

**The Ugandan Asian Archive Oral History Project**  
An Oral History with Bashir Lalani

Archives and Research Collections  
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Narrator: Bashir Lalani  
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**Abstract:**

Mr. Bashir Lalani and his family of eleven siblings were all displaced from Uganda following Idi Amin's announcement. His mother was born in Masaka, Uganda, and his father came to Uganda from Gujarat at the age of 18. Their family ran two general stores within the region and enjoyed a pleasant upbringing.

He reflects fondly on his childhood in Uganda recalling a happy lifestyle with his family and his parents' strong connection to Uganda. Bashir was studying in the UK when the expulsion decree was announced trying to complete his A levels. After the announcement he continued to study abroad until he was finally reunited with his family in Canada in 1974. Eventually, in 1978, Bashir immigrated to Canada to be with his family. He continued working in hotel management before transitioning to a career in finance.

Currently, Mr. Lalani is a certified financial planner and continues his work in investments after a fulfilling career in hotel management. His family is preparing to celebrate the impending centenary of his mother and are working on creating a family history. Mr. Lalani volunteers as a guide every Wednesday afternoon at the Aga Khan Museum alongside many other volunteer activities.

This oral history was conducted with Mr. Lalani at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto.

**Shezan Muhammedi: “This is an oral history being done on June 22<sup>nd</sup> and Bashir uncle, I'll let you take it away.”**

Bashir Lalani: “Ok, so I was born in Masaka, Uganda in 1954. I spent my childhood in Masaka Uganda and attended elementary and junior high school within the Aga Khan schooling system which I have very vivid memories of. Very exciting memories because of the town where I was born and raised. It was a beautiful town with everybody sort of knowing each other. If you can imagine from nursery school and kindergarten days to grade eight, and then four more years to O-levels; because we used to be under the British education system. So about twelve, thirteen, fourteen years in one school and all the kids doing the same. You can't help but know all the students and you get to know the siblings and the families and everybody. So it was one extended family, that's the early childhood and my experiences of growing up in Masaka. We had a tremendous amount of activities, in addition to the schooling system, and we had a lot of fun playing different kinds of sports. We were introduced to all kinds of sports, soccer, cricket, volleyball, even baseball, badminton, you name it, we were into it. As kids we used to have many competitive sporting events amongst friends and different communities. So the Ismaili community, of which I am a member, use to have sport competitions with the Hindus, or the Sikh community, or the Punjabis, all of South Asian background, but essentially all friends in a sense. Even my schooling days, I remember, they were very competitive academically because everybody wanted to strive to be the best in a sense and we thoroughly enjoyed. I remember having my childhood in Masaka, Uganda, as very fulfilling for me but also a very naughty childhood. Because as a child growing up, we had to get into things we weren't supposed to. That's part of life.

So that's what I remember and as an Ismaili Muslim, um, we used to have a Jamat khana which is a prayer house located on the hilltop in Masaka which could be seen from all the highways coming from Kampala, the main city, Mbarara the other town and approaching the city or town of Masaka, you could see the Jamat khana on the hilltop and the tower and everything. I remember that very clearly. Can we pause this and let me think?”

**Shezan: “Oh yeah”**

Bashir: “So a little bit of a background of myself and my family. So I am one of ten siblings right now, we were twelve, I've lost one sister and one brother. But even going to the historical roots, my dad was

born in Gujarat in a place called Bilka. At a very young age in 1929, and I believe he was about 18, he moved to Africa. The journey itself was quite a chore, from India to Africa, and he ended up in Zanzibar and apparently from what I recall from my dad, one of the travelers on the steamship caught some virus or some disease and everybody had to be quarantined in what is called the prisons island in Zanzibar or just off the coast of Zanzibar. On Changuu island, I cannot remember the vernacular name but I think it was called the Prison Island. So they stayed there for about twelve days and they were all cleared. Then my dad moved from Zanzibar to Kenya where he had a sister who had immigrated prior to him. And he had his cousin in Masaka who had asked him to join. So he went from Mombasa by train to Masaka. So my dad was born in India. He had never seen the African continent so it was a huge culture shock, coming from a South Asian background to the African continent, the language was completely different, he couldn't understand. So throughout all that anxiety he managed to acclimatize himself and to understand the culture and gradually he began to like it. And this was in 1929 and that was it. He never had the opportunity to go back to his homeland in India, until the expulsion from Uganda.

