

LONDON REVISITED - 1999

It is nearly 30 years since I have been living in Geneva. Uprooted from a well-established small town of Eldoret in the "White" highlands of Kenya, social roots cannot grow easily in Geneva. In Eldoret every one knew every one. Many Kenya Asians flocked to Britain where they continue to meet frequently at marriages, deaths, birthdays and religious ceremonies where they get the chance of flashing back to good old days. In Geneva there is none of those with whom I had schooled and played as a teenager, trained as a teacher, taught in my own primary school with teachers who became my colleagues, and lived with families because I did not have one until I was married. On rare occasions I get the chance of sharing reminiscences of Kenya. One such memorable occasion was when Amarjit visited Geneva in early summer of 1999. His mother often played the role my mother who had died when I was not yet five. He was suffering from blood cancer and usually travelled with our common Eldoret friends, Davinder and his wife Jyoti. In England old friends from Kenya have continued the traditions, social mannerism, humour, drinking, singing and talking in Swahili mixed with rustic Punjabi when they want to be rude. During the three days they were with me we did not finish turning all memory stones. The rest of my family with little "Kenyanness" in them were astonished to hear us talk like children as if we were from another planet. Such intimacy can only come when there is something common, not necessarily important, to talk about from the past. The three recognized my situation and the difference it makes to have roots severed completely.

"You come to London and stay with us for a few weeks", offered Davinder, "Do not visit any of your relatives; we will meet only old friends. When I say come, you come. No excuses".

"If you are working all day and I am left alone to wander around, my coming makes no sense. If there is some event, like a music concert let me know and I'll fly over", I said.

A few months later Davinder phoned me, "Come on Friday, we have bought tickets to Jagjit's concert. No excuses." He does not believe in niceties between friends and it works.

I had tried my hand at writing but it was a complete disaster. John Braine in "*Writing a novel*" warns that "You're either born with this particular talent or you're not. Intelligence, education and hard work won't remedy the deficiency". Well that explains every thing. I have no intention of writing. Nevertheless I remembered Braines' one advice: your writing should be truthful.

On the last day of my ten-day stay in London Bakshi asked me, "What do think of your time with us?" Without thinking I retorted, "I can write a book" and forgot it

all. On return to Geneva I started to write an e-mail to express my thanks to all friends who had received me so lovingly. Without actually having the intention of writing the whole story, I sent four e-mails to them and to our common friends spread over many continents. I received many appreciative responses from even those who had never communicated with me before. What I described was good enough to make them remember the good old days in Eldoret. I felt good.

For years I have been writing technical reports, documents, draft resolutions and recommendations for international meetings. I had unlearned whatever English language I had learnt. It is not easy to get into an English ambience in Geneva. I realised that to be able write in English I must live in England, visit the pubs, see plays and just hang around observing people.

My short visit to London inadvertently evoked in me an urge to tell friends what I had experienced. Here are the four e-mails!

London revisited – E-mail 1

EARL'S COURT

You will recall Friday 3 September when I flew from Geneva to London (Luton) by Easy Jet. There were hostesses for ease of passengers. The pilot eased around Luton for twenty minutes and could not see the runway; nor could Davinder who so kindly came to receive me. The plane had an automatic pilot and could have tried to land without the pilot. The kindly pilot did not take the risk. He knew that besides himself there was at least one important person in the plane! So he tried Swindon and finally landed at Birmingham, refuelled, took off again and reached Luton at about 10.30 about three hours late. On the ground Davinder's car could not see its way through fog and found its parking place at the airport with great difficulty. Since then he has been talking of installing an automatic driver: "write the address on a piece of a paper, put it on the dash board and the car will find its way to the destination", although to go from Wembley to Earl's Court the car might drive via Glasgow.

It was nearly 2 o'clock when Jyoti greeted me with a welcome lunch. Within minutes I met Bakshi at T shop and then Soma and their son Puche who was writing his BSc project. What a reunion!

