

**Sites and Signs of Remembrance interviews 18.12.06.
Group interview with Asian Elders in ASRA Sheltered Housing Scheme,
Woolwich, South East London**

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Mrs Hiraben Patel (Background from India in Gujrat):

Mrs Patel first came to England 20 years ago, with her husband to visit their son. Her son was already settled in the UK. She stayed with her son for a year and then returned to the Arab Emirates where her husband worked.

On the death of her husband, Mrs Patel came to live with her son, as she had no other immediate family. Both her sons live in England, one in Crawley and the other in Greenwich. Mrs Patel stayed with her son in Greenwich for many years and says she had no problem with coming to settle in England.

However, despite the support of her family, Mrs Patel said she felt isolated without the company of other Asian women from her own age group. Helping out with the school run for her grandchildren helped Mrs Patel make contact with other people, some of whom were bi – lingual in both English & Gujerati. The fact that her grandchildren also spoke Gujerati helped to reduce some of the initial isolation. Her son had always insisted the grandchildren speak Gujerati so that they do not lose their identity & culture.

Since coming to England Mrs Patel has been back to Gujrat in India with her son & his family and has kept in touch with her external family abroad. In India Mrs Patel says she felt more independent and there was a sense of community, especially when it came to religious events and festivals.

Mrs Patel's first memories of England are of the Market at Elephant & Castle where she was able to shop on her own and was able to shop for Indian spices. Things have changed a lot since then and she is able to purchase spices & other Asian food from the local shops in Plumstead. For more variety and for bulk items, she goes on the elders' shopping bus to Green Street, that is arranged by ASRA & the Local Greenwich Borough Council

Mrs Hiraben Patel came to live in ASRA sheltered housing to reduce isolation and to get support. She said that when she lived with her son she felt lonely during the day as all the family would be out at work or in school

At ASRA she has the support of the Scheme Manager, Atia, who contacts her every morning and is there to help during the day. There is always something happening at the Scheme, like the mobile library coming round or advice surgeries from Greenwich Council for Racial Equality, or parties and outings. Everyone is given a choice about how they live and all are treated equally. Hiraben says she is good friends with other tenants and likes the fact that she can speak to them in her own language. Moving to ASRA has built up her confidence and independence, she no longer has to depend solely on her family to take her out or help with other matters.

She likes her independence, and feels safe knowing that Atia, the Scheme Manager lives on site. One of her favourite moments at the Scheme are when tenants gather in communal room and relax and chat. It reminds her of the days in India and living in a community.

Going to the local Mandir (Hindu temple) is another favourite social pastime. This is not only a place of worship, but also a place for social events such as Garba (a religious stick dance). People at the local Mandir, like Mrs Misra, are very helpful and help organise religious events like Navati/ Holi etc. Hiraben says one of the things she enjoys most is going nearly every morning to the local Mandir in Bannockburn Road and helping out there.

Mrs Patel manages to communicate with the English speaking community with the help of her scheme manager and the facilities that are now available such as interpreters in hospitals and Language Line. In Plumstead there is a good cultural mix and community spirit, so you can often find people to help.

Mrs Patel says she likes going back to visit India but, as all her family are in London, this is her home and ASRA is her home & family. She hopes to spend rest of her days living at ASRA.

Basanth Kaur (Background From India - Hindu Punjabi)–

Mrs Basanth Kaur originally came from India around 8 years ago to look after her sister-in-law who was ill, and who later passed away. Mrs Kaur had to settle in London to look after her brother and his family.

At first Mrs Kaur did not like living in London. She missed family and wanted to go back to India, where her husband was still living. However the family in London insisted they needed her to look after the grandchildren and so she decided to stay.

Mrs Kaur says she came to know the local Asian Community in Plumstead through her sister-in-law. At the local Mandir (Hindu temple) she was able to make more friends and get to know a wider circle of people.

Recently, Mrs Kaur felt she wanted to move on. Through her one of her friends at the Mandir, Mrs Kaur found out about ASRA and applied for sheltered housing. She was very happy when she was offered a place in ASRA as this gave her more independence, and an opportunity to reduce her isolation. Mrs Kaur says she is fortunate with her new home, which is a one-bedroom bungalow with a rear garden, as it is in walking distance of the local Bannockburn Road Mandir where she spend most of the mornings.

In the evening Mrs Kaur likes to sit in the communal room at Amar Court and chat with other tenants of the Scheme. She feels safe at ASRA as there is a Scheme Manager on site to help with matters. Mrs Kaur is unable to read or speak English.

