

# My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

## Interview details

Interview with Khaled Hussain [KH]

Interviewed by Farhan Apurbo [FA]

Farhan Apurbo [FA]. You may have heard many stories about Partition from people at home. Would you please share these with us? I'll not interrupt; you can keep on talking as you wish.

Khaled Hussain [KH]. I've heard stories about 1947 from my father; and also read in books. An enormous migration took place in 1947 when people from varying caste and creed had travelled from one border to another. My family too was part of this cycle. There was my father, primarily, and my two uncles. My father told me that our house was in Jyotinagar, Patna. The name of the village was Hilsa. We had a flourishing business there—grandfather's business. At first I was told it was fortune business; perhaps I didn't understand it too well then. Later I came to know that we had a grocery shop both in Calcutta and Patna. Father told me that grandfather was a hard drinker. He had a lot of *tari*, country liquor made from date palm juice. His liver was completely destroyed and he died young, around 1945/46. That was when my father and my maternal uncles took over the family business and ran it successfully until 1947.

But before that were the happenings of 1946. Perhaps you know that there was a horrific riot in Bihar in 1946, possibly in the month of October. Fifty thousand Biharis were killed in those riots. Our family was caught in the vortex of those riots. Village after village was being destroyed and people were being killed indiscriminately. My father had two brothers a baby sister, who was only one; and there was my grandmother. My grandfather had already passed away. Hindus



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

were attacking Muslims, and raping and killing women. My grandmother, my father's phupu [paternal aunt], father's younger sister—all of them jumped into a large well in our house, in order to preserve their honour. Father was only ten at that time, and he had a younger brother who was seven. Before jumping into the well, grandmother told father, 'Now you two brothers need to run away from here. Follow the path that other people are taking. We'll not be able to save or protect you.' Saying this, they jumped into the well and killed themselves. Father saw his own mother killing herself along with others. He was only a child then. He was crying inconsolably. There was nobody around. There was utter mayhem and everyone was fleeing. My father's maternal uncles too couldn't give him any support. Like everyone else, they too were fleeing. That was when a Hindu gentleman who used to be an employee in our family, took father and uncle with him to a house beside his own, and hid them both for six to seven days in a room where rice was stocked in sacks. Then he told them, 'Looks like I won't be able to keep you hidden any longer. I'll take you to a place from where Muslims of your own community are fleeing towards a new country called Pakistan.' So he made father and uncle wear dhotis and left them in a station in Calcutta, indicating trains that would take them to Pakistan. He told them, 'Look! Those trains are going to Pakistan. You will go in that direction. You will be able to find your relatives and other Muslim families too.' In the rush, father lost my uncle in that station. They were children after all. The two brothers boarded two different trains. They came away to what was East Pakistan then and Bangladesh now. They came to Nawgañ, to Santahar- Nawgañ.

Father began searching for his younger brother in the refugee camps. Where could he be? Where? He was unable to trace him. In one of those searches, he found his Mama, maternal uncle. He had in the mean time taken over their ancestral business. So now uncle and nephew began their search for another missing nephew. They found him in due course and then the three of them came away to Santahar. They started life anew. Father told me that it was a life of acute struggle. After all they came from a well-to-do family, and never really faced any



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

privation. But his father died young, and then came Partition. He never could get proper education. His maternal uncles too had come away from there and there was nothing to fall back on—no means of sustenance. They had to work as day labour. Father's uncle had a family, and he was in a quandary whether to send his own child to school, or his nephew to school. Ultimately he got my father a job on the railway tracks, for the railways. Things went on like that for a while. After that father came away to Dhaka, and tried to provide proper schooling to his younger brother. He studied till class VIII with great difficulty.

Father continued with his job of a labourer in the railways and remained there. He got married after a while, and was trying to settle down with his wife and a family of two children, a boy and a girl. Father told me that in the Pakistan period our house was in Alobajar, next to Motiya Chaudhuri's place. When my mother was alive and she saw Moitya Chaudhuri, she would recall with great pride that, 'Our house was right beside Motiya Chaudhuri's.' Our families had extremely cordial relations. She might not have known anybody, but knew Motiya Chaudhuri when she was in that neighbourhood.

Then another phase began in the lives of my parents during the 1971 war. They had to be saved yet again. Now they had two boys and two girls, and they had to move from one place to another. Father used to work for an establishment called 'Jeni Kabab' in Dhaka. It used to be run by a Punjabi. He was a Pakistani, educated. Maybe he could foresee the turn of events and had presumed that Pakistan wouldn't remain whole any longer, and a country named Bangladesh would be created. He used to love my father a lot because he was very hardworking. So he told my father, 'look, I don't think with the situation the country is in, I'll be able to pull off this business any longer. The country will surely be partitioned. Let's move to Pakistan.' Father replied, 'I won't go to Pakistan because my wife's family is spread out all over Bangladesh—Nawogan, Santahar, Rangpur; and I'm somehow responsible for them. Where will I go now? There's nobody I can call my own in Pakistan. I came here when I was ten, and now



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

I'm forty. I won't be able to go to that side. I'll remain here. I stay here and breathe this air.' So he didn't go.

The days of the war loomed in the horizon and father was fleeing from one place to another, hiding somewhere, then moving on again. This was because the Urdu speaking people were in grave danger. After 26 March, it used to be thought that whoever spoke Urdu was a Pakistani army ally. Urdu was the national language of Pakistan, but people in our community also spoke Urdu. But even among the Urdu speakers, people in the Punjabi army spoke in Baluchi, not Urdu; and the Baluchi army had a different dialect, not Urdu. But our community suffered the most because of our Urdu language. There came a point in the war when the army that was raping Bengali women or were killing Bengalis, were speaking in Urdu. The common people who could not differentiate what was happening thought that all people who speak Urdu are bad. So the ordinary civilian, the lower middle class person who lived from hand to mouth, had not held a weapon in his life, yet spoke in Urdu became the target for revenge. All those who spoke Urdu, were clubbed as a single community who were to be targeted for revenge. But Urdu speakers who came from India, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh or Bengal, belonged to different nationalities—Punjabi, Baluchi, Sindhi—all were from different nationalities. But the ordinary Bengalis were under the impression that they all belonged to the same nationality. Hence they persecuted us.

