

# BIRMINGHAM BLACK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## The Land of Money?

### TRANSCRIPTION OF CASSETTE 1 SIDE A

#### Preface

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** My children born in this country, brought up in this country, outside they are migrant. So the whole issue, a white person will say, "migrant", "Where you come from?" I tell you the stories, it goes like this, "Where you are from?", "Birmingham", and in Bob Purkiss' case, "Winchester", "No, no, no I mean where you are from?" "Winchester England" "No, no, no where I mean, I mean where you from?" Bob Purkiss used to say, "But I am bloody from England!" and still it is "Oh no, no, no I mean, we mean oh West Indies." Like this [laughs] and this is still for the generation after generation it goes on "Where you from?" and the other thing that the racist slogans are "Go home!" We say, "Go home where?" So these are the issues which carries on and it is perpetuating issues of immigration.

**Ravi Thiara:** These words pose the dilemma of people born in another country and that of their children who were born here. Where is their homeland? - with all its questions of adaptation, cultural religious and national rivalries followed by prospects of division or the evolution of a multi-cultural society.

This cassette-pack has been prepared by the Birmingham Black Oral History Project with the financial assistance of the Birmingham City Council Race Relations Unit to illustrate, in their own words, the lives of a migrant, minority community, their arrival in this country after the war and how some of them came to Birmingham.

#### Departure, arrival and first impressions

**Esme Lancaster:**

"We came to the land of money so the saying goes,  
From the land of poverty that was what we had supposed,  
But soon our hearts with sorrow were filled as we wandered along each day,  
Trying to find somewhere to live and to make our new abode."

[Poem by Esme Lancaster]

**Saji Kaur:** I think like any other peasant society where there were limited jobs in India and there was always the hope of that the grass is greener on the other side and there was a tremendous amount of immigrants who moved out of India during the World War. So I suppose my parents came to Malaya hoping that things would be better. So it was during the time of the Second World War that my father and my mother took the boat to the ship and sailed across to Malaya and the moment, the week that they came to Malaya, the Japanese landed. So they were more or less stuck into the mining village and living through the war times and again like the grass wasn't greener on the other side. And then as things didn't work out economically for him he thought the best thing for him to do was to leave Malaya and move on to England and this was in the 1960s. Again, that in Britain the streets were paved with gold concept that things might improve. So he came over here in 1962 and I must have been about nine years old, and the whole ambition of his was that maybe if we got to England he'll save enough money for the whole family to go across.

**Nurul Hoque:** Well, you know the local market, when you go to the market, people talk about go to England, have a good earning, you can live prosperously and so on. So I pick it up from the market, This is the bad period when my father had died. This is the only time I suffer a bit financially because every three years, one after another had flood, insect, Have a little income to survive but hardly to pay anything to servant, hardly to buy anything, you know, you cannot sell anything except your land. Therefore I had to sell about 24 Cader of land to survive you know, keep everything going [3.5 Cader is around 1 acre]. If you go to England you can have a job, you have a good earning, so you can live prosperously. Also you can look after your family and so on. That's all I know, I had to sell some land and some bamboo plant to buy the ticket.

**Carlton Duncan:** At the time it was a craze, you know, that the place to be was England, "the Mother Country" and the streets were paved with gold. Everything was right about coming to England. We're talking roughly about round the early, what, 1955 in fact, they travelled to England and the then Labour Government full-employment policy and the shortage of unskilled labour, there was a very heavy demand for people to do unskilled jobs in Great Britain. In fact the invitation came from "the Mother Country" to the various West Indian Islands, appealing for people to come along to this country and do what essentially were jobs that the local people, the national people would not do, and that is what really explain the great influx of what used to be called West Indians then, from the various islands, Jamaica, and Barbados and Trinidad in particular. I was then despatched to stay with relatives in Frankfield, Clarendon, which was quite the fashion for people emigrating to this part of the world to actually leave their younger ones with other relatives, aunties, grandparents, sisters, brothers.

**Sakiina Haaruun:** It was an exciting time of my life, basically, you know as a child and there was this thing about you know if you have somebody in England. And there was something about getting a letter from England because you could

always look forward to probably getting a parcel that had some clothes that you could then say it came from England.

**Zahoor Ahmed:** When I used to live with my grannie in India the money order used to come from Birmingham in the 1940s. So you can see that even then we know the address, Bath Row, Birmingham, was from here. The money order used to come.

**Carlton Duncan:** The letter came from England, from my parents, father, mother and step-father saying, "Look, you come to England, the place is riddled with teacher-training colleges, riddled with universities, you gonna have it so much easier getting into one of these places." And of course the lure, the attraction of the foreign land and travel and the fact that my ambition would be enhanced and more easily obtained and so forth. A young person, just nineteen plus at the time, I jumped at it. But what a disappointment, It really was a major disappointment.

**Esme Lancaster:** Well I left the place I was teaching, it was a Friday morning and I cried a lot before that. But that day I didn't and when we got into the line, when the plane came and I asked Mary, the stewardess, to take my passport, one of the immigrations officer came up to me and said, "Let me have that passport." And he looked at the air stewardess and says, "Stewardess, excuse me a bit, I just have to talk to her," and he said, "What are you going to England to do?" I said, "Well I am going to develop my studies." He said, "That's three loads of children out there crying after you and if you were going to England just to work," he said, "I wouldn't let you go because those children needed you," he said, "but since that what you going for," he said, "OK go on, because if you're going to England to work you would never make it in England."

