



Melei Leisna Nungjumapal
[Khongamelei]

Chapter Five

Beginning of Life in the UK



Author at World Conference on AIDS virus, Yokahoma, Japan 1993.
Yokahoma is famous for Kirin Japanese beer. The whole factory had only 2 men. All automatic.

There is a saying in England. “There’s no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing.” It all depends on how you look at things, not how they are in themselves. It is like in the old proverb, ‘a glass is half-full (optimistic) or half-empty (pessimistic), which determines one’s worldview.

As London weather transitioned from chilling February (5c) to warmer April (12c), I decided to take a tour of London, two months after my arrival. The weather still varied from warm and sunny to cold and rainy. It was in the month of spring. The spring had arrived in my life.



Receiving annual present as Medical Officer for Bradford Police Boxing Club.

As spring is the season of new life and regrowth, I was filled with the conviction that I would get my degree in due course and return home in the sunshine. I felt cheerful as happier hormone serotonin began to circulate in the blood. Now my hospital work required me to work during the normal weekday hours and be on night call at night for three nights a week.

The spring also reminded me of the old Manipur classic song:

**Basant rituna lakpada, kumgi hangoina khongbada
Shabi shanou ngaunare, Leishabi pakhang tunare
Thamoi nangna thiriba manja kanano?**

The song was the lament of a lonely girl with the coming of the spring season when everybody seemed to be bubbly, and when animals became lively.

In English: as the spring season arrives and the annual chorus of the frogs begins, many lovers are getting intoxicated; many girls and boys are falling over themselves. (Oh) my heart, which boyfriend are you looking for?



Visiting the ancient capital of AWA in Burma. Margaret & Neil, forefront. Begaye wooden monastery (1834). Only surviving building in the old capital of Awa, the old name of Burma, from the time of 'Seven Years' Devastation'.

It was a shiny spring Sunday when I went to London from Halifax in the north of England. London revealed its most colourful. In London, I travelled by bus and tube for experience. The red double-decker buses reminded me of the Bombay buses of my student days. It was amazing.

Soon the captivation tipped over to curiosity. It was extraordinary that there were so many black people driving the buses of London transport. In my retentive memory, London was like Shangri-La of Tibet ("with streets paved in gold"), where everything and anything was available, and where middle class white British gentlemen, known as City men, moved about in pin-striped suits, wearing black bowler hats and carrying rolled umbrellas and briefcases.

They were the people who worked in the City of London in the financial sectors. Not anymore. The figure has now become a joke. It was with this memory that the first suit I had, was a grey pinstripe three-piece

suit from the Jackson tailor shop. I was not trying to become a WOG (Westernised oriental gentleman) – a derogatory term but was trying to keep with the Joneses.

It was years later that I learnt those black people were from the Caribbean and the Bahamas. They were recruited during the late 1940s, after the war, when there was an acute shortage of manpower in Britain.

Britain lost 450,770 (nearly 5 lakh) people during WWII, out of which 383,600 (nearly 4 lakh) died while serving in the military. Half of the civilian deaths were in London because of German bombing, known as Blitzkrieg (German), saturation bombing that began towards the end of 1940.

By the end of the war, the total working population in the UK had fallen by 1.38 million. There was a drastic shortage of labour. Britain needed manpower to develop its economy. Britain wanted immigrants to rebuild the war-damaged country. The British Government encouraged migration from Commonwealth countries. There were also immigrants from Eastern Europe, like Poland, and Ireland.

The first black immigrants were 492 Jamaicans who arrived in June 1948 as temporary visitors. They came by a British troop ship named Empire Windrush. So, these black people were known as Windrush migrants. The British people in the beginning, were quite alarmed seeing so many black workforces.

These men came well-dressed in suit and tie and wearing felt hats – the dress style they expected English men to have. So did the women folk in two-piece suits and hats. They were trained mostly, to drive London buses and Tube trains, and the women, some of whom were already trained nurses, were employed mainly in the National Health Service. The black or West Indians settled mainly in London, mostly in the

borough of Notting Hill. Since then, they have been having a Notting Hill Carnival every year.

There were great discriminations in those days, against the coloured people (including South Asians) and the Irish. Many landlords would not rent rooms to black and Irish immigrants. They had notices put up like 'Blacks and Irish are not welcome'. Racism against the Irish was mostly because they were staunch Catholics. The good thing about having an oriental look is that I never encountered racial profiling in this country while my Indian class fellows did.



Drinking with my class fellows in the pub, who have settled here.
Valerie, Urmila, Pushpa, and Meena (Ellis, my neighbour]

Most doctors from the Indian subcontinent came to settle here permanently. There were also quite a few like me, who came to do post-graduation and return home. Some did. Most of them stayed here, even after getting their degree. Some would go back then return as they could not find employment in their own country. Two of my class fellows did.

I started my life as a senior trainee doctor, who was allowed to work for only six months in that speciality at one hospital. At that time, my salary was £70 per month (£1 = Rs 10), with free food and lodging.

