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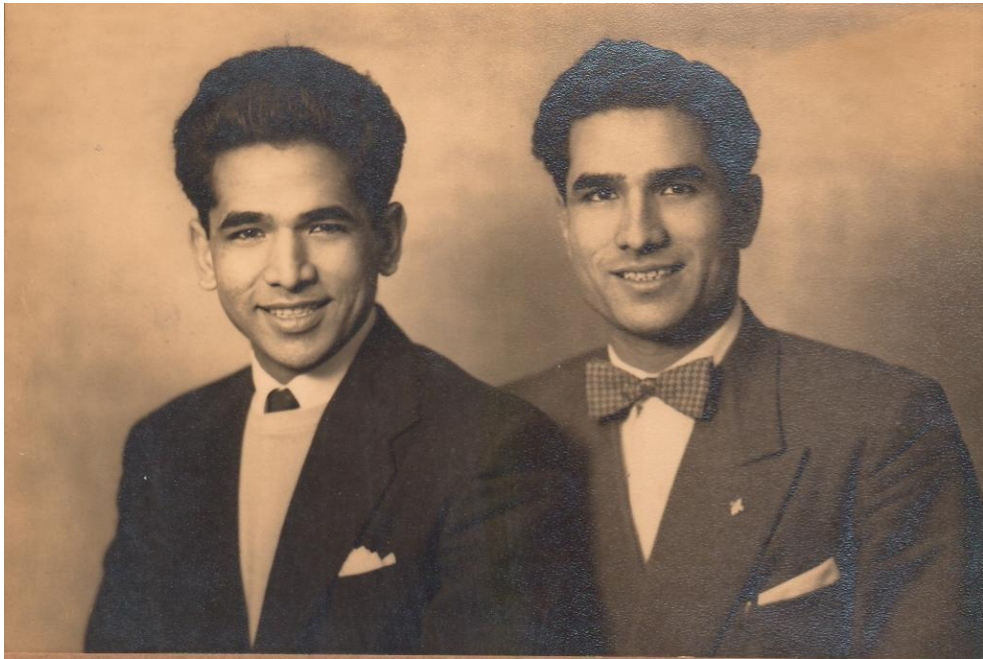
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“Finding Myself” – Educator and Activist Chand Kishore Saint looks back on his time at Hull in the 1950s

“With this experience my nostalgia for home vanished. Atiq and I stood around for a while when the ballroom dancing began, watching in real life what we had till now seen only in films.”

Chand Kishore Saint, Geography 1959



Chand Kishore with his brother Prem in London, Christmas 1957

In this article we look back at the life of the late Chand Kishore Saint (Geography, 1959). A revered activist and educator, Chand’s memoir, *Finding Myself*, was published posthumously this year and we have published extracts from Chapter 2, concerning his time at the University of Hull, below.

Chand Kishore Saint (1932-2022) migrated to the British colony of Kenya in the aftermath of the 1947 Partition and worked in both Kenya and USA of the 1960s, a time of intellectual fervor and ferment. His memories of student life in the UK, the Indian diaspora in Kenya, and life as an educator in Kenya's government service (both before and after the country's independence) provide a personal glimpse into a world that was just emerging from the long shadow of colonialism.

Returning to India in 1972 to keep his tryst with his motherland, Kishore Saint worked in social and rural development, eventually forming the voluntary organisation, Ubeshwar Vikas Mandal in Udaipur. In his memoir the author also describes the ecological movements in Udaipur during the 1980s–90s and his engagement with fellow social workers, Gandhian activists and civil society groups.

Extracts from Chapter 2: England, 1953–58

We were received at London airport by British Council officials and taken to East Africa House, a hostel for students from Kenya, Tanganyika (part of present-day Tanzania) and Uganda. Each of us had a room of our own with a heater for warmth. However, London in autumn was quite cold for us from the tropics. As my clothing was totally inadequate for this weather, we were taken to Burtons, a readymade clothing store on Oxford Street. There I bought my first woollen tweed jacket and trousers and a winter overcoat, using the clothing allowance given to us in British currency. We had to stay there for two weeks as the new term in the college began in late October.

At the end of two weeks Atiq and I were put on the train to Hull at Kings Cross station. It was a day-long journey from south to north, traversing the lush, green English countryside with its low hills, dales and plains, broken by mining and industrial towns, a landscape I got to know and understand better through my studies in geography and geology.