You'll notice how in every place that lay on the railway route in Bangladesh had a predominantly Urdu speaking locality. The Urdu speaking people had migrated to Bangladesh in 1947 or 1965 because they were railway workers and had travelled by rail. They settled down everywhere there was the presence of a railroad. They had developed into a large community and they were privileged too. But when the country came to be divided, other people started taking revenge on them, and their properties were either destroyed or looted or usurped. The Urdu speakers were gradually shrinking and withdrawing. Our family too adopted this policy of going over to a predominantly Urdu-speaking locality and seeking shelter.



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

Once father with my two brothers and two sisters —I hadn't been born yet—had tried to get out of Alobajar and move to Mirpur-Mohammadpur because there was a large community of Urdu speakers there. Bangladesh came into existence on 16 December 1971, and they tried to cross over to this new country. And my father got arrested immediately by the Muktibahini soldiers. Mass arrests were quite common in those days. He was forcibly dragged away in front of my mother. When he was being hauled up in the vehicle, mother asked them, 'Where are you taking my husband? How will I get him back?' They replied, we'll let him go after interrogation.

In the mean time my family had fled towards Mirpur. They told us that they would take us to a peace meeting. They were being taken in a car, but in a different direction towards Gabtoli. Mother had told me that the vehicles that were moving towards Gabtoli weren't coming back. They were being finished off there. Mother was very apprehensive of what was going to happen because it seemed we would never get father back. So she pleaded with the soldiers of the Muktibahini, 'Please, my husband has never done anybody any harm. He has a hand to mouth existence and we have a hard life here. We have kids. We haven't done any harm to anybody. We were in a nice place. We haven't troubled any of our neighbours, nor have we faced any trouble from them. What is our crime? Why are you taking my husband away?' They replied, 'We'll interrogate him and let him go, and we're going to keep him in the police station for the time being, then in the Central Jail.' Saying this, they took him away. What would my mother do? She knew nobody who would help her trace her husband's whereabouts, or rescue him. All the Urdu speakers had fled. So every morning, with my two brothers and two sisters, she would wait at the gate of the Central Jail thinking, let me request people that my husband is inside, could you bring him out? There she met several Urdu-speaking women who were doing the same thing as her—waiting from morning to evening to night, then continuing the vigil the following morning. But they weren't getting back their husbands. They were taking back their dead bodies, sometimes these dead bodies didn't have heads. Mother thought if they killed



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

him, at least she could take back his dead body, so that she and her children would have the consolation that he has been killed. After this routine for four-five days, fortunately an Indian army soldier spotted her, wearing a burkha, standing with her four kids and shedding tears. He asked my mother in Bhojpuri dialect what was wrong. Bhojpuri is a dialect used in Bihar. So my mother told him, 'Brother, we belong to Patna, the same native land as yours. My husband is also from Patna. We are ordinary people. They've taken my husband away. It is four days now, and I have no information of his whereabouts. The soldier was a Hindu from Bihar. He told her, 'Give me your husband's name and give me his description. Let me go inside and check. Look, sister, I can't give you my word whether he is alive or not; but if he is alive, I assure you I'll bring him back.' He checked and saw that father was alive.

My father told me how this Indian soldier held him by the hand and said, I'm taking you away. Just come quietly with me. Father told me that the very same night all the Biharis who were being held inside the Central Jail had been taken to the firing squad, made to stand in a row, shot and beheaded. That was how it would be done. That soldier told father, 'Your wife and kids are waiting outside. I'll smuggle you out anyhow.' That night all the people in the same serial number with father were executed. He only made a sign—'I'm Mohammad Siraj'; he was covered in blood. When I was a child, I found it very amusing that after bath, a part of my father's head retained water. They beat him up so badly that there was a serious head injury. There was actually a hole where he had been struck with a scythe. Father told us how he had suffered severe blood loss as he was beaten up badly. So this Indian soldier held father's hand, talked to him in Bhojpuri to confirm his identity and somehow brought him to the gate and handed him over to my mother, saying, 'Sister, I promised I would give your husband back to you if I found him alive. But I won't be able to take any responsibility beyond this point. You are aware of the situation only too well in this country. The Bengalis are taking revenge. Now it's your responsibility how you will take your husband from here.' He told mother, 'Many people from your community are in Noorjehan Road, Mohammadpur. The International Committee for



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

Red Cross has set up several camps there. If you can once reach the camp, you are safe. That's the only way all of you can survive. But if you are outside the camp, I don't know how you'll manage to remain alive. Make your husband wear that burkha of yours, and take your kids and start walking. It is evening already. So you'll be able to make it under the cover of darkness.' So mother followed his instructions and came to the refugee camp on Noorjehan Road, and registered their names in ICRC, again as refugees. Another phase of struggle began. From that temporary camp on Noorjehan Road, they were brought to the Geneva Camp in 1972, where each family was given 8 x 8 feet rooms. Starting all over again, once more in the new camp allotted to us—but there was a nagging fear all the time—the fear that we would be killed, we won't be able to survive.

ICRC gave an option to this community: this is a temporary refugee camp for the time being, and we are providing a temporary shelter to you people. But what is the solution? Would you like to go back to India, from where you came, or do you want to move to Pakistan, or do you want to stay on here, in Bangladesh? The maximum number of people, in sheer fear of their lives, gave the option that they wouldn't like to either go back to India, or stay on in Bangladesh—they wanted to go to Pakistan. So the ICRC filled up a form stating that all Urdu speaking people who are in the camp do not wish to stay on in Bangladesh, in which case they would be given the option of either going to India or Pakistan. After this they began a negotiation with the Pakistan government. They told them, after all these are your people. You abandoned them after using them as a friendly army. Now who is going to take their responsibility? There were about six lakh Urdu speakers then, who were trapped, and who were claiming that we will not stay in this country, neither do we want to go to India—we want to go to Pakistan. The Pakistan government vehemently denied their claim saying that all those who are in Bangladesh are citizens of that country, they are Bangladeshis. How can we give clearance to seven crore Bengalis to come over to Pakistan? Pakistan has two divisions—east and west. They are living in East Pakistan, and will continue to live there. But ICRC was a huge



