

# **BEST OF THREE WORLDS**

**With A Pile of Rotis**

**A soulful, cultural and historical journey across three continents**

By

Hansa Pankhania

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## **Forward**

I really enjoyed reading these memoirs. The overriding impression I was left with is that for the author, love, humanity and the idea that we are all part of a world family mean much more than national and cultural identity. That is a powerful and valuable message.

It is interesting that others were more fascinated by her multi-layered cultural identity than her initially, maybe because most people do not have such a rich background. Perhaps it is the same with cultural identity, we just accept our own background as the norm, even though in some cases, like this, it might be quite special!

I loved the way the author talks about the one-mile world and ten-mile world of her childhood, and how, thanks to her parents, had no sense of the disquiet in the wider world beyond, only learning about what was happening in Kenya much later through conversation with a friend. I loved reading about the courgette plant that covered the house and picking the mangoes.

From the book, I had the impression that she very easily accepted the move to the UK, which surprised me. Leaving familiar home, friends, the glorious sunshine and the beauty of Kenya and moving to cold, grey, ugly Birmingham cannot have been easy!

The passages about her first trip to India and family holiday to Kenya are very descriptive and engaging, among the best parts of the book. I particularly enjoyed the evocative description of the trip to the cinema in India and reading about the reactions of her children on the Kenyan Holiday.

It strikes me that she has created a very personal cultural identity from her own recipe, perfected over the years.

This book is really thought-provoking. I very much enjoyed reading it and would have liked to read more.

–Sara Rowell, Solihull Writers Group

## **Prologue – Birmingham, West Midlands, England, 2017**

I wake up and realise my equator sun of many years ago has crept into my dreams. The telephone rings, bringing me back to my present world. I jump up, grab the phone and mumble a sleepy ‘Hello?’ to the caller. My new friend Katie wants to know what time I will go over to her house later that day.

That afternoon, I am relaxing at her house, enjoying an English cup of tea accompanied by an Indian snack. My mobile phone rings and I have a short conversation with my sister. When I get off the phone, Katie says –

‘That was amazing. You were switching between English and some other language every sentence but still kept the flow of the conversation.’

‘Really?’ I respond. ‘To me, that feels as natural as breathing.’

To which she asks, ‘How come?’

‘Well, I was brought up with three languages: English, Gujerati and Swahili,’ I say.

‘I know you speak English very well, so is Gu...je...rati one of the Indian regional languages? And Swahili is African, is it?’

I nod. ‘Yes, Swahili is the national language of Kenya.’

My friend is silent for a few moments and the look in her eyes when she meets my gaze says she is very puzzled.

‘So, how come your parents were in Kenya if they are Indian? How come you were born in Kenya, an African country? I hope you don't mind me asking but, obviously, you look very Indian and are living in England.’

She wants to know my story.

Katie was born in Manchester, moved to Birmingham in her teens and has had a handful of holidays abroad. She says she assumed I came to this country from India as an economic migrant.

I say, ‘My parents were born in India as subjects of the British Empire. My dad and grandad sought work in the British Protectorate of East Africa, where present-day Kenya is. In the years following Kenyan independence, Indian Kenyans began to feel less welcome in Kenya, so, as British passport-holders, my family moved to England.’

At that moment, our attention is drawn to the television as a heated debate on immigration is taking place as part of the Brexit issues. After listening for a few minutes to a right-wing politician talk about curbing immigration, we resume our robust conversation. She wants to know where my allegiance is and to which country. She wants to know who I am as a person with these diverse influences. She wants to know whether I will make my children marry an Indian, African or English person.

Towards the end of my visit, Katie says, ‘Hansa, you have written other books, why don't you write a book on all this? I found our conversation today absolutely fascinating and want to know more.’

‘Okay, I promise to think about it,’ I say as we part for the evening. Another friend of mine, Jane, also said this to me many years ago.

For numerous days after, I reflect on who I am and what makes me who I am in light of the African, English and Indian imprints. What is my purpose, and do I have a legacy to leave for my future generations? It strikes me there is a risk that this rich cultural history and journey across three continents might never be known to the world. This story needs to be told. In light of the current conflict surrounding intercultural issues, I want the British people to understand that this Indian from Kenya and her future generations are as British as they are.

*And that is how this book is born.*

I am delighted to take the reader on an adventure that immerses them in the enchanting interrelationships between African culture and exposure to diversity from birth, the richness of Indian influences and living a simple life in tune with nature, and my western education in England and life in a democracy. In particular, I want to share my memories of a moment in time when an Indian-origin child born in the British Colony of Kenya witnesses the liberation of a new African nation. I hope I can convince the reader that 'Britishness' is nothing without its ties to the commonwealth and therefore cultural variation need not be a threat to the concept of Britishness.

