

My Parents' World: Inherited Memories

Interview details

Interview with Sraboni

Interviewed by Rituparna

RD. Would you please share with us stories you have heard from your grandfather or other members of your family, of your native place in Bangladesh? I shall take down notes, but you please feel free to continue; I shall not disturb you.

SG. My *thakurda* [paternal grandfather] passed away before I was born. I lost my grandmother too when I was a small child. Hence all the memories that I have are those that I've heard from my father and mother. My father's native place is in Konda in Dhaka district, and my mother hails from Narayanganj, also in Dhaka district. My grandfather's family, that is my father and others came away immediately after 1947-48. After the situation somewhat improved, my grandfather escorted my grandmother back to their village in East Pakistan. So a part of the family was living there. But after the situation in 1971, the entire family shifted here. As far as I can recall, there was some disturbance in East Pakistan around 1965, after which my mother was sent here, and she continued her studies here. She would visit her family back in Bangladesh occasionally; but her side of the family still lives in Bangladesh, i.e. my maternal grandfather and uncles.

The family of my [paternal] grandfather or *thakurda* came away, but the conditions were neither conducive nor convenient. They had to leave everything behind in the native village, practically wearing just what they had on. The Rajakars or Khan Senas [a paramilitary force trained by the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan during the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh; unleashed a reign of terror; primary function to systematically locate, arrest, torture and kill pro-Bangladesh nationalists, and loot and plunder at will, with full support of the Pakistan Army] had unleashed tremendous torture on the Hindus, and they had a wide net of cronies and spies who acted as informers. They would swoop down on any family that was migrating. My grandfather sent away his small kids and his wife, i.e. my grandmother to his maternal uncle's place in Dhaka district, and let it out that they were visiting him on account of a family function. My grandfather followed them the next day, locking his house, pretending that he too was joining them in the celebrations. They trailed him, but managed to give them the slip. My grandfather's uncle helped them come away via Tripura and Agartala.

Now when they came away in 1947/48, my great grandfather was already living here. He used to live in a rented house. Later, he bought some land. This was to rehabilitate his sister who was a child widow. She became a widow when she was only nine years old, and returned to her father. So this land was bought in her name. This place that I mentioned in Beliaghata, that was my *pishithakuma's* house [my great grand aunt]. On arrival, the family took up lodgings in that house.

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When my grandfather came here, he couldn't manage to do anything. He knew nobody. So he told his father that he wanted to go to Jalpaiguri because there were some people from his native place. In those days people from one's native place would help others. The family who owned Saha Nursery were settled in Jalpaiguri. They helped my grandfather a lot. Grandfather was a homeopathy doctor in Bangladesh. Jalpaiguri wasn't that developed in those days and there was a dearth of medical practitioners. So when he went there, they contacted people in a place called Kalirhat, where a sort of a wooden room was erected for him, and he started his medical practice. That was how he slowly managed to raise his family, and keep the home fires burning. But from what I've heard from my father, they had a very difficult life. He didn't seem to have very happy memories of childhood.

In those days a weekly market would gather in all localities. This was the *haat*. As college students, my father and his [paternal] uncles, viz. *gyethu* and *kaku* would go to villages quite far off from the haat and buy merchandise from the villagers at a relatively very low price, then bring them over to the haat and sell them at a substantial profit. Now we have a shop there. At the place where the shop is located, they first started displaying their wares—a mixed bag—matchboxes, *biri*, small trinkets, items for make up, etc. for sale. By and by, they cordoned off the area with tarpaulin sheets, and then with stone slabs and bricks. That's how the family managed to eke out a subsistence.

On my mother's side, mother would come and go once in a while. My mother's side of the family didn't stay on. Her uncles [*kaka*, younger paternal uncles], i.e. another set of my grandfathers, used to live here and she would come and stay with them on these visits.

RD. You've mentioned that these visits across the border were a continuous feature. Would you care to tell us a little more in detail about these visits? What would they feel about these visits, or was there any compulsion to go back?