My mother was actually born in Masaka so I'm a second generation Ugandan. My maternal grandparents were born in India. My mom was born and raised in Masaka, and over the years, the communities were small so they got to know practically everybody. The early days of my family were rough like most new immigrants in a new country. So they were basically shop merchants trading in local goods and cash crops. That's how they made their way about. As I mentioned earlier, I am one of ten siblings, I rank the ninth right now. The youngest of the boys but I have a sister younger than me. And we all essentially grew up in Uganda, had our schooling in Uganda. All the siblings went to Makerere University, which was one of the finest higher institutions of learning. Some even call it the Harvard of Africa from a medical school perspective and others. So it was a very good educational system. And everything rolled about, life was very peaceful under the British colonial powers. It was a Commonwealth country and things were fine as far as I understood.

Uganda got its independence in 1962, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1962, when Dr. Milton Obote became the first Prime Minister. Before that, under the constitution, we had the Kabaka, Sir Edward Mutesa who was the king of the province called the Buganda province. Buganda was the predominant province in Uganda but after the constitution changed, during independence, Uganda became one and we had the Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda. So after the British left, things started to change. Everything seemed normal, life went on and into the 1960s I could remember a beautiful life. In fact, it was paradise on

earth, as Winston Churchill once said about Uganda, it's the pearl of Africa. And whatever you sowed in Uganda, grew. Uganda is one country where you would not hear of starvation, unlike Kenya or Tanzania or the other parts of Sub-Saharan African countries. Uganda is very green and fertile and it is also the source of the Nile. And you might recall from the history, it was Dr. Livingstone who had met Speke near a town called Jinja. The River Nile is the source from Lake Victoria which sources the water to Egypt. So in the 1960s, I recall life was beautiful, normal, we used to call it paradise on earth and things started to change in 1966 when new the constitution came about. Dr. Milton Obote had come out with the Common Man's Charter and he wanted to introduce the local Africans into the community and into the businesses at large, which is fine and normal. But those things were incorporated by those people who had taken up the right to become a citizen of Uganda and there were others who did not become citizens so they remained as non-Ugandans and it continued with their activities.

Fast forward a little bit, in 1971, when Dr. Milton Obote was attending that conference in Singapore, the Commonwealth Conference in Singapore. When there was something in the air about how the Asians were to be kicked out because the Common Man's Charter had stated that if you are a non-Ugandan, then you may have to leave the country, or the choice was given, to become a Ugandan, and you become a Ugandan and you have the right to continue as a Ugandan. So there was some whiff in the air about what was going to happen. To the best of my understanding it was the British government who thought what was going to happen if there was a mass exodus. So while Milton Obote was attending the Common Wealth Conference in Singapore, the military coup was organized by the British behind the scenes with Idi Amin. With the intent that he would overthrow the government which he did and he would come to power and everything would be normal. And it was normal until 1972 when Idi Amin, the president of Uganda at the time, supposedly had a dream that he wanted to make Uganda completely a black African, native, country. Which may be fine in speech but not practical because the Ugandan Asians were running the economy of Uganda essentially and they had the upper hand on the economy.