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

organization. They pressurized the government with the argument: how can you shrug off responsibility? These are people with a different ethos, a different nationality, a separate community who are living here, in a tremendously backward situation, victims of revenge. If we let them go they will all get killed. You will have to take responsibility for them. The Pakistan government said that they wouldn't be able to take everybody. Thus on the initiative of the ICRC, the Pakistan government entered into a tripartite agreement in Shimla in 1974. The signatories were the three countries, viz. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The three parties came to the following negotiation: how are you going to take back the 90,000 Pakistani soldiers who are in India? People who claim to be stranded Pakistanis, and identify themselves as Urdu-speaking Biharis, how are you going to take back this community? Technically speaking Pakistan safeguarded their interest in the agreement. They laid stress on the issue of the 90,000 soldiers, and sidelined the other issue with the argument that technically we cannot identify them as Pakistanis, because seven crore Bengalis were also in Pakistan. Does that mean we are going to take back those seven crores of people? They suggested three categories to identify 'stranded Pakistani nationals' and said all people who do not fulfil these criteria would be considered nationals of Bangladesh. They knew beforehand that the Urdu-speaking Bihari community was actually very small, and very few people were in the direct employ of the Pakistan Central Government, and they were all railway based. The railways were under the Provincial Government. They proposed a definition of the 'stranded Pakistani'

- (i) those who were born in West Pakistan and have been somehow stranded in Bangladesh, they would be identified as 'stranded Pakistanis' and the Pakistan government would be committed to taking them back, and shall take them back;
- (ii) Pakistan Central Government employees, not provincial, they would also be identified as 'stranded Pakistanis' and the Pakistan government would repatriate them;
- (iii) the 25,000 people in general who have lost their family members in the war.



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

Now this was no criteria at all—repatriating 25000 people! So these were the three categories. For those who were unable to fulfil these categories, the terms of the agreement clearly stated that they would not be able to claim that they were 'stranded Pakistanis' or citizens of Pakistan. The government kept to the terms of the Shimla Agreement and took back those people. But there was one little point—the first two categories were all right, but for the third category, the Awami League did not take the 25000 from the refugee camps. Instead they singled out all the hardened criminals (who were also Urdu speaking) languishing in jails for atrocities on Bengalis and killing Bengalis, and sent them over to Pakistan on the quota for the third category of 25000 people. But all those people should have undergone trial. So the docile people who hadn't done any crime languished on in these camps, and the culprits, the war criminals went scot-free. Thus all three quotas got fulfilled and Pakistan clearly stated that they had honoured the quota and there were no more people allotted to them on any quota, and we won't be able to identify this community as 'Pakistanis' any longer. Now it is the responsibility of the Bangladesh Government, and they would have to figure out how to keep them.

The incredible part of this story is even today about 3 lakh Urdu-speaking people are languishing in about 116 camps in Bangladesh. They are leading an extremely degrading, inhuman life in 8 x 10 feet rooms, with no sanitation, no education; yet their plight had become only too clear way back in 1974. But Bangladesh government is not coming out clear on the terms of the agreement in which all the people other than those under the three categories are not being recognized as Pakistani citizens. Even today they are being given the false hope of an option to return to Pakistan, when there actually isn't any. The government is least bothered—they've been given the option, haven't they?

We have felt that from 1974 to 2001 the Bangladesh government is settled with the idea that these people don't belong here, and they will eventually go to Pakistan. But the option was unofficial. We've proved this. We, who have been brought up in this Geneva Camp, hear right from the time that we are awake, that we aren't citizens of this country. We are Pakistanis,



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

we'll go to Pakistan. Why, then, are we speaking in Bengali? Why are we going to Bengali medium schools? There have been so many hurdles all along. Yet we continued with our education, and waited and watched thinking let's see what comes at the end. If we can move to Pakistan, we shall, and if we need to stay here, we will.

A group of about twentyfive-thirty boys and girls from our camp passed SSC, then HSC in 1999, but we had some bitter experience during SSC. Our camp school was from KG to class VIII. We didn't have any registration, so in order to sit for our SSC examination we had to go to another school. So from the Geneva Camp about twenty of us in search of a school outside the camp, a Bengali medium school. There was one on Noorjehan Road. So we took admission there. The school had a totally different atmosphere. In our camp school, teachers were Urdu speaking—they would teach Bengali, but were Urdu speaking; then their English pronunciation was like ours. We had never done PT [Physical Training, a compulsory subject upto the school leaving exam, involving drill, exercise, sports, etc.], never sung any national anthem till then. Yet we were students of class eight. On our first day at school (we had taken admission in class IX), all of us were gathered on the grounds for the singing of the national anthem. The twenty of us were standing in a group, and we were unable to sing a syllable of the anthem because we didn't know it. We never belonged, you see, that song was not for us. The entire school was singing '*Amar sonar bangla*' except the twenty of us. Everybody observed our silence, including the teachers. When we came to our class after that morning session we could feel that a negative vibe was doing the rounds—they are Biharis after all, their fathers were our enemies—these started getting circulated. In school, the seating arrangement was three students in a row. Our group stuck together, because we were twenty in all, and two rows were exclusively for Bengali students. They could answer, but we couldn't. We were feeling so helpless. Things came to such a pass that there was a great fight—some had bloodied nose, some had their mouths cut open. However, in that school there were three-four Hindu teachers who could understand our pain and empathized with us. They realized that we were the victims. They sat



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

all of us students down together one day and explained, 'Look, you are abusing them, but what is their fault? How can they be held responsible for what their grandfathers or fathers did? They have done no wrong! They too, just like you, are trying to study properly and remain in this country, or move to Pakistan. If they go, let them go, but at least let them study now, make friends with them. They have no fault.' After that the other students were very cordial with us, and mingled with us just like friends. We no longer sat in one corner of the class, I made four friends. We shared seats with one another—there wasn't any segregation any longer. Thus we spent the two years in classes IX and X.

Then came the phase of registration for SSC, where a form needed to be filled in with a permanent residential address. The teachers sat a meeting and the general consensus was that the Geneva Camp address wouldn't be considered valid, and the Board might not allow us to sit for the exam. Just imagine! There had been no discussion on the status of our studentship until then. And this was an incident as late as 1994/95. What were we to do? Which address to give? At last a Hindu teacher, Madhab sir hit upon a solution. He used to take Maths for us. He suggested that five of us were to give his residential address as our permanent address; and similarly four of our teachers—Khalil sir, our Geography teacher offered his address for another five, and two other teachers offered to cover the rest of the ten. We filled up the forms, and duly passed our exam, and entered college.