SG. My paternal grandfather's family never went back, because they understood this was no longer possible. But my maternal grandfather's family went back. Now why they went back I really cannot tell, nor were the reasons disclosed to me. My mother's side of the family had a huge house there. Possibly they couldn't abandon all that. So they went on living there, despite all the trouble brewing around them.

RD. What kind of ties do you have with your maternal uncles who live in Bangladesh?

SG. Yes they live there. Mother visits them every two /three years. I had gone to them long time back, when was in class VIII. I've visited both my paternal grandfather's house in Konda, and maternal grandfather's house in Narayanganj. My father had told me to watch out for some trees near their house in Konda. He had told me that there were two trees at the entrance of their village. These were known as 'Buroburi gachh' [lit. 'old man and old woman tree']; and a banyan tree and a *pakur* tree flanked my grandfather's ancestral house. I've seen that banyan tree, though I haven't seen the *pakur*. There used to be a *lakshmi mandap*, i.e. a separate worship space for the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi. I've only seen its ruins. A Muslim family

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lives in our house now. That was what I saw when I went there in class VIII. There was another uncle I met—Gobindo kaku. He is still there with his family. My maternal grandfather's house is in the heart of Narayanganj town. It is still there. That's where my maternal uncles live.

RD. You had heard stories, and then you actually went there and saw everything for yourself. Would you tell us how you felt, seeing the real places, and connecting them to your memories?

SG. You see, the stories that I heard in childhood and what I saw when I was grown up—what one makes of these is somewhat different. That was also a long time ago. But what I felt was that tremendous emotional pull at the heartstrings at a mere mention of the village homestead in one's native place. I could understand the deep attachment that father had to his native place—'the people of my native land', 'my village homestead', he would say. There is some charm, some attachment. That is undeniable. When we made that trip, there were so many who could recognize my father. There were others who were asking about my *gyethu* and *kaku*. Then we met a Muslim farmer who told us how my grandfather had saved the life of his little boy when he was very ill. He said, 'This is my son. Look, *didibhai* [a term of endearment, usually for a young girl], this is whom your grandfather saved.' This is so good to hear! But with it there is a pang, somewhere deep down, a regret—why did we have to go away from here?

A prosperous river flowed by our house. Suddenly you relive the pain of locking up your own house and moving on—just like that, overnight. Here were all the people you knew, your familiar surroundings. Leaving all that behind must have been agonizing. I too feel the pain, maybe not as severely as mother or father, because Bangladesh is still their *desh*, their native land. They have certainly come to accept India, but the position of 'native land' is still accorded to Bangladesh. Interestingly enough, whenever my uncles and aunts on my mother's side of the family, or on my father's side come together, the language they speak is their own East Bengal dialect. When I was a kid, it used to be great fun hearing them speak: 'What language do they speak?' I would wonder. Nowadays I feel sad, because truly this was our language. I miss speaking that language, because it was our language.

RD. You've told us that during family get-togethers you use your own native dialect; yet once you are out, there is an endeavour to change it. This use of language, one at home and another for the world outside—would you like to tell us something more about this constant balancing act?

SG. If I go into a little more detail, it would be something like keeping an external persona—almost like the use of the more familiar, everyday *chalita bhasha* or the spoken language for speaking and the *kathya bhasha* or typical language spoken in this part of Bengal. When we are out, we speak the *kolkattaiya* tongue [the usual standardized Bengali spoken by the West Bengal people, though there are distinct variations in language usage that varies from one part of the city to another, that only a discerning linguist can identify]. Yet when we are with our own people or have relatives visiting us from Bangladesh, it is astounding with what felicity our elders break into their native dialect. That is something we simply can't master. Our

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generation simply can't speak that dialect. What I mean is, somewhere their roots are stronger, they have remained with them, and their memories haunt them all the time. Something must be happening inside them so much so that they cannot forget and remain steeped in the language and culture of their native land.