I hardly had time to dress up appropriately to attend my first live concert by the "King of Ghazal Kings", Jagjit Singh. As usual finding a free parking place on such occasions is an ordeal. We decided to wait at the gate of a paid parking showing "full". Davinder asked me to go out and "use my hands" (pat gently) to convince the pretty black park attendant. I asked him if it would not be better to use my tongue instead! Magic: the car was parked in less than one minute and we were in the entrance of the Royal Festival Hall. We saw Amarjit's white turban and zigzagged to him without much ado.

My friends were exchanging greetings with usual remarks laced with Punjabi lurid humour depending on the closeness of friendship. I looked lost among a sea of Indians. Suddenly someone recognized me, it was my sister-in-law, Parkash. Our embrace was as strong as her surprise to see me there. Her husband, Sukhi, joined in. Then I recognized someone talking to a pretty woman, I thought his wife (a few days later I learnt that she was A... and lived in Crawley). He did not recognize me and I let him stir his memory glands. But when he heard noises of intimacy of my previous encounter, Chani's memory somersaulted and through him I shook hands with A... . Next time I go to London, I will try to include Crawley in my travel plan!

Amarjit and Davinder had gone into lot trouble to obtain tickets in the front row. I sat in the company of Jagjit's true fans: Jagan and Sukesh Watts, Jyoti and others. I was deeply touched by their love of music. I felt greatly honoured to be sitting right near Jagjit and fully assured that I was not listening to his CD! At the end, I came out very content and motivated. When we returned to collect our car the pretty park attendant had been replaced!

I abhorred the thought of wasting time in trains and buses to visit close relatives who are scattered around London. This time I was going to meet old friends and get to know better some I had met only briefly in the past. I had not planned but it happened that the next day, Saturday, I went to the marriage of son of a far cousin of my wife. It was in Clay Oven just opposite Applerton Underground Station. This hall is one of many made to cater for usually big Indian marriages: 500 hundred guests would be an underestimate. Birthdays and marriages are convenient meeting occasions. In fact very few meet each other rest of the time!

I killed many birds with one shot: There I met two of my sisters-in-law, their husbands and children now grown up and married; third one (Gudi) could not come because she was looking after her sick dog (Peter). I shared lunch table with my brother-in law and his family. I socialized with all of them; had a brief exchange of courtesies with the parents of bridegroom to whom I was introduced when we were leaving.

I was back in Earl's Court just in time to join before-dinner drinks in a pretty garden at the back of the house. Usually whisky is the darling drink of most Punjabis. Davinder's younger brother Perminder (Pindey) and his wife Surinder enlarged our "concert" group. The downpour of whisky fell with mixed humour, lurid jokes and, of course, plenty of poetry. Ghazal singing followed a delicious Gujarati dinner. Puche turned up with a keyboard, which took many "fingers" before we were able to play an instrument that would match our varied voices. Jagan sang so well and his mastery on Ragas was so thorough that in no time I was reduces to a candle lit in front of the sun. Amarjit, Soma and Davinder enhanced the sunlight. How much I wished then that we had such friendly and

social gatherings in Geneva? I lost track of time. We must have finished the party around 1.30 a.m. (to continue).

With love and happy memories, Naginder

London revisited- E-mail 2

HYDE PARK

When I woke up on Sunday (5 Sept) morning I sensed that I had already accumulated too much alcohol in my joints. You know the usual symptoms: stiffness arising from a sort of rustiness of my aged bonny frame. Quietly I put on my training and tried to sneak out for a jog just before eight. Jyoti's Brahmanic sense must have alerted her of my intention. She was waiting in the kitchen, with a hot pot of Indian tea. Her gentle way of talking is catchy. An hour passed before I remembered that I had a mission to complete. Every Sunday, Davinder ("boss") opens and runs T-food store until midday so that other staff could rest over the weekend.

Earl's Court Road was already buzzing. I ran through back roads in the general direction of Gloucester Road and then turning left towards Hyde Park. I met many other late joggers before I entered Hyde Park, Holding my balding head high, as if I had completed the marathon, triumphant, nose sniffing air like an English snob, I imagined entering the Olympic stadium to the thunderous applause of spectators! The park was almost empty except for a few who were walking their dogs and some others, males and females of different races, and crazy like me spoiling their Sunday morning sleep. Surely no one missed ZTV programme because I did not see any other crazy Indians like me.