So when that happened, when he came to power, Idi Amin was fine for some months and I remember because I left in 1971, September 1971, and I went to England to pursue my high school certificate. So A levels, what we call it in the British system, until then it was fine. There wasn't any concern of what is going to happen and it wasn't until, I think around January or February of 1972, that Idi Amin claimed that he had a dream that he wanted to get all the Ugandans with non-African background, wherever they are, whether they are citizens or not, out. Initially, it was non-Ugandans so people started getting

worried, although they did not take him very seriously. But people had a concern and within months he changed his tune. And he said that ok not just non-Ugandans, all the Ugandans with Asian background or European background were to leave Uganda and he had given a 90-day notice which was shortened to 30 days very quickly and the panic grew. So here was the situation, on one hand, Britain who was the Commonwealth country had the citizens of Uganda issued with British Protectorate passports and they were under an obligation to accept all those Asians. So panic started happening that how is Britain going to be able to absorb eight to ten or twelve thousand Asians all at once. So that was the huge dilemma, most of the Asians who were non-Ugandans ended up in Britain or other European countries. There was a segment of the population that were Ismailis, that were Muslims who ended up in Canada because of His Highness [Aga Khan IV]. The Prime Minister of Canada was Pierre Elliot Trudeau who had agreed to help the Ismailis through some conversations or dialogues he may have had with his Highness the Aga Khan and he came to fulfill his promise that he had made. And I think as a result of that, the Ismaili Asians of South Asian descent from Uganda, most of them ended up in Canada. And the figures are anywhere between eight to ten thousand. This was back in 1972.

I remember that I had left Uganda in 1971, so the family had my address in the UK. I was in Hastings, where I was studying for my A levels in high school. So the family members had my contact but I had no clue as to where every member of family was. It took almost two years for me and for the family to find out where everybody was. I can give you an example, you can understand all of the property, all of the belongings, everything was lost overnight. We literally left Uganda with whatever we were wearing and it is ironic, even until today, we wonder and we thank God how we survived to this date, and how my parents actually survived because they had nothing to show for it. They had lost everything, the shops, the buildings, the trucks, the businesses that were ongoing. All of a sudden everything was snatched under their feet. So it was extremely hard, very painful, a lot of anxiety amongst the family, amongst the population. Literally we didn't know what was going to be ahead of us tomorrow. I was in England, I used to see the reports on the independent television on the BBC and they were showing clips of Ugandan Asians. How they were treated, how - as they were leaving the country to depart from the international airport at Entebbe, which is about maybe 20-25 miles from Kampala - the army had barracks set up. How they were interrogating them, if they saw some jewelry or money with them they would snatch it or ask them to take the jewelry out and go without those. So under those conditions people started panicking, word spreads very fast. There were a lot of people who were kidnapped killed, harassed, interrogated, you name it, everything happened. And literally we talk about ground zero after

9/11, this is how the Ugandan situation was when we left. We came, or most of us came here with ground zero, literally nothing. The only fortunate thing that we had as Ugandan Ismailis was good education and this was all in English. So our assimilation, our integration into society was a lot easier. Because we understood the language, we understood the culture, it was a lot easier. That was the starting point, that was some forty-five years from what we are talking about now.

When I was in England, my family scattered all over the place. I'll give you an example, you can understand my parents who are very distraught ended up with my brother who was in Nairobi and from there they went to India and Pakistan for the first time from Uganda. For my dad, 1929 to 1973, is when he was in Uganda, he met with his brother and sister for the very first time after all these years. So you can understand the emotions, the happiness, but also the anxiety not knowing what was going to happen to the family, let alone where the family was situated. My elder sister-in-law was born in Rwanda, a neighbouring country, so after she moved to Uganda she had three children and because she had a British passport, not Ugandan citizenship, she ended up in a camp in the UK, a camp in Newbury. And that's where they spent the earlier days. My brother was stubborn leaving Uganda because he didn't want to lose all the businesses and everything else. So he kind of stayed behind and sent his family out. So there was one member of the family there. My other sister, actually my sister married my sister-in-law's brother, there's one brother and one sister, so she moved to Rwanda, so they were in Rwanda. My one sister from Kampala moved to Belgium and they have been in Belgium all this time. In fact, she passed away in 1978 at the very young age of 38, so we lost her. But that's where she had established herself.