**Ryland Campbell:** So we were like cattles actually and we stopped in France and we were to board a train not knowing that your luggage would follow you. Some people get excited when they couldn't get their hand luggage and then I understood down the line that a French man hit one of us and it's like it was gonna be a fight or something because no black man take that sort of thing you see and then he just rest his hand on his gun and so everybody else backed off. That was another like lesson number two, you know, try and understand before it. So when I went in the boat again, our language, you can hear it is a sort of mixture of all sort of region and if you didn't know correct words to enunciate you would be just like a babbling nothing. And so I understood a little bit of French because I was at this place when they were talking about "Monsieur" or "Mademoiselle" or something like that and "pardon-nous" and all that sort of thing. So when I sort of get to the boat and I wanted something now, I go up and say, "Pardon nous Monsieur?" and the Frenchman say, "Monsieur?" I say, "Biscuit, Coca-cola, drink" and the man say, "Yes, Monsieur" and so I jumped the queue. And I thought that was music because it played back the sounds, the sounds is relevant and it will be pronounced and understood and so then for

England, it's "please", "thank you", and if you know those things and be humble with them they can get you around.

**Ranjit Sondhi:** I was a mere sixteen years old when I first came and do you know I had never travelled on my own until the point when I was put into a Jumbo Jet and sent through the skies into a new country altogether and do you know I didn't feel at all apprehensive about this. I jumped into that plane and landed in England and I felt as almost as if I had come to a country I had known all my life, until I met the immigration officer who appeared rather cold and distant and a bit suspicious, until I showed him my letters and so on and then he waved me through.

**Nurul Hoque:** I was a bit worried when I landed in case I did not meet my relations, could not find a place to live and so on but when I meet that Pakistani person and he seen - he went towards me saying, "Where are you coming from?" I said, "Sylhet, Pakistan" and [he] asked me which village I come from. He asked me my father's name and say, "Where are you going?" I say, "I don't know, I have a relation living in Birmingham, do you know him?" He say, "Yes" and [I] say, "Would you kindly take me to him, I have no English currency", and he say, "Don't worry about it, I will pay your train fare, taxi fare and take you to your relation", and so he did.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** And so I boarded KLM and stop over in Amsterdam and then I arrived in London, Heathrow Airport, and when we came off there was nobody to receive me because my flight was arranged at the eleventh hour and then couldn't communicate with my brother here. In those days no telephones direct [laughs], it used to be only telegrams but I said to my uncle, "We should give the telegram," he said, "It's alright, you got London address, you go there and then from there you send the telegram to your brother and they will come and take you away." So I arrived and I met at the airport by two Indians and they used to go to the airport, taking their car and getting passenger. I remember they said, "Hello boy", and also they said, "You look from college, from India." I said, "Yes" in Panjabi and then they asked, "Where you going?" I said, "Well I'm going to London but my brother lives in Birmingham, Smethwick." And they asked what's the name of my brother, and I said, "My brother's name Gashi, he live in Smethwick." They said, "Oh yeah we know him, we know him, we work with him, don't worry, we will take you there." But my uncle warned me he said, "Don't go with anybody", and what happened, "They will say they charge you £5, when they go there they will say we want £10," and in those days £10 lot of money. And they said, "Don't worry boy we will take you." Twenty-year-old young person! And they said, "We know your brother, we know Gashi and we take you." I said, "No" and then they said, where I'm going in London?' I said, "I'm going to Jasvir Singh Sanghera," and they said, "Oh, then you alright" [laughs], because they knew that person as well.

**Ryland Campbell:** That's it and so we came and at twilight and then one of the next thing that really hit me is some loud-mouth West Indian, who think he knew and we were newcomers, "£1, all night, ten shilling stand up." So what is he on about? So he's saying, oh he's talking about girls. In other words he was hustler, he would know where to take you as newcomers to go and get girls. But the next thing is I saw this white man, dirty coat and all that and he was diving and picking up dog-ends off the streets and I thought wow!

**Esme Lancaster:** Well I was surprised when I came to England, first because comparing it to our houses in Jamaica, we thought that every house that we looked at were factories because we didn't have to have chimneys because of the tropical country, but when we came and saw that ... The next thing again, was I came in winter, just early in December when the trees were bare and I was saying to them, "Why do they keep so much dry trees around?" I didn't know that the winter, the leaves had gone.

**Sakiina Haaruun:** The day I arrived in this country I never did like it, it was cold, it was damp, it was mouldy, it was wet, it was funny, I remember having to go to town with my mother and somebody else to buy a coat.

**Zahoor Ahmed:** I was quite surprised to find the place was very cold, even in May, and I found people liked to keep indoors most of the time.

**Badrun Nesa Pasha:** When I came to this country my goodness, it was in October, so cold. I had my overcoat because we don't usually put overcoat on in Bangladesh and I didn't have that shoes because we wear sandals type, sandal shoes, so those type of sandals, but I did have lots of socks on.