All through my life's journey, I have been enveloped with the love, acceptance, connectedness, and humility I received from my parents, siblings and husband that I believe is a basic human need for safety and a sense of purpose and belonging. All this amidst the delicious sacred aroma of a pile of *rotis!*

This is my journey as a commonwealth subject, the product of three proud cultural identities each with a rich history. This is the story of how diversity can enrich our world and bring us together through the simple concept of humanity.

## **Chapter 1 – Thika, Kiambu District, Kenya, 1958-1960**

I am now five years old. It is quite normal in my childhood days to wander off to the green common, a large rectangular patch of grass and shrubs bordered by a road, houses and shops. The square is lined with a gutter about two feet wide and deep to gather the water from the surrounding area. Our house with the blue door is the second-to-last of a row, next to a lone fabric shop. The *Gurdwara* is round to the right corner and the *Mandir* directly opposite. A carpenter's workshop owned by our neighbours in the last house stands beside the *Mandir*. There is a mill and another timber shop in the same row to the left. Baa and *Baapuji* know that if I am not in the house then they will find me in the grass square across the road where all the children from the neighbourhood gather to play.

The equator sun above is showing off today, shiny and bright like Baa's gold bangles. The pale-blue sky is reflected in the pastel shades of her cotton *saree*. There is the familiar earthy scent of the African soil in the air.

Children are having a game of '*Gili Danda*'. *Danda* is a makeshift bat and *gili* is a finger-length wooden oblong that Baapuji has made for us in his workshop. A bowler bowls the *gili* at the person batting. Fielders run or catch the *gili* before the batter gets to the stump ten or so yards away. I run up, dressed in my hand-me-down pink cotton dress and brown plastic shoes. I want to join in the game my brothers, sister and their friends are playing. I see *Bhai*, my older brother, bent to the right, both hands clutching the bat poised just above the ground. His gaze is fixed upon the *gili* being hurled towards him by his classmate who lives in the house on the opposite side of the green grass square.

'I want to bat. I want to bat.' I shout in my little voice, trying to get his attention.

'Not now, go away,' *Bhai* shouts, flicking his attention to me and missing the *gili* by a fraction of a second. 'Now look what you've made me do!'

After a fuss, the older children persuade me to sit with the three younger children playing '*Panchika*' in a corner away from the *Gili Danda* match. I try to compete with Sima and Niru but fail miserably. Niru has won the game and runs up excitedly to her sister who is a fielder in the *Gili Danda* match, making her miss a crucial catch. Some things never change – younger siblings being a nuisance and embarrassment to their older siblings!

It is literally a carefree and innocent existence as a child. We have a radio but no television in our house. Time after school, weekends, and holidays is spent playing outside with whichever children are there at that time. We do not have expensive toys so we make our own. My favourite is when my brothers give me rides on one of their homemade carts – four wheels attached to the underside of a one-foot-by-two-foot wooden plank. I sit on the plank and they push me until the wheels whisk me away, and then push me again when the cart comes to a halt. I squeal with delight and fright at the same time.



## **Chapter 2 – Rotis Rolled in Divine Love**

### **Thika, Kenya, 1962**

It is only five o'clock in the afternoon and Baa will not expect me home until dusk. Niru's Baa invites us to help her make the dough for the evening meal's *rotis*. We wash our hands and scramble to the kitchen where we perch ourselves on the row of *patlas* laid out for us. In the deep aluminium *saani*, Niru pours the water into the well she has made in the middle of the heap of flour. Sima attempts to mix the water into the flour with a long wooden spoon. I get to mix it with my hands! My nimble fingers have a go at binding the two together, spilling a copious amount on the floor.

'Let me do it. I can do this better,' Niru says. Sima wants to have a go as well.

'Let her do it,' insists Niru's Baa as she intervenes gently, not wanting all the flour to end up on the floor. 'You will all learn to do this.'

Niru's Baa explains as she enfolds the ingredients, 'As you mix the flour and water, caress one with the other and infuse them with love. As you knead the dough, bind it with blessings. Do this for the people who will eat them so you feed their hearts as well as their bellies. Niru, you can knead the dough tomorrow, and Sima can do it when she comes to play on Saturday.'

We wash our hands and file back into the yard. As we do this, I think of Baa singing her *mantras* as she binds and kneads the dough for tonight's meal.

The evening flies by... and it's the next morning in the playground at Shah Primary School, which is named after M. P. Shah, the main sponsor of the state school. Amongst the tittle-tattle of seven-year-olds you hear a group of girls in their khaki skirts and white blouses running and singing in a circle –

*'Aitishooo, aitishooo, we all fall down.'*

Giggles and laughter follow as their delicate hands and legs stumble on to the grassy ground. They get up and ringa-roses again.