The rituals of the two Bengals are so different. Take for instance, during Durga Puja, people of West Bengal would eat *luchi* on Astami day [according to Hindu mythology, the goddess Durga slew the demon Mahishasura in a battle at the end of Astami and beginning of Nabami, i.e. the eighth and ninth day after the new moon in mid-Aswin (late October)]; we wouldn't; we eat hilsa on Saraswati Puja day, they strictly observe a vegetarian diet. We have *payesh* [rice pudding], they don't.

We have so many varied marriage rituals that are so different from the ones people follow here. Our custom is that the bride leaves for her in-laws' home after marriage, the following day evening from her father's home. This is not so here. The bride reaches her in-laws' home in the morning. The rituals are different. Then there is that ubiquitous feud between the hilsa and the prawn that I don't want to dwell on. We definitely like to cling on to the rituals of East Bengal.

RD. Now these rituals—are we carrying these on with us, do you think we are passing these on to our next generation, or are these just getting lost somewhere along the way?

SG. Yes, yes. It is like this: our subsequent generation grows with us, but I would certainly want to pass on these timebound traditions to them; but I feel their mentality is somewhat different. 'What's the use of learning / knowing all this?' That's the general perception. This is our country now. So what's the use?

If I could take you all to Jalpaiguri, you would have been able to see for yourselves how people who have left their motherland behind resettle, reclaim a new land and make it their own. I've this. I've been born there. Earlier, we used to go to Jalpaiguri twice a year—once during the Pujas, and then during winter vacation in December. As I've grown older, I've learnt to relate to certain things. For instance, coconut and betelnut trees surround our house. So are all the adjacent houses that belong to settlers from East Bengal. Surprisingly, they have similar looks and surroundings. Later on, when I've grown older, I've come across that beautiful piece by Sankha Ghosh, 'Supuri boner shari' [rows of betelnut woods], and having read that, I've come to realize, yes, since they were accustomed to living amidst verdant surroundings, they transformed their living space in this new land to something they could relate to. Or for example, when they would sit together recounting tales from the days gone by, how wistfully they would recall, 'What you see now is nothing. We used to do it thus in our house. There was such prosperity—fish in the pond, cow in the cowshed'—I love hearing all those memories that tell of the things that are not there anymore, things that I miss.

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RD. You've just told us about your childhood memories [of Jalpaiguri] or of the stories that you heard of your ancestral house in the native village. Could you share with us some of those images and stories in some detail?

SG. Like I told you, father misses that house very much. One memory of his native place is how the *namoshudras* [a specific caste, predominantly farmhands and agricultural labourers] of the village would worship the *buro-buri* tree (that I mentioned a little while ago); and once a year it used to be a really big celebration, and *shoal* fish would be offered. Then they would roast the fish, and make a paste of it to make the *prasad*, and distribute it among all the villagers. Father misses that very much.

Then there this common notion about Hindu-Muslim riots and the two communities being at loggerheads. But I've heard very different stories about the Muslim families in their village. Both my parents unanimously told us that the native Muslims were very kind and affable people. I've heard from my mother that they would call my grandmother 'dida' [endearing term for grandmother; from *didima*, meaning maternal grandmother]; and would be on utterly cordial terms with her. They would joke and laugh with her, also babysit her kids. It wasn't possible for her look after a huge brood, so they would pitch in. That's how they lived together in perfect camaraderie. My father sorely misses the old banyan tree and the *pakur* tree of his homestead, and the channel that flows through. He says so. If he is given an option to return, I think he will. I say 'I think' because he has been here in India all these years, so I have that little bit of a doubt, but father still misses his homestead. It's not my father alone, mother misses it too.

RD. Whom does your mother, grandfather or father blame for this division of two countries, the Partition?

SG. None specifically. But both say that the common people have been pawns in a political chess game. A single Radcliffe Line broke two countries into two and before anybody could fathom what was happening, people were supposed to leave their native land, their homestead and just leave! My grandma would say how painful it was to leave the dwelling that belonged to her husband and in-laws and move away. Who does one blame but the politics that made this happen. There is no specific allegation—it is always said that the political situation necessitated migration.

