

File: Sanyogita Kumari Audio.wma

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[0:00:25]

Contributor: Before I came to this country, I was lecturer in Hans Raj Mahila Maha Vidyalaya in Jalandhar, of Indian classical music. For a very short time, and then I came over to this country and tried to establish myself as a singer, as a teacher, but I could not sustain full time. So, I've been teaching and singing, but at the same time I trained myself to be a social worker, and then I worked for the council, working for adults.

0:01:04 In India, I was in Jalandhar, I was born in Jalandhar. It's a very big family, I was part of nine children and I was the youngest. My mum and dad came from Pakistan during the partition, and I think four of my brothers and sisters were born in Pakistan, and then they came over and settled in Jalandhar, and that's where the other five were born, and I was the youngest born There. That's where I did my studies, and my upbringing, early years, happened there. When I was little, most of the times evening time used to be stories about the partition, because all our family were settled in Jalandhar now.

0:02:05

They all had come from Pakistan before partition. My mum's side of the family were from [Jammu side 0:02:11], and they spoke Dogri. My dad's side of the family was from Sialkot and they were also in Jalandhar. So, most of the time people got together in the evenings, and my nana, my [chaachas], my [taayas], they would come at the weekends or in the evenings and talk about their experience in Pakistan. There were some very beautiful memories they used to share, and we used to just sit there listening to those stories.

For us those were, like, evening time stories to listen to, and they were very interesting. Some were very painful, and some were very happy and funny, and they used to talk about their friends they had there.

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Or people who worked in their factory, people who my dad had taught, because my dad was [ustadji 0:03:07]. They had a business, a sports business, where they made cricket balls, hockey balls, and people from the villages used to come and work for them. They were in the ____, you know, the city, they called it, and my dad was the ustad who used to teach them how to saw, the hand sawn, cricket balls. I used to hear that he had about 500 students, and they worked for him, and it was a huge place they had, and they were very well established there before partition.

The painful memories, where they had to leave everything behind and come over to the India side of the partition, and the way they came was just a very painful experience for all of them.

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They all came separately. My dad came separate, my mum came separate with the women and the rest of the family,

because my dad was the head of the, sort of, business side of things, somehow they decided two weeks before, when they'd heard that everything was going to go that way and there was going to be partition and all the people who are non-Muslims will have to go to the India side, they decided that he will leave early. He took about nine boys from the family, all the boys, and decided to leave before everybody else.

So, they thought he'll be safe, and all the boys will be safe, and the others will go when the government say, or other arrangements will be made. Then they will go, and he took my cousins and my brothers.

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They used to have a tonga, you know, the horse cart, of their own, and the driver was a Muslim guy, who said he'd help in case there were any problems on the way. So, they hid in the bull cart, and they just went from home. On the way, they got stopped on many places, and he tried to save them and hide that it was Muslim people, because they were stopped with Muslim groups of people with machetes, with hockey sticks, and a lot of things they were using to just beat people up or kill people.

I think they went through two, three villages just like that, and then they got stopped. Where a group of very aggressive people stopped them, they got hold of the horse, and they said, "We want to see who's inside."

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The guy did say that, "It's my ustadji, and he's Muslim, and we're just going to some place," he just made an excuse, but they said, "No, we want to see exactly." When they pulled the curtain, they saw my dad. My dad used to wear gold rings, and somehow they thought he was a Hindu [Lalla 0:06:25]. So,

they said that, “We know he’s not Muslim, and you’re hiding, and get them down,” and somehow, I don’t know what came to his head, the guy just got hold of the horse and just ran. Those guys just left behind and he just fled, and this is how they got rid of them, but then he was really scared and they didn’t know how to get to the next place. Whoever came on the way, they just didn’t stop.

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Somehow, it took them two weeks to get to the other side of India, but in the meantime the rest of the family, when the government announced that everybody had to go, and just get whatever you have, just pick up your stuff and go. My dadi, my grandma, told all the daughters-in-law that, they all used to get jewellery and stuff equal every year, so she said, “Everybody have your own and look after your own stuff, and just make one pillow, or a cushion, with all your belongings, and just take that, and don’t take anything else. Just the kids and that pillow with all your jewellery in it.”