Having been in England for a relatively short time, Mrs Kaur said she does not know the names of places as her family take her everywhere. Her most memorable place both in London & India is the Mandir. She is beginning to know the shopping areas like Plumstead and Newham where a variety of Asian goods are sold.

Mrs Gian Kaur (Background from India - Punjabi Sikh) :

Mrs Gian Kaur came to the UK 30 years ago with her husband and two young children, a daughter aged 12 and son aged 4 years. Mrs Kaur had her third child (now 30 years old) in England. Mrs Kaur's husband came to London 6 years before her and then she applied for the whole family to come to London for the

education. There was no difficulty over this application, provided she came as well. The children could only come to London if accompanied with their mother.

Mrs Kaur's first experience of employment in London was working in a laundry called the Advance Laundry in Blackheath. She then went on to work in another laundry in Charlton. Other work experience involved working in fruit factories on the Bowater Industrial Estate and in Tex House for 12 years.

Mrs Kaur says she had a tough life working long hours and then coming home and attending to her family. In India she would have had the support network of other relatives & neighbours to help. In London at that time there was little outside support and Mrs Kaur had to rely on the good will of her friends.

Mrs Kaur says language was a problem as she could not speak English. However she was able to communicate with her employer through other Asian women who worked in the laundry. These women had helped her to find work..

Mrs Kaur's memories of India are of working on her farm and carrying water with other Asian women of the same culture & background, of living in a community where everyone helped one another.

When coming to London it was a culture shock not being able to communicate and to be dependent on other people and family. Mrs Kaur's young daughter would interpret for her when she went out shopping or had to attend hospital appointments. At that time there were no facilities like now for interpreters, etc.

Mrs Kaur attended the local Gurdwara (Sikh Temple place of worship) and this helped her meet other people of the Sikh community.

There were very few Asian shops south of the River Thames and Mrs Kaur had to go to East Ham in Newham for more variety of Asian spices & food. Mrs Kaur found the shopping very different from India where she was used to buy things from the stalls. For this reason Mrs Kaur felt more comfortable buying goods from the market rather than shops. The new currency also took time to get used to as she was converting money into rupees (Indian currency).

Mrs Kaur returns to India every two to three years to catch up with news and relatives and to attend weddings. She does miss her village life. However, she feels London is her home, as all her immediate family are here. Her grandchildren are bi-lingual so she does not feel isolated as they can communicate with her in Punjabi. She feels that there is a real sense of community in Plumstead.

Since moving to ASRA, Mrs Kaur says she has the best of both worlds at Amar Court. She feels she is back in her Indian village as she can communicate with every one and there are cultural things going on such as the shopping bus to Green Street (predominantly Asian shops), Zee T.V (Asian T.V Channel), Annual Scheme Parties and gatherings of tenants in the communal room in the evening,.

With the support from her Scheme Manager, Atia, Mrs Kaur is able to access services and able to talk freely about matters of concern. Her home is ideal for one person living on their own. It is a one-bedroomed bungalow with communal facilities. She feels safe as the Scheme Manager contacts her every morning and lives on site. If she is locked out there is always someone there to let her in or attend to her if she becomes ill.

Mrs Samara (From India Punjabi Sikh background) :

Mrs Samara came from Jalinder in India to live in Ilford 23 years ago. Mrs Samara says she originally came to look after her friend who was unwell. Unfortunately her friend passed away and through other friends she had made, she found accommodation in Bekno Ka Ghar (Home for Sisters). This was accommodation based in Newham for Asian women only. She had her own room with shared facilities. This type of accommodation was helpful as Mrs Samara had the support of an Asian worker and other Asian women also lived there so she did not feel isolated.

When first coming to London it was a slight cultural shock as Mrs Samara lived on a farm in India and was used to having a lot of space around her. When coming to London Mrs Samara was struck by how small the houses were and the lack of open spaces. Her first and fondest memories of London are going shopping in Ilford Market.

One of her most memorable place in India is the Golden Temple. Although she has lived in the city she misses the Village life and the sense of community.

Mrs Samara said her reason for staying in London was that she did not have any immediate family in India. Her daughter lives in America and it was easier for her daughter to visit her in London than in India. Mrs Samar says she has made many friends in London & feels this is her home. She loves living at Amar Court where she receives a lot of support from her Scheme Manager and is within the Asian Community. It reminds her of the community sprit in India.

Growing old in India would be very different where she would be depending on the good will of neighbours.