At Hull we were received by a member of college staff and taken to Camp Hall in Cottingham, a large village 7 miles west of Hull. There we met Mr Treherne, the resident warden of the hostel. I lived there for the next two years. Camp Hall was a US Army Camp dating back to World War II. It had Nissan huts—15-foot high, semi-cylindrical structures with corrugated iron sheets stretched over four rooms measuring 8 by 10 feet, with a common corridor and toilet and bathroom, all enclosed within single brick walls. Each room had a single bed, chair, writing table with a small bookshelf, a cupboard, wardrobe and an electric heater. Even by the standards of post-war Britain, it was a spartan facility. The other two hostels of the college, Ferens Hall and Thwaite Hall, were modern brick buildings with central heating, spacious rooms and better facilities. Rooms were allotted to women students in Thwaite Hall and to men students in senior years in Ferens Hall, with preference given to those with better academic performance. There were four of us in the Nissan Hut where I was allotted a room. Three of them were English from different counties, each with his own accent. It took me several months to make sense of what they were saying.

The dining room was about 200 yards away from our hut. There were set times for meals and fixed quantities of food due to rationing. Evening meals and lunch on holidays were eaten together in the presence of the hostel warden, who led the prayer before the meal. Basic English fare was served with some variations, including a meat dish, except on Fridays when fish was served instead of meat. Bread and butter were made available for a late evening snack. We toasted these on an electric heater in the room after finishing our evening studies. Sometimes we took a walk to the Cottingham Village fish and chips shop to relish fried fish and chips, served wrapped in a newspaper sheet. At formal evening dinners, there was a high table where the warden and lecturers sat with the students who were invited to join them. The tables nearest the high table were for senior students, while the freshers sat at the table furthest from the high table. Thus, there was a well-established hierarchy with little informal interaction between senior and junior year students. For us newcomers from the colonies, it was not easy to be accepted in this

hierarchy. Most of us kept to ourselves. There were also bouts of homesickness; then Atiq and I would get together in my room and, using the heater as a tabla/drum, we would sing Hindi film songs, much to the amusement of our English companions in the adjacent rooms.

When the term began, our whole routine changed. We had to get up early to be ready to catch the bus or cycle from the hostel to the college 5 miles away. Classes began at 9.00 am and went on till 1.00 pm. Afternoons were free for sports, both indoors and outdoors. We returned to the hostel after 5.00 pm for supper/high tea, following which we studied in our rooms or in the library. During the first couple of weeks, there were special events. A dinner, followed by a ballroom dance, was arranged for freshers. This included an address by the Principal, Nicholson, who welcomed the new entrants and stressed that the ethos of the college was that of a community of scholars, where everyone was expected to contribute to community life through active participation in sports, and cultural and academic clubs. These were run by the student management, under the aegis of the student union with its own elected executive committee. I listened to this with close attention, at once feeling included amongst strangers in a land far away from home. With this experience my nostalgia for home vanished. Atiq and I stood around for a while when the ballroom dancing began, watching in real life what we had till now seen only in films. However, we soon left, and spent the rest of the evening playing table tennis. The other event was a freshers' day of introduction to college clubs and societies. Each of these had set up a stall or booth with volunteers explaining the scope of their activities and enrolling freshers.

I enrolled in the hockey and table tennis clubs as I had played these games in Kenya. There was a well-planned programme of matches for all the games, both on home grounds and for away matches. For the latter, we travelled by bus and returned in the evening. After every away match, tea and snacks were served to the visiting team. Matches were played on Wednesdays and Saturdays, with practice and coaching sessions on other afternoons.

During the first year, all the British students went home for Christmas holidays. For overseas students, family stays were arranged in villages around Hull. Atiq and I stayed with a pastor of the Congregationalist Church and his wife in Wilby, a village in the low hills of Yorkshire Wolds. It was a week-long stay during which we participated in Christmas celebrations in the community. It was a white Christmas with snow covering the village and countryside, a very rural English setting. Our hosts were a kind, soft-spoken, middleaged couple who ensured we were warm enough in this, our first winter in England. There was always a log fire in the drawing room. We were given hot water bottles at bedtime since there was neither central heating nor room heaters. We had long fireside conversations about our background and our religions. Atiq, as a devout Muslim, observed the discipline of offering namaaz five times a day. We walked through the village and into the fields, accompanying the pastor on his walks to meet members of his church's congregation. We were probably the first Asians to have stayed in this entirely English community. There was curiosity and Merry Christmas greetings were extended, but overall, a reserve prevailed. Our stay in the village was arranged by the local staff of the British Council in Hull. During the summer, the British Council also arranged a friendly cricket match for us, where a team comprising overseas students played against a country club near Hull. I played as a bowler and even took a couple of wickets with medium pace cutters on a wet pitch.



Chand with his wife Sudesh in 2018