RD. Your mother came away in 1965.

SG. That's right. Around 1964-65.

RD. The fact that they didn't come away in 1947, but 1965—growing up there for so many years—would you share with us some memories of that period?

SG. You see, my mother was sent here for good in 1965. But before that I guess she would come here on visits. I really know nothing about the period between 1947 and 1965. All that I know is, that my mother came here, was admitted to school in Class III, and continued with her education here. Since she was a girl child, perhaps it wasn't safe for her to stay there. I had two more aunts [my mother's sisters], one of whom

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was born in 1965, while the other was already married off. So bringing her over was out of the question. So my mother came here and continued her studies. Then something really amusing happened. It seems—and I've heard this story too—both sides of the family were firm in their resolve not to get into any matrimonial alliance with any traditional family from West Bengal, i.e. the wedding could happen among *bangals*. Hence my mother got married to a *bangal*; and it was the wish of my parents that I too get married into a *bangal* family. Interestingly enough, that's what happened. What is amazing is that this *ghoti-bangal* dichotomy still exists! Don't know why, though!

RD. Tell me, this ghoti-bangal divide, this was there in your parents' generation, and this continues even in yours. Why do you think this has survived?

SG. I've seen more of this in my father. I'll tell you what I feel about this situation. There are two things to be noted. One is this refugee situation. A huge population was migrating as refugees. It wasn't possible to accept them very gladly here. Why was it not possible? There was a tremendous pressure on the economy. They were being provided for, given shelter; resources had to be shared with them. Most people living on this side of the border could not accept this situation. So this thing about being a 'bangal' was like being what you're not. Father had to face such situations. Say he was visiting a friend, and suddenly this crops up, 'O! so you people are bangal?' And after that his friend's parents could not be as warm or affable with him. This had a deep impact on my father's mind. So I wouldn't say that this divide isn't there.

However, it was funny how when I was studying MA in Jadavpur University, this became a light hearted banter. It wasn't that serious any more. It came down to the bangals and ghotis pointing out how the other one didn't know anything, how ghotis would use sweeten every culinary preparation, while banglas would make them unbearably hot and spicy. For us it was not as pathetic as it was for father. For him it was he was a pariah because he was a bangal. I've heard from father how it was impossible to intermarry between ghotis and bangals.

RD. You've just told us how your father had to be witness to this acrimony. Are there any small incidents that you can share with us that illustrate this?

SG. Supposing father has gone to a friend's place, a very good friend; but his manner of speaking would give out that he's a bangal, and the friendship would break. That scarred father for life—the painful realization that, 'This was done to me just because I'm a bangal.'

RD. Bangladesh became an independent nation in 1971. What was the general feeling at home? How did your family members react?

SG. They felt glad, obviously, that Bangladesh had become independent. But with it was a nagging pain—we will never be able to go our own native land, the land that was once ours, where we once lived. It was especially not possible for my paternal grandfather, because he had started living here, and spread out. So

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he never even thought of going back. On the other hand, my maternal grandfather too had everything settled there, and he too couldn't think of moving at that stage.

RD. There is something else I wish to know: you've said that this bangal-ghoti divide has now found its way into light hearted banter ...

SG. That right, because nobody takes these things seriously any more. I don't think so. Why? Because I've been born in this country and this to me is my native land. But there is of course this thing about ones roots—how much I had there—especially after seeing what we had there, I really used to feel quite despondent. I had seen our village, and the land that was ours. It was a large tract. So deep down, one does feel sad. And when all those people who were telling me about my grandfather and father, I was feel so pensive, and this question welled up in me—why did we have to leave all this and move away? It would have been so much better had we remained there. Apart from this, considering the present condition, there is no question of going back. I don't think of it.

RD. When you cross the border, what significance does the word 'border' hold for you?