On the first exodus flight to Montreal was my brother Amin, who came with the Canadian Air Force or Canadian Red Cross and ended up in Montreal, where the reception was very hospitable as he remembers. And I think it was maybe September or October so the weather was getting quite cool and they were given warm clothing and everything else and they were given a choice to either settle in Montreal or Toronto so he chose Toronto. When he moved to Toronto, he somehow got in contact with the family in Uganda so my brother and my other sister also moved to Toronto. My other sister, as I said I have five sisters and five brothers, so my other sister moved to Vancouver. All on different flights, she was in Arua in the north close to Murchison Falls. So from there they had moved to Vancouver and they settled in Vancouver. And I was in England, so I had all of the addresses of all of these people but nobody else had the addresses of all these people. So I was the focal point.

Ironically, I speak English and I speak Gujarati my mother tongue but I can't read Gujarati or write Gujarati. But fortunately, my mom could communicate in broken English writing so I could make up what she was trying to say. So this was the form of communication which was interesting and through me I was able to keep the contacts alive. My eldest brother who was back in Uganda left on the very last flight the Red Cross flight that took him of all places to Malta. So he stayed in Malta for six months with ten or fifteen other families. He eventually joined his family after nine months in the UK, with his three little girls.

So you can imagine, my sister-in-law had no idea where my brother was and he had no idea where my sister-in-law was and the kids were. So lots of anxiety, eventually they came together and made a life in UK for many years and then they moved to Canada. So it was troubling times, some anxieties but touch wood, look you know, stay positive and everything comes out ok in the end. It was a learning experience, a frightful experience, but also one that you can never forget. My children, I have two boys right now, they were both born in Canada. Although, when I explain it to them they get the concept but don't really understand what we went through because they've never experienced it. Most people you talk to can only sympathize and empathize but really don't understand in detail how the Ugandan Asian crisis happened and what we went through. It was tough times, although the language and everything helped us but to get into the workforce and get into educational institutions was hard. So we lay the groundwork the foundations for future generations through hard work, education, and businesses or whatever and I'm seeing the results of that into the new generation who are well established such as yourself who will hopefully take it to the next level. Who will remember and remind the audience in the future of what happened and how it can be avoided.”

**Shezan: “That's great”**

Bashir: “My family's business was as shop merchants. We had extensive trade and tenders from the Ugandan army who we supplied with cash crops. So we had bananas, coffee, sugar, that we were tendering with the Ugandan army in the later years in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Initially the businesses were not good when my dad was working alone and the principal person in charge. But after my dad had surgery, my brother who was destined to become a doctor had to leave his profession to help out in the business because that's the way it was. Because family networks expected sons to take



over their businesses but my oldest brother Nizar was a principle business person and he essentially helped us afford our education with the help of my parents. So he ran different businesses, we had two shops in the main town Masaka and one in a village Bukoto which is just ten miles from the town of Masaka. And we did local trade in the stores and we had an Indian grocery store, selling food supplies. So like a grocery store and also the tendering with the army. And we were fortunate that my parents could put us through education. I'll tell you something, I was seventeen years old when I left Uganda and the only reason I was able to go to England was because I was seventeen. And when I was researching the high school requirements there were two or three high schools that I observed stated that if you are from the British Commonwealth and under eighteen years of age, your education fees are waived as a British subject. Which meant a substantial amount so it was like 150 pounds a year back in the day. So 150 pounds may not seem like a lot but think about time value back in 1972 and from Uganda, which was a lot. My family could not afford it. So that was the selling feature was that they didn't have to support me for the fees. They paid me 50 pounds in allowance a month, that was the legal limit since there was foreign exchange control in Uganda at that time.

