

Piroj Amrolia

Writing in from Burnaby, Greater Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 14.09.09

Dear Vali

I could not sleep as my mind has been constantly reeling with stories of our Ugandan childhood from the mail you have been receiving. Memories seared in minds of a unique blend of people that had the privilege of growing up without boundaries of religion and cast. It's going to be a difficult task to squeeze the stories in three volumes. Vali, you have awakened the "Sleeping Tiger."

While reading through the material from my father Jal Dastur it is amazing how much I had forgotten vital information like my great uncle Pesi Dastur who came to Uganda in 1908. The street DASTUR STREET is named after him. Indians were in small number at that time, no more than 2,000. Papa has a full chapter on cotton industry like how in 1891/92, Mr Lugard found Ugandan soil perfect for growing cotton. Half a ton of cotton seeds was brought from Egypt.

I was born in Kidzi seven miles away from Masaka. I was delivered by a local Ugandan lady called Fatma Bibi. She lived in the charo in a small hut. She had no medical education but knew what needed to be

done. She delivered my brother Nanu at home, while I and my elder sister sat in the next room with my dad, awaiting the new arrival. I was too young to understand what my father and mother must have gone through knowing that things could have gone wrong.

I grew up surrounded by love of seven families - five that worked with my father in the cotton ginnery and two who were duka-waras. Then there were the "masis", the most unrecognized in their lives. They were strong in mind and body. I cannot explain how lucky I was growing up with so much love. How very true it is in Hillary Clinton's words that "It requires a village to raise a child." I was tutored at home by my parents till the age of 9 as there were no schools in the village. My first two years of schooling started in Jinja. We moved to Kampala and I joined the famous Government Indian Secondary School. It is amazing how that small school with good and indifferent teachers brought out the best out of so many and how we still keep in touch with one another. Weddings, births, and deaths are relayed from all over the world with the mere touch of a button.