SG. What significance does it hold for me? It would've been better had it not been there at all. Because a line or border cannot create a cleft in the minds of people. I've seen my father and mother—though they live here physically, a part of their heart and mind remains in their native land. It is almost as if a part of them has been left there. I feel it was better done away with. If there wasn't any border or so many fences all around, we could have gone there so often, and our relatives there could have come here too. It would have been so convenient; could've touched our land.

RD. You've said borders are best dispensed with. Is that what you feel about international borders as well?

SG. Certainly. All borders. That's what I feel. What use are borders anyway? I don't understand. What's the use of creating enmity between people? It's no use, is it? There's all this tension along the border between India and Pakistan. There's so much of acrimony. It would have been best had the border not been there at all. After all they lived together as one people, didn't they? A country got partitioned? What for? Why? Maybe it was a consequence of certain political circumstances, but do the people actually want it at all? Perhaps they don't want borders segregating them, or perhaps they don't even understand what constitutes a border. When I visited my native place in Bangladesh, everyone, from the autorickshaw puller to the rickshaw puller was so cordial, so friendly, asking me, 'O! So you lived here once? Where did you live? Where was your native village?' The warmth with which they would strike up a conversation—there was such familiarity and genuine fellow feeling in these exchanges. It makes you feel that ordinary people don't really understand the significance of a 'border.' To them being a Bengali is what matters. It is immaterial whether you are a Hindu or a Muslim. The core of the fact is that you are a Bengali. You'll see how two Bengalis bond when they are abroad. Doesn't matter whether you're from India or Bangladesh. I've felt so

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elated whenever I've seen a Bengali on my travels. It hardly weighs on my mind what the nationality of that person is, or his/ her religious belief for that matter.

RD. What to you is your native land?

SG. India, of course.

RD. Does that differ from your parents' understanding of the concept native land?

SG. You see my parents were born there. So it is but natural that they would have a different kind of attachment to that country. They were brought to a new land. If you uproot a tree and transplant it somewhere else with all the care, its roots remain in its place of origin. I do feel sad, I do feel despondent about why we had to come away, and there is always this craving that it would have been so good had I been able to go there. But the fact remains that I was born here, everything I have is here, I'm a girl of this soil. Let me give you a small example. Before you get married, the attachment to your father's home is supreme; but once you get married, there is also a pull towards your in-laws. You cannot deny either, and both are equally strong. I feel, in the case of my parents they cannot deny this dual pull. In my case I simply cannot deny that this is my country.

RD. You have heard these stories from your grandparents and parents. Now what kind of stories would you like to pass on to your next generation?

SG. Everything—I want to tell them everything because I want the subsequent generation to know what the tradition was like: a whole generation of people, their families who lived in a particular time, who had their roots in a particular country, who had to leave their own country—the struggle they went through and how they overcame the adverse circumstances to establish themselves once again. My father and his elder brother had to undergo such privation. They had to keep the household running even as they tried to study. They had to take up so many odd jobs just to eke out a living somehow. It is essential that the next generation too know the stories of these struggles. So I want to tell them everything in detail.

RD. You've said your father and uncles had to take up odd jobs to keep the home running; they had to struggle such a lot. Would you like to share with us stories of the struggle?

SG. I told you some time ago how they would buy goods from the farmers directly and then sell them at a profit at the weekly *haat*. They would buy rice and other things too. All this they would do very quietly. My grandmother didn't know all this. She was a very grave and strict lady. She didn't know all this was going on. In my memory too my grandmother has that grave image. As my father and his siblings grew older, they started a small business, then bought an autorickshaw. We also had a *biri* [tobacco leaf rolled into indigenous cigarettes; the poor man's cigarette] shop which worked like a biri manufacturing unit. Then there was the garment shop, which we still own. That's how they established themselves.

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My *mejo jyethu* [the third eldest brother of father] got a job. So this endeavour to pitch in, to make the family economic situation was always there.