\*

During the lunch break I walk at a brisk pace with a few friends or my older siblings to home half a mile away. As I set foot in the house, Baa's soft rendition of mantras sanctifies the ambience. I see Baa is cooking in the kitchen over her coal *sagdi* and the aroma of garlic and turmeric incites my hunger. In addition, the whiff of *rotis* cooking makes it heavenly. My siblings and I sit in a circle on *patlas* laid out on the kitchen floor, ready for Baa's sacred offering of the day.

We grow up nourished by a simple low-budget, mostly plant-based vegetarian diet passed down through generations. Baa says food is medicine to the body. She says bananas and okra are cooling to the body and balance out the heat from the effect of our equator sun. Baa says we should give gratitude and respect to everyone in the food chain, farmer, distributor, seller, cook, who make it possible for every single morsel that we devour.

Jerome does a house-to-house drop to all of the Baas on the street to sell his home-grown *bhoga*, and a bargaining slanging match always ensues. As well as bananas and the okra, Baapuji's favourite, she also buys *turiya*, aubergine, peas, tomatoes, guava and fresh fenugreek. Baa did not ever have to buy courgettes, though – Baa grew her own.

Lunch is a big pile of *rotis*. Actually, breakfast is also a big pile of *rotis*, and supper a big pile of *rotis*. Well, it is really not as boring as it sounds. Breakfast is a pile of *rotis* with tea and sometimes pickles, lunch is a pile of *rotis* with a vegetable curry, and supper is a pile of *rotis* with yogurt or lentil soup, except for Sunday when it would be *khichadi*. Today, Baa scoops up cauliflower and pea curry onto our plates one by one. She is running late so there is only the beginning of a pile of *rotis*. If there was a big pile, we would help ourselves to what we wanted, but today she serves half of the *rotis* in turn so we can all begin to dowse our hunger.

She frantically rolls up one *roti* and drops it onto the hot griddle. She picks up the next piece of dough from the aluminium *saani*, rolls it between her palms, sprinkles dry flour onto it, drops it onto her *patli*, and starts to roll it with her *velan*. She sweeps her drooping *saree* back onto her shoulder as she turns over the *roti* on the griddle, then continues to roll the next one. She swiftly flicks the first off the griddle and onto a plate as she picks up the next one from the *patli* and drops it on the griddle. It is all one rhythmic flow.

Oh yes, I forgot to say our after-school snack is also a rolled-up *roti* smeared with ghee and sugar.

To me, one of life's biggest pleasures is the heavenly aroma of freshly cooking *rotis*. For us, it is as sacred as Baa's love that she enfolds in her cooking and in her being. Baa and Baapuji's world is filled with love, love, and love. I truly cannot recall a time when I did not feel this love from my parents or my siblings. It is just there, not said, not expressed in any fancy words, not bought with materials things, just there. Maybe I feel it because I cannot recall ever feeling judged or criticised for anything by my parents and any of my family as I am growing up. Maybe also because I feel I can just be who I am. Just who I am. Maybe. I am happy here amidst the love and aroma of *rotis* – I feel at home.

But growing up in my beloved Thika is not just about hibiscus shrubs, turiya *Panchika*, being a nuisance to my older siblings, *Aarti* at the *Mandir*, stolen mangoes, steaming spicy *mogo*, reading well in English, singing and dancing with Niru and Sima, or Baa's heavenly *rotis* rolled in her divine love. It is also a history in the making.

### **Chapter 3 – History in the Making Kenya, Thika, 1963**

#### **12th December 1963**

Everything is the same as any other day, yet something is different – a different vibe and pace to the morning. Baa and Baapuji are up early and siblings are rushing through their morning routine even though there is no school. Little brother is banging the bathroom door with one hand while pressing his crotch with the other, shouting for Bhai to come out of the bathroom. He is desperate to get in there, but Bhai is taking his time, as usual. My older sister is crying as Baa is struggling to untangle her long waist-length hair with a big brown comb. Baapuji is shaving on the veranda in front of a one-foot-by-one-foot mirror fastened to the wall with a single nail.

‘Baa, why is there no school today?’ I want to know.

‘Because it is “*Jamhuri*” day,’ she responds while plaiting my sister's long curly hair and reaching out for the white ribbons to secure the ends.

‘Jam...hu... What is that?’

My brother tries to explain to me over the steaming *chai* and *roti* breakfast, but most of it is lost to my naive eight-year-old brain.

Without any warning, the sound of drums and singing breezes in from the street. We all race out through the yard, past Kuende and Wanjiku's house. They are there too, dressed in traditional Kenyan clothes today: *kitenge* and *kikoys*.

‘It's Jamhuri day today!’ they both shriek in excitement together.