So I left Uganda in '71 and I ended up in Hastings in Sussex and then I went to the Hastings Scholars of Further Education. So for the first year it appeared that I was ok so far as the allowance was concerned. My life in England was a different take all together. You can imagine, born in raised in Uganda, first person in the family to go abroad, and far away abroad to the UK. It was quite an experience, it was a learning experience, a frightening experience, and it was at the best of times initially because the population when I arrived in London when I first moved, to see it was rapidly changing. It was a cool climate, different currency, different population, very few Africans. So it was a culture shock but as soon as I adapted to it, it was a good thing for me. So I did my A levels in Sussex and then I had the option to go to Essex University for computer science which I declined. And I ended up going to Portsmouth Polytechnic to pursue a hotel administration course and the reason I did that was because I used to work in the hotel in the summer months and I enjoyed it so I thought let me try the business venture in hotel administration and I never looked back. So I was in Portsmouth for three years. In '74 I had the opportunity to come and visit Canada for the first time. This is where and when I met my family again for the very first time. It was nerve wracking but I was so happy to see them starting to settle down although not completely. It takes time, as you know, and I really wanted to go back to England and my older brother insisted that I might as well go and complete my university and then come back. I took his advice and I'm glad I did, so I completed my diploma in hotel administration in Portsmouth in '76.

When I came back to Canada, I thoroughly enjoyed it and this time I went back with the intention of coming back. So in '78, I was fortunate to get my visa, I had a British passport by then. The British government had issued a passport in London and it literally took me six weeks to get my immigration papers and come over so I didn't have that problem at all. While I was in England, my first job was at the London Hilton Hotel in Parklane and I was very fortunate because I met some fantastic people in the sports world. Including my greatest hero Muhammad Ali, and you know Muhammad Ali just passed away and I had the fortunate opportunity to take a picture with him and he autographed his name also for me and I still have that picture with me. If you want to show it, I will forward it to you, it's not a problem. That was one of my highlights, that I met other sports personalities while working at the hotel. I met people like Bobby Moore the 1966 captain of the world cup British soccer team. These were all England players; it was a great hotel for meeting sports players. It was interesting times. I also had a job working at the Harrods in London. So I was trying to save up to come to Canada. It was probably about 8 weeks or so. It was a Saturday job; it was an interesting place to work. But '70s in England life was very different, there was still a lot of discrimination, English people did not appreciate foreigners coming in, in these masses and there was definitely some times that were not amicable. Sometimes challenges, sometimes abuses, those kinds of things but you persevere. You persevere and you know what it was because we had to make a home somewhere. It was either Canada or England and my preference was definitely Canada.

So after coming here in '74 and '76, I had decided to come for good in '78 which is when I immigrated to Canada. I never looked back, never looked back. I thoroughly enjoyed Canada and this is a prominent place. So when I came to Canada, I continued with my profession in the hospitality industry. In fact, I was one of the instrumental team members to reopen the King Edward Hotel in Toronto, 36 King Street East where I was the assistant controller from 1981 for about 8 years. And then I moved on to a different hotel, it used to be a Westin hotel on Richmond which is now the Hilton because they did a swap between the Harbour Castle Hilton and the Westin on Richmond in '88. After that I was working for a different company. SC Johnson, as a corporate accountant and then I pursued my career in investments and financial planning. My background is I'm a professional accountant, I'm a CPA, CGA, and I'm a certified financial planner and this is the career I am still embarked on. And I thoroughly enjoy it.

With regard to my family, as I said, I'm one of ten. So my oldest brother ended up in Malta and he joined his family 6 months or 9 months after in England. They settled in a town called Welwyn Garden City

which is about an hour north of London and he was working and then he eventually opened up his own business and as an entrepreneur one would expect him to go back into entrepreneurship rather than working. So he managed his own business until 1989 when he finally decided to join the rest of the family in Canada. So he's here in Toronto with me. My second brother Diamond was in Nairobi where my parents had gone. He was working in the East African community as a meteorologist and so he looked after my parents travels to the east and when they came back getting comfortable and then eventually sent my parents over as immigrants to Canada. So my parents have been here since '73. I've lost my father in 1973, this year we are celebrating my mom's birthday, her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, a major birthday. So we are very fortunate that mom is still with us and relatively healthy and strong. So she's never worked of course, we've looked after her. She stayed with me for a very long time and now she's staying with my eldest brother here and we all look after her.