I was not sure how far I should run-walk. Thirty years earlier I had seen the Serpentine. I decided to circumscribe it. The tea bar on the far side was just opening, temptation to stop. I kept my eyes turned away. That is not entirely true; I was distracted. A young Japanese-looking woman overtook me and I could not resist following her at a safe distance. Soon I reached Kensington Palace and saw flowers, posters and notes tied to the steel barrier in memory of Diana. A few tourists were already photographing. Seeing that I was attracted to Diana, the young woman disappeared in some side lane.

I showered, no, I bathed in the tub in the traditional English way. Showers are still not very common, I believe, because low pressure is unable to push water through narrow holes. I did not know what I was going to do that day, in fact the remaining eight days. Intentionally, I had not planned anything. Looking back at my life, everything I planned never worked. Things just happened, often spontaneously and the outcome was always satisfying. From the time I landed in Luton to my departure ten days later, I had the most wonderful, memorable and satisfying time in my life.

EARL'S COURT

After I had finished discussing the project with Puche, Soma served curried chicken and vegetables with hot chapaties. In memory of good old Kenya days she also served brown-raw cane sugar mixed with hot butter, a dish made in Punjabi villages for special guests. Simplicity can work miracles with taste buds!

I should have rested for half an hour after the Hyde Park jog. Chasing young joggers is tiring! Immediately after lunch, Bakshi proposed a walk in Holland Park. Although I was stiff as a bamboo stick, I could not refuse. We had a lot to catch up since our last proper meeting in Kenya more than ten years ago.

When phoning various people to fix my week's programme, I realized, not too late, that pleasure had put me off the true purpose of my visit: to share more time with Amarjit. Monday morning I spent with Davinder including a drive to "Cash & Carry" to obtain stock for the shop. In the shop I sat on the Manager's (Bakshi) chair to find the value of my French shares in "Le Monde"; stupid: Monday papers do not quote share values! A young customer approached me and said gently "I love your shop; so quiet and so easy to find things". That was my impression too. It was my pleasure to pass the message to Davinder and others running the shop. Then, Jyoti told me that it was not uncommon for some famous persons who live in neighborhood to come to the shop there. Hugh Grant sneaks in shyly. Diana was often seen going to the nearby gym centre.

Jyoti loves to be at the shop, keeping it tiptop. Fingering the cash register, putting things in plastic bags and dipping hands deep in cold storage "froze" her left shoulder. The week I arrived, Boss had banned her from the shop. A dynamic person like her would find it difficult to sit idle. Her shoulder pain had already disappeared before I left London. I do not know how long she would resist, although Boss assured me that there was no need for her to be in the shop.

A long walk and equally long talk with Jyoti in the afternoon, did a lot of good to her and I became more acquainted with that part of London. Without prior warning we went to see Soma with the idea of getting invited to high tea. We were spoiled beyond our expectation and we gossiped and we talked psychology of uprooting from Kenya and installing in London, thus relieving ourselves of pent up grievances against society, politics and mix marriages. It was not difficult to conclude on a positive note because every thing has ended well. It was up to us to make the best of the situation.

REFUELLING-AMARJIT'S TRICK

During this time, Amarjit should have refueled his system with new oxygen-carrying blood. I packed my small rucksack and took the underground to Wimbledon and train to New Haw, which is in the southwest bend of M 25. Precise directions given by Amarjit in the morning made it simple for me to follow the road for about fifteen minutes to his house, next to the motorway itself.

Chani, his super active wife Ravinder, their children Navdeep, Rajdeep and Manvir, and of course Amarjit welcomed me. Soon we launched into nostalgia: childhood adventures and misadventures; story of his elder brother Kirpal who was my age. Two years ago, a car accident in Kenya took him and his life partner to another world. Amarjit talked but little of his illness and without any evident trace of anxiety or fear. Next morning he took me for a long walk along the canal. Our talk started where we had stopped the previous night.