RD. You were also talking about the similarity between the house in your native place and the house in Jalpaiguri; or the house in Kolkata. If you tell us something more on that.

SG. I visited Dhaka when I was in Class VIII. That was in 1998/99. I saw this canal flowing past our village homestead, verdant all around; and the house was like any other common village house. But here in Kolkata our house in Belehata was a house built on a very small patch of land with bricks and mortar. No such expanse of greenery; but you know wherever bangals live, they try to make the surroundings as green as possible. But our Jalpaiguri house is very different. Lots of trees are planted there. My *jyethu* is in the habit of planting trees—something that I've inherited—and he has planted lots of coconut and betelnut trees all around our house in Jalpaiguri. Maybe that's how he tries to bring some sort of a semblance with our village homestead, maybe because he misses his home.

RD. Living in a small, constricted space after coming away—how did they feel about it? Did you hear anything about that?

SG. They had to take up rented lodgings at first. Then this plot was purchased in the name of my *pishithakuma* who was a child widow, to keep a provision for her. Grandfather bought the land in his daughter's name. My grandfather and my father and my *jyethu* lived there. Obviously living conditions weren't ideal, and it wasn't to their liking either.

But when we went to Jalpaiguri—and I told you about the Sahas (owners of a nursery), who helped a lot—we bought a house right beside theirs. Our house there is quite a large house, and as our financial situation looked up, the area was enhanced, more land was purchased. I feel it was impossible for them to continue living in a small, constricted space; so the aspiration for a larger span remained. That's my assessment. I've never asked father what he felt about it, though.

RD. You've mentioned that your grandfather returned after 1947, when the situation became more conducive. Why did he go back? What was the process? What did he want? If you could tell us something about that.

SG. During Partition, the situation was tremendously volatile, there were riots. That's why he had come away. Then the situation on both sides became calmer. But the house in the native village was there all right, and so were the people who were looking after it. So he had to go back. Besides, my grandmother was there too. My grandfather would continue travelling between the two countries. My great grandfather, as I told you earlier, had this rented place, from where he would keep the operations going both here and in Bangladesh. My grandmother would see to the affairs there, and my grandfather would be on the lookout for income opportunities on his visits here. But this was rendered impossible after 1971. Possibly my

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grandfather felt that it would not be possible to live there after that. Father was a child, only two / three years old. He remembers nothing of those times. He just remembers that they had come away. Father used to be very naughty as a kid. Then my grandma would try to scare him by saying, 'Let your father come here from that country, then you'll know what's what.' Father was brought here in 1952. Because father remembers sitting for a scholarship test when he was in class IV, i.e. around 1955 or 1956. That he remembers, but he cannot say very clearly about the years before that. Those recollections are somewhat hazy. I've heard these stories from my father, so I too wouldn't be able to tell you very clearly about that aspect.

RD. Your grandmother, who used to live there till 1971—do you have any memories of her experiences, living there by herself?

SG. [As I told you earlier] Grandma had a tremendously powerful personality, and had a lot of grit. She knew how to live all alone, and managed pretty well. There were many people who tried to scare her into giving up her house and going away. But she managed to ward off all such threats. I've heard stories about how people would dress up as ghosts and try to scare her at night, and how, unperturbed, she could come out with a *kathari* [a common, short cutting implement shaped like a scimitar; common in every Bengali household, used primarily for splitting firewood, coconut husk, or slicing the top of green coconut for water] in hand to catch the truant prankster. So she never really had any trouble. And as I told you, there were helpful neighbours like Gobindo-kaku and the Muslim families, who were very supportive. But after 1971 I guess they too couldn't give any assurance about safety, because the Razakars were pillaging and murdering Hindus and Muslims indiscriminately. So it was no longer possible to remain there. They had to come away.

RD. As the situation began to change around 1971, did they have to face anything untoward?

SG. No, not at all. Apart from the little bit of the chase that my grandfather had to dodge, the coming away was pretty smooth.

RD. Of all the stories that you have heard from your father, is there any particular story that wouldn't want to share with your next generation?