My other brother, my third brother Amin was in Toronto for a very long time. Married in Switzerland and he's now residing in Switzerland. So from Canada he decided to make Switzerland his home. My fourth brother, Zulfikar is in Edmonton. He was in Toronto, pursued his studies in medicine and ultrasound. He's now working in San Francisco, or I should say Oakland and he is based between Edmonton and Oakland. And of course all our children are born in Canada and they all live here. So with respect to my sisters, my elder sister moved to Canada but they are now back in Tanzania, as her family, her husband has businesses in East Africa and they decided to settle there. Their children are here and they work and run the businesses in Tanzania. So my second sister was in Belgium, Roshan, and she passed away in '78. Her family has now moved to Canada and they are in Toronto. I don't know if you need the names or not. So my third sister, Arzina is in Vancouver, they had moved from Western Uganda to Canada and decided to settle in Vancouver. They've always been in Vancouver and their family is also in Vancouver. My fourth sister is Dilshad, she was in Rwanda, they moved to Canada in '74. So they have always been in Toronto in North York. So my fifth sister Yasmin also moved later from Uganda to Toronto and she settled in Toronto with her family. My younger sister Shirin, she came to visit me in England in '73 en route to Canada and that was the first member of my family that I had seen since the Uganda crisis so we had a lot to talk about. And she was quite fascinated with the English Christmas time traditions as you can imagine because we learned about it in school and so forth but she eventually moved to Toronto but now she resides in Philadelphia with her family. So this is how we are scattered all over the place."

**Shezan: "That's great, and then sort of you came in '78"**

Bashir: "'78 to Canada"

**Shezan: "And then you started working almost immediately?"**

Bashir: "I didn't have a problem getting a job, yes, I was fortunate"

**Shezan: "Interesting, and then sort of how was that transition, I guess from English life to Canadian life?"**

Bashir: "Ok so when I did my training at Holiday Inn at Heathrow airport, the inn keeper at the time, the manager at the time had moved to Toronto. And it was actually at the Holiday Inn at Yorkdale on 401 and Dufferin which is where I had first started my job at a hotel as a manager in training. So I really didn't have a problem finding a job, I think it was only a matter of a month and my family was living in Scarborough at the time. And I remember taking a bus, sometimes four buses each way, changing each time and it took me an hour and a half to two hours each way from Scarborough to Keele and Dufferin area, so it was quite a long way. But otherwise, working through the system, the Canadian way, I learned and gained experience. It was not, I would say, not a huge challenge. When I was still working in the hotels, when I had the opportunity at the King Edward hotel, I had already enrolled in pursuing my CGA program which I have completed. So this was my first professional diploma if you'd like or accreditation. My first ended up being the hospitality management in Portsmouth England. And that was it, and I stayed with the hotels for some time and then I moved to a different industry."

**Shezan: "And then you were married in England?"**

Bashir: "Yes, good point, so I was here, I went on holidays in 1982 and met my future wife there. So we courted over the phone and back and forth visits and we decided to get married in '84. And I actually got married in Peterborough, England. And then my wife followed me soon after that, after marriage, in fact all our papers were done perfectly, so we came together in '84, after being married in September. Ironically the day I left Uganda and the day I got married is the same date, September 16th, so that's a very important day for me. And we've been here since '84. We moved eventually from Scarborough to

Mississauga because my wife's profession is in x-ray technologies and she found a job at the Trillium Hospital near Sherway Gardens in Etobicoke and that's where she's been all these years, so 30 plus years. I did the triangular route from Scarborough to downtown and then to Mississauga and did that for three months and decided to move to Mississauga. And that's where we live right now so my two sons were born in Etobicoke, in the same hospital, and we live in Mississauga.”

