

FAZWIR BEGH

23/07/2014

Interviewer: Intikhab Bashir

Interviewer: I

Respondent: R

00:00 I Can you please tell me your full name?

00:03 R Fazlwr Rahman Begh.

00:06 I And can you tell me the year that you were born?

00:09 R 1939.

00:15 I Tell me about your life in Bangladesh.

00:18 R I was born in Assam which was part of, Sylhet was part of Assam and then I was educated at Sylhet Government School where I matriculated from there and after that went to college, MC College, did my intermediate there and while I was doing my intermediate I applied for courses in this country and I was accepted by Federal House Indian College in London. So I was enriched there and after I intermediated I came here.

01:08 I Tell me about your family in Bangladesh.

01:11 R I had father, stepmother, my mother died when I was very young. Father, stepmother and I had, at that time I had four brothers, four brothers here and two sisters.

01:35 I What did your father do for a living?

01:37 R He was the forest ranger in Assam. That was, that was British time.

01:46 I And your brothers, were they older than you?

01:48 R No they are all younger than me.

01:52 I What made you decide to look for work abroad?

01:57 R Initially it was study, I thought I'd come and do some studying here you see, and my father said he'd provide the funding you know for further education here, but when I, well, that's how we started you see, so I started applying to college.

- 02:22 I What year did you come to the United Kingdom?
- 02:26 R 1958, February 1958 yea.
- 02:33 I Tell me about your journey from Bangladesh to the United Kingdom.
- 02:38 R Journey, ok I started from Sylhet by train, came to Dakha and I was supposed to pick up my currency from Dakha, and at that time it was Pakistan, and when I reached Dhaka I went to the bank and they said you can't cash this money from here because it was issued by the Chittagong exchange office there, you have to go to Chittagong is about 150/160 miles so there was little time, I couldn't cash my money and couldn't bring any, so I had some, I was allowed to bring only about five or ten pound, something like that, you know cash. So I send all the money whatever I had to my dad and came here with this ten pounds in my pocket, then I flew from Dakha.
- 03:48 I Where did you land?
- 03:49 R Heathrow and that was February, was cold at that time, I come from a hot country. And I was supposed to, I have a cousin here, he came before me and he was doing another technology in London and he was supposed to pick me up from Heathrow Airport, and unfortunately what happened, my plane changed on the way and I was supposed to come by British Airways and half way in India I flew to India then from India I came by Quantas which is Australian plane. So possibly he lost track of you know which plane I was coming in all that, and he didn't go to the airport and so what he did, there used to be a Victoria terminal at that time. He went the Victoria terminal because everybody used to come to Victoria terminal from Heathrow. So he went to the terminal and put some money, you know, for me to take a taxi to him, so I arrived there and I couldn't find him. I came to Victoria terminal, he was not there. At that time I didn't realise that I had to go to you know the desk, you know, to the desk and ask for, well you know, if there's message. So what I did, there are two other doctors who came with me at the same time and three of us, there's nobody else to pick us up you see, so all three together went to Pakistan student hostel there, not hostel, it is like a hostel. So we went there to find accommodation, there's no accommodation there and they said we can stay in nearby hotels. So what I did, we went to a restaurant to have some food then straight to the hotel and then stayed the night there and the next morning got up and came to, my cousin didn't come so I didn't bother to even ring him or anything, do anything, so I came straight to Birmingham. This is how I come to Birmingham otherwise I was admitted to college in London (laughs).
- 06:18 I Where did you first live when you came to Birmingham?
- 06:20 R Number 9 Farm Road.