At the gate by the main road we ogle the parade going past. Women with painted faces, feathers in their hair, beaded necklaces, and brightly coloured garments are performing ‘*Goma*’, a local dance. Men in *kitenges*, and men draped in orange and red cloth holding spears, do another variation of *Goma*. A row of drummers leads the parade.

Mrs. Nyame is wearing feathers in her hair and is dressed in a bright *kitenge* dress as well. She hands us flags coloured in green, black and red to wave in rhythm to the singing, drumming and dancing. We join in with the singing with whatever words we can catch and get in step to the *Goma* with Kuende and Wanjiku.

‘*Harambe tumuse pamoja...utinde...serekari.*’

It is as if we have been transposed into another world, having not seen such celebrations and influx of people before. At midday, the dancing stops for a while. Everybody stands solemnly to sing a different song I have never heard before. I thoroughly enjoy the day eating *ugali* and *irio* with Kuende and Wanjiku, not understating what I am celebrating.

Fifteen months later, in History class in school, I am able to make sense of that day

## **Chapter 4 – Extended Love**

## **Thika, Kenya, 1964**

At the age of nine, my world is not just Baa, Baapuji, siblings, school, temple and the square of green grass outside our house. It goes beyond that, to *Motabaa*.

I was the second daughter born to my parents. My Motabaa has one son and she stakes a claim to me as her adopted daughter when I am born. Motabaa is round and cuddly where Baa is sleek and slender. She ties her hair in a knot just like Baa, but her hair is fine and silky. I do not understand all of what she says to me as a young child, but she tells me she felt an instant connection to me and had to have me as a big part of her life. Little did I know at that time that she would feel part of my soul forever; that I would think of her at sad and happy times for the rest of my life, and that she would guide and comfort me in my dreams; that she would be amongst one of the most significant people in my life, one who would bless me with the profound experience of human connections.

Unlike Baa and Baapuji, Motabaa and Motabapuji show their love for me by taking me on outings and buying me gifts, though they do also cook me the foods I love. It is Saturday today, so, like most Saturdays, they both pick me up to spend the weekend with them. Motabapuji drives a sleek black Chevrolet and today he drives me and Motabaa to Nairobi, twenty-six miles away, for a day out. The day goes past in a flash, shopping and having dinner in a restaurant. I fall asleep on the way back and wake up the next morning in my own room with plush furniture and designer bed sheets. I hear Motabaa pottering about the flat and I recall their detached house with the papaya tree in the garden that surrounded the house, before Motabapuji's retirement and my cousin's departure to the United Kingdom.

## **Chapter 5 – The Three Waterfalls**

### **Thika, Kenya, 1965 - 1968**

Talking about our little innocent worlds takes me back to the ten-mile-radius world of my ten-year-old self. I try to imagine ten miles stretching beyond the one mile of home, school and the grass square surrounded by a gutter next to my house. What is beyond this...?

I am walking home for lunch on a school day as usual, panting, trying to keep up with my brother who, for some unknown reason, is not affected by the scorching sun and plumes of red soil that strike my brown plastic shoes with each hurried step. I can see the end of the parting in his head of dark hair, the white shirt on his back, khaki shorts down to his white socks and faded black shoes, as his satchel bobs up and down, matching his eager footsteps.

‘Bhai... Bhai...’ I shout after him, ‘*aaste chalone*, (walk slower, please)!’

It gets worse as he accelerates into a run, completely ignoring my protests at being left behind. This is not very kind to a hungry, flustered, tortured-by-the-sun, little girl with dusty, brown plastic shoes and I fume within. Then he disappears from my low-ceiling horizon completely.

Eventually, I can see home in the midst of the shadows of the trees, leaves dancing amongst the yellow of the sweltering sunshine. I see our house but I also see what looks like the back of a minibus tucked between the alley entry to our house and the fabric shop next to it. Ah... now I know why Bhai broke into a run – Baapuji is home and he has borrowed the factory minibus this lunchtime. Whenever Baapuji gets a chance to bring the minibus home at lunchtime, we know it is adventure time! The rumblings of hunger in my stomach are taken over now by rumblings of excitement. After our hasty and tasty lunch, my siblings and I, as well as the children of the surrounding neighbourhood, will be having a tour beyond our one-mile radius world.

‘Shall we have a ride to the waterfall today?’ he calls out to the group of children that have gathered around the minibus after lunch. ‘*Chalto, Chalto* (Come on, Come on),’ he gestures, inviting his eager audience.

‘Yeah...Ha...’ we all yell in unison and excitedly pile into our seats.

Baapuji makes a right turn at the end of the road, driving past the *Gurduwara*, and then takes a left.

Soon, we are waiting in anticipation for the sharp bend bearing to the right. As Baapuji skilfully takes the turn, we all gasp ecstatically at the sight and sound of the rush of the waterfall beyond the bridge. But then Baapuji says we will have to turn back from the bridge so we are not late for the afternoon session of school! We all howl with objection, even though we know that Baapuji is a man of principle and discipline and there is no way we are going to be late returning to school. We head back, but the waterfall story does not end here.