My mum tells us that she had, sort of, a pillow, quite a lot of stuff in that, and when the bus came to take all the people and they were guiding people into the bus and telling them, “Don’t carry too much stuff. You need to go now, everybody just sit down.”

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In that hustle, bustle, she forgot the pillow, of all her gold in there. When she was sitting in the bus, she said she realised that she’d left everything. Whatever she was supposed to take with her, she hadn’t taken that. So, but at the same time one of my dad’s students, who was a Muslim guy, was also wandering around, and he saw them sitting in that bus and he came and said, “Is everything okay?” My mum just told him

that, "We are leaving, but there is something in the house, that sort of pillow, this colour and everything, you go and take whatever is in that. I've left it now, so don't worry, but at least I'd rather you take it than somebody else." So, she told him.

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I think the bus was going to Amritsar, there was a camp, and that's where all the people were taken by the government. So, somehow they reached there, she said, "I was wondering, we left everything there, and dad's gone. We don't know where he is, all the kids have gone." She had three kids with her, and then my maasi, there were other people, my chaachi, and they were all in one group, and she said they met Mahatma Gandhi there as well, and Nehru came to the camp. One day she said she was just sitting and an announcement came, said somebody has left something behind, come and recognise if it's yours and take it.

It was just a very, very vague message, and she said, somehow, she thought, "It was mine." Whatever she's left, somebody's brought it back, and she said, "But I was hesitant. I thought nobody's going to bring that back, who's going to bring it to me?"

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They announced it again, and then she said, "I've got nothing to lose, go and see what it is." So she went, and she said, "I have left something behind as well, so I don't know if what you are saying is mine," and they said, "[Non-English speech 0:10:16]. Tell us whatever you've left in there," and she started telling them, "I've got all my jewellery, and it's got this sort of [kantar], it's got this sort of [kungun], and these sort of rings." He took one of them out, and he said, "Is that yours?" She

said, "I just nearly died." She said, "How come? Who's brought it here?"

Somehow that guy who she had said, "Take it," he came all the way to return it, and he managed to actually give it to the authorities, with the name and everything. To say it belongs to them, and it reached her.

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That was a very pleasant memory for her, and she used to tell us with a lot of love for the people who helped, but she also talked about some of the things they saw on the way. People were murdered, there were dead people on the roadsides. The trains were all blood everywhere, because a lot of people were killed in the trains. I also heard one of my maasi, my mum's sister, she was heavily pregnant, and she gave birth to one of my cousins in the train, when they were coming in the train. She came from a different place, and in that train, it was going through Lahore, I think, his name is Lahori. They named him Lahori.

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Somehow, the people helped in that coach to deliver the baby and everything. So, there were some very helpful people, because everybody was going through trauma, and they were all trying to help each other as well. Somehow, in Jalandhar, she got her pillow, and they all went to Jalandhar, trying to find a place where they all can live together, and they went to that [hakim's 0:12:27] house. It was only a small house, apparently, and there were 20-odd people, just went into the same house, started to live there.

By then, my dad hasn't come yet. The boys weren't there, so everybody just started to think that they'd been killed. So, they were really depressed, and they were all crying, and they all

thought they're never going to see them again. So, but somehow, this is my eldest sister, she told us her experience.

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She said she used to cry every night thinking about her dad and the brothers and the other cousins. She was very close to my dad, she was the eldest daughter, and she said, "I just used to not think about anything else but dad. Maybe he will come one day, but everybody used to say, 'This is it. He's not going to come, so don't have too much hope.'" She said, "One night, we were all asleep, in the middle of the night," and she heard my dad talking. Knocking at the door and saying, "Open the door," and she just got up and she said, "I knew it was dad's voice."

The others said, "Oh, you're just dreaming. Go to sleep, he's not here," and she said, "No, I can hear him. He's outside," and she said, "I just didn't listen to anyone." She came down, running, and opened the door, and there he was with all the boys.

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She said the tears just went through, the whole family just got up and they were just all crying and wanting to know their experience, how they got there. When she used to tell us, she used to cry. The tears used to flow. So, so ___[0:14:21]. Somehow, it was pleasant, at the end of the day they all made it. There were some family members who didn't make it, but I probably didn't know them anyway, or they didn't tell us too much about them. I think they try to avoid it. People who didn't make it, they didn't talk about them, but then I hear a lot of stories from my brother.

