Ans: Not at all. First of all the weather than language barriers and above all with full of clothes it was really hard to cope. That was a very difficult time but slowly I adjusted.

Ans: Have you understand everything in first instance?

No, no way I was not able to know everything or understand anything. It has taken time to learn many things. Slowly I start to use buses, train etc. But I have to say that the people of this country were very helpful.

Did you bring any memorable things from Bangladesh?

Ans: I did not bring any visible things but my student life memories. I still remember who I have spent my boyhood in Bangladesh, Where I studied, where I was lodging.

What was expectation when you came in this country?

Ans: Actually I did not have any expectation rather my father wished to educate me in this country therefore he took me with him. He sent me school, I studied sometimes and speak using English language but it was not much. My father went to Bangladesh and I stepped to employment. Basically restaurants job one and then another.

How did you come to Westminster?

Ans: I was in Birmingham and was looking for a job in Westminster. I got a job at the Agra restaurant which was in W1.

Were there many Bengalis in Westminster during that time?

Ans: No there were not many Bengali people in Westminster. Even very few Asian or Black people were in this borough. In the weekend some Asian or African people used to visit Westminster. Only in Piccadilly there were couple of Indian restaurants and the owners were from Moulovi Bazar, Sylhet. Most Bengali peoples whatever the amount, were in Piccadilly. There were about 15/16 restaurants in Piccadilly.

Where did you stay first? Was it a flat or house?

Ans: I was working at Whitfield Street and was sharing a flat nearby.

Your family was not with you?

Ans: No, no, family was not with me.

How was your English that time? Was it fluent?

Ans : Little bit, I could manage without any help.

How did you communicate with English speaking colleagues?

Ans: I was able to understand them and was able to communicate with them as I learn some English in school and during my job as a waiter.

Did you ever seek any help from your neighbour to go to doctor and somewhere else?

Ans: No I never seek any help from any one to visit my doctor or hospital. I tried my best to do those things myself. The people of this country are very intelligent; they easily understand the purposes of your communication.

Coming back to weather, obviously the weather was not similar to your country, completely opposite, from hot weather to cold weather, you were not able wear the same clothes you used to wear in Bangladesh. What type of cloths do you wear here?

Ans: I could still member those days, many warm clothes need to be worn, When we go out we have to wrapped our whole body with clothes, we had to wear at least two pair of socks to protect us from the cold. Mostly it used to foggy. When we first came to this country, many of the things were not like this such as the streets, housing, heating and even baths, toilets were completely different. Westminster has improved a lot since.

What kind of difficulties did you faced during that time?

Ans: Not very big difficulties without my family, but when my family join me and I had flat in Lisson Green in 1977 for the first time I faced racial harassments. That time I felt so unsecured on my way to work even there were no certainty that I will returned safely. Not only me, but the others were in the same situation, our family members eagerly waited for our safe return. All of our family members would have been looking at the street to see whether we are coming back without any trouble. That time there were no mobile telephones to inform our family member that we are coming back. They waited for us for hours and hours. Most difficulties for us were in front of the lifts. Most of the racist people would have been loitering in front of the lifts and assault vulnerable people. There were a lot of crime in Lisson Green area, I was victimised and many others were attacked and victimised. Administration was good they had taken actions against those types of incidents therefore; gradually the situation had changed. Now we feel very comfortable to live in this area.

What did you eat during that time? Were there any halal food?

Ans: No halal food was easily accessible only rice, vegetables and fish. Those fish were not from Bangladesh mostly English fish. We could get fresh chicken from Aldgate Hessel Street.

Did you face any problems in practicing your religion?

Ans: No whatever practice I did, I had no problems. Of course, I could not go to mosque due to fear of personal safety in the street.

Did you think that without any obstacle you have been practicing your religion?

Ans: I personally felt that I have full liberty to observe my religion, no one obstructing me. I freely did and until today doing the same.

How did you do your worship?

Ans: I did it in my home but there was very little chance to do this in my work place. Basically we would have to our duty until 1-2am especially in an Indian restaurant.

How did you observe your first Eid in this country? What is the different between Eid observation of that time and at present?

Ans: Day and night difference, that times there no opportunity to know when Eid or Sabe-Barat or Sabe Kodor is. There were no good communications even amongst us. There were no telephones or television in every household. Very poor communications were each other. There was no Bengali newspaper either.

Anyway have you did any traditional food or similar anything in this country during Eid?

Ans: We could not attend any Eid prayer far away from us but attended the nearest Jamat. We made good food by joining our family traditional pitas or other food we cooked and served them.

You fasted during that time? Did you think that there were some differences in your daily life during Ramadan?

Ans: it normal that during Ramadan there are some physical and mental changes, self-consciousness and kindness impressively increased. To me Ramadan month is more peaceful and comfortable month for those who.

Did you feel any different that you were not able to do during Ramadan?

Ans: No, not really. I did not find any difficulties. For me, this country is the best place to do religious practice without fear

Did you go to any agencies for any help in the beginning?