Next day (Tuesday), to satisfy my expressed wish, Amarjit took me to the next town, Cobham, where Chani runs a post office. He was needed to replace the absent assistant. I walked down the quiet almost dreamy main street with neat small shops. A few paces from the shops I ended on the bank of a picturesque canal. Neither cars nor people disturbed the ducks. I saw a woman sitting on a wooden bench knitting serenely in a yogic trance. Being a hydrologist, I was trying to assess the flow rate and quality of water, when two water supply technicians descended from their van and started to do the same thing!

I was back at the post office in half an hour. Amarjit was free again and we walked in the main street again. He introduced me to his friend, Mike, manager of the shoe shop, and others. No one can escape going to the post office; so almost every one in Cobham knows Amarjit; what a privilege! It was past lunchtime; so I invited him to a nearby restaurant. But he said the one near the post office was better. He ordered his favorite dish and I went for "plat de jour", a Giant Thai sandwich. It was very good. When I went to pay, the owner refused to accept my Swiss pounds! Amarjit's trick!

In the afternoon, Ravinder took us to Southall, the first world famous Indian Bazaar in British Isles. A lot of local people to be seen; a few English I saw looked like foreign tourists. We were back home at seven.

New Haw is a small village. Behind the house is a golf course. A huge ultra modern health centre is not far away. Chani was keen to take me there that evening. Although rather late, an hour on the machines followed by a high-pressure hot shower converted me into an angel. To celebrate the heavenly feeling, we toasted with cold beers and discussed his business, pastimes and of course Amarjit's love of ghazal-music and invaluable help he gives in running the busy post office.

NEELAM AND NAVI

Navnit Bhalla, also an ex-Eldoretian, now settled in San Francisco, and his wife Neelam had come all the way to participate in Amarjit's 60th birthday celebration on Sunday 12 September. During the week they visited Marrakech (Morocco). I accompanied Amarjit to Gatwick to meet them at mid night. Next morning they flew to Nice (France) at 8.30. I decided to go with them to Heathrow. We hardly

knew each other as persons. His mother and I were colleague-teachers in Eldoret Secondary School and Navi was a student in 1963-65.

Over a cup of coffee we renewed our acquaintance. I saw that he was reading "Emotional Intelligence" by Goleman, which I had read in French the previous week and had purchased its English version the previous day. Talk on the book led to knowing each other and our common interests. Forty-five minutes together passed like the wind. We could not get to our differences! That precious moment produced unforgettable affection and we parted with reunited spirits and many questions remain unanswered: a good reason to communicate by email.

HOUNSLOW

Three stops from Heathrow I landed at West Hounslow tube station. I had decided to spend free Wednesday with my aunt (mother's sister) and uncle. Right on time at 9.00, I knocked at the door and she received me lovingly. "Where is your bag?" she asked before noting my small backpack. "You look as if you have returned from school". Never before had she seen me in such a vagabond gear. After breakfast we exchanged notes on family affairs, shares and house extension they were making. I tried to sleep after lunch; but the plumber came to remove the old bathtub and replace it with a new one next to my room. Regrettably such a job cannot be done in silence. Any way I was called out to give hand to carry the new tub upstairs. Sometimes I can be useful.

That woke me up completely and I was ready to meet Jagjit Sihra, my colleague-teacher and friend from Kenya, ex-Kisumu, at 3.30. We went to his house in the same area. Jagjit is tall and lanky very intelligent. His wide smile narrows his eyes, which appear to emanate a sort of energy deep from his head, always controlled and meaningful; as if he has already read your mind. Since we were together in Teachers' Training College in Nairobi 44 years ago we have rarely missed talking about psychology of fears and phobias. His charming wife, Parkash, joined the talk while she poured tea. He took me back at 17.15. My cousin (aunt's daughter), Kanwal (officially Kameljit K. Kalsi) had not yet come. She was supposed to take me to her house at 5.30. So we continued talking in the car for another hour about personal relationships in rapidly evolving Indian society under British conditions. I saw Kanwal drive in and we quickly concluded on a religious note of enlarging our capacity to accommodate the changes without harbouring bitterness, which can lead to hatred. We might hate dogs but dogs do not know it. Hate or bitterness harms its owner. Jagjit thanked Kanwal for being late and I got the chance to be angry with her for the same reason!