- 06:22 I Number 9 Farm Road?
- 06:23 R Yea.
- 06:24 I Tell me about that address.
- 06:27 I This er.. I came by train from Euston to New Street and there I came out carrying a suitcase and came to ask somebody who said there's a bus stop there, you can get the bus and go to Sparkbrook. So I went there and pick up the bus and he charged me about two pence or something, so the bus driver dropped me there. I said will you please drop me there, so he dropped me, and then I went to 9 Farm Road, my cousin, one of my cousin used to live there. I go there and you know travelled by bus and walked across the road and came you know to this house you know, and then you see that house I can tell you, is only young people were there. At that time hardly anybody married you see. All the young people there, they were all mostly educated people. They finished schooling, they been to college or this sort of areas they were you see. They all come from very good families, back from home, and they all very good you see. So I liked it but I went there I met all these people, I liked it so I stayed there you see with them, and then eventually you know I bought this house.
- 08:15 I Describe number 9 Farm Road to me
- 08:18 R It's end house, it is end house now, it wasn't then you see, one house has been knocked down, so the number 9 Farm Road is a very old building, big house. You go through the corridor then there's got two rooms on the right hand side and go straight into the dining area then off there you have got kitchen and after the kitchen you go out, you've got the coal room where you store the coal for fire and there's a toilet outside as well. On those days people didn't have any toilet inside, you know in cold weather I don't know how people coped you know going outside. When I moved there, there was a toilet one of the bedroom it is converted to a toilet so we had about one, two, three, four, five bedrooms and a toilet upstairs you see the attic and you know, the two rooms in the attic. There are five rooms altogether and because the single people at that time was living there, so apart from the lounge, front room, the other room people used to live in there as well you see and we have a coal fire, initially we had coal fire and we had a very old television, one of the new one you see at that time, black and white and what else can I say? And people, there were quite a few people, all the young people used to live there.
- 10:20 I So tell me about how you changed from being a single man to a married man?
- 10:28 R Well I worked for two/three years, then initially I started work in a restaurant

as a cashier you see, and then I thought there's not enough money being a cashier then started working as a waiter, waiter then manager, you know very quickly, and then worked in one, two restaurants, three restaurants altogether before I started work at the University of Aston. I came here in 58 and I joined Aston University in 1963, yea. In the meantime I did study engineering courses part time at the Aston Technical College and then went to Aston University, at that time it was called College of Advanced Technology, so I started doing, I used to work there and I also used to study there as well and I also used to do work, you know, restaurant work. At 63 years like I said I started work as a technician at the University of Aston and the College of Advanced Technology, then it became the University of Aston in 1966 and in 1966 I finished my digression there and 19.. I changed my job, I came to University of Birmingham 1970 as a Research Engineer there in the mechanical engineering department and worked there since then you see. Until I retired.

12:29 I Until you retired.

12:30 R Yea.

12:31 I What year did you get married?

12:35 R 1964. 1964 I went back and got married and she joined me in 1965, May 65.

12:46 I Tell me about your family in the UK.

12:52 R Family is just myself, my wife and then at Farm Road I had my daughter born, she was born in I remember Selly Oak Hospital, which don't exist anymore and after seven years, she was born in 1967 and she was about seven years old when our son Redwan was born, so I have a son and a daughter, and we lived at Farm Road until my son was a year and a half old and then we came to here.

13:49 I Tell me about your friends when you lived on Farm Road.

13:53 R OK. I had quite a few of them actually and all the young people used to come round and be just there in my house you know, we used to go out together. But at the Farm Road we had one, two, three four, about five people, young people used to live with me when I was a bachelor. And when you got married so that things changed you know.

14:30 I Tell me about your friends when you lived on Farm Road.

14:33 R Yea there was quite a few people used to live with me and one of them is my classmate, who studied together, and he in fact has come from Chittagong in Bangladesh, and he finished his degree and got married in 1962 and he was the first person to bring his wife here you see. They all bachelors but they

are a couple, so we used to go and meet them almost every week. He moved out of Farm Road and he's got a flat he used to live with his wife, so we used to go and visit him and when I got married in 1964 we are very close you see, we used to visit each other every weekend you know, and the other friends, he's one of them, the other friends, one of them he used to work with me at Aston University and the College of Advanced Technology then you see, and he worked there for a bit and eventually he went back to Bangladesh, and he was in fact he did chemistry, and the others, one came to for education, came from a very rich family and he in fact didn't work at all, he'd didn't do, he'd go to the college and eventually he got taken back home by his parents. And there are others, there are two others, they're in fact go out and eventually got the business. One of them had a business in Sutton Coldfield, he still got the restaurant and in fact they all became quite rich, well off, most of them.

16:54 I Tell me about your neighbours.