Ans: During that time everything were very easy, people were helpful. I had no issue that I have to go to any agencies for any help. Directly I dealt my problem with the offices, even when my family join with me I reported to Westminster council for an accommodation and within a week they called me to collect the keys

Did your neighbour help you in anyway?

Ans: Yes they did, neighbours were very helpful.

How did you spend your leisure time?

Ans: Before bringing our family, in our single life we contacted each other from one restaurant to another restaurant. We met up and went to park or a restaurant in Brick lane together. We also watched Indian films as there were no Bengali films available in London. There was a Cinema hall in Talmar Square now it is gone. We mostly watch films in this hall or in another hall in Brick Lane.

Did you participate in any religious events during that time?

Ans: I could not remember anything.

When did your children and family join with you? Obviously some of them born in Westminster?

Ans: My eldest son came with my wife in 1977 and afterwards two daughters and one of my sons was born in this country.

When you first visited your doctor or nurse how were their services?

Ans: Lisson Grove health centre is very old; I first join with them when my family arrived in this country. I had a doctor friend in Harley Street, his name was Peter, he was a consultant of

Brampton Hospital, this gentleman who helped me a lot. First he has taken my family to his hospital and checked them there.

You send your children to local school? How was the behaviour of the school teachers then? How behaved were the other parents?

Ans: Gateway primary school is an old school, when I admitted two of my children there, they happily welcomed. We received enough support from the teachers. They looked after our children very carefully, there I feel proud to say that all of my children become educated and are now involved in banking or businesses.

That time did you receive any help or support for you, your family or children from any community centre of organisation? Were there any organisation?

Ans: No there were no organisation as far as I know, I did not contact any one, school always contacted me for my children and I personally dealt any issue. If they were absent they would contacted me over telephone or send off letter.

Who were your children's friends? Were they mixed or just Bengali?

Ans: It was mixed group. Like present, they have friends from different backgrounds. There was very rare infighting amongst them.

Any fear about this type of mixing?

Ans: No I allowed them to mix freely, I never stopped them mixing with their peer group, but I always checked them in to the school and took care of their education. I always met their teachers and liaised with them so my children had a good education.

Did you ever feel or realise that your children may be in trouble if they were involved in this type of activities or group of people?

Ans: I did not hesitate as I myself was mixing with the multicultural society, why should I think of my children should not mix with others. I never thought that my children will be destroyed if they mixed with the children of different cultures.

Do you feel proud of your children that they have mixed knowledge of cultures or experiences?

Ans: I feel proud for the reason that my children had free access to the cosmopolitan society therefore they had been properly educated and are now competing in the job market.

Did you ever thought that how your children will maintain their own culture in a different cultural environment?

In terms of culture I felt that my children are following me, following my culture, following my family. I never thought or even I still believe that if a child mix with other culture this would change their own culture.

If your child marries someone from different culture do you have any problem or will you accept it easily?

Ans: No I will not be disturbed with this. I will accept it as the situation has now changed. This not our time, this is their time and they must act on their own life.

Are worried at any time in raising your children that they may adopt different culture or they can marry someone from different religion?

Ans: I never thought like this during that time because I never had any clue of such an issue from their attitude. As I was not aware that my son or my daughter were involved anything like this therefore I never been worried about this.

Did you face any obstacle in raising your children in Westminster?

Ans: No I could not remember anything like this

What types of role you did you play in educating your children in between two cultures?

Ans: As parents we always dealt with them as friend thus why they shared everything with us and never hid anything. Through our good relationship we were able to help each other.

To maintain your culture did you ever involved in any events or activities, such as birthday parties or religious activities?

Ans: We never did any birthday party at home but they did in school. In terms of religious lesson there were no good facilities during that time, however, we engaged private religious teacher to educate them on Quran and Namaz that much we were able to do.

What kind differences or changes you can identify in between previous Westminster and current Westminster?

Ans: There are lots of changes in Westminster such as roads and streets which have changed, new buildings have been built, more people have been educated, schools and colleges have been increased, peoples life standard has been changed and massively improved.

As far as you are concerned, how British are your children?

Ans: We only changed our passport as British but our children, to me are hundred percent British. Our way of life and British way of life are day and night difference. As we have good connection with our own friends back home similarly in this country they have their friends and community connection.

How Bengali do they feel themselves?

Ans: It's very hard to say as my eldest son is a HSBC consultant, he was in Bahrain and covered all south Asia and toured most of part of Bangladesh such as Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet. After five years of his services this year he returned and reported me that to him Bangladesh is one of the richest countries of the world.

Has he felt proud to be a Bengali?

Ans: He said if he would studied in Bangladesh he could be a minister but he has raised in western country studied here therefore not able to understand everything but he has connection with Bengalis.

How religious they are?

Ans: They do Namaz and Ramadan, but in this age how much more you can expect; they pay Zakat and follow the Sunnah of prophet. Some cases they are better than us.

How do you see their future? Good or bad? Are happy or disappointed to see them?

Ans: Future of our community is very bright as many of our children are becoming doctor, engineer, Barrister and solicitors etc. They have been occupying various employment positions. I am sure they will go far and far.

Are happy with our future generation?

I am happy and feel proud; at least, we should be proud that our generation has been happy, passing a good life.