**Frank Scantlebury:** I think it was just a few days before Christmas. Of course it was very cold at the time. We were having severe frosts during the night and so on, it was very cold. Still I hadn't seen snow, only the frost on the pavements and on the roof-tops and so on. And I remember hearing a knock on my door on the Sunday morning and I answered the door and the landlady said to me, "Frank, come and have a good look at the snow, it's here at last, you can see what it's like." And I was amazed when I went and looked through the window, her garden was covered with the snow, it looked just like a beautiful white carpet. And, as you know, the city of Bath is surrounded by hills, I could look on the slopes of the hills and see it. It was so beautiful, it was breathtaking, quite an experience and I rushed outside and I took a handful of it and made a ball with it, you know, and I thought what a thrilling experience this is. At last I've seen snow and I was just like a ten-year-old boy really all excited about it.

**Sakiina Haaruun:** I just didn't like it. I remember the first experience I had using a toilet in this country and I sat down on this toilet seat and it was so cold I jumped up [laughs].

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## TRANSCRIPTION OF CASSETTE 1, SIDE B

### Housing and work

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** We came to Smethwick, my brother's house, it was in Oxford Road, Smethwick. There were many people, I thought maybe waiting for me to come, but when everybody went away there was still fifteen or sixteen people, Indians, staying at the house. In the front room, two double beds, in the bedroom upstairs, each bedroom two double beds and in the small room, one three-quarter bed and those beds with like the metal springs and big wooden headboards. No carpets in the house, it was lino in all rooms. The food was kept under the beds and in the kitchen there was electric cooker and this - not the present-type steel sinks, it was this china-type big sink. No hot water system, the toilet was outside, there was a tin bath tub. It was a surprise to me to see the house, a villa-type house, small one, much smaller than my own house in Jandiala, much, much smaller than that.

**Carlton Duncan:** Fortunately I didn't have, like many of my compatriots, I didn't have to go house-hunting, find a room to let, that alone would have really killed me off. Because on my journeys to and from college, I used to pass these shop windows and I'd see "ROOMS FOR LET - SORRY NO COLOURED, NO IRISH, NO DOGS", this kind of thing, and I couldn't understand that you know, we were in the "Mother Country". I was finding that very difficult to come to terms with.

**Esme Lancaster:** Black people could not get houses to rent as other people. The conditions of living when we first came here let me cry for months and months and months till we began to find improvement in our living standard. We had to share the kitchen with everybody and every other conveniences.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** Within our group two people unemployed, four employed, and for the unemployed there was, the landlord didn't charge rent. The rent was 50p a week, ten shillings. Then for the food, which [was] generally called in the community "ration", something like £1.50 for the food a week and the unemployed also were not charged for the food, the others shared.

**Ryland Campbell:** The conditions in tenement thing is something I couldn't adjust myself to because we had to be, you know, fighting for the stove and in those days you didn't have bath in the place, you had to go down to the public bath and that's not the kind of life I know not here, not even if I was living in shanty town I would have, you know, a way of doing it without so public a thing. Then I'm asking my mother to let us buy a house because in those days houses were cheap and she said, "Oh no", she don't want no house, she not intending to stay here forever.

**Badrun Nesa Pasha:** People they, they used to go to the public bath and in our country we think the bath is more essential one because sometimes in our country we take it twice a, three times a bath you know in the hot weather, whereas in this country, nowadays people take shower more or less every day going to work and in the summer time sometimes, twice you see. But I never, when I came there was no such things and weather was cold so I don't know whether the people were - but they had a Gas Ascot that, in the kitchen. Some houses I visited they didn't have anything, they just boiling the kettle all the times and pouring the water in.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** The environmental issues in those days were never talked about and on weekends we used to do our washings and then put on the garden, particularly in the summer. And if it is put during daytime, working days Monday to Friday, Saturday, and by evening they gone black because of all the smoke coming from the chimneys of the foundries.

**Ranjit Sondhi:** There must have been a number of factors which created the settlement of pockets of migrant communities in the inner cities. Handsworth is not unlike Sparkbrook in that respect, for instance, or like certain areas of Balsall Heath or Saltley. What happened, I think, was that these areas were in decline at the time migrant communities were coming into the city and they had been in decline many years before. The shops hadn't, were no longer busy. The main areas, the main streets were now depleted in many ways. The housing fabric was old and getting older and the quality of houses was largely of the Victorian terraced type with many, many rooms, and families had shrunk and moved out of the area leaving behind these rather large and cumbersome properties, difficult to heat, difficult to keep the damp out of and that was really the only option available to them at the end of the day. It also suited them to some extent because it was cheap and their idea was to make as much money as possible and not to spend it on themselves or on clothes or on housing but in order to send remittances back home to their families. But it also created for multi-occupation because obviously these houses had a number of bedrooms which could be used by able-bodied workers who were just interested in having a bed for the night or the day as it might happen and then go off to work in the foundries and factories in the area. There was discrimination in those days, people wouldn't lend money to immigrant families, particularly Afro-Caribbean families, with the result that a lot of them had to resort to council housing. So eventually I think, both Afro-Caribbean communities and Asian communities did what was the only option available to them. They grouped together, bought houses in common, pooled their incomes and their savings, formed little co-operatives of their own, indeed some of the earliest co-operative movements were among black people in Handsworth, and bought houses and then only when they had saved more money and they were contemplating bringing their wives and children over to this country did they branch out into smaller houses, into semi-detached houses, for instance, where there would be only one or two

families. But initially, they started off, for all kinds of reasons, both external and internal reasons to live jointly in very large Victorian type of housing that characterised Handsworth at the time.