We had matured somewhat and had come to understand that we were to stay, but the people of the camp and my parents wanted to go to Pakistan. There was an organization SPGRC who were creating a ruckus with the slogan '*adha roti khayengey Pakistan jayengey*' [lit. 'We'll eat half a roti, but we'll surely go to Pakistan']. But it was nothing but a fraudulent hope, a fraudulent procession. They too had understood that this community can never be transported to Pakistan. They too knew the terms of the tripartite Shimla Agreement, but somehow what we realized was that the governments of Pakistan, Bangladesh and the opposition party in Bangladesh were playing dirty politics with us, our fate, and were gaining political mileage.



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

Jamat never wanted our community to go to Pakistan, or be well established here. No wonder they supported SPGRC, who advocated the exodus to Pakistan—keep your stentorian voices up, shout all the time. They had thought that if this hullabaloo can be sustained, the blame for all the war crimes could be planted squarely on us because we would be sitting ducks—it would be something like: look, they have done it and they are still lingering because they are to blame. But this allegation has been disproved. War criminals are being put on trial, prosecuted and being hanged. The list has names of all the 116 camps, including the Geneva Camp; but not a single Urdu speaker would be listed there. We've seen names of four to five Urdu speakers who are no longer alive; who have either moved to Pakistan, or are absconding. The governments have made a farce of our lives. They knew only too well that they are citizens of Bangladesh and they must be given citizenship. This should have been done, but they did not implement. The opposition wanted this ruckus to continue. No youth group had been formed until then, who would guide the community to their real home, their legitimate address.

When we passed HSC, we decided we would take our community to their true address. Are we Pakistanis in reality or citizens of Bangladesh? That was the first time we thought about connecting with people, communicating with them, and if we had to go to Pakistan, then fight for it under a proper guide; we would write about it, approach the issue legally. If not, then we would adhere to the modalities of becoming a Bangladeshi.

The Urdu poet Ahmed Ilyas was associated with Alfalah, an NGO, which used to run Alfalah Model Clinic in our Geneva Camp. They had started an awareness programme on HIV-AIDS, and we would go to the programme. He would be awfully enthused seeing young people like us, and would talk to us. He was an Urdu speaker and besides spreading the routine HIV awareness message, he would lightly touch upon the fact that: you are citizens of this country, you are being educated; you must come forward. So we mustered up courage and decided, why don't we go to him! So fifteen-sixteen of us from the Geneva Camp who had just passed their HSC, and were aiming at further studies in college, went to him and asked him, 'We want to know



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

what should we do?' He replied without mincing words, 'This is the first time since 1971—and this is the year 2000—that you are coming to me from your community. Of course you will, and also go to others too, because you will have to figure out your own identity for yourselves, you need to understand—and I can give this to you in writing—that you are not Pakistanis; you are citizens of this country and your rights are the same as the rights of a Bengali, equal as any other native of this country. You have to establish yourselves here and it is you who have to take up this responsibility. From among those who have come to me today, some may choose to abandon the group; maybe just one person or even four persons will carry on, but you will have to take up the responsibility.' We said, 'Okay, we'll take up the responsibility. What needs to be done?' Right at the outset he gave us two names and said, 'You will first go and meet them.' One of them was a professor of Dhaka University, Professor Dr. C R Abrar of the Department of International Relations. The other was the poet Asad Chaudhuri. He told us, 'I know them personally and both of them are sympathetic to the Urdu speakers. They will be able to guide you.' So we thought, let's go to Dhaka University first.

I still remember clearly we had fixed an appointment with Dr Abrar over phone before going over to him. It was 14 February. So we told him about what we were looking for, and he appreciated the fact that so many young people had come to him from the Geneva Camp for the first time. He said, 'I'm with you. You commence your struggle. What I propose to do is to begin an intercommunity dialogue in Dhaka University where you will give four speeches on four specific issues. We will invite young people from the various departments of Dhaka University who will engage with you; and also a few intellectuals like Shahdeen Malik (a friend), Dr. Hasan Arif who was the Attorney-General then.' So we prepared ourselves. My friends Hasan, Pappu, Shabana, and me—the four of us gave separate statements. That was the first time we felt that we too were part of this country, this country belonged to us too. That was the beginning of our struggle. We formed an association—Association of Young Generation of Urdu Speaking Community. I'm the Founder-President—still am; and began with about forty



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

people. We decided to commemorate certain national days like 21 February, 16 December, the first day of Baishakh; and along with these widen our circle by meeting Bengali intellectuals. We went and met Asad Chaudhuri at his Green Road residence. He was so pleased that so many young people had come to meet him after so many years! He appreciated our efforts and told us, 'Go ahead with your objective. I'll be there by you, and help you. You people are much superior Bangladeshis than me—this I strongly believe.' Saying this he gave us twenty five taka and said, 'Buy pen and paper with this. Have sittings every month, and draw this community out of darkness.'

### End of part 1

Next, we visited senior advocate M I Farouqui, an Urdu speaker. I think it would be interesting if we recount his story here. He too had come from Patna in Bihar. So we told him that we come from this community. 'That the community I come from too. Now, tell me what you want.' We told him that if we had any rights at all over here, we would like to reclaim them. 'Very well,' he said, 'I shall give you legal support; you proceed.' He told us a story that day. He said, 'I've been born in Patna and came away to this side with my parents. So I became one of this country. But I've gone to Patna and brought with me a small lump of soil from my village. I've given instructions to my children that, that little lump of soil should be the first bit of earth dropped on my coffin when I'm buried.' That lump of earth is still there in his house. Just imagine, the pain of it all—how much love a man can have for his place of birth! He had come from Patna to Bangladesh, then he'll leave this country forever one day; but that earth is invaluable precious to him. I was so moved, listening to him.

Then the year 2000 arrived. Voter lists were being drawn up for the national elections. The officials had gone everywhere, except our camp. They hadn't entered our camp. We mustered up some courage and went to the Election Commission, wrote a memorandum on our letterhead saying: we are Bangladeshis (we hadn't written that we are not Bangladeshis), we are eighteen years old but our names are not enlisted in the voters' list, we find they are



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

missing; kindly include them. People from SB, NSI were present there and were watching everything. They snapped at us saying, 'How dare you! You Pakistanis, how come you want your names on the voter list? We'll haul all of you up.' We gathered courage and replied, 'Why will you arrest us? We've submitted a memorandum, respond to that. We've committed no crime. I'm a citizen of this country; I've been born here.'