0:15:00 He's 82 this year, he's the eldest brother. My sister was a year older than him, and he was 12 when he came over, and he talks about his schooling there and all the boys, what they used to do, because they were from a well-to-do family. They had people taking them to school and bringing them back. There's a very funny story he tells us, I don't know if you want to hear that, he said the parents used to go to weddings and things and they didn't take children with them, because they were at school and things, and my bhaa ji says, I call him bhaa ji, that there were five of them, of a similar age group.

0:15:57 My [taaya-jis 0:15:58] ___ and the [chaacha-jis], and they were a very similar age. There was one that was elder than him, and he said that, "They always, never take us. I know where they've gone, so we all can go," and he said he was about seven, the others were about six, or seven, or eight, and he was ten, the eldest one. Or maybe nine, not even ten. He was like, "I know." So, "Let's not go to school, and go over there," and it was in a village which was about 10, 15 miles away from home, and they started walking.

They didn't know how to get there, they didn't go to school. They went to the village, to this wedding. He said that when they went about a mile, two miles, they were all happy, and then they started to get tired, and it was hot, and started to get scared as well. Then he kept on saying, "No, no, it's just there. It's not very far, and we'll all be there soon, and we're going to have a big meal once we get there."

0:17:06 He only knew his grandparents' house, you know, his mum's-parents' house, ___[0:17:12]. So, ___, but I think the wedding was somewhere else. He only knew that place. They kept on

going. He said, "Halfway, then, two of us gave up. We just sat down and said, 'We can't go anymore,' and started crying, and then we've got to go back. We can't go anywhere any further, we're tired, our feet are swollen, we can't walk any further, and we need to eat something. We are thirsty, hungry." He said, "Don't worry, there's the ___[0:17:45]," the sugar cane fields came, so he said, "[Non-English speech]." So, they started stealing some sugar cane from the fields, and said ___.

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They had sugar cane and that gave them a bit of energy, and they also had something to drink, the juice, and they felt a little bit better, and they started to walk again. They said it started to get dark, because it was getting so, so late, and it was too far. They didn't know how far it was, but he kept on going, "Don't worry, we can't go back. We have to reach there. I know where it is," and then he said, "We saw a [Non-English speech 0:18:36]," you know, the well. They saw that, and they drank water from there, and they stole some more fruit and veg from the fields and then they ate that.

They kept on crying, and kept on cursing him, "You're the one who's taking us, we don't want to go anymore," but he kept on going. He said, "No, you will be happy once we reach there," and he was tired himself but he couldn't give up anymore.

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They said, "We sat there for an hour thinking which way to go now," but he said, "I know. I know the way, but it's only a little bit further away," but 15 miles is quite a long way. So, somehow they managed to reach there, and it was night time. It was really late by the time they reached there. In the meantime, the school time came and the parents found out that they hadn't come home, where have they gone? So, they

had, at that time I think they used to have somebody with the ___[0:19:40] to go round in the streets and saying, “These kids are missing, has anybody seen them?”

Then the mummies were crying, and the aunties and everybody, the whole house was just, like, in mourning, and everybody was so worried, what’s happened to the kids?

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Somebody has actually kidnapped them, that’s what they thought, because they’re from a well-to-do family, maybe somebody wants money, and that’s where they’re taken. They’ve not reached school, so God knows where they are. So, they’re crying, and there was too much going on back home, and there they are just trying to reach the wedding. To the place, he said, “When we reached the place where we thought the wedding was, it wasn’t the wedding house.” It was his nana’s house, and when they saw them, oh, [Non-English speech 0:20:33].

They said, the boys, just on their own, “What are you doing here?” Quite late, as well. Then they realised what had happened, and instead of giving them a good hiding, they just sat them down, fed them, and they gave them bed and said, “Go to sleep, and in the morning we will-“ but at the same time they were worried, what’s happening back home now?