After 3 months, I bought a small used (second hand) car, a Ford Anglia for £90 from an Indian doctor who was returning to India. I could drive

a car for one year with my Indian licence. After six months I went to another Hospital, where I met Margaret. The rest is history.

Because of the intense prejudice against coloured people, the then Conservative Government (1951-55) banned racial discrimination which meant nothing in practice. Racial prejudice is very deep-rooted. Besides, the Conservative party in 1964, was regarded as racist. In the 1964 general election, the supporters of one Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths, had the slogan, "If you want a nigger for your neighbour, vote Labour."

A notorious speech in 1968, known as "Rivers of blood" by the Conservative shadow minister, Enoch Powell, revealed a prejudice against non-white immigrants. The speech shook the British people. Enoch finished his speech by quoting from the famous ancient Latin poem, *Aeneid* by the famous Roman poet Virgil. He said, "I seem to see the 'the river Tiber foaming with much blood.'"

Racial profiling exists even now, except that using the word "Negro" or "Nigger" is punishable by law. And it does in practice. But prejudice will always be there with subterfuge.

Fast forward. By the early 1950s, the woollen and textile mills in the North of England, such as Bradford and engineering factories in the Midlands, such as Birmingham, were closing due to lack of workers. That shaped the pattern of immigration from the sub-continent of India (South Asia).

They also came in suits and ties. Indian Sikhs had shaved off their beards, cut off their long hair and discarded their turbans. Pakistani Muslims did the same. No long beards for men or burqa for women. No hijabs, no niqabs.

Mass immigration to Britain had been concentrated in some cities of England, where there were jobs in the mills and transport. Many textile mills in Bradford for instance, had night shift jobs which were shunned by the British men after the hard years of WWII. They would rather go to the local pubs in the evenings. After the War, women had also begun to drink in the pubs. So, it was very homely evenings in the heated pub.

Certain cities had concentrations of kindred fellow countrymen. They lived in cheap old dilapidated back-to-back terrace houses, with just enough spaces to sleep. Southall in West London had Indian Sikh and Punjabi immigrants. Leicester and Birmingham had Gujaratis, especially after the mass exodus caused by Idi Amin of Uganda in 1972.

Bradford where I live, has the biggest concentration of Pakistanis, mostly from Mirpur in the Pakistani part of Kashmir. By 1998, white children in many schools in Bradford and elsewhere became a minority. In the Middle School where I was Chairman of the Governing Body, 95 percent were Pakistanis. Over a third of inner London's children did not have English as their first language.

In many Secondary schools, dominated by Pakistani Muslim children, Muslim activists have been trying to gradually Islamise the schools with things like school uniform covering the girls' legs (not short skirts), holidays for Eid and the introduction of Halal meat for school lunches.



Author giving annual speech both in English and Urdu (as requested) as
Chairman of Governing Board of Whetley Middle School.

As Chairman of the Governing Board of the secondary school in Bradford and, as I represented local Muslim and Indian communities, I argued successfully in favour of Muslim girls wearing trousers and later, for head scarf. I won. I also helped to introduce Diwali holiday for a tiny few of Indian pupils. I thus, was not very popular in the Governing Body.

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Over the years, a few Asian immigrants who were living in crowded and run-down housing accommodations, became economically solvent. Some of them could afford to live in the poor working-class terrace houses in the white neighbourhood in the cities and towns. As the Asian family moved in, the two next door white families would move out. This would go in a domino effect until all the houses in the street were occupied solely by immigrants.

Eventually, many streets and localities became solely Asian. It those days, British people could not stand the smell of Asian spice-flavoured cooking, and their habits such as spitting outside and talking aloud in conversations, to name a couple of South Asian habits. It was a cultural shock.

About this time, the economic boom, mainly due to migrant labour, led to an increase in the disposable income among the British working-class youth. A sub-culture of youth developed among these young men. Many of them were in low-paying jobs or, on the dole (on state benefits for the unemployed). They embraced working class fashion with T-shirt and worn-out Levi Jeans. They shaved their hair and wore heavy working-class boots. They were known as Skinheads.

They became racists and attacked Asian people in the street for no reason. They blamed them for taking their jobs (an excuse) and sending their money back home. They played the traditional nationalistic ideas

of the working class. Much later, many of them joined the far-right nationalist organisations like the National Front and other Neo-Nazi groups in England. We do not hear much of these nationalists anymore.

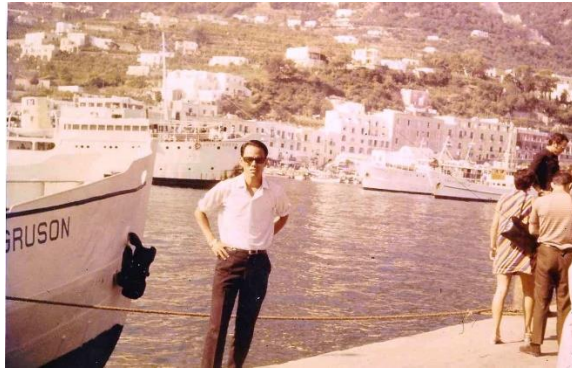
Things began to simmer down a bit in open anti-racism after the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, passed by the Parliament, which restricted immigrant number, by setting up a voucher system. With this system, only those who were issued a work permit could come to Britain. This was the voucher with which I came to London.