We had already started reading the Constitution bit by bit, though some of us were from commerce, some from arts, some from science—none of us had any training from the legal angle. So we went to M I Farouqui's chamber and told him, 'They've snapped at us and sent us back. Now what do we do?' 'They can't do this to anybody,' he replied, and explained, 'Why? They simply can't legally, because you are citizens of Bangladesh. This is your country. So what is to be done? Let's give them a legal notice. You'll have to move a writ.' Now we had no clue what 'writ' was. So he explained, 'According to Article 102, if anybody has faced any violation of any Fundamental Right, then he can invoke Article 102 and reclaim his right. Then the court can compel the respective government departments to reinstate the rights. So this is writ [petition]. Do you want to move a writ petition?' 'Of course we shall,' we replied. The modus operandi would be: hand in copies to the Election Commission and the Home Ministry with the plea that the ten of us, by birth Bangladeshi, do not have our names on the voter list; our names must be included. We did not that we are not citizens. All we are saying is that we are Urdu speakers, we are Biharis and we live in camps. Our names are missing, so our names may please be included. A legal notice was served. They ignored it. We served it a second time; this time too it was ignored.

Then in 2001 we filed a writ petition in the High Court. The funny thing was, the court too turned us away saying, we shall not accept such a petition, because we know these people aren't Bangladeshi; they are stranded Pakistanis and they have been given the option. My court will not accept this petition. But when we moved to another court, it was accepted. A rule was issued in 2003 by which we were able to get the ruling: the 10 petitioners are Urdu



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

speakers and Biharis. They live in camps but are citizens of Bangladesh. Their names must be included in the voters list. The directive was given to Election Commission and the Home Ministry. Our names were included in the voters list. History was created in 2003 when ten people from this community, from the Geneva Camp, who knew they were Pakistanis got their names registered on the voters list of Bangladesh, and became Bangladeshis. But there was a technical problem in our drafting because we wanted only ten people to be included in the voters list. Hence when other people were appealing to the Election Commission for inclusion of their names, they were refusing point blank, citing the court order which said we will give it to ten people and no more. This happened in 2003.

Just five years later, in 2007/2008 when the government launched the National ID Card programme for the first time, they said that those who had all the requisite papers would get all possible facilities. We saw that even if it was a rickshaw-puller living in a camp, and he wanted a license, he would have to have the ID card. Without the ID card, nothing could be done. What would I do? I was at Geneva at that time, on a three-month Swiss fellowship for minorities. I was in touch with my friends, my group who had fought rights. How could this happen, we wondered. The ten of us would get our cards all right, but what about the others? So I asked my friends to work on this. They were getting a lot of materials on caste conflict, Urdu speaking issues through me. I had the opportunity to move through the Bangladesh Mission to drive home the fact that they too are Bangladesh nationals, and needed to be given ID cards. So I gave whatever push I could from there. And here the people from our group contacted another youth group from Mirpur who were working on the issue of rehabilitation. Their leader was Sadakat Khan. So we made another group of eleven ready from there. They moved a fresh writ in 2008, in which they said: we Urdu speakers who are living in 116 camps, all of us are Bangladeshi nationals; yet our names are not listed in the voters list. We want to include our names on the list, and get ID cards. So in the writ, it was specified that it included 'all those Urdu speakers living in the camps.' So in that same year, the court passed the order that



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

everybody living in the 116 camps in Bangladesh are Bangladeshi nationals. They are Urdu speakers and they are Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis. This was a truly wonderful thing. We received our nomenclature from the court that we are Bangladeshis, Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis—the court was saying this—and ID cards must be provided to them.

So all of us got our ID cards, all of us became registered voters. The court also said something significant in that order—if an elderly person identifies himself as a Pakistani, leave them to their own fate. But someone who was identifying himself as a Bangladeshi and seeking an ID card, give the cards to them. This judgement of 2008 was such a clear judgement that a community that was stateless, came into the mainstream. Their statelessness came to an end. This became an example worldwide. I had gone to the Hague, Netherlands on a first ever Conference on Global Statelessness. I had a presentation on statelessness. Everybody from Irine Khan to a host of international scholars had mentioned in their speeches that the best practice on statelessness had been done by the Urdu speaking community—how the stateless, displaced community came into the mainstream through their struggle. The 2008 judgement favouring us was thus a universal judgement, a very clear judgement. We cast our vote for the first time in 2008.

Then we saw that though we had become voters, there was no particularly significant change in our lives. We were not getting our birth certificates, which is mandatory with ID cards. A birth certificate is mandatory even in school admission. Education is gradually spreading in our community, and some local Urdu speakers who are now part of the diaspora in the US, they started supporting us—you continue with your education, carry on with your education. Now our children want to study, but when they approach schools for admission, where's the birth certificate? Without birth certificate there will be no admission. So we approached them again only to hear that birth certificates won't be issued at any address in the camp. Meanwhile in 2012 there was a Global Youth Leadership Summit as part of a UNESCO programme, where I was selected as a junior facilitator. I went to the US and met and Namati, an NGO working on



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

legal empowerment issues, and help accessing community based para-legal civil documents. I told them that we neither have passport, nor birth certificates, nor trade license. So I want to do something about it. They went on a fund raising drive, and in 2013 the para-legal programme was started in Bangladesh. There are nearly sixteen trained para-legals in the various camps. They go to various places in the camps and motivate people, telling them what a birth certificate is, the utility of a birth certificate, how a birth certificate can be applied for, what is a passport, how a passport can be obtained, and so on. In this way we are not only communicating the message to them, we are also giving them the service. We bring them to our centre, help them in filling out the form. To make it sustainable, we take the people of our camp, including women to the city Corporation; our para-legals escort them there, show them around, guiding them—this is how you submit your application, this is where they will receive it. In this way in the first year itself about two hundred and fifty birth certificates could be obtained. Because that is a mandatory requirement for any school admission, people were coming to our centre in droves, with the request, 'Please help us get the birth certificate for our kids.' Earlier they would approach brokers to do it for them The brokers would take 500 -600 taka, while we give them free service along with legal support. So now we were able to obtain birth certificates quite easily; but one year passed, yet we couldn't manage to own a passport.

