Alia Syed, *The Dhaba - 1st Chapter: Mr Sharif and 2nd Chapter: Mr Bhari* (2025)

Transcript

This is a text version of the spoken words in the film. Speaker names appear in bold when the speaker changes. Non-speech sounds and other notes are in square brackets.

Speakers: Mr. Sharif, Mr. Bhari, Alia, Zaitoon.

Film dialogue

Mr. Sharif: I'm born in 1952.

Alia: So after partition then?

Mr. Sharif: Yes, after partition. My uncle took me to Rawalpindi. And I was sitting in the train engine. I was frightened as well, you know, in case I fell off the engine.

Never seen the electric city, the lights. When we reached Rawalpindi, I have seen at the station, I have seen the lights, tube lights. Very bright, seems like, ahh it's daylight. On the left hand side there was, very dark and I was wondering where I am? One side is night, other side is the day. After 3 or 4 hours, I realised that these are the lights, tube lights.

Because see in the villages, ehh... If you go for shopping as well, you will come back at the daylights. So we didn't have in the village light at all, just those old paraffin ones.

And ahh, when I came over this country, my dad used to, he was working in P&O company, the

Alia: ships

Mr. Sharif: ships

Alia: uh huh

Mr. Sharif: and when he had holiday from the P&O maybe 6 month or something then what he do in his spare time when he was on holiday, he was going to the market, big markets, other side of the city and he used to buy the buffaloes one truck, two truck. Then he will take to the local market plus people coming to the village and they buy from there. He was doing like that. So when I reach here, London, I have seen green grass everywhere [laughs] big huge and the motorway sides.

Alia: yeah yeah

Mr. Sharif: And I was thinking, I wish our buffalo will be here. They will be [laughs]

Alia: They will be very happy.

Mr. Sharif: They will be very happy.

I came in February, and February's day is very short. It's dark very early. So while we were travelling, I have seen the bulbs on the floor on the road and I was wondering, the British they got

Zaitoon: they're so advanced, they got cat-eyes or something?

Mr. Sharif: they're so advanced. Aye. They've got lightbulb on the road. When I turned around at the back, there was dark and I says, this driver. [laughs] It's no good. He's breaking all the bulbs [laughs]

Zaitoon: He thought - my dad actually believed that the driver of the van or the car that they were sitting in, was actually driving over them and smashing the bulbs.

Mr. Sharif: From...

Alia: How old were you?

Mr. Sharif: I was around 12 and a half, 13 in the plane. Those days there wasn't much ehh... restrictions.

Alia: Yeah, but you need to tell me the story.

Zaitoon: Yeah, like from the beginning,

Alia: Who brought you?

Zaitoon: how did you come here, who brought you?

Mr. Sharif: Who brought me?

Alia: Yeah

Mr. Sharif: My ahh... What you could say

Zaitoon: family friend?

Mr. Sharif: family friend. His wife, she was coming over and his son. So they adopt me and they bring me here.

Alia: So your parents knew them.

Mr. Sharif: Yeah, my brother knew them.

Alia: They pretended, you, that you

Zaitoon: That he was the son. They pretended he was the child. So they registered the name as their own

Mr. Sharif: Aye

Zaitoon: and they brought him over as their son. And that's how he came. So when he came, he had to obviously the lead up it wasn't just a case of they wanted him to come and that was it. He went to I think he went and watched his first film. They took the women wanted to get to know… Dad and his cousin a wee bit better. So if there was going to be any questioning in the airport or when they land then there should be you should know a wee bit more information than just their names. So she would take him and his cousin because his cousin also came along with him.

So this lady would take them both and her own son to... they took him to the cinema one time,

Mr. Sharif: mmm

Zaitoon: So that's when my dad watched his first film, in the cinema in Pakistan.

Alia: Tell me the stories that you'd heard in the village about your dad who used to because he told you lots of stories about all of the places he went to.

Zaitoon: Yeah yeah yeah remember...

Mr. Sharif: Oh yes, ah yes. I was kid and I was playing, you know, and, Dad and his friend was sitting there talking.

Alia: So this was in the village?

