



Late Sitarambhai Dayarambhai Patel

06.04.1924 - 02.03.1996



Sitarambhai Dayarambhai, his younger brother Dullabhbhai Dayarambhai and father's younger brother Mavjibhai Pursottambhai came to UK in 1954. They were soon joined by their first cousin, Isvarbhai Mavjibhai.

Our joint family were well known diamond cutters and dealers from the city of Navsari and in our village of origin, Asta. Once a middle class family our income dropped after Indian Independence and therefore it was decided some members would come to UK for the betterment of the entire wider family.

Life in UK was so different. On arrival they had to find accommodation, work and learn a completely new language which was the biggest barrier.

In those days people were so helpful and therefore, they decided to locate in Birmingham where they knew people from Navsari. They all lived together with many others, "taking shifts" in the limited space, beds and kitchen facilities at home as well as at work. They all worked in the same factory where jobs were available by word of mouth.



Travelling to work was difficult due to their lack of knowledge of the English language so they left stones at bus stops so they knew when to get off and they counted themselves very lucky if they met a Gujarati bus driver or conductor.

Also food was so different from back home only basic ingredients were available for cooking. They cooked in one pot for everyone and rotlis were rolled with milk bottles as no rolling pin was available. Hence, the humble vaghala baked beans came to fruition. This improvised dish is still enjoyed by 2nd and 3rd generation Indians in UK.

Houses did not have bathrooms so bathing was at the local council baths once a week.

A few years later, they saved money to call their families over. Sitarambhai's family came by boat as there were 4 of them and flights were expensive. They were at sea for 21 days before arrival in the UK.



From left to right - Bhikabhai, Isvarbhai Mavjibhai, Champakbhai Premabhai, Sitarambhai Dayarambhai, Thakorbhai Mavjibhai, Pravinkumar Goradhanbhai Patel



They settled in East London where Sitarambhai found work in Ford Motor Co. Due to his diligence he soon gained respect from the Management at Ford and he was allowed to recommend others to work in Ford, hence Ilford became a popular place to settle for Gujarati families as work was easily available and the community could be close to each other.



From left to right - Vinoobhai Sitarambhai, Pushpaben Jitendrabhai, Narubhai Sitarambhai, Sitarambhai, Laxmiben Sitarambhai, Kiranbhai Dullabbhai, Jivanbhai Sitarambhai

Initially, his family lived in rented accommodation. They were fortunate to be able to buy their own home with the support of friends and family who helped with the deposit. The house cost £2,800.

Isvarbhai soon joined them in East London, initially living with Sitarambhai and family and worked in the seat making department at Ford. Ford soon became the major employer of Asians arriving from India and Africa.



Isvarbhai married in Leicester and their wedding was in his wife's brother's house with only 10 people in attendance. 4 others families shared Sitarambhai's family home until they saved enough to buy their own. It was an era where you helped each other and the family understood and accommodated sharing rooms and beds with other siblings.

The women all worked in the local pickle onion factory to help their husbands and also helped each other cook and clean. Times were hard but so many good memories and relationships were forged which have been upheld today, across multiple generations, due to the experiences shared in the early days.



From left to right - Jayaben Isvarbhai, Pushpaben Sitarambhai , Laxmiben Sitarambhai, Nelaben Isvarbhai (baby), Vijaybhai Isvarbhai (boy), Vinubhai Sitarambhai, Vithalbhai Dayarambhai, Narubhai Sitarambhai, Sitarambhai Dayarambhai



Their struggles were great but they persevered so that future generations could enjoy the life we do now. I know our first generation would be and are so proud of what the second generation's Indians have achieved in UK today. Our achievements are a testament to their hard work and perseverance in an unknown country, with many barriers. Even though times were tough they made time to help and look after each other and maintain our community and more importantly our culture. Future generations owe it to them to do the same because happiness comes from being available to help your own friends, family and community just like they do and did.



Front Row Narubhai Sitarambhai, Kiranbhai Dullabbhai, second row Pushpaben Jitendrabhai Patel, Sitarambhai Dayarambhai Patel, Laxmiben Sitarambhai Patel, Vinobhai Sitarambhai Patel. Third row Vinobhai Mehta (adopted son/lodger,) Jivanbhai Sitarambhai Patel