However, the new law backfired. The immigrant workers, whose aim initially, was to return to their families back home in the long run, had now other ideas. They realised once they had gone home, they might not be able to come back. So, they brought their families to join them and decided to settle here permanently.

So, Britain passed another law, the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act that restricted entry only to those with a father or grandfather born in the UK. For the doctors, the voucher was for indefinite stay in the UK and to allow them to bring their families with automatic right to British citizenship



Family at famous Raffles Hotel Singapore July 1988. Drinking the world-famous Singapore Sling. July 1988. Priced Singapore dollar 37, about ₹2000.



Isle of Capri in Italy

Having saved up some money for a year, I went on a package holiday to Italy for two weeks with Margaret. We visited Capri, Rome, Pompeii and Naples. They were breath-taking experiences. We stayed at the seaside town of Sorrento, opposite the Isle of Capri that was frequented by the rich and famous.

The Isle of Capri was made more popular by the song: *"Tis was the Isle of Capri that I found her, Beneath the shade of an old walnut tree. Oh, I can see the flowers blooming round her, when we met on the isle of Capri."*

On return, I got a job as Senior Resident at a hospital in a poor seaside town known as West Hartlepool for six months. Then I went to study at the Edinburgh University where special classes were organised for the mass of overseas doctors. There, I spent all my savings to pay for the course, lodging, and boarding. My little car became very handy.



Again, at Raffles Hotel, Singapore. This is history.

At weekends, on Friday evenings, with high octane love, I would drive from Edinburgh to Newcastle, about 100 miles or 160 km in 3 hours, and back on Sunday evenings, starting about 8 pm and after a couple of pints of beer, driving across vast wastelands, without a hint of worry, all alone in an old car, with chances of breakdown.



At the famous St Mark's Square, Venice 2007. Margaret, June & Author



Venice City central by St Mark's Square on the right.

Many years ago, the buildings were built by using long wooden piles (about 60' long) driven deep into the ground. Wood submerged in water do not rot.

After finishing my study in Edinburgh, I went to work at a hospital in Bradford as a Specialist Registrar in Medicine until I got my degree. Then, I settled in General practice in Bradford in 1974.

In 1970s, mass migration of Bangladeshis began to Britain. Mostly from Sylhet. Though they mostly settled in the poor area of East London, they began establishing 'Indian Restaurants' all over Britain. They adapted their menus to the working-class white customers. Not too hot and a bit sweetish. The hottest curry was known as Madras curry.

A dinner party in the UK, is almost always an alcohol party. Alcohol is the celebratory symbol of choice, especially Champagne. Not that everyone drinks alcohol. Many women just partake of soft drinks. After a few drinks and snippets of conversation exchanging pleasantries in the lounge, guests would repair to the dining room and sit at the table laid with cutlery, napkins, and wine glasses for small parties. For large parties it would be a buffet where you serve yourself.



Buffet party at home.

Eating etiquettes are now relaxed for day to day eating after the arrival of Indian restaurants. In general, most working-class people used to drink beer and the upper-class people drank shorts (spirits), at least in public. Women usually drank gin and tonic. This is no longer the case.

In the 1980s after Ayatollah Khomeini's successful revolution, British Muslims began to grow their beards and change to their kurta and pyjama national dress, while their women gradually began to wear burqa. The Indian Sikhs also began to grow their hair and beard. They started wearing turbans but kept the British attire of trousers and jackets or suits.

The city of Bradford soon became known as the capital for Pakistanis in Great Britain, as more and more Pakistani men with their families as well as several illegal immigrants settled there. The large number of Pakistani immigrants were almost all from Mirpur in Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

It was in Bradford where the Pakistanis burnt a copy of Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*, on January 14, 1988, following a fatwa from Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, sentencing him to death. The event started worldwide Muslim agitation.



My late brother Gokulchandra's visit, in my back garden In Bradford in 1985.

Rushdie spent 13 years hiding and living constantly under British police protection. The fatwa was eventually removed. Since then, Rushdie, who now lives in America, has been married four times, and is now a multimillionaire. He is regarded as the second-best Indian writer after Rabindranath Tagore.

There are not many Indian Hindus in Bradford. It took years for them to establish a small temple and that also in a gable-end terrace house. Sikhs although very few, being hardworking and ingenious, had a larger Gurdwara. Muslims, financed by Saudi Arabia, began to build large mosques all over the city. Most Indians, about 2.6 lakhs now live in London.

Work and study are the most common reasons, making 71% of the main factors that encourage people to migrate to the UK. Some are asylum seekers and many are illegal immigrants who come in the hope of finding better opportunities.

It was not the reason in my case. I am not an economic migrant. I came here for study and return home in a short while. But like many I settled here. It was because I committed to someone I genuinely liked, and my word is my bond. As it has always been. This is the life.