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One of my uncles took the tonga, and he went round the villages looking for them, and he also ended up in that village, thinking that one of the boys’ [nanki 0:21:16] are there, so they may have gone there. So, he ended up there, and bhaa ji tells me that they were trying to sleep, they were so tired. They were crying all the way, as well, he said, “We didn’t know whether we were ever going to get home, ever,” and they said,

“If we do get home, we’re going to get beat up. We were all so scared about that,” but anyway, my uncle reached there, and then he realised, and he was really angry and furious, but his nana said, “Don’t say anything. They already really, really are very fed up and very tired, and just let them sleep.”

He said, “No, I can’t let them sleep, because back home it’s just really very bad, because they are all crying and they are all thinking that they’ve been kidnapped, or something has happened to them.”

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“So, I have to take them back now. He said we couldn’t sleep, so they took us back.” In the middle of the night he brought them back home, and then my dada ji said, because mums were crying to grab hold of them, dads were angry to beat them, and dada said, “Nobody will say anything.” He said that, “He was our saviour.” So, the mums took them, and just went to sleep, and since then, they said, they used to watch them all the time, that they don’t do anything like that.

Their memories of Pakistan were very pleasant. One, they were very well-established there, and they’d been living there centuries, and that was their home, and then everything was, like, home there.

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Back home, back home, and this was, we’ve come to something, had to establish again from the start. You know where they were living, 25 of them in one house, 2-bedroom house or something. Not even bedrooms, they were just back to back houses, and they just used to sleep on the floor, everybody, and they were awarded a lot of land, because people could claim what they had left, the similar land they could get. Some laws came up, and the government tried to

reimburse people, but they were so scared that we were probably going to die again, or something was going to happen again, and we were all going to end up somewhere else.

They didn't want anything. They said, "We'll just live together wherever we are. Whether it's one house, or a small house, it doesn't matter." They tried to stick together there.

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So, eventually, slowly, they started to get other places of their own. My uncles, my aunties, and they all moved out, but that house where they stayed first, was our house. My mum and dad's house is still that. It's a very, very interesting one, and we live in a very old city of Jalandhar, where even rickshaws go very tight. So, but they don't want to move from there. Somehow there were psychological things, even though my brother has got another house, and his shop, they built the shop again, and the factory, but they split up, eventually.

It couldn't be sustained as a joint family, because it was very big, very big. My dada ji had five sons, and at that time that was the family, joint family, but then all five sons had five sons each after that.

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So, you can see that it started to spread a lot, and this is how, eventually, everybody moved away. You know my uncle, the story I told you, the nine-year-old who led them to the village, he became ___[0:25:18] [police], eventually. Very, very, very bright guy, and my brother, he's a writer. He writes a lot of stories and poems. He was a producer on ___ and radio, and he always wrote his own scripts, any programmes he did. He's retired now. So, they did very well, but obviously they had to start again from scratch. My brother still writes in Urdu, and

that's his first language. Even though he can read and write Hindi and Punjabi, and English.

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He feels more comfortable in Urdu. That's what he had learned before Partition. That was the medium they were learning. All I heard from my mum about the camps is that the government tried to give them the basic requirements. Of the food, and they used to go in the evening, the food used to be distributed. You go and get for your children, and they also gave some clothes as well, because people just came with nothing. It was a community feeling, because everybody had left everything.

So, people were there to try to support each other, but there were some people who had left loved ones, people who had got killed on the way. Those were really sad stories to hear in those camps, and mum avoided those, telling us.

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I could see in her eyes sometimes that she knew that so much had gone on, which she couldn't tell us. My maasi tells some stories about where she gave birth in the train, and that was the train, one of the [bogeys 0:27:26] were killed. All the people were killed in that, but she was in a different one. Somehow they were lucky to survive, because when they stopped that train and started killing people, at the same time, I think the India side also stopped a train, and they started to tell them that, "If you kill one more person, we're going to kill everybody in this train." So, this is how, it was so crude.

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It was so violent, that people just became, overnight, enemies of each other who were friends before. They couldn't live without each other, and then all of a sudden they wanted to kill

each other because of the partition. I couldn't believe, what had this done to people? I'm sure they experienced a lot more trauma, but because we were children, we used to sit there wanting to know nice stories, and what happened, and then they picked on all the good ones to tell us.