In 2014 we began a community dialogue in which we invited all passport applicants who had not been issued passports. We also invited some intellectuals like barrister Hasan Arif, Sara Hossain, then we brought Mafidul bhai. All of them asked, 'What is their excuse for not issuing passports?' We said: we had applied for twelve passports from Saiyadpur, Khulna, Maimansingh, Mohammadpur, Mirpur—these five places. Passport addresses were issued in camp addresses for Saiyadpur, Khulna, Maimansingh, but not for Mohammadpur and Mirpur. Their reason was that the Special Branch officers have given instructions not to issue passports to Biharis and Rohingyas. So our para-legals asked, 'Where is the instruction coming from?' The answer was Home Ministry. I talked to the SB officials yet again and inquired, 'Please could you



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

tell me why passports are not being issued to us?' They said, 'We have a written statement.' So I asked for the written statement saying, 'By which law are you clubbing us and the Rohingyas together? Biharis are Bangladeshis, and the Rohingyas are refugees. Biharis have ID cards. You are bound to give us passports.' They replied that they have a written statement from the Home Ministry. I told them to give me that paper. They didn't. But there is a way out. In such situations you can invoke the Right to Information Act and ask for the specific passport policies for Biharis. So in 2014 I invoked RTI and applied to the Home Ministry posing three questions:

1. Is there any directive on the part of the ministry regarding issuance of passports to Urdu speakers?
2. How is it that passports have been issued in Saiyadpur, Khulna, Maimansingh?
3. Why are Mirpur and Mohammadpur being excluded?

I gave the application, but there was no response. I waited and appealed; no response this time too. Then we complained to the RTI Commission. About fifteen days later, a letter was issued, and a summons was issued in my name and one in the name of the Home Ministry for a court hearing on 31 December 2014: Both parties are required to be present themselves and the disparity that both parties have regarding information will be resolved. I talked to barrister Sarah Hossain. Sarah-apa said, 'Very well, Khaled, you go, but it'll be better if you take an expert from our centre. You'll answer, but that person will help you.' So we took barrister Akmal along with us. On reaching the place we realized that we had reached there on time, but there was nobody from the Home Ministry. Then they told us that the ministry had asked for more time—about a week more. They have more queries about this. So they told us, 'You may leave now; you will be summoned later.' After we came away, we received a summons for a hearing on 25 January 2015 at 10 am. On 22 January I received my answer in the form of a six-page document from the ministry delivered at my home address in the camp.



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

What surprised me was, in 2008, the year that we got our ID cards, three people had taken the initiative to apply for passport. The passport authorities had issued a letter to the Home Ministry that these individuals are Bangladeshi nationals, they have ID cards and are applying for passport. Please instruct us whether to issue passports. The response came in 2009 that those Pakistani nationals who are stranded, have owed allegiance to Bangladesh and received their ID cards are eligible for passports, and will get them. A copy of this letter was given to the DC, to the passport authorities, and to all other DCs. They gave me all these documents, which meant there were no hurdles any more in the way of issuance of passports. I told the experts that I've got a valid document. Sarah-apa told me, 'Go to the hearing on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and see what happens.' So I went. The Additional Secretary in the Home Ministry was present. The hearing began. I was asked why I was asking for this information from the Home Ministry and what was I looking for. I said that I work in the area of legal empowerment and that the people of my community are being denied passport. I wanted to know the reason of this and had put in an application to them. But on the 22<sup>nd</sup> we got the passports. Then the representative of the Ministry was asked, 'Has all the information been provided?' He replied, yes. We have already declared that all those who have ID cards will receive their passports. The Information Commission now asked them whether this information had been widely disseminated by them in the print media or on any website. The Information Commission expressed surprise that they themselves didn't know of this directive. They said, 'It is incredible that the educated section of the society does not know of this; how do you expect the people living in the camps to be aware? What you should have done is to widely publicise it in the media, put it up on the website. Had this information been there in the media website the SB officials couldn't have harassed them.

He was instructed to put up all the information on the website, and I was told to resubmit the rejected passport applications, which I did. Then an SB officer arrived at the USA camp with two passports—for a couple. Now the SB officer said, but you aren't citizens. Where is your



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

electricity bill? Having an ID card does not mean you are a national of this country, and several other things. That's when the para-legals intervened and said, 'Look here, we have a written order from the home ministry.' We showed it to him. He asked for a copy of that six-page directive. Then he asked us to bring a certificate from the councillor. So we gave all that, and he issued two passports. So we got two passports a second time. But Mohammad Javed, who had applied from the Geneva Camp, didn't get his. He applied; an SB officer came, but said, I won't be able to issue a passport. Why? Because you don't have electricity bill, gas bill, no legal papers or documents—only an ID card won't do. We said, we have the Home Ministry order. But he replied, 'Well, it hasn't been sent to me. So this order is of no use to me.' Saying this he went away. We applied again for a third time. Again SB officers arrived. This time they said, we don't know of this order. We'll ask our seniors. The seniors said, we don't consider this order to be valid. We applied for a fourth time. This time too it was rejected. However, the SB officer gave us as clue this time. He told us, 'Get it from an address outside the camp. I know you are a Bangladeshi national, but we won't be able to issue a passport to a camp address.' A man who has applied for a passport in 2013 hasn't been able to get one till date. We brought it to the National Human Rights Commission. It is six months now, that the Commission has taken this up as a case, given letters to the Home Ministry, Passport Authority, but till date there has been no visit either from the SB, or the Passport Authority. Now we are planning to take Dr. Shahdeen Malik's advice and move court and take a legal order; otherwise one SB this time, another SB on another occasion will simply harass us no end. This huge section of humanity has been living in such dehumanized conditions for the past forty / forty five years; they have accepted this country as their own, yet the country has given them no opportunity.

FA. You have spoken about your childhood—how you have had to struggle a lot, viz. the issue of the national anthem and other things. Would you like to tell us something about that?