London visited – E-mail 3

SOUTHALL

My cousin, Kanwal, is a biologist, doing research in heart science under the supervision of Professor Sir M.H. Yacoub in the National Heart and Lung Institute at Harefield Hospital, UK. I have met her on numerous occasions but never for more than a few minutes. I did not know her. For many years, unflinching she sent me Rakhi: a sister wishing her brother happiness. With the advent of e-mail our communication increased but it is impossible to know one another. In recent years, she started travelling to various European cities, sometimes not far from Geneva, to present papers on topics such as "Adenine/ribose and ATP pool in Adenosine kinase-inhibited cardiac cells" and "Energetics and function of the failing human heart with dilated or hypertrophic cardiomyopathy". These mouthful words scared me, one cause of cardiac arrest. To know the author first exhilarated me more than reading her papers.

From Hounslow she took me home in Southall in her Golf that sounded as if it was running on a worn out rear right wheel bearing. A little later, her husband, Rajinder, backed his new metallic grey Peugeot 406 next to Golf. The frontage of houses can hold only two cars. He was late because he was installing computer network in the houses of Parliament. No wonder people looked relaxed because they had not heard Tony Blaire for a few days!

We celebrated our reunion with refreshing tea and family talk. An hour of daylight was available to explore the little Punjab. Riding in the 406, Rajinder showed me the new Gurudwara (Sikh Temple) complex. While we were debating about going in, he pointed to the Glassy Pub, in the opposite corner, decorated with true size panel figures of singing jats. The location of pub reminded me of Dublin where a church in the middle of a block has a pub in each corner. Spiritualism needs spirit!

To quell my interest Rajinder parked round the corner and we entered the pub. There were about ten clients; probably it was still early or the prayers across the road had not ended! I was told that every Friday there is live Punjabi music and it is difficult to get in. I ordered a small bottle of red wine, which the bar man fished from behind the cardboard panel "HUSHIARPUR". Rajinder had told me that one could pay here for drinks in Indian Rupees. Incredible, I thought I was getting Hushiarpur wine. I was wrong; it was Spanish Rioja. Then I noticed that each section of bottle shelves was named after a Punjab city or district: "Ludhiana", "Ferozpur", etc, not the origin of spirit. On our drive back we passed by the well-lit Sunrise Radio studio.

Every time I have been to Southall my first image was of incongruity of residential houses with the people, mainly Punjabis, walking in the streets. One would

associate the people with villages and towns in the Punjab. Yet I felt that Southall is the most human place in London.

In no time, our biologist served a delicious dinner and an excellent Australian wine. They have lived in this house for many years. The road, neighbours and the surroundings have become a part of their life. They would like to continue living there, at least for the sake of Rajinder's old mother who lives five narrow houses away on the same road. Yet, it appears that they feel that their life style has changed. They talked about moving to a better residential area.

I was deeply touched when Kanwal told me that she would not go to work the next day. Some research students would take care of the Centre. In the morning we walked to school with her son. What an experience! Almost all children were Asian. Most mothers wore salwar-kameez; very British indeed!

In no time we were in Broadway. We talked and walked and talked, time did not exist, at least for me. Having been to Jagjit's concert on Friday, I bought his CD "Silsilay", three videotapes of Mirza Galib and a tape "He Ram", all recommended by Amarjit. Then I remembered Talveen Singh. I had never heard of him until the morning before. In the Underground I read in the "METRO" that some Singh had won the Mercury prize of £20 000 for his CD "OK". I assumed that he must have become a celebrity in Southall. I decided to buy "OK" for Amita. Surely I should find it in Broadway. We went to all music shops; only one had heard of him. The attendant assured us that we would have to go to "England" to buy it. "We can go there by bus", said my cousin smartly.