Even that, we used to be just mesmerised by listening to all that, and feel how must they have, emotionally, managed all that upheaval. Just from something, you're established there for centuries of your families, and all of a sudden it's not your home anymore, and it's not your choice.

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You have been pushed. Not by choice, but somebody made a decision that this is not your land anymore. So, very sad. Somewhere it brought them together, as well. I would say when people go through trauma they do want to stick together, and all the material things became meaningless for a long time. Then when they started to see that, "We don't have anything to actually educate our children, or feed them properly, or clothe them the way they were used to," then they started to actually make more of an effort to do those things. The first few years, my mum said that, "We didn't want to do anything."

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They sold all those gold and things, and that's how they were living for a long time. Just selling those things, and just making do. My mum was more kind to me than any of my brothers and sisters. I was the youngest, first of all, and she always thought, "You've never seen what we had." She used to say that. She used to say that to my other brothers and sisters as well, but somehow, because my dad became ill quite early on, and I was only 10 when he passed away, so she felt that I had the

worst, because I didn't even see my dad properly, and the sort of empire they had, or sort of things they could do. She just, I don't know, felt sorry for me, or something.

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She never, ever was, she wouldn't say anything. Whatever I asked for, she would always try to get me that. So, very sad. You know, my mum, when she passed away last year, before that when I went to India, we used to talk about things, and she used to talk about her childhood. She said she's seen so much change that she can't believe. From a village which didn't even have electricity to, she came, she was 12 when she got married, to the city, in Sialkot, and from a village house which was only one storey she came to share with a very big house, and a lot of things in there.

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She said, "First thing I noticed was they had houses on top of the houses." She could not explain that they were multi-storey houses, she had never seen that. She said that, "These people are very clever, they've made houses on top of the houses. They're using the space so much," and she used to laugh about it, and she said, "When I went back to my parents' house, I used to tell them, 'They've got big, big houses, but they're not just houses like our houses. They've got houses on top of the houses.'"

So, to her, that was a big, big thing, and then the electricity. You just have to switch, and then everything would be on. So, those things were really, she said, "I saw all that," and then from there to be part of this big family, and having a [coach 0:32:58] _____ who would take them to shopping and to the bazaar and all those places, to nothing when they came in the Partition.

0:33:08 They had nothing whatsoever left, and then building up from there to something, whatever little they thought they had. She used to say, "I just can't, it feels like a [Non-English speech 0:33:23]." Means it's, like, going many, many more lifetimes, "When I think about my childhood. When I think about Sialkot, when I think about Jammu side," where they were living, and then the Partition. The journey they had, the camps they had, the houses they lived in and the places they experienced on the way to Jalandhar. All this seems like a dream.

0:33:58 Sometimes it's like, "It can't be true, that we've gone through all that," but now, she used to sit watching TV, and sometimes she used to say that, she was 98 when she passed away last year, she said that, "___[0:34:13] and [Shah Rukh] always come to say goodnight to me," because she used to watch their programmes. You know at the end they say, "Good night?" She used to think they particularly came to see her, and she said, "All this has changed. You couldn't imagine, from where I have started, that people could be coming to your house to say goodnight, all the way from the other side of the world."

So, she had amazing experiences, and we had, through her, those experiences.

0:34:54 Story to this country is a strange one, because even though in Sialkot their business was very big and they were exporting goods, sports goods, to England at time, Canada, and in Europe as well, but when they came to India, it was nothing. So, they had to start again, and they had no connections left with anybody abroad. We had no relatives in England, or

anywhere else, really, for that matter, because the whole big clan was well settled there. They never wanted to go away, anywhere, and somehow when I was growing up, with the arranged marriages, you know this Hakim who took them to Jalandhar? It was his family's person who had connections with relatives who were in England.

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Once again, he was the one who came to my family and said, "There is an eligible boy who has come from England, wants to get married," and fixed my marriage for me to come over. Even though I never wanted to come. I had no idea what England is, where it is, and what sort of country it would be, because I was quite happy, what I was doing there, and I had all the dreams to be there and never thought about going away from India, but it just seems to be destiny. So, I ended up here.