16:58 R At that time, all mixed, mixed means mostly there are mostly English people there in that area. I can count the number of houses, one opposite us was a Pakistani house and there's another house which was Indian on the side you know, the next road. There's another one who came from Pakistan, on the other side of the road, the other side, and about three, four houses I know of you know, otherwise they're all English and Irish origin you see, in that area. And the shops used to be just like the family shops you know, they used to be owned by mostly English people you know. The two shops on far end of the Farm Road, they used to be run by Frank and Joan, I remember you know, and they became very close friend to us. This the one shop was grocery shop, you know vegetable shop, and the other shop was all mixed everything that they used to sell. Both of them very close friends you know, they were there for many years you know the shops.

18:25 I Tell me about your work.

18:29 R Work which? Where?

18:32 I When you lived on Farm Road, the jobs that you did when you lived on Farm Road.

18:36 R I started work in the restaurant as a cashier there and worked as a waiter and then as a manager. I worked in three places, and then applied for a job at Engineering at College of Technology while I was studying part time, and then I was employed there as a technician in the physics department, because I did physics before, you see, before I came here, an intermediate, and engineering takes a lot of physics, there was a lot of physics involved. I was interested and I wanted to join there and worked there for seven years in that department, and I came to know a lot of people who became very close friends and from there I applied for this job at University of Birmingham, as a

research engineer, and you know I was employed as that in 1970, and then my wife was on holiday in Bangladesh and she came in and had a shock when I changed my job, you know, and then yes since then I worked at that university.

20:00 I What are your earliest memories of Stratford Road?

20:06 R Earliest memories, er, I remember you know the Camp Hill area, after the Camp Hill area, the shops, there are shops on the one side of the road and the other side was few shops not many, but it came after the Farm Road, and then the shop finishes there you see and then of course there are houses on both sides, and after that you know Walford Road where it starts, from there we had some shops further on and there's a cinema hall, two cinema halls there, one on Walford Road, you know and one on Stratford Road, and then if you keep on walking another five/ten minutes there are shops on the right hand side used to be, then there's nothing there just used to be houses, no shops at all. Now you find all shops there you see. I remember I used to walk from Walford road about five/ten minutes. On the right hand side I used to have a fish and chip shop, it's a restaurant that used to have fish and chips and the steaks and everything. I used to go for a meal there on Saturday/Sundays when I was single. That's how I remember because there was not so many shops not at that time like it is now.

21:50 I Did that change over the years?

21:52 R It has changed yea with lots of shops now owned by a lot of people. The road is owned by mostly Asians now you see.

22:07 I Tell me about your work.

22:11 R My first work was at **(inaudible)** restaurant and it was owned by a chap who was very big there. This place had three different sections, one whole floor into three parts and one was Asian part, one was Chinese and the other part was English and accordingly he employed Chinese chef, English chef and also Indian chef and three sections here, the kitchen also three sections, and in the restaurant and he employed English people for the English and Chinese he couldn't find, obviously we were rarity, so Chinese part and Indian part used to be done by us Asian people you see, and when I went there he looked at me and there's a very nice cash desk nicely decorated and he said you sit there and you look nice and you start working there.

23:28 I Where was that restaurant?

23:30 R That restaurant was on Corporation Street opposite the Law Court. It was above a chemist, it was quite big place.

23:40 I Is that restaurant still there?

23:41 R No it's not there anymore. When I started work at Birmingham University, as a research engineer, my job was primarily to develop research and develop experiments for post graduates and under graduate students, so I worked in the area of control engineering, and also I did a lot of work with the lasers and I published quite a lot of papers doing all this work and I used to teach students, you know what I used to double up, I used to teach them and eventually when it was the end of my years there I had the opportunity of working as an Accident... Can we stop?