It was past one and I was hungry. Kanwal had not tried Lahore Karahi, a Muslim restaurant. We crossed the road and found a quiet table for two. At the long table behind us ten "foreigners" I mean English were enjoying what looked like an official office luncheon. Further inside two other tables were occupied. I watched the traffic of people outside. Davinder had told me to go to Broadway if I desired to see beautiful Punjabi women. Other than my company I did not see any. I saw elderly Sikhs followed by their wives a step behind. A Muslim and his wife were dressed as if they had been to the mosque. I could have been sitting in Chandigarh, No, more like in Hushiarpur judging from the rustic talk and gestures of people. We ordered "bhoona" lamb and chicken, one vegetable dish and simple Naans. Where were the beautiful women? No sooner had Kanwal finished saying, "They are working, you have come at the wrong hour", a young man surrounded by four tall Pathan or Afghan looking pretty girls, wearing long Kamiz with just a little less long side-slits over matching salwars walked in. I shut up, I had no more questions. Kanwal informed me that in the last few years many Punjabi Muslims had migrated from the north and opened businesses here. This has made Southall even more colourful. We paid up when we got our delicious kulfis.

We were getting late to go to "England". We stood at the end of a long line of waiting passengers, all Asians. The red double deck London bus swallowed us all. A Punjabi lady in pale clothes was standing in the passageway between the bus driver and us with her back towards us. "Shouldn't you offer her your seat", said Kanwal. "She looks happy standing. If she would turn and show me her face I could offer my knee". For that I received a rib-breaking elbow jab from the right. The lady turned round and recognized others at the back and very contentedly joined them talking gently in Punjabi, "Your are also here?" The bus must have been cruising at supersonic speed? We were already in "England"; we landed in Ealing.

One shop back from the bus stop, we entered a music shop and right in front were displayed a stack of Talveen Singh's "OK" CDs: "A boundary-melting compound of past and future... not just OK but stunning"; "Perplexing, contemplative... devastatingly beautiful"; "Purist genius from a sonic global engineer", etc.

We invited ourselves to coffee and watched a completely different world. People smartly dressed and walked purposefully. The Indians were dressed more British than the whites. We crossed a tall Indian gentleman showing off a neatly trimmed beard and whiskers in the style of an English countryman. I had made a geographical time jump of some sort!

Kanwal pointed out some landmarks during Bus journey back to "Punjab": district of the well to do and her daughter's school. Suddenly, every thing appeared normal to me. People looked happy, healthily adapting to each other's ways and customs. Talveen Singh's music was appreciated in the English world; curry becoming the national dish; Punjabi's puffing out English, as it should be instead of torturing and mincing it in ultra pure phonics. A few who have learnt Punjabi locally, speak it in the English way.

Besides family affairs, Kanwal told me about her work environment in the Heart Centre. I wanted to know how she was able to accommodate so effortlessly two different cultures. She wore a Punjabi dress; I have never seen her in clothes she wears to office or during her travels in Europe. I would like to know more about Rajinder. I hope they would visit us in Geneva. Amita, who will soon be a biologist, will have lot to share with Kanwal and to get to know each other.

Parting was difficult. Jagan and Sukesh had organized a dinner party that evening to celebrate my visit. They live in High Barnet. Kanwal took me to Northfields Underground and I continued my vagabondage.

London revisited –E-mail 4 (last)

PEAK DISTRICT!

At Leicester Square, I boarded a waiting train. Inside I did not know if it would take me to Edgware, Mill Hill East or to my destination High Barnet. I asked a young man. He did not know! A young girl on my right said that it was the Edgware train. Edgware was not a wrong destination; but I would be there three evenings too early. I changed at Camden Town. High Barnet is hilly. My enthusiasm for walking made me miss one turning and I approached Jagan's house from Underhill side half an hour late. I was happy to find that I was the first to arrive.

Under normal conditions public transport is the best way of travelling (not always safe: what happened to two trains near Paddington is sad). Every time I am on a motorway or a major road it stresses me to see so many cars chasing each other. I often wonder how much petrol is being consumed every minute and how can people support it. I was told that most people spend half their wake lifetime on roads and they apparently enjoy it. May be I have been spoiled by Geneva!

Sukesh's house is tastefully furnished in soothing pastel shades of grey and blue. From the terrace at the back Jagan showed me his London-ward sloping garden adorned with exotic flowering plants, some of which he had brought from Kenya many years ago. In the horizon one can see the London plane pierced by some high-rise towers.