**Frank Scantlebury:** All the firms then were glad for workers. They weren't getting rid of people and giving us their jobs, they were glad for workers. They were only too glad to get people to do the work and that's why people were coming to the United Kingdom at the time. But in spite of that although it was so easy to get employment at that time, one could leave a job today and you could walk into a job tomorrow, leave it and you would find it easy to get another job. There was no difficulty in finding employment at that time.

**Ryland Campbell:** First thing you have to sign on to the dole for social security and more or less "big brother" sat watching you and all that sort of thing. And then next thing you must show that you are looking for a job and so on and so this friend start take me to factories and I thought - and again guys who live in that home now they think, well come and try my factory. And I got myself a job and the best job those days were to be a bus operator of some type. So I got a job on the Midland Red as a conductor and I'm telling you everybody think I was the "bee's knees".

**Nurul Hoque:** My relation he told me not to go out, might get lost on my way and when he went to work and a few people was without jobs as well - they have come like me, you know, newly to this country - I take them too, say, "Come on now, not to sit at the house all the time, let's go out see if we can get a job without anybody's help." So we went to Kitts Green, at that time the company's name was James Booth Aluminium Limited, and I went to the Personnel Office and said, "Is there any vacancies please?" and he say, "You are too young to get a job in the mill." I said, "I can do any job, sir," so he called the maintenance foreman to the Personnel Office and said, "This lad look very bright, could you provide him a job?" He say, "Yes." So I get a job as a maintenance fitter-mate, carrying tools. How you get the job, how I get the job. When my relation come back from work and he was surprised I get a job and I went out and come back, go back to the house safely [laughs].

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** In 1958 when I started work was 44 hour in the foundry industry, in the engineering industry plus overtime in the foundry, ancillary overtime. So 44 hours plus another 7, 8 hours, it was no less than 50 hour week. And lunchtime some workers used to go to the public house for two pints or three pints, particularly those workers who working on molten metal area or knockout area, hot, dust and all the smoke. So the lunchtime going to the pub, coming back, having meal, Indian roti, dhal and then starting work again. And that was the typical situation around the foundry industry and that was where most of the, almost all I would say, people worked. I didn't know any school-teacher at that time, I didn't know anybody working in bank or any office jobs, even those people who have been graduated who worked as teachers back home, they were

working in the factories and foundries. One example, Comrade Teja Singh Sahota, who came earlier than me around '53, he was, he has Master's degree. He used to teach in a college in India and when he came over here in Coventry and all he was offered a job of a primary-school teacher, that was only temporary job.

**Carlton Duncan:** It is not until I hit the shores of Great Britain and met with that experience being told that my qualifications weren't recognised here that I begin to search who I am because here I am sitting examinations in the West Indies, set by "the Mother Country", marked by "the Mother Country", I acquire them and when I come to "the Mother Country" about whom I've heard, had heard so much wonderful things etc, even by my own parents etc, suddenly to be told by "the Mother Country" that we don't recognise your qualifications. I mean I took that a little bit hard and really sowed a determination in me, I think, which made me decide to repeat my general education so to speak. It took a great deal of courage to start all over again.

**Joan Proctor-Monroe:** I didn't have a lot of struggle really, Eventually I got a job at County Hall where there were many other black people from various parts of the world and I worked there for about, from about '56 to about '60, and then a job came up nearer home, nearer where I was living in Hammersmith, to work in a hostel, in a home for young offenders and I was transferred there.

**Zahoor Ahmed:** My Nanna's [maternal grandfather's] nephew used to sell things along Bull Ring Market, so I saw him selling there. I was quite surprised, I say, "My family people doing such roadside selling," you know, that was something below, you know, our expectation. We didn't expect them to do such things.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** The majority was contented because of the earning they were making and also their occupation in terms of personal occupation, spending time, well most of the time, to save maximum money for sending back home. And when people came their vision was, nearly everybody, that I will work here four, five years, have lump sum of money in Indian rupees and then I will go back. And I remember the example of one comrade who, now in Southall, Vishnu Sharma and it is known about him when he came that, when I would have 20,000 rupees,\* then I am going back. He's still here even after his retirement. The - nearly everybody, even I have the same vision, that after some time I will go back when I have some money, and some money means 20,000, 25,000 rupees, then I will go back. But that was, in reality, it turned out wishful thinking. So their mental occupation to save money and also economising on even drink, most of the people, and economising on food in terms of cooking meat once a week. Some of them I would say, very few they did go astray, but most of them they stayed single person, they stayed as they were and the reason particularly that one married to going out, going astray cost money as well [laughs]. Also for them the preoccupation was, preoccupation most of the time thinking back home and getting 20,000 rupees, sending back, pay off the loans they taken and then going

back rather than indulging into the extravagances which were considered in those days. So therefore, they stay single, totally single people.

**Ryland Campbell:** I start realising that it seem that it's the white race that had the money and the black race was the one who had to work for their money.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** My job was a white man moulder's mate. There were other Indians in the foundry, all of them working as white moulder's mate, who [were] on the labourer's job, not skilled job. None of the Indians was a core-maker which is considered skilled and which was highly paid. All labourers, migrant labour, all so-called skilled worker or moulder, white; all fitters white, all electricians white, all cupola operators white, all dressers white. So it was clear-cut division: low pay, hard work, migrant labour. And in the evening we went to pub. I said, "We got to do something about it" - I can't remember the exact words, but it was that we should do something whereby we should organise the Union.