When I came over as a bride it was such a shock to me, because first of all I didn't know what to expect, because to me, England was something, strange land. I never had prepared myself to study about where it is, what people do, and how it is, because it happened very suddenly.

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Within a month, I was married and I was here. That marriage didn't last, it didn't work out. I ended up going back. When I went back, I was just, like, back in my own territory with my family, with my friends, and with my music field. So, I started where I had left, I started from there, but because I wasn't divorced, I had just left, I had to come back to sort that out. So, once I came back, it took longer. So, I just ended up staying on my own. It was a struggle, for a couple of years. A big struggle, and that's where, I think, I grew up as a person, because there was nobody from the family.

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So, but somehow that period gave me a lot of strength. A lot of opportunities for me to actually do things that I wanted to do. Whereas when you're with the family, there are a lot of expectations, and they do mould you, and you do go along with that. Whereas here there was nobody to tell me what not to do and what to do, and somehow I had the grounding, and I felt that the education, basic education that I had, prepared me to keep my sanity and develop myself as a woman, as a musician. As a singer, as a person, and then my nephew came over. After about three years, he came over to visit.

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Just to visit, and then he ended up marrying someone here, and he's here now. Now my sister comes, my other brothers come, my elder brother has been a few times. My mum also came, and then I got married, as well, in '92. I met somebody here and we got married, and most of my family have visited now. I see this as my home now. So, I do go back every year, and that's very important for me. My daughter goes as well, and she's very close to my family. All her cousins, and all her mamas and maasis, and everybody, but she was born and brought up here. She speaks perfect Punjabi, which has helped, because going every year, that has helped.

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She used to speak to my mum, who couldn't understand English anyway. So, she had to, and because my mum spoke more of Dogri rather than Punjabi, she also picked up a little bit of that. She used to sit there asking me, "What does this mean? What does that mean? Nani is saying this," and she picked a few words of Dogri as well, and I speak Dogri quite fluently, because my mum used to speak that. So, now

England is not a strange land for me at all. It's home, it's home.

When I came here, I always knew that India and Pakistan are two countries, enemies, and people from Pakistan are not good people, and we cannot be friends with them, because we had two wars with them.

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That's all we could hear in everything, but since I've been here, that's an amazing, amazing experience, and it's strange enough, the majority of my friends are Pakistanis. I don't see any difference, and the things I used to hear from my mum and my dad, my uncles and aunties about people from Pakistan, Muslim people from Pakistan, I can see with my own eyes. I can see how they had all that love and all that affection for those people, and I have the same. I have the same here, and it's really a very different experience.

When I go back and talk about them, the new generation don't understand, because they haven't probably heard all those stories which I have.

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They say, "How could you be friends with Pakistanis? You can't trust them," and I say, "They're just like us. Their culture is the same, their language is the same, their food is the same. They feel the same, we're no different. It's just, politically whatever has happened has made us feel different towards each other, but we're not different people," and I just, somehow, it's like a circle. It seems to have gone back in a circle, where my parents have started, and I've ended up there.

I don't think that is the same feelings in both sides in India, or in Pakistan. People have different ideas about Indian people in Pakistan, and the same thing with Indian people for Pakistani people.

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Whereas here, we live as one community, and that's the positive side of it. Being out of that environment. So, I'm very happy to be here. With my daughter's generation, I think they do, it depends on what the parents' experience has been. Like, my experience has been very different, and I never, ever have told her that, you know, the Pakistani people are different, or we're not supposed to be friends with them or anything like that. She doesn't see any different than me, but I know some people do. I've known families where they still have those feelings.

0:44:02

What happened during Partition, some families who really got hurt. They lost so much, and through that hatred towards each other, and it's still there. Those families, the centuries have gone and they've not got rid of it, and that's been passed on to the children, but I think it all depends on what your experience has been, and where that's been taken. Somehow, I thank my parents. They've given me all positive experiences. They didn't tell us a lot of stories which they probably have seen, and we know that.

We see it on TV, we see it in the history, what's happened, and we know for sure that that's been a horrendous experience for everybody who was in that transition.

0:45:09

Is that okay?

[Break in conversation 0:45:10 – 0:45:36]

END AUDIO

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