24:57 R Towards the end of my working period, the last three years I worked with the Accident Research Unit at the university, and that involved going to the road, seeing the accidents, car accidents in road, the different cars were involved with the accidents, and also I had contact with police and hospitals. And accidents usually used to be reported by police to us and we used to go and see the cars, see the people involved, all sorts, sometimes I used to visit hospital, go to hospital, pick up the coroner report if somebody dead, and used to compile all this information, each individual accident we used to compile, and it was under Ministry of Transport, you know, we were employed by Ministry of Transport for this job ,and I enjoyed working this, because I used to go out and look at the cars, look at the crash and looking at the car you could tell whether it has, the damage of the car, you could tell what was the impact and how the angle is hit and the people who were inside the cars, their injuries, how they could be injured and if they hit the pillars or different things in the car, the windscreen, without a seatbelt and also the whole idea was to see all this thing and then do research so that it could increase the safety of the cars and the people like Toyota and Ford and other people used to buy our work you know from us. The Ministry of Transport used to pay us for this work you know, and there's a team of twelve people who used to work together for this and I remember I had an individual office and computer there. You go into, after you have seen the accident, you've compiled everything, you've brought all the reports, all the things that are there and then put it into the computer. The computer could tell the speed, looking at the crash, the computer used to give us the speed of the car on the impact and from my experience I can tell you if you hit, if a car hits a solid object like a tree which can't move, then obviously the person inside there will be damaged very much you know, so we have seen a lot of dead people of hitting the trees or solid objects. So this was some experience you know and I enjoyed it.

28:18 I What are your lasting memories of Stratford Road?

28:22 R One incident I can mention, we were four of us, my wife, myself and two other friends. They were bachelor at that time, those two and we were walking along Stratford Road, going towards Farm Road and we saw a couple, they were fighting, you know, and this chap was starting hitting his wife or girlfriend you know, kicking her on the floor and then I tried to stop this chap,

came round and started to stop him and he turned round and said it's nothing to do with you, get lost (laughs) and that's one of the things I can say you know.

29:11 I Do you still visit Stratford Road now?

29:13 R Yes I do yea. Do most shopping there that way.

29:20 I Tell me how Stratford Road has changed over the years.

29:25 R It has developed you know, developed in sales, there are a lot of shops now on both side of the Stratford Road, and it goes up to the park you see and so there's a park where there used to be old baths, so it's shops all along the road now you see, it wasn't there before. That way has changed, and the old shops used to be owned by you know, initially all the shops used to be owned by individuals, the family business, and they used to do well, before this Sainsbury's and other people started coming you see. So now on Stratford Road you find lot of businesses, they are mostly Asian businesses now, all sari shops you know and mostly selling different things. But we do visit there a lot, because we buy our groceries and meat from those places. Over the years Stratford Road, you know people live like you know, initially there were lots of English people, Irish people, and slowly slowly Pakistanis and other immigrants is starting to come in so, Indian, they started to buy houses there you know and eventually in majority houses were starting to belong to Asian people and nowadays if you walk along there are a lot of Somalian people there you know, other people, so it's all mixed cultural place you know, this area has become. I think in time it has changed a lot I would say you know, so I'm talking about 1958 to now you see. I think it is obviously for better we becoming a lot of resources there, everything is there, business is there.

32:05 I Why did you move?

32:08 R I moved there, two reasons, one is as I started to work at University of Birmingham, this place is closer to me you see, one straight road for the university and the other thing I was concerned about, my daughter was growing up, she was eight and at that time I thought although she goes to grammar school, but I thought there's a girls school here nearby, I thought it better if she goes to the girl's schools here, it's single sex school. Those are the two reasons.

32:54 I When did you move away from the Stratford Road?

32:58 R Farm Road you mean?

32:59 I Sorry Farm Road.

33:00 R Yeah. Moved in 1976.

33:08 I And tell me about your life now.

33:12 R Well I am a retired person now, I have a son and a daughter, and the two, one grandson and one granddaughter from my daughter, and two granddaughters from my son's side you see, so my time is with them. I spend a lot of time with them, you know, and we go on holidays together, all of us you know, all ten of us, different places. We've been to Abu Dhabi, all of us you know. We booked a hotel, booked a hotel you know, all of us went there, and it was very nice, so you do move places you know and a few weeks back we went to a hotel in what place is this? Cheltenham, yea hotel in Cheltenham. We spent a weekend there to spend my son's fortieth birthday.

34:32 I Thank you very much for your time.

34:35 R You're welcome.