

Amin Visram

Ugandan Asian Oral History Project: Political Environment

Shezan Muhammedi: “Do you feel like there were some sort of ethnic tensions? Do you feel like this was something that you saw might become an issue between South Asians and Ugandans?”

Amin Visram: “It was very surprising—I think it came from left field. What had happened was, in 1971—I still remember the day, when I was twelve and change, on January twenty-fifth. It was a Monday. We came from my uncle's house where we had a barbeque on that Sunday, and at midnight, all of a sudden, there were guns going off everywhere and bombs. This was on the eve of January twenty-fifth, Sunday night—which would have been the 24th, 1971—and there was a lot of bombing going on everywhere. In the middle of the night, people were waking up to see what is going on. Next morning, we woke up, it was Monday morning, and we all went to school and we were told to rush back home. We rushed back home and the bombing continued, and then in the evening, that's when Idi Amin announced that he had now taken over the country, which was on the twenty-fifth, Monday, January 1971. He had basically taken over the country about a year and eight months before he decided to expel everyone. That's my recollection of it now, unless it was 1972, January, I can't remember that.

Shezan: “No, I'm pretty sure it was 1971. You're definitely right.”

Amin: “So everybody was happy because what had happened at that point when he took over, the president before then... and this was the Common Man's Charter, for the people, by the people, of the people, which was President Milton Obote from what I remember. Again my memory was very sparse being only twelve years old.”

Shezan: “Oh no that's bang on. It was Obote, yeah.”

Amin: “When Idi Amin took over, the Asian community was flabbergasted that things are going to happen now, they are going to be in our favour. I guess for a year it was in our favour and then it went haywire, but it came from left field. In fact, that first year when Idi Amin was there, I don't think anybody had any problems, even the first year and a half, and all of a sudden, this August of 1972 is when it came from left field and everybody thought it was a joke. We were in Jinja at that time. My father was going to be transferred by Shell, or British Petroleum, to Jinja to work at the depot there, so we were looking at homes there. It was a Saturday, I remember. We came back Saturday night and Sunday is when the bombing started, and then Monday is when he announced, this is in January in 1971, that he was in power. That's as far as my memory goes back.”