\* 20,000 rupees was equivalent in 1956-7 to £1,509, and would have bought 5-10 acres. The 1992 equivalent would be 500,000 rupees, or around £10,000

# The Land of Money?

## TRANSCRIPTION OF CASSETTE 2, SIDE A

### Arrival of wives & children; social gatherings; problems

**Esme Lancaster:** Quite a few women were here and well settled because you have people that came here from the Caribbean that were from the Royal Air Force, came and had stayed on, and most of those men have sent for their spouse or their wives, whatever. There were hardly any children here at that time and they don't think that England at that time was a place for the black children because there was hardly any child-care provision.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** I like to here mention now about the migration of women. Why women were not here, number one that the perception among the migrant was after few year we will go back and also pay off the loan and for having a woman here it was considered that before inviting a wife it is important to have a house, not living as a lodger.

**Esme Lancaster:** It was hard to find yourself finding the people that you used to move with; the kind of people, the kind of way of life, because most of the people that came had to resort to some kind of recreation or the other. The only recreation they had seen when they first came here was the bingo house and the pubs and that was the only place they could have met with anybody, and this was the only thing they had, the pubs and the bingo halls. Coming from work they went home and had change and either to the bingo or the pub and I didn't go to any of those and so I missed out on the sort of things that I would have done at home, cos I run a youth club home and we did a lot of craft and art work. There was no way I could have done it here in those days. I want to cling to the church more than anything else cos there was where you find that you can have fellowship. We have social gathering and to me I find the church brought me the most of the kind of life that I used to live at home. I've never gone to any dance hall, any - I've come here and never went to a bingo hall, I've never gone into a pub cos we did not go there when we were in Jamaica. Those are places that we thought it wasn't very good for women especially.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** Around late '59, in Smethwick a few men they got together and then they started to hire a room in a school and they brought Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh holy book, from India and I like to mention in those days the only Gurudwara [Sikh temple] was in England was in London, there was no other Gurudwara, and now there are 2,500 Gurudwaras in whole of the United Kingdom. They started Sikh congregation in a school once a month and then every other fortnight and then every Sunday. Money was collected in the community, and then Guru Nanak Gurudwara was bought, an old church on High

Street, Smethwick, which was converted into Sikh temple and it was also a point of social gathering.

**Zahoor Ahmed:** I wanted to pray Eid\* one day, so I said, "Where to pray Eid?", and they took me to Digbeth Hall. Jumuah\* prayers and Eid prayers were held in Digbeth Hall, you know Digbeth Hall? They used to rent, the Muslim community used to rent that Hall and everybody donated, you know, £1 each. Some people 50p, whatever you want to give, they would go there and pray and from that collection they will pay the rent for Hall and all that. So now got Mosque everywhere. There 144 Mosques in Birmingham.

**Carlton Duncan:** A Jamaican girl that I fell madly in love with but she, she just didn't bother to notice me at all. She went along to this Strand Palace Hotel on this occasion and she just fell head over heels for my cousin and they just hit it off in a big way on the night [laughs] and that really savaged me very much to the extent that I started mixing my drink and doing all sorts of things and I recall that - me getting up and going on the dance floor all by myself and putting on a demonstration. It was, Chubby Checker had just commercialised the Twist, in the early '60s, and there was me twisting away all on my own and I just - suddenly there was no music and all around me there were people and this red-coated toast-master came up to me and said, "Young man, you've won a prize!" and the prize was 20 Players cigarettes. And I then went back to my table still thinking about Fay and Hughie, when the same toast-master came up to me again and this time he had, he had a card in his hand and he said, "I'd like you to come up to 18 Charing Cross Road, the Tavistock Rooms on Wednesday," this was the Monday night, our do was on the Monday night, "You come up on Wednesday, I'd like you to give a live audition there, I think we can do something for you." I had read stories you know, I used to read a lot of comics as a kid and love story books and heard that film stars were discovered in this kind of way and so forth and I had visions of being discovered.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** Those women who come, who have come, now the women they didn't work and why they didn't work, one, was a stigma also, if a woman goes to work, our respectability goes down the drain and that was the major problem and also there was not work available. So they brought up their babies, children, and one story is that women living in the same area they got together during the month of summer, going to the park. When the workers go to work in the morning after that they get up, get ready, all this Surkhi powder, Surkhi powder means lipstick and [laughs] cosmetics and - but in those days it was plain Surkhi powder. And then it was a fashion to have two long tails [plaits], yeah, and placing their babies in the prams and go to Victoria Park and have a pram-race in Victoria Park and pram-racing with sometime not the babies in, babies playing on the grass and they having pram-race. And the other, which is that used to be said, the women that, when the whistle of the factories goes, they used to say, "Let's go home now before our husbands come back home!" [laughs]. And their occupation was during daytime to get to one another house and having cup of

tea and playing music and also some dancing which is called *Gidha*, five, six of them get together and doing *Gidha* and that sort of activity was among the women.