\*

I have passed my secondary education with a distinction and it is time for me to join my older siblings in England to further my education. My beloved Thika and its remarkable natural surroundings, the innocence of childhood years, fade away into oblivion for many years until these sweet poignant memories are reignited some thirty years later.

## **Chapter 6 – England, Home from Home**

### **England, September, 1971**

I am sixteen years old now. It's a crisp September day under a grey sky as I leave Heathrow airport with Bhai who has made the trip from Birmingham to meet me. I have no idea what I expect England to be like, as I had only a handful of photos to go by that Bhai and my sister had sent me. They came to England in 1968. My parents will follow a few years after me.

Settling in is relatively smooth-going as Bhai, my sister, and my cousins guide me through the British way of life. I do not recall feeling homesick because I have my siblings, and my Fai and cousins live across the road. I think of Baa and Baapuji often, but I soon get engrossed in my studies at college, doing my A-Levels in Social Sciences. Apart from the size of Birmingham and the many European people in my surroundings, it feels like home from home. I am used to the English language, having been taught the same curriculum in Kenya as is taught in schools in Britain. I can speak Gujerati with my family, and there is ample Indian vegetarian food available in local shops.

Fai tells me this was not always the case. She and her family came to Britain in the early sixties. She tells me about the harsh winter conditions without central heating and relying on kerosene heaters for warmth. Some houses did not have bathrooms and they had to go to the public baths once a week to bathe and wash their hair. I find all this hard to take in, having walked into a comfortable, warm and welcoming, centrally-heated house with a bathroom on my first day in England.

\*

With Baa and Baapuji now here, our happy family times together with Fai and my cousins are restored. After a week of work or study, we all look forward to enjoying the weekend with each other. The men do the shopping and odd jobs around the house on Saturday. Baa and the girls cook the traditional Sunday dinner: *pappadoms*, a savoury item like *bhajiya* or *samosas*, vegetable curry, rice and lentil soup, and a sweet dish made from milk and vermicelli. The younger generation now calls this ‘DBS’ – *Daal* (lentil), *Bhaat* (rice), and *Shak* (curry). We are all grown up now and have bigger appetites, so the pile of *rotis* is almost a foot high. My sister and I start on it at noon and just about finish it for one-thirty when lunch is served. After clearing up, we all gather in the living room for the Sunday matinee which is typically a western starring John Wayne. Cups of Indian tea do the rounds halfway through the movie, followed by a light supper of leftovers, and then it’s Monday again.

I pass my A-Levels and Bhai wants me to go to university, but I meet my future husband at the local youth club where I like to sing and I fall in love and get married.

### **Birmingham, England, 1987**

At the age of thirty-two, I am juggling two boisterous children with a job in customer services and the addition of my husband's family. Even though in my birth family there were no restrictions upon my spirit and sense of self, tradition expects that I, the daughter-in-law, make my husband's family my own and assume responsibility for their welfare. I take this duty seriously, and my parents and siblings are supportive, but it takes me further away from myself. My siblings-in-law help me with childcare in return for the effort I make towards securing their futures, but all is not hunky dory. Life never is, so I try not to judge those



challenges and carry on. Eventually, they are all married and settled in their own homes. My upbringing has taught me to love them unconditionally, so they remain an integral part of our life to-date.

## **Chapter 7 – India, Ancestral Home**

I am thirty-five now and have lived in England for nineteen years. It is January 1990, and we are off on our first lifetime family holiday to India.

It is literally the sweetest assault on all our senses and the culture shock takes days to wear off. It is nothing at all like my introduction to Britain. After the freezing temperatures of the English winter, stepping off the plane and being hit by the dry heat with its distinct musky smell still lingers in my psyche. Travelling in a taxi from the airport to the hotel and being taken aback by the sea of only brown faces after thirty-five years of living amongst multicultural faces is the most striking aspect of that initial entry to the country of my ancestors.

‘I thought England would be a shock to the system when I first arrived but actually India has completely bomb-shelled me,’ I say to my family, and they agree wholeheartedly.

It takes a few weeks to get used to India.

I will not go on about *rotis* here, although this is where they originate, and instead tell you that one of the first notable differences in cultural behaviour is how Indians go to the cinema. You could not have experienced India without experiencing Indian cinema, the largest film industry in the world.