SG. No, there's nothing like that. As I told you, I'd like to share everything with them.

RD. What's the reason?

SG. I told you, I strongly feel that people must know their past, because if they don't, they'll never be able to know their roots. Hence I would like to share these memories in their totality. In fact there are no harsh memories as such that I would like to hide, or not want to share with them. Most of the memories are rather funny—grandma standing up to the pranksters, or grandpa starting his medical practice. I also want to share with them the stories of how my father and his brothers struggled to keep their education going. I

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want to share all of this with them. Or my mother's story, for instance. She used to live away from her parents, with her paternal uncles. So her memory of being homesick—just imagine a small child studying in class III—wouldn't it be natural for her to be wanting to be close to her own parents? She used to miss her mother a lot. These are the things I do want my next generation to know.

RD. Of all the stories that you have heard—of the memories of your father and mother—do you find a parity in their stories?

SG. Both their memories have a common aspect—that of longing for a place left behind. Mother had this pain of staying away from her family; whereas father had memories of struggle with his family beside him. Just a little different, perhaps; but in both their memories, there's a lot of pain. The pain of Partition—that pain that gets so entrenched in the memory of a child that come what may, that never goes; the people carry it with them like a burden.

RD. Your grandfather was a homeopathy doctor. Would you like to share with us stories of how he began his practice here, after coming away?

SG. A dispensary was opened for him at Kalirhat. Grandpa had a PWD [Public Works Department] plot, and a wooden cabin was made for him on that plot. Our house is in Dhupguri, in Jalpaiguri district. Now it is a full fledged municipality. Kalirhat is about three kilometers from Dhupguri. There was no medical help in those areas. So it was very easy for my Grandpa to create a name for himself. That helped.

RD. If you could also tell us in some detail about how your father was earning his living while studying—his struggle.

SG. Father studied till B.Com; but didn't have a job as such. He was more inclined to be an independent businessman. I've heard from my father tell me how an uncle, a neighbor of ours loaned father ten thousand rupees with which he started a partnership firm. Father is a PWD contractor. That's what I know. Father would go and work in Medinipur, Joynagar, and slowly he found his feet in his business.

RD. Could you tell us something about the situation of the women in the household, after they came away and settled here?

SG. Women, meaning, it was my grandma alone who was an adult. All her daughters were still kids. Two of my aunts were really small, so I don't know whether they had to face any struggle at all. They used to help a lot in the daily household chores, but I don't think they had to go looking for jobs sacrificing their education. That much is certain.

RD. Could you tell us something about how the household was run? Were there problems?

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SG. Coming away from an established household —what I mean is, the family had a handsome income in Bangladesh. There was a lot of agricultural land where paddy was grown. When the y came away, that wasn't there any longer. So obviously there was financial trouble.

RD. There's another thing I want to know: you've mentioned rituals. Would you elaborate on the special bangal rituals, specifically in your family that you have seen?

SG. It's the same that I told you some time ago, those were the ones I noted. For example, we don't eat *luchi* on Astami; we eat rice, but no fish is cooked that day. On Dashami, there si a ritual called 'jatra' in which offerings are made to our ancestors. We eat vegetarian food on Dashami. Then a bride is sent off in the evening. Then there's one ritual mandatory in a ghoti marriage—they make something called 'Sree' [lit. 'grace / beauty'; a small ornate cupola-like shape about four to six inches high, made of rice flour, mustard oil, lentil powder, vermillion and other colours (except black) made by married women of the household on the previous evening of the wedding; an essential object in any Hindu marriage in West Bengal. This is placed on a new brass plate, and soaked with mustard oil to prevent it from cracking. The bride and the groom are welcomed with it by the mother and the mother-in-law, by moving this in a specific clockwise pattern, to the accompaniment of ululation and conch-shell blowing]; we don't have that custom. Similarly the ink pot for Saraswati Puja. We eat hilsa fish on Saraswati Puja. These are some of the rituals.



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