**Esme Lancaster:** I wasn't frightened, I was more upset, more upset with the life that I had lived because I have not lived this kind of life before. Things, I missed home that thing I had treasured. I couldn't have it any more here. For instance my acquaintance with the people I used to move with, you came here and you lost them,

**Saji Kaur:** For my mother it was also very unusual experience because in Malaya she had already learned to adapt to a different society being able to speak a number of languages, whereas coming to this country she couldn't speak the English language and obviously being of a slightly older age now she therefore wouldn't be able to cope with learning something. So she began to adapt with a small narrow community and she only isolated herself completely into that and I suppose her way of overcoming everything was to conform to some of the ways and the means of that. But I suppose in a way it was a tragedy and this is something that you learn through the process of immigration that what you think may happen, or what you don't know what lies ahead of you is then experienced and I think that was very sad and I'm sure that, that was a kind of an experience that many of the older generation of the Asians had when they came here because they're not accepted into the society, they can't speak the language, they began to sort of stick with their own community. And often, in those days, there weren't all the so-called leisure facilities which we have got today. So it was very much of an isolated community.

**Esme Lancaster:** People could not understand our language, most of the ethnic minority, especially when it comes to the West Indians, they were saying that they could not understand.

**Sakiina Haaruun:** The only time I would ever say my life became unhappy is when I actually came to this country because things changed. Everything changed! I then inherited a father that I'd not seen for how much years, who then became the voice where my mother was that, and I had a relationship with my mother, that I could tolerate my mum's scolding and belting and telling off but I could not tolerate my father's because I would think, "Well who the hell does he think he is and how dare him talk to me like that, I don't know him!" But of course those were things that I was only thinking, I could not voice these things, cos I daren't even say that to my mother cos I might get another belting on top of it or she might have been supportive but I would not take the chance.

**Saji Kaur:** It was then that I for the first time began to see my father. I think it was interesting from the point of view that this man I've not seen for eleven years is therefore my father and he's far more conservative and he's trying to dominate me, he's trying to modify me into, "You better dress like a Sikh and behave like a

Sikh", and this man has the right to do that to me who has never ever seen me for eleven years, you know. And all the anger suddenly begins to come out. So I suppose I reflect back on how many other Asians must feel because they were separated from their own family.

**Joan Proctor-Monroe:** I think racism was not as - it was there but you weren't as aware of it as you are today. I feel it is even worse than it was then. I mean you had the things of people not getting work because you were black but you weren't as conscious then that this was the reason and they gave you various reasons and you think, well they can't be lying, you know, and they can't be using your colour against you. You are now aware that this is so.

**Frank Scantlebury:** Strange enough, I feel, and many people felt the same way too, that because of our colour we were easily spotted. That's why we became the target very often of abuse and criticism, much of it unjustified. Even if we as friends on Saturday evenings or any time when you went about in a group together there were always people who would seem to single us out as if we were going out looking for trouble. I remember a chap saying to me one day, "Why do so many of you coloured people walk about together?" And I said, "What do you mean?" and he said, "You're always in groups, are you planning something?" and I said, "What makes you think so?" I said, "I see very often Polish people walk about in groups, Italians, Irish, Australians, Canadians that live here in Britain, why it is that you always think that if you see three or four of us together that we are planning to do something wrong?" I said, "It's not like that at all." He said, "Well we don't walk about like that," I said, "Of course you do, every day."

**Sakiina Haaruun:** I didn't recognise it then, no I really didn't cos I came into this country when I was, what, 13 I think it was, or 13 going on to 14, so I certainly didn't. It wasn't until I came into this country that I actually recognised this thing you know, the distinction of the black/white thing. I just didn't see it,

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** We went to a pub named Wagon and Horses. There were two smoke rooms, one assembly room, and two bars and I opened the door of the assembly room and they were all white men. It was not my brother, someone else, he said to me, "We not going there." I asked, "Why we not going there?" He said, "Oh, Gaffa, he doesn't let us drink in that room." We were allowed to go in only in one smoke room and one public bar. We were not allowed in another public bar and another smoke room and the assembly room. And I asked about why we were not allowed in there and my brother said, "Well that is for white people, we are on this side." But in the public bar and the smoke room we were allowed in, there were white people as well in those rooms. And that was another shock for me. I said, "Why?" and he said, "The Gaffa says when we sit together we talk very loudly and white people don't like us talking loudly, the other thing that we talk in Panjabi and the white people are complaining that we are talking about them [laughs] in our language!" and these are the problems - but this was

just the excuse but in real terms it was a colour-bar operating which I later found out that it was nearly in every public house in Smethwick and Handsworth, later on.

**Esme Lancaster:** When I first came to this country I was given my transfer to any church that is nearby where I am living, I would be living. I had my certificate of the Mother's Union and everything and I came and I handed it to the vicar of the church when I went to church but he told me to come back and each time I went to see him he's not always there. And I remember still going to church on Sunday and this Sunday when it was St George's Day I went to church and there he was pulpit saying, "I don't know why," he said, "people are leaving this country, going away and yet others are coming and enjoying the wealth ...", and he really went on. I sat there but I got up when the church was over and on my way out he stood at the door and he said, "I would ask you to find another church because I don't want to lose my parishioners." And he told me where another Anglican church is, quite some way from where I lived and my brother and I went down there to stay and when we went, it's only four old people in that church. I recall that that church was sold out not very long after that. They refused us coming into the churches and then as I knew that I must serve God, there were other avenues open. Pentecostal people were coming here and forming their churches, binding themselves together.

\* There are two Eids: the first, Id-al-fitr, an annual festival commemorating the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting; the second, Id-al-adha, celebrating the sacrifice and the last day of the Hajj. Salatul Jumuah is a Friday noon prayer offered during Zuhr time in congregation; all adult Muslims must take part.