I am near a cinema in Porbandar with my husband and children, aged eight and eleven, as well as a relative who has been escorting us since our arrival, and I am trying to fathom the chaos outside the cinema hall. In the crowd, there are young men eyeing up the pretty girls, dressed in jeans and some in traditional *salwar kameez*, the men, flirting and whistling whenever an opportunity arises. There are many families with young children clutching the

hands of their dads and mums. There are men in turbans, and men without turbans. There are Hindu women in bright *sarees* with *bindis* on their foreheads, and Muslim women in *burkhas* closely following their male relatives. There are older couples and older single men not wanting to miss out on seeing the latest offering from the big Indian film star, Amitabh Bachchan, and there are babies crying in their mother's arms while their fathers negotiate the box office.

We step out of the cinema and into another extraordinary experience. We have been here for two weeks now but still cannot get over how the roads work in India.

By the time we set foot outside again, it is dusk and we are all exhausted. Tomorrow we are travelling to Rajkot, which has a handful of fixed-price shops. I sigh with relief at this news. On our way back to the hotel, we drive through a less popular shopping area. I spot a small shop selling utensils. By small, I mean *small*. It is amazing how the retailers in this part of the world cram their merchandise into a five-foot-by-five-foot space. Piles and piles of pots and pans.

‘Please can you stop here. I would like to look at some *sufuriyas*.’

The rickshaw driver gives me a blank look and I repeat my request. He again gives me a blank look and I again I repeat my request. He stops the rickshaw and turns around to the back seat.

‘*Aap kya kehe rahe ho*, (I do not understand what you are saying).’

I hear a burst of laughter from dear hubby. ‘Of course he would not get it. You are saying “*sufuriya*”, which is Swahili for ‘*pan*’. How is he going to know this?’

We all crack up with laughter.

But those are not the only things that are exhilarating about India. The food is mind-blowing, or rather, taste-bud-blowing.

## **Chapter 8 – Re-Inventing Myself**

### **Birmingham University, England, 1991**

I am thirty-six years old now, with a full-time job, my son starting secondary school, taking care of my in-laws, and there is not much space for me. Kenya and India fade away with the daily grind. My husband is affectionate and attentive as always, but there is something missing, something is rousing waves of discontent in my core.

I yearn for intellectual creativity and stimulation, absent in my monotonous job and domestic routines, so I enrol at university as a mature student. I do not feel a passion for maths and science subjects, so I pursue a professional qualification in social care first. The modules on psychology fascinate me. I am intrigued by human behaviours and drawn to their social and psychological aspects, so I decide to pursue a degree in Counselling Psychology. I adore university life. I love the learning environment and this feeling of strength in my psyche as each day moves on to the next. My fellow students think I am crazy when I say I love the assignments and research projects. Call me crazy, I do not care, I just love it.

Back at university, I am in a personal development group, which is part of the syllabus. A group member is sharing a traumatic experience and I offer her a solution. The facilitator asks how she might be feeling, and I offer another solution. The facilitator asks again how she might be feeling, and I offer yet another solution. The facilitator says –

‘Hansa, are you in touch with your feelings? This is not about solutions but about how well you can empathise with a person’s emotions.’

This statement hits me like a bombshell. How might my group member be *feeling*? What was I feeling? Had I ever been in touch with my feelings?

Unbeknownst to me, this is the root cause of my burgeoning health problems: tightness in my chest and rashes on my skin. I am tested for asthma and eczema, neither of which is verified. So I begin my journey to connect emotionally, starting with myself. I keep a diary of events

and associated feelings. I learn to accept anger as a valid human emotion and explore ways of expressing it safely. My journal entries after that day are rather longer than before.

For the topic of my thesis, I choose stress management. In my research, I come across literature on stress caused by repressed emotions, and the emotional overload that can ensue. This is a light-bulb moment for me. I have an overload of repressed anger and all the resulting symptoms of this stress: tightness in my chest, skin rashes, irritability, cystitis, and so on.

I am sitting in the library and in my reading somewhere it asks if the significant people in my life have given me permission to express my anger in healthy ways and modelled this to me. Another light-bulb moment! I remember what happened next like it happened yesterday. I come home to an empty house and so practice one of the anger management techniques I have read. Using not so many nice words, I give myself the permission to be angry by verbalising my feelings at an imaginary mother-in-law. I cannot describe my sense of relief!

\*

Kenya has been far from my radar, though, until a series of conversations with my friend Jane brings all my memories flooding back.

## **Chapter 9 – Kenya in the News**

### **Birmingham, England, 1995**

I am forty now. I am sitting with my friend Jane in an Indian restaurant. We are tucking into curry and *naan* bread. Jane has now acquired a taste for chilli-laden spicy food. In fact, she orders the *vindaloo*, which I cannot stomach. As Kenya has been in the news, we re-visit a conversation that we had when we first met five years ago.

\*

She sees my Indian looks and hears my faintly accented speech. She asks,  
‘Which part of India are you from and how long have you been in England?’

This is a common inquisition I get on a first meeting and I immediately think,  
'*Here we go again.*'

'I have only been to India for one short holiday,' I say. 'I was born in Kenya.'