Mr. Sharif: In the village, yeah. And, ah he was saying that there is a... There is a canal where they fill the water and ships goes in there and then next step and the next step and there is a big mountain where they have to take up the ship because if they go around the mountain it will take them several days, maybe I think 7 or 8 days. Where there, they will be in one day they go other side. And we were thinking, how can be that possible? [laughs]

That was the Panama Canal.

There's a big mountain where

Alia: mm-hmm

Mr. Sharif: ship goes step-by-step, step, step-by...

Alia: Yeah yeah. Right

Mr. Sharif: And then he was mentioning something like there's a city where there's no taxis, it's all the water, and the boats are, they use as a transport, and we were amazed, you know? [laughs]

[Zaitoon and Mr. Sharif speak in Punjabi off-mic]

Alia: So then when you came to this country, so what did what did you think?

Mr. Sharif: Hmm. I was crying [laughs]

Zaitoon: He was crying. Reality hit.

Alia: Why?

Mr. Sharif: Ahh well, I was that was first time I was away from the family, and I used to cry on the side streets [laughs] where nobody can see.

Mr. Bhari: I came here as a male fiancé and ehh, there was a restriction imposed on my passport. I couldn't work for initial 4 months. So after that, I tried to find a job. First choice and easy choice for us too. As I was advised by my other friends to start with the Glasgow City Corporation Transport. So I started as a conductor in... June ehh 1972. And then, as... worked as a conductor. But, ehh... job was very, very difficult, especially for me because. I've got a... educational qualification plus teaching experience in India. So I have to persevere in those conditions. Although that job was not of my kind, I didn't like it.

But my preference was to... establish myself in this society, and ehh... to... look after my mum and dad back home in India. So I continued that conducting job. And after doing a year or so, I was so fed up. And ehh... I... applied for ehh... for, to be a driver in the... in the same company like. So passed that driving test on my very first attempt. I became a driver. So... Comparing from conducting to driver, and from driver to conductor. So I thought, which was the best one? Because in those days it was bad weather outside to have to go outside to check buses and all that and do various other types of jobs as well, you know? So...

Again, same question. Surinder was my wife's name. I, I can't carry on this job. I was better at being a driver. At least I was in the cabin. I was in the cabin and there was a wee heating up there as well. This was not a right job for me. Can't stay in this job for long, it’s... Can't, can’t go along with it. Because in those days, you know there was a... not a good atmosphere for the coloured people. I mean, to be abused, that was

day-to-day business like, you know? Just like, ah... Go back to your home... you, you. Paki, excuse my language. And in those days they only know one word, you know? But even then, either way, I didn't accept it.

Alia: No.

Mr. Bhari: What I can do? I can, I can take it. And ehh... just to... I, I, if I'm going to say, if I'm going to reply them back. Two things, being in a public service job, like you know? I was breaching the trust, and plus I was creating animosity again, you know?

I done my master's degree first part, I couldn't do for second part because I came over here, you know. To go into the teaching, you need a refresher course here. And in those days, I didn't have any backup financially, ehh... so that I could carry on my training.

Alia: Mm-hmm

Mr. Bhari: Because my wife, she used to work as a machinist, so she used to get five pounds in those days, you know? Five pounds per week. And we lived in those five pounds, you know? Paying everything plus running house as well, you know? But, we passed through that age, and... come to... ehh, being a driver. I think I was about a year or so, or a little over a year. Over a year, I drove buses. Then, I applied for promotion. They used to call it inspector. So, I applied for it, and, on very first attempt, I got the job.

In 1998 April, the process was started. There was other company was going to buy Glasgow City Council Transport Department, you know? So that deal went ahead. So, we were taken over by First Bus Group, and they... Put it that way, they want to get rid of all the inspectors which

were there. So slowly and steadily they were releasing all of us, you know.

Alia: Mmm

Mr. Bhari: So I applied myself as well. Have a good handshake like, you know? Given all the best of it, but I got... So in those days, I took voluntary redundancy.

Alia: Right.

Mr. Bhari: That was April 1998. And, I am proud to say that my wife stood by me at every, every stage, And she worked, she helped me out through my life, not like, just like my wife only, but the best companion in my life.