KH. That was very painful indeed. We were so neglected in school that we dared not approach anybody to strike up a friendship. I had to conceal my Bihari identity and project myself as a



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

Bengali. I could speak and understand Bengali after a year, but didn't have the courage. The one good thing about this community is, they are Muslims. If somebody wants to hide that I'm not a Bihari, I'm a Bengali, there's no one to understand that. If I say I'm an Urdu speaker I'm not a Bengali, in that case I'm a minority. What we have seen in our struggle is that there is frustration here. The youth are frustrated. What will they do? Will they merge with the Bengalis by becoming Bengalis; or will they hold on to their Indian habits and traditions? Maybe our religion is the same, but there are lots of differences. Muharram is a festival that is not observed by Bengalis, but we do. It is a ritual, a tradition of grief that we nurture. If I become Bengali, I'll have to forget all that; forget the beauty of our cuisine; forget the special rituals in our weddings. The rituals after childbirth in our community are very different from Bengali rituals. There are so many rituals that we have borrowed from the Hindus—that tradition lingers on. Yet we are frustrated, and our next generation even more so. What are they supposed to do? Become Bengalis, forgetting their language, tradition, or will they remain a minority? We think that this community should remain as an Urdu-speaking community. We believe in diversity. Several nationalities coexist in any country, and so shall we, practicing our beliefs and traditions and habits. For example we like meat more than fish—that what we are habituated with.

FA. You've spoken about rituals that are different, and those that you want to hold on to, because merging those rituals might create problems. Would you like to tell something about those rituals?

KH. Primarily in weddings, for example, the rituals are different in Bengali and Urdu-speaking community weddings. There will be two witnesses, one will give the *wakalat*, the *nikah* will be completed, there will be the *quabul*—that's all; it's not simply *boubhat*. In our weddings we have the *sindoor* application, which is entirely a Hindu custom. Though we are Muslims, we have this ritual. We apply something called *sandaal*, a powder-like substance. The Hindus apply *sindoor* with their hands, but we put the *sandaal* in a little perforated chamber in the silver ring



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

of the groom. This is used for application of the sandaal. This is an art, part of the culture. If this is not done, the wedding somehow remains incomplete. That's the beauty. Then there are separate rituals for '*gayey halud*'. There are certain specific dishes that are prepared before marriage with sweets. This is called *gulgulla*, part of the Indian tradition, cooked in both the bride's and the groom's homes. This sweet must be taken by three women in the wee hours of the morning right when the *fajar azan* sounds, to the mosque and kept there. Along with that a lamp of flour dough must be made, with a cotton wick and ghee. That lamp will burn all along. These rituals are not there in any other community.

Before there is a birth in the family, when the mother is in the seventh month of pregnancy, there is the ritual of *godbharai*. The expectant mother is given new saris, all the relatives gather and many varieties of fruits are given on her lap. Then a replica of a boy and a girl are made out of flour dough, and she is asked to choose. If she chooses the boy, she is supposed to have a baby boy; else a baby girl. These rituals will get lost.

But there are many people among us who are getting educated and going out of the camp, merging into the mainstream. They are hiding the fact that they are Biharis. These people are always in utter denial of their true identity—they claim not to follow any ritual. All they want to do is to hire an apartment and transform myself into a Bengali. Where's the village homestead? They'll make something up.

FA. What would be your answer if I ask you where your village homestead is?

KH. This is a tricky one, very confusing. For those of us who live in Bangladesh, it is a very common question we have to face. We try to find out where our roots lie, but ultimately reply Dhaka, just because we aren't able to pinpoint whether it is Noakhali or Barishal. I don't have a village homestead, you see. So then the safe reply is Dhaka. The Urdu speakers are urban-based. But for those who have a home in Saiyadpur will say that he is from Saiyadpur—and

## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

frankly too. Same goes with somebody whose house is in Rangpur. For me, ultimately I would confess, I don't have a village home to speak of, because I'm a Bihari. That's how I would reply.

FA. We'll go back a little. You told us about the struggle your father had to undergo when he came here at the age of ten, in 1947. Your uncle was seven. How did they manage to adjust—if you could tell us something about that.

KH. As I told you, living in his maternal uncle's family, who was also starting a new life, father became a child labour, working in the railways on the rail tracks, even as a porter. Then he came away to Dhaka and continued to work there. There was a hotel where the Town Hall is now. He was a waiter there. The hotel was built when I was born; and before that he used to work as a porter in Chakbajar. We would wait for him to come home and bring some basic groceries or cooking a meal. At one point these jobs weren't there anymore. He worked at Sufia Boarding for pretty long. When I was born in 1981 he had the job in the hotel. There were many Urdu speakers in the locality of the hotel and the Town Hall. Because he was a waiter, he had a salary, and then there were tips of course, so that was a good time for our family. My elder brothers were working too, and were supporting the family. He had a dream that he would give me every opportunity to study, because he couldn't; and he was fighting poverty all the time. He had lots of hopes for me. He would confide in certain good customers of the hotel that his son (i.e. me) was studying in class VIII or IX, and I want him to continue studying, and they would assure him, why not? Sure he will.

Meantime, from the 1980s to 1995 people from various camps began to get passports, sell of their house in the camp and move away to Paksitan. Our family too though about goingto Pakistan. My eldest brother was asked to go to Pakistan, test the waters there, then take us one by one. We didn't have any money then, but there was a trend those days in the camp—some Urdu speaking youth would take batches of people, cross the border to India then to Amritsar, from there cross the border again to Pakistan. This group would do this circuit and return again. This became a lucrative business. They became brokers. They would tell the youth in the camp,



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

if you want to go to Pakistan, we'll travel by road, a trip of two months, and each of you will have to shell out so much money. They would travel with groups of twenty / thirty or forty people through India, Calcutta, Delhi, Amritsar, Lahore, Karachi. Our family decided to send my eldest brother through this route. He was very young then. He was a CNG technician, had a garage of his own, he had even bought a car. But that had an accident and a man was killed. He was petrified of being persecuted for it and decided he would leave the country. There was a broker gang that operated, and my brother left with them. Two months later we received a letter from him in Urdu saying, only if a child becomes a burden should the parents send him on this arduous path to Pakistan. He gave us all the details of the pain he had to withstand in order to reach Pakistan. But he started work very soon, and began sending us money. Then it was decided that my eldest sister, who was married would go with her husband, but with a proper passport. My father was very keen to go too, because he was apprehensive that he would die, and besides, his three daughters and two sons had already gone there. But he couldn't understand the changes that were happening in the country. He somehow couldn't forget the privations that he faced here. He would always say, even if you have to tolerate hardships, leave this country. He used to believe that Bengalis would have their revenge one day. 'They've done it with me, and you won't be any exception either,' he would tell us. So we gathered money and sent him over in 2003. But by that time I had a distinct anti-Pakistan attitude, I was talking about my community, that they would stay in Bangladesh, and my second brother and I were resolute in our stand that we won't go to Pakistan. But father, who was so keen to leave, had a completely adverse reaction once he reached there. He didn't find his peace. Instead, within six-seven months he was taken ill and started insisting that he be sent back to Bangladesh because this country was very hot and the food was not agreeing with him. Our plan was all of us would slowly move in with him, because we had spent quite a lot sending him over. But he died of brain stroke. He could never come back, and we too couldn't bring him back then. I was a student then. Had I been in the position that I am today, I would surely have



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

brought him back. This is a deep hurt that I carry within me—that my father died yearning to return to this country.