'Oh, so you came here as a refugee?'

'No, I came because I am a British passport-holder, as were my dad and grandad.'

'Oh, really? How's that?'

I tell her I am asked this question umpteen times, often when I meet a new British person.

\*

We begin to talk about the day's news coverage of the political issues in Kenya.

'I realise now I was actually born during the political uprising seeking independence from the British Empire. For half my time in Kenya, it was a British colony, and the other half, a free country.' I tell Jane as she asks me about my life in Kenya. 'Growing up, I heard the words "*Uhuru, Mau Mau, Kenyatta*" bandied about, but never understood their meaning. Thika, where I was born, is in the central region of the country where a lot of the fighting was taking place, but I have no memory of any of this. I later found out that there was a lot of fear around, but my parents protected us well from it and I did not sense any of this.'

As I take a bite of my scrumptious stuffed pepper, I see the look of fascination in Jane's face urging me to continue.

'Kenyans and Indians had similar experiences in their quest for independence. The British colonial powers used the divide-and-rule approach in both countries. In India, they played on the tension and divide between Hindus and Muslims; in Kenya, between the different tribal groups, especially the Kikuyus, Lous, and Samburus. Gandhi in India tried the non-violent approach. Despite that, there was much violence and loss of life, especially during the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.'

I pause as I see the brightness in Jane's eyes fade, a lump forming in her throat. She tries to swallow her piece of *naan* soaked in chicken vindaloo but coughs and splutters instead. I pass her a glass of water. She takes a few sips and composes herself before responding.

‘This is awful. You can say I am ignorant, but, truly, I had no idea about any of this.’ She gulps and clears her throat again. ‘I need to know more about all this, maybe do some reading.’

She raises her head slowly and holds my gaze with a look of guilt and shame. I get up, cross over to her and hold my arms out, inviting her for a hug. We hold each other in a forgiving embrace, my way of reassurance that she had no part to play in all this.

Then I do what the British do whenever something gets difficult and uncomfortable: I offer her a cup of tea.

‘Oh yes, please,’ she says in a lighter tone. ‘Shall we have your boiled Indian *chai* instead? I prefer that to English tea,’ and adds, ‘I’ll pop to the loo while you do that.’ We enjoy our tea and snacks before she continues with the history lesson.

I stay awake most of that night reflecting on how oblivious I was as a child in my one-mile-and-ten-mile-radius worlds to the tumultuous events that were going on in Thika.

## **Chapter 10 – India, Kenya, and England Connections**

Later that week, it is a cold winter evening and we are all sat by the fire in the living room, snacking on *garam garam*, *bhajiya*, and boiled masala *chai*. My children have become inquisitive about my Kenya-India connection. I am not surprised as I have been jabbering about it all week since Jane came over.

‘So, Mum, how come you were born in Kenya but grandad was Indian? How come we were born in the UK?’ my son asks.

I give a summary of the explanation I gave Jane and top it up with more family history gained from childhood stories told to me by my Fai.

‘Wow, Mum, you never told us any of this before,’ my son says excitedly.

‘You never asked. Like I never asked my father, and now I wonder why? It just never occurred to any of us. I suppose that was our normality and we assumed everyone was the same in the world. How wrong we all are.’

‘Are you seeing Auntie Jane again?’ my daughter asks in anticipation.

‘Yes, in a few weeks,’ I say.

\*

Later that month, I meet up with Jane again. She has been reading up more about colonial rule in Kenya and India and we continue our discussion.

‘Has that got anything to do with the exodus of Indian refugees in 1972? I remember it all on the news. One of the rehabilitation camps was not far from where my sister lived, in the south of England.’ Jane asks.

I shake my head vehemently, ‘No, Jane, many people confuse this. Kenyan-Indians came to Britain voluntarily because of the gradual change in their economic situation under Kenyatta. They were not forced out in a massive ninety-day exodus as the Ugandan-Indians were by Idi Amin. Kenyan-Indians were not put in internment camps. They settled in Britain by themselves, often helped by relatives who had arrived earlier. The reason my family settled in Birmingham is because my Fai was already here. My cousin, Motabaa's son, was one of the first of our family to come to Britain, followed by my older siblings.

‘So, Hansa, what puzzles me is this: why did your father choose to come to Britain, the country of his oppressors both in India and Kenya?’

This is a loaded question and I have to think for a few minutes.

We stop for our usual *chai* and snacks break. While I am in the kitchen preparing this, it gives me time to reflect on what we have been discussing, and I share my reflections with Jane as I return to the lounge:

‘What strikes me now as we talk about all this is that while the British were taking over land for the British Empire, its newly-acquired subjects were sprouting their own histories, rich and dynamic and soulful histories, under the banner of the British flag. British subjects like my family sowed their seeds of culture and commerce wherever they went and these are flourishing and blooming all over the world, but I doubt many people know much about this, I don't think you will find this in the British history books.’