# The Land of Money?

## TRANSCRIPTION OF CASSETTE 2, SIDE B

### Problems at work; changes; identity; 1992

**Frank Scantlebury:** The name of the factory was Westinghouse Brake and Signal and there were quite a lot of people from the colonies working there at the time, as well as from various parts of Europe, Poland and Hungary and other countries, Italians, and so on, and although we were glad to have the opportunity to work, there were those in the group who thought for some reason or other that we should not have been there. They never showed any hostility as far as I can remember towards the Europeans that were there but we were the ones who bore the brunt of the attacks, not physical attacks, very often verbal attacks, unpleasant remarks. They would often refer to us as ignorant and uneducated and accuse us of being lazy and if we decided to answer back and then we would be accused of having a chip on our shoulder and not being able to take a joke. And this is what most of us resented, when people say things to us deliberately to humiliate us and make us look rather silly.

**Ranjit Sondhi:** I'd suddenly discovered there was an English working class and, of course, in India you never hear about the English working class, you only hear about the administrative class and the rich people and the aristocracy. So really finding that there was an English working class was quite a unique experience [laughs].

**Nurul Hoque:** My feeling was English people never tell lies, never steal, so one day I left £4 in my pocket in the changing room before I started work. When I come back at dinner time it's gone, and since that day my feeling is changed. I say, English people also steal, they'll tell lies. Before that I so sincerely thought, they never steal, they never tell lies and they never do any bad thing. That was my feeling before that £4 was gone.

**Carlton Duncan:** And I saw this job going in Brent for a Head of Economics Department, so I applied for it and I was one of five applicants short-listed for the job. When I got to the school the first thing I noticed is that at a guess 80% of that school was black children. Very large school but I remember very well five of us congregating in the Head Master's office at the time and he's saying to all five of us, I being the only black one present, "I don't know why you've applied for a job at this school," he says, "They're all niggers here you know and they're rough, tough and loud." And I could see everybody looking, they can't believe what they are hearing and three of the candidates, three of the candidates withdrew there and then.

**Esme Lancaster:** Another time I went into the coat-room to take my coat and she was in there talking and as I came she says, "I can't stand the sight of her," and I said, "You can't stand the sight of me," I said, "well let me tell you, I am here, we are here, we are coming and we're increasing and one day we shall be like the children of Israel in the land of Egypt and if you don't like it you either go or die!" And I walked away.

**Ranjit Sondhi:** Then when I went to university it all flourished. I think in the first year there was a demonstration against Enoch Powell, who had made his "Rivers of Blood" speech and incidentally at that point really racism wasn't a word in my dictionary but he had made his "Rivers of Blood" speech, he was due to come back there and we had organised a demonstration. The students had not liked it and I saw here a bunch of white, university students, largely white, protesting against a man who was making comments about black people and I thought this was something, I really must get involved, and I did and I was in the front line and I remember being punched by a policeman in the stomach, very coolly and very calmly, The policeman came up while my hands were pinned behind my back by other demonstrators; I got punched in the stomach. Now this infuriated me and that fury lasted for many years, I couldn't talk about the incident without really feeling very angry about that but it had most important impact upon my thinking.

**Nurul Hoque:** It was a very important factor, how the sub-continent people survived, help from each community to another community. Even at work like there was a good feeling towards each other.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** During the 70s there was very big, great trend towards westernising. In the homes people tried to speak English, even the children lost their mother-tongue and that speaking English is higher in status. And also among the children of the 70s, youth, the trend was "becoming westernised." High-heeled shoes, flared trousers, long hairs and disco dancing, and everything. So what happened that it was great in the schools going to the discos, all this and that. I'm talking about the first generation of the children who either came from Panjab or born here but when they came out on the labour market they suffered a shock. Who are they who are not getting the jobs. A white person came out of the school, have a job, I don't have a job and this is a fact even today not even in the 70s but then it started "Who I am?" and then these people have been forced to go to their roots and hence the demand came, "I want Indian meal, I want Indian food, I want Asian food," and hence the question of identity.

**Ranjit Sondhi:** When I say blacks, I suppose I mean all those people who have suffered, in some ways, the impact of discrimination and disadvantage. Now this would obviously mean people largely from the third-world countries, from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, People who have been seen to belong to the native hinterlands and who have now arrived at the "Mother Country" and are treated, literally, almost in the "Mother Country" as if they had been treated as if they were still back at home in their own countries. I think that old colonial

relationship, if you like, between the master and the native or the master and the slave is reproduced with a vengeance in the "Mother Country" and it is that old relationship in its new form that you see in Handsworth and that leads to trouble from time to time because it is not a healthy natural relationship. It is an artificial created relationship between black people in the servile role and white people in the master's role. It'll have to break down and as it breaks, as people move towards equality, struggle for justice and create equality, there is a tension and that tension sometimes becomes quite difficult and it erupts like fire in the inner cities.