Soon other guests landed including Harminder and his lovely wife, the couple who had obtained our front seat-tickets for the concert. I chose to drink Californian red wine to give company to my hostess. Starter delicacies were followed by a sumptuous dinner and a delicious ice-flan (kulfi). I have a sweet tooth. Sukesh told me the recipe. At that moment I thought it was easy and I would remember it; but I have forgotten it: a good reason to call her (I did, the recipe is on the way).

Earlier Jagan had wisely proposed that we would give a break to singing to avoid overkill. Humour interspersed with occasional poetry was on the agenda. Nearly all jokes were new to me and I enjoyed them. The evening ended on that note. Jyoti, the only sober person, drove us back to Earl's Court.

Have I already said earlier that pre-planning my programme has rarely comes to fruition? On the morning of my second day in London, I met Rumi, Davinder-Jyoti's 25-year-old son who is a lawyer/solicitor. The parents think that he should work day and night seven days a week as they did when they were his age. Rumi claims that he would do the same if there were need; a sort of "enough is enough" approach. He has bicycled round the world, including South America. I was told that he takes off and goes hiking, mountaineering, or camping anywhere in Europe whenever he feels like doing it. His office is upstairs in the same house. His windows are always open.

Jyoti's soft call from the back garden brought him down almost instantly. He looked very fit and trim ready to accept any proposal of an escapade. He proposed to go trekking in the Peak District with another enthusiast on Friday, camp there and return on Sunday. I just could not believe my luck! Alas, on the way from High Barnet, Davinder told me that Rumi would not be able to make it the next day because he had to handle an urgent property deal. That proved parents wrong; Rumi respects his work priorities.

WEMBLEY

Davinder's sense of art and music excels in appreciating beauty. It is difficult to say what impact Jyoti continues to have on him. His appreciation weighs heavily towards Gujarati beauties. He has been telling me to go to Wembley, the little "Gujarat" of London. Friday mid morning Jyoti took me there. Soma and Puche were also with us.

Our first stop was the new Hindu Mandir in Neasden. After all those days of fun it was time to seek peace! Suddenness of seeing a white marble temple built in the ancient style transported me to southern India and Thailand. It is beautiful. Every chunk of marble was shipped from Italy, worked in India and put together in London. Woodwork of the entrance hall is impressive. Cathedral-like silence did evoke peace. But I agreed with Jyoti: for some reason, it did not give the same deep feeling of spiritual calm as one would get in an ordinary, simple, more human place of worship. The Hindu Temple is now a major attraction of London for tourists, foreign and local. Tourism tends to turn holiness into holiday. I cannot but appreciate and commend the original idea and effort that Gujaratis of Britain have made to complete this project, thus enlivening London.

There is very little chance of building a big new church; there are many abandoned and others taken over by other communities. A thought came to me. Christians of Rome converted pagan Britain and built churches and cathedrals to symbolize greatness of God and the Church. Followers of Judaism had built synagogues. How many are still there in Britain, I do not know. Probably, the Sikhs were the first non-Judaic people to build or convert abandoned churches into Gurudwaras (Sikh temples), followed by Muslim mosques. Tibetans and other East Asians have also set up Buddhist monasteries. This is an enormous positive cultural input, which can only benefit the English people. In not very long future these inputs will be commonly remembered as British contribution to civilization!

Then my mind turned to Africa. What can it contribute? Most Africans are already either Christian or Muslim. Is black Africa, which is the cradle of human race, now ready to create a new way of thinking based on its own social experience and contribute to the well-being of the world?

In no time we were in little "Gujarat", quite hungry. It was easy to find Sakoni restaurant. Two Gujarati dishes we had ordered came quickly, but Chinese

vegetable noodles took many more minutes than the fifteen the waiter had indicated. I realized that China is further away than India! As an outsider, I found that prices very high for what we got. The place was very full. People must be earning well.

While Jyoti and Soma shopped, Puche and I were told to look at Gujarati beauties outside. There must be a conspiracy; I am always taken to see what is not there. "They are all working. Next time, you must come on a weekend". Hard luck! Our ladies bought some bulky stuff, which I offered to carry calling myself their "Njoroge" a Kenyan name. The old shopkeeper reacted and asked if we were from Kenya.