Then in 1980, one of my friend, ehh, Prasanta Bhowmik, ehh... he used to work as a civil engineer with the Glasgow City Council, and he... thought that we should do something, because he he was aware of my background, what I was doing, you know. So he consulted with me that why we want to, ah organise an umbrella organisation, like, eh... get all those associations working in Glasgow, either religious or political, or either... bring them under one umbrella and we'll form uh... such type organization, you know? And the majority of them, they were for it.

Because the way the things were going, the discrimination and other problems creeping every day like. So we formed that association and the name it was named as. Scottish Asian Action Committee. Nickname as SAAC in short. So being a founder member was summer 1980. Then, that organisation's job again to help the people who are needing it in various... problem they are facing in their day-to-day basis, or everyday level, everyday living, you know? Any coloured people working any

sphere, anywhere, if they having a problem, ehh... they come to us. And believe it or not, our office was, it was attacked by the National Front people.

To stop us to do all these things, you know? So quite a lot of damage was done.

That was '82, '84, '85, and I remember then when we were working in. IW [Indian Workers' Association], do you remember in the same context, you know? National Front people, they were organising their first meeting in Glasgow. We came across that they are going to held a meeting up in Paisley Road in the public library there. So, we went to protest it. They were inside and we were outside. So there was a bit of a scuffle as well as them when they came out, you know, police was called in. So, couple of us who were been charged, myself, and one of the other boy Ranvir Singh. But there was no, they never further, you know, they...

So that was very first interview, uh meeting, they were holding in Glasgow. So we opposed them at that time, and that was '76, '77 I am talking about. So then in the SAAC office, we were... it was really a very, very, very bad attack. It happened after five o'clock.

Alia: Alright.

Mr. Bhari: They ransacked the building, you know the office like, you know. Because they were aware that these people are doing so many things for the community, and they are... they're well aware of the situation. So they tried to put a stop on our activities. So that we should stop it and say, right, enough is enough and we... But we carried on. And there is no... There was quite a... few other things we used to we were

involved with the union, trade union. So every year we used to go there to attend the procession, like, you know? There was quite a... good liaison between the union and us. We...

Almost every sphere in that organisation had helped the people.

I could have came here in 1968 on that basis, but a few things happened in between. And during that time, this, male fiancés were banned that, ehh... they were not allowed to come on the marriage basis. So I was caught in that case. You know that was a... another saga in my life, you know. Ehh... It was 1968 when... my... wife sent me a sponsorship, like you know to... Because...

So 1968 I was sent a... sponsorship. And by the time this law came in between. So, that was very, very rough time in my life. I have given up my service because I had to resign to come over here to UK. So it took three years to go through that case. She was doing whatever she could do from here. So, case went to the tribunal. That whole case was won after three years.

Alia: Gosh.

Mr. Bhari: So, she never given up from this end. I never given up from another end. And it's just luck, I think. We have to be dear husband and wife, you know? The things we crossed over, we came across, we.... And we wonder now how we had done it.

Alia: Yeah, so many...

Mr. Bhari: So many, so many...

Alia: So much things...

Mr. Bhari: So, anyway, we done every honest... deed like, you know and, ehh being a good citizen, and the way, the... the values of life are taught to us by our parents. So, we try to carry it on in this country as well, you know? Honestly, every... thing we done honestly. Ehh, so, Ehh, God rewarded it.

It's all hard work, like, you know, it's no like, oh no, it's snowing outside. I'm no going, I'm no going outside, you know, I'm not going to work. I done it, and... I can't express myself. I... I killed my feelings. I killed my likes and dislikes, like, you know, dislikes, no likes. My priorities like working shift work, you know? Only one aim. I have to make a place in the society for myself.

I'm grateful to Almighty, that he fulfilled all my wishes. I've got a status in the society. I've got a... roof on my head, you know. And I've got a good family. Boy and girl both are... post graduated, and both have got good, very, very good jobs in Scottish government. So, that's all I can say. With God's grace and with hard work, I achieved all these aims. That's it.