FA. In your recollections it is only too clear how a border can affect human lives. The borders between India and Bangladesh, for example, or between these two countries and Pakistan, if we take the subcontinent—how do you perceive the border psychologically or physically?

KH. It is a great tragedy I feel. It has been proved wrong now—Jinnah's claim that Hindus and Muslims can't coexist together. My experience says, had Pakistan not been divided, if the subcontinent had remained whole, so many people wouldn't have suffered in the way that they did. We could have travelled so easily between Dhaka and Delhi, Dhaka and Calcutta, and Calcutta and Dhaka. Things would have remained beyond borders. But in the name of religion? What religion? Who was Jinnah targeting? His claim that Muslims weren't safe here? Are they safe in Pakistan? This is the moot question: are they safe there? They're getting killed while saying their namaaz! Then what use is Pakistan? The largest concentration of Muslims are in India. Maybe we too could have remained there. Even if there was one single country by the name of India, Bharat or Hindustan, all of us could have made that a truly beautiful country. So many diverse communities would have coexisted. Didn't India have a Muslim President? Maybe a Muslim Prime Minister too would have been possible. But we are paying the price for the way religion had been used to fool us. And the origin was Pakistan. The very idea of Pakistan was a wrong idea, a flop idea. Dividing up this huge talented pool of human cultural resource—it was wrong. Our talents too have been wasted. Had we stayed in India, maybe the future would have been better for us. Father could have been properly educated. Maybe we could have made use of whatever we had there and made a life of our own. Teachers, poets scattered here and there: they too couldn't do anything worthwhile.

FA. Though Partition is a just historical fact, it holds a deeper meaning for you. How do you see Partition?



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

KH. Sure. I believe that my family, like so many others, are victims of 1947, victims 1971 and victims still. We, the Urdu speaking community, who migrated after Partition have been affected the most because of Partition. People from West Bengal haven't had to suffer that much, because they had their culture, their language, their community intact in Bangladesh. Similarly in the Indian side and the Pakistani sides of Punjab. It is only for us who migrated here, they were completely in a fish out of water situation. I don't think their struggle or sacrifice will ever end.

FA. How far has attire, food habits, or whatever remains has contributed to your development?

KH. We are still very attached to the culture of the camp. Father would wear kurta with pockets on both sides. This was not a Punjabi, and this kurta nobody could stitch outside the camp. Only tailors in the camp could. This was a typical dress of the Urdu speaking elders. Another dress that father used to wear is called *namastin*. This is like a sleeveless vest made of pure cotton, with pockets. There were only two tailors who would stitch them. This dress is no longer in vogue. Tailors can't stitch it now. We wear Aligarh pyjamas, never salwar-kameez like the pathans.

In food there is Mostakim kebab, Bihari kebab.

FA. You have so many memories, happy and sad. Will you care to share these memories / stories with the next generation?

KH. I think dissemination is extremely necessary in order to keep the tradition alive. I stay outside the camp these days. I have two sons, who speak Bengali right from the beginning; but my wife and I speak to each other in Urdu. They get confused at this strange sounding language emerging out of their house. They mix Urdu and Bengali. They say, 'Ma, ami anda khabo' [Mother I'll have an egg]. Now 'anda' is not a Bengali word, it's Urdu. The Bengali word for it is 'dim.' I feel amused at their language usage. When it rains, they'll say 'barish hochhey' instead of 'brishti hochhey.' So they are growing up with this strange mixture of two languages. I tell



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

them, 'You are studying in a good school, in YWCA. If you don't speak good Bengali, people will laugh at you.' So now he is learning both the languages properly.

I feel our next generation must be made aware of our memories, and also their identity. That is very important. If that is lost, and my boys start thinking of themselves as Bengalis, I won't be pleased at all. I believe that he will establish himself and proudly proclaim 'I'm an Urdu speaker.' Just as the Bengali is no super race, the Urdu speaker is also no super race. They should be able to speak English and Hindi with equal ease. I would want my next generation to grow up with diversity, and having many dimensions. They should be aware that they can and this should be advantageous for them. If I go to India, I can become untraceable. If I go to Bihar, I'll be able to speak fluent Hindi and Bhojpuri, again I'll be able to speak Urdu and English too. That's my strength. Why should I not pass on this strength to my sons? They will grow up with their identity. Today Urdu speakers have been reduced to butchers, barbers and rickshaw pullers; but that does not mean that Urdu speakers were butchers from the beginning. Urdu speakers led the Dhaka University; there were famous doctors, professors. Golam Mehdi was such a good doctor; Aijaz Ahmed was a leading orthopaedic surgeon in Bangladesh. This community has nothing to be sorrowful about. We are studying again; I've become the first lawyer from my community. There are many more who are progressing. There's bound to be a change, and the change will be rapid. More lawyers, doctors, poets, journalists will emerge from us. But the identity must be distinct—I'm an Urdu speaker, I'm a Bangladeshi.

FA. Any final remarks or comments?

KH. It is a pain, actually. Identity is a huge crisis worldwide. I feel all of us should try to understand one another. The problem is, we don't try to. Nobody wants to enter Geneva Camp because 'they' live there. Why? Come to us, talk to us. That is important. If I don't understand somebody, how can I claim that there is a fault in him? It is important to understand people. Men may have faults, but it is wrong to stigmatize a community because of a few who are bad. Every nationality has good and bad in equal measure. It should be our endeavour to bring the



## My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

wayward into the fold, and help them become better human beings. A good person will be able to understand another. This empathy helps a society move forward and foster peace. If we neglect the need to communicate, the talents remain hidden in us. We must allow proper fruition of talent. Only then can we live in peace.