RENDEZVOUS

I was keen to get back because I had an important rendezvous at 5.30 in Victoria Station. I had not waited long when Gudi, one of my several sisters-in-law, found me reading some book. She had come from Crawley on the Gatwick Express. Whatever the situation, she laughs. She had a long story to tell me. So we walked towards Vauxhall Bridge and found a quite garden bench where we sat for about an hour. Having worked in the National Social Security office, she knows a lot about needy people. Her generosity has caused her many personal problems ending in considerable self-sacrifice. I observed that she has become a stronger person and she claims it too. Just recently she helped a handicapped Kenyan friend who lives in Leeds in getting his file from the bottom of the pile. I had no doubt that she was managing her affairs wisely. She is enjoying life, as one should.

To celebrate our happy meeting we found a quiet table in American Steakhouse and ordered fish dishes and red wine. As in the past she unloaded on me many intelligent and naughty jokes and our loud laugh did not go unnoticed by others in the room. We shared the desert. She was full of life. To describe her exuberance I told her the story of Saint Peter guarding the gates to heaven and hell. At the end of another boring day he heard a women coming up laughing, sounding very happy. When asked what she had done on Earth she said that she had enjoyed life in every sense of it. Saint Peter gave her the key of his hut and asked her to wait for him. He would finish with the last two in five minutes.

We walked back to the station the long way; to find that if we had been ten minutes late she would have missed the last Express. That gave me a chance to hug her harder than I would have and she went laughing into the train. Things I was able to talk with her and others, none of us in Geneva could do. There is no one to talk to. That social context is missing. I do not need to give her my house key; she knows she is welcome to Geneva any time.

On Saturday we attended another marriage, met more friends and talked nostalgically of old days in Eldoret, of our friends and girl friends and love affairs. I did not know the bride or the bridegroom. The next day (Sunday), was barbecue

in New Haw to celebrate Amarjit's birthday. It was a big reunion. I am glad Harminder, my nephew, and his wife Mina and kids also came. He had accepted transfer to Budapest and was flying the next day, just like me. The party was too big to organize a ghazal singing session. Having talked legal matters with Ramesh, my lawyer, who was going back to Kenya in a few days, I got easily persuaded by Jagan and Sukesh to leave early at 17.30. Without disturbing the party I was able to thank and wish good-bye to all. On the way to High Barnet we talked and I came to know them better, a loving and knowledgeable couple. I could learn a lot more from them.

EDGWARE JOKES

We rested and got ready to go to a dinner party at Sunita's (my daughter-in-law) parents' house in Edgware. As I was travelling light, I changed into clothes, which I had worn three days earlier. I was a sort of gatecrasher. Rajinder Thapar received us lovingly, as usual. Directly in front through the corridor I saw a pretty girl dressed in black standing in the kitchen. Her face looked familiar. I approached her cautiously and got a big surprise to find that she was Ritu, Sunita's elder sister. She had trimmed herself so much that in her black clothes she could be taken for a teenager. Saroj (Rajinder's Rani) was so completely occupied with cooking that she almost did not notice me. Before even I had finished introduction to other guests, Ritu excused her self and went home to release Toni, her husband who was baby-sitting. Dinner was served when Toni came. He told me about his flourishing business and the new house he was about to purchase. I hope the next summer would be nice and hot; I would like to surprise Toni with a splashy dive into his new swimming pool!

The highlight of the party was jokes especially the "non-vegetarian" ones. Women excelled in telling erotic and horny ones. I was able to hide my blush under my white beard! The next day was working day; so guests left earlier than usual.

My flight from Luton was at 10.55. I woke up early and jogged to High Barnet Park where I saw a signpost showing Red Circuit and Yellow Circuit of London. I have still to find out where they lead. Are they bicycling or walking tracks round London? I had a quick shower. A hearty breakfast in the company of Sukesh and Jagan tempted me to stay on. We had just enough time to reach Luton. Easy Jet flew me back to Geneva, where lonely-looking Amita and Nalla (our dog) came to receive me.

Thank you friends for giving me such a memorable ten days among you. When shall we meet again? Why not in Geneva? Come all together or singly! Regards,
Naginder