

1. Arrival in England

I arrived in England 55 years ago today, on 5th October 1953. Having started the voyage from Karachi, on 16th September, by the all-first-class boat/ship Caledonia, we had landed at Liverpool at 11 am. They had told me in Pakistan that England is a very cold place – and it was already winter there. So I had on a jacket, an overcoat, a woollen muffler on my neck, and leather gloves on my hands. It was a bright, sunny, brisk morning – and I was soon sweating profusely, but would not take off my overcoat – just in case.

My elder brother, Sajjad, who had just returned to Pakistan after having done an MSc in electrical engineering at the University of Manchester (Victoria College?) – although our boats had probably crossed on the high seas – had arranged that a friend of his, a Mr Qadri, would meet me at the London railway station (Liverpool Street?) and put me on the right train to Cambridge, whither I was bound. I remember Mr Qadri meeting me at the station, giving me a hug, and helping me with my unwieldy luggage – which included one or two iron trunks (some filled with MSc physics books, clothes, blankets, bedding materials (*khes*, etc.): for the Cambridge college authorities had written to me to bring an ‘eiderdown’ – which I had to consult a dictionary to understand – laundry bags, pillow cases, etc. I only realized much later that these instructions had been actually meant for English students who came from their British homes; in addition to a number of items in hand-held bags and other paraphernalia.

Alighting at the Cambridge railway station, I took a taxi and arrived in the Gonville and Caius College Porter’s Lodge. There I was greeted by the chief porter – a portly man wearing a high, shiny, black top-hat (which greatly impressed me). The porter – or porters? – helped me with the luggage, which they placed on a large trolley (or trolleys?) and rolled it to my room in College. I gave the porter a half-crown (two shillings, six pence) as tip – as I had been instructed (probably by Mr Qadri).

I had been given some of the best rooms in college – C2 in Caius Court (or was it called Gonville Court? P.S. I believe it was the latter), which is nowadays the junior parlour. It consisted of a large sitting room with brown leather sofas, a desk, and some chairs, and leading to a separate bedroom, with a small window with iron bars, giving on to the narrow lane (Trinity Passage?) that separates Caius College from the much grander Trinity College.

The reason I had landed at Gonville and Caius College (the fourth oldest college at Cambridge – 1348 – after Peterhouse, Pembroke and Clare) was that my Professor of Physics at the Government College Lahore, Professor Rafi Mohammad Chaudhri – (PES – Provincial

(or was it Pakistan?) Educational Service), Class I: as he always insisted on putting after his name and the degree MSc (Aligadh), PhD (Cantab.) – was himself a Cambridge man. He had done his research at the Cavendish Laboratory in the early 1930s – where, according to him, Lord Rutherford (a great physicist and Nobel Laureate) had once introduced him to Sir J J Thomson (the Head of the Cavendish, and another Nobel Laureate) by saying: Sir, here is Chaudhri, the most hard-working student that I have ever come across – and had known Sir James Chadwick – a Nobel Laureate and the discoverer of the neutron – as his senior at the Cavendish. Sir James was now the Master of Gonville and Caius College – which had advertised a Viscount Rhondda studentship, tenable at the college and open to the whole of the British Commonwealth and the USA. Dr Chaudhri had sent a very strong supporting letter along with my application for the studentship (which he advised me to make), saying that I was the most brilliant student he had ever come across during his 25 years teaching career. This was most kind of him – although it was with great difficulty that I had persuaded him to delete the last sentence of that supporting letter; in which he had originally stated that it had been his sad observation that those students who went to England for higher studies from the Indian subcontinent seldom came back to their homeland. I had argued that this sounded like a recommendation not to give me that scholarship. He removed that sentence in the final version of his letter – but how sound was his observation/instinct! I am still here in England after 55 years!