**Carlton Duncan:** There is a view that we didn't have any racial riots in this country. We have racial uprising in this country. But there's also a view that look, it wasn't only about black people in Brixton and Lozells or Handsworth and Toxteth and so forth, that working-class white youngsters were quite visibly taking part in these areas, which would tend to subscribe to the view that it was an uprising rather than riots: in the sense that if society makes some of its members feel that they don't belong, they haven't got a claim on anything, then it can't be surprised if people who don't feel that the towns, the centres, the buildings, the facilities have anything to do with them set out to destroy them. It is a way of people saying, "Look, you've really got to release me, you gotta really take me into your confidence and make me feel part of the system, only then can I respect what we have!" and so on. It was people rebelling against a suppression, being kept in poor circumstances, poor housing, no jobs, little resources and so on, that's my opinion of what actually happened in these various towns.

**Ranjit Sondhi:** The ground was laid in Handsworth over a long hot summer in which people had started to feel, as they had been feeling for a long time, but feel a bit more critically, some of the impacts of what I call wagelessness. There's no money in your pocket, there's everything to play for, there's no way in which you can get something in your lifetime. There is no job that you can take on because there isn't a job to take, it spills over and if you read the tabloids at the time you would have thought quite clearly if you'd lived outside of Handsworth that really this was a Russian plot, but it was nothing like that. People in Handsworth don't know who Trotsky is, don't know what the Russian revolution meant. What they were responding to was the exact nature of the quality of their lives and they were saying to the world, "This is what we think about our houses, this is what we think about our area, we think so little of it that we are prepared to see it go up in smoke without any problems!"

**Carlton Duncan:** Yes, this is an uprising, against deprivation and that deprivation to a very large extent was concentrated on the black community. But white working class understood that, suffered that and that's why in all of these so-called riots you could see white youths in particular, running the streets with blacks and throwing the stones and lighting the fires in the same way and nearly all of them, if you watch you saw that happening. It's an uprising against

deprivation. It's not easy to determine the truth, if, I suspect that if you were to ask the players themselves you'd get as many explanations as there are players about what was really happening. We shouldn't just block off a whole sector of our community and say, "No, you can't get the chance, you can't get the opportunity." Yes: it's the opportunity to become part of the system, to own some of those shops which they burnt down, to get jobs so that they are not on the streets at night, in fact, if many of those had jobs to go to the next bloody morning they wouldn't have been out there in the nights. They'd have been catching some sleep because they gotta get up early the next morning, but the system was such that the jobs available, the jobs were for white people not for black people.

**Sakiina Haaruun:** Some people you know they are not going to move, they are not going to shift, they going to have this thing about white supremacy, because that's where racism is coming from because of the different colour, it means I have more power than you as a black person. Now who then wants to shift that, it's like you have being a boss and you know, you're managing your resources all this time and then you're going to go down into the workshop and give your, somebody from your workshop, your chair and tell them to get on and do it. So it makes it difficult but there is something about, understanding, there is something about sharing, there is something about even though you and I might be different colour and even though we might come from a different background, we are human beings. And that is what people should actually try and remember because it must be a purpose, you know what I mean, for me to be here and for me to be black, [there] must be a reason.

**Ranjit Sondhi:** The more I got involved in the work in this country there was a slow and steady shift into the English way of life and by English way of life I don't mean the white way of life because the English way of life is white and black way of life.

**Ryland Campbell:** As far as it go we are strangers whichever country we are, we are strangers, British passport say that I must travel the world and nobody should, you know, trouble me, so with that it make me into international person. I'm a universal man, I can die in any part of the world I feel.

**Carlton Duncan:** I don't really feel I could settle anywhere now which didn't enable me to share both Jamaica and England.

**Esme Lancaster:** I'd like to go back to enjoy a bit of the sun, you know, get that heat generating my body again, build my strength a bit. I'd like to, but then I found I couldn't, so then all I had to do was to make the best of it here.

**Saji Kaur:** I've been back a number of times but then you see it means that I would now have to be in a situation that I couldn't possibly live there because my children couldn't live with me. So I think, as an immigrant I think it sums up the

fact that I was born one because this country didn't accept me (do you remember you said), and I think I shall always die one [laughs]. But I think you also come to a very philosophical ending that maybe with that life ahead of me as the children grow older I might still find some place somewhere, wherever it is, where I think I like to grow old, and that's another romantic notion.

**Carlton Duncan:** I feel my children are too early to avoid much of the racist practices which still permeates this society. They might not have it as difficult as I had it in that front because society is changing slowly but maybe their children will see a society which is much more equitable and just.

**Avtar Singh Jouhl:** The dream with which nearly everybody, I would say almost all, who came to this country, that dream is shattered from the aspects of, back home connection will not remain here which we in the community saw that our children will live together, there will be lot of cosiness, closeness, all this. Children started living separate, they want their own life and there is a tension, argument between the first generation and the second generation and second generation are saying, "You are not living up to the time and you are not changing with the time!" But I would say, if they are in first generation shoes they would realise what change mean and so I would say it is a sad story. The situation looking for future is even more grim unless we in the Indian community, Pakistani community, Bangladeshi community, black community as a whole, the whole black community whether they are of whatever origin, they unite their ranks, rather than in two years, now, against the rising tide of Fascism on European scale. It is frightening, it is frightening in terms of reading the result of the elections in Belgium that Fascist parties have made inroads up to ten to twenty per cent votes, in France, in Germany and even in this country the Fascists have become active again and their target is black. And next week National Front France here they picketing this 1992 conference organised by Birmingham City Council and they saying a hundred per cent white Europe. So life is again linking back to the '50s with the dreams that life will be easy but life have been difficult and it is difficult and I can see it will remain difficult. Life of any migrant is difficult yeah.