**Shezan: “And then how was raising your children in Canada?”**

Bashir: “Wow, raising the children is always a challenge. In fact, in my family of all the siblings, I am the only one with two boys. Most of my family, my brothers and sisters have nieces or they have one boy. So I have two nephews but two boys in my own lineage. So Faraz and Rahim are both born here and you know they had good schooling and education and they are working. One is working full-time professionally and Rahim has identified himself with a career he wishes to pursue. Faraz is twenty-six and Rahim is twenty-three today. No more challenges than a normal parent would face. There will always be challenges, you know there's a saying, you can pay off your mortgage for good but you can't pay off your children for good. They're permanent mortgages”

**Shezan: “And then, uh, sort of my last question is, how would you identify yourself today? Would you say you're a Ugandan-Canadian, Canadian-Ugandan, Ismaili-Ugandan-Canadian, no wrong answer.”**

Bashir: “So you know, here we are sitting in the beautiful Aga Khan museum, which has recently opened, it is a jewel in the city of Toronto, as you know, and I am volunteer tour guide on Wednesdays. I have given of my time. I often get asked the question, so what's your background, are you an Ismaili? So I have to give them the true answer. So hear me out, I am born into Ismaili faith of an Indian background, born and raised in Uganda, adopted Canada as my permanent, definitive home, and this is who I am. So I am a Canadian with a South Asian background of an Ismaili Muslim background is who I am. This is how I identify.”

**Shezan: “And then sort of what does it mean to be a Canadian to you?”**

Bashir: “Oh, Canada is the best country one can experience to live in. We are so fortunate. It is a tolerant country. Tolerant in more than one way, it accepts different cultures, it accepts the diversity, it allows you to flourish. So if one is destined, educated, hard working, then I don't see any reason why a person

cannot establish himself or herself very comfortably as we have done perhaps. And it's applicable to anyone. It doesn't matter what part of the world you are in you are all welcome in Canada. The government's motives are with diversity and accepting diversity. Ironically with Justin Trudeau, the first time his father was the Prime Minister when the Ugandan Asians came and today the Liberal government's policy is well set for immigrants and the diversity of the country. And even within our own community we a huge diversity and that the diversity is actually a strength and not a weakness. So we endow to harness the diversity to live in the land amongst the people. I think that's very important because everybody is equal and you know to progress, to advance, one has to have good education. We are on the merit system and if you don't work hard, and if you are not well educated then I suppose one would face the consequences. So it is very individual but it's a fantastic opportunity. It's a very safe community, a very safe country, despite the weather and it's great. So we love Canada."

**Shezan: "And your siblings that ended up coming, I believe you had one brother that came straight to Toronto. Did they, I guess they were considered stateless because you were all Ugandan citizens?"**

Bashir: "Yeah initially we were all considered stateless because we didn't have any identification of course right? So they were helped by the Canadian Red Cross. I remember my brother and my sister Yasmin both stayed with a very generous family of Greek background who unfortunately had both passed away but they were very hospital then. They showed them the kind of basics and then soon after, I think about two or three months they found accommodation for themselves and started life in there and sometimes when you are thrown in that situation, you have to see it through and that's the way it was. So it was challenging but also fulfilling at the same time because Uganda was a paradox. It was an island, a land of paradise for the Asians because we had almost everything at our disposal within certain limits and life was good. Life was very normal and good, no challenges in a sense. But if you read in between inverted commas, there were different challenges, and then all of a sudden you come to Canada and you have to start your own life. Compare that to Uganda, most of the people, did very little work, they had local housemen and housewomen to do most of the house work. All of a sudden you come to Canada and you became that employee. So the transition was a big knock, however, you know, we survived"

**Shezan: "And is there anything else you wanted to add?"**

Bashir: "I think you are doing great, I hope that you are successful in your thesis, and I hope you can put this into better words and make it exciting. I would love to read it at some point and if you need more information, Shezan, let me know, you have my contact numbers. Currently we have the history being informally written within our family since we are celebrating the centennial birthday of my mom. We kind of traced our history from India to Uganda to Canada with all the families from my dad's side, which 90% or 95% we had no met. My mom's side of the family, most of them were Ugandan so we knew and met them. And our own family, our immediate family comprises today of 84 members, four generations, it's a very large family. So we've got a lot of people and I mean I can even send you what I have written for the book so you can keep it for yourself and use it if you so wish."

**Shezan: "Yeah that would be perfect"**

Bashir: "You have my email address or even text me to remind and then I will send it to you"

**Shezan: "Thank you so much for your time, this was absolutely wonderful"**