## **Chapter 11 – Time Warp**

### **Thika, Kenya, 2001**

I am forty-six now. My son, twenty-two, has just finished university, and my daughter is nineteen. Life is surging ahead, and I am playing catch up. My husband and I want our children to learn about our roots and experience our childhood, so we set off to Kenya for a holiday.

We step off the plane and onto the soil of Nairobi and my heart churns and wrenches with nostalgia. For my children, it is the excitement of Africa, an alien continent and culture, as well as curiosity about their parents' childhood years.

Later, we are welcomed to the Masai village by a group of young men. They are dressed in traditional orange cloths crisscrossing their slim bodies, white paint marks on their faces, and wear large round earrings that circle the whole elongated earlobe. They break out in a Masai song and dance and we are enticed to join in.

‘Would you like to see the village?’ one asks us in English.



We nod and one of them leads the way. The village is a scattering of round mud huts with flat roofs made of assorted metal sheets. We stoop through the entrance of one to see a wood fire in the left corner, leather sheets as beds, and a small fenced area to the right that has a calf suckling away with its mother – all in a four-metre-radius space.

‘They live in such a small place, and do not have much,’ my son remarks as he smiles and waves to a group of women and children chattering in the shade of a tree, ‘but they look happy and contented.’

We drive up to the Masai Mara Lodge that night – apparently, the Queen was visiting here when she received the news of the death of her father, King George VI – and the next day, we head off on safari.

The safari is unbelievably breath-taking!

‘Hey look, there are some zebras!’ my son shouts in excitement.

My children feast on this first sight of a live zebra. From only a few yards away, we also see wildebeest, lions, deer, and elephants, all in their natural habitat. That night, we stay in a tent on the edge of the animals’ terrain and listen to their night sounds. Hearing them at night is scary! As is having to go behind bushes to go to the loo. We later see an elephant drop a big poo twenty times the size we humans are capable of. But the most beautiful sight on safari – the highlight – has to be the row of majestic giraffes walking into the sunset towards the end of our third day.

We drive up to the Lake Naivasha National Park next to see white hippos, crocodiles, and the spectacular famous flamingos flying over the lake.

‘Mum, you were so blessed to have been brought up in such beautiful surroundings,’ my daughter says, giving me a big affectionate hug.

‘You haven't seen nothing yet!’ I quip. ‘Wait until we climb down close to the waterfalls.’

We do, just like my siblings and I did as children. I think I am dreaming.

We end our visit with a coffee and snack at the hotel, this time with my children instead of my siblings.

I have somersaults in my stomach now, as well as the thumping heart and ear-to-ear grin, because we are driving to the house of my one-mile-radius world!

We walk through the short alleyway and knock on the (still blue) door. No-one opens for a while and I wonder if people still live here. Then the door creaks open and a face from thirty-plus years ago appears: Shobna was our neighbour all those years ago and I am flabbergasted that she still lives here. She recognizes me instantly and welcomes us in.

It all feels surreal, like I am in a time-warp.

## **Chapter 12 – Eastern Lessons from the Westerners**

### **Birmingham, England, 2002**

I am forty-seven now. A question from Susan, an English colleague, shakes my world profoundly. I have a few minor health issues and have been low on energy lately and I ask Susan for advice. She is a natural health practitioner who shares my work premises.

‘It is possible there is a block in one of your *chakras*...’ she says.

‘Sorry, what did you say?’ I ask puzzled.

‘The seven main *chakras*, in our body. Maybe one of yours is blocked?’

‘I don't understand, what are “*chakras*”?’ I ask.

She responds with a shocked look on her face. ‘Hansa, you are of Indian origin, how do you not know about the *chakras*?’

I am shocked too. The truth is that many Indian-origin people have no clue about their traditional medicinal heritage and rely exclusively on allopathic medicines during bouts of illness. The irony is that I am now learning about *chakras* and Indian health traditions in Britain from an English colleague!

Susan patiently takes me through my seven *chakras*. She recommends books and teaches me *chakra* meditation to activate and release any blocks I may have, which I put into practice over the next few months. As I master the art of *chakra* meditation, I begin to feel more alert and energetic.

#### **Deepak Chopra Center, California, USA, 2004**

I am forty-nine now. After a gruelling journey, with a stop-over in New York, I arrive in Carlsbad, California, accompanied by my daughter who is now twenty-two. An English friend has lent me a book by Deepak Chopra entitled *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* and it has drawn me here, to his Center. I gather that his endeavour is to globally re-ignite the ancient Indian healing traditions, one of which is ‘*Ayurveda*’, and I have booked two spaces for his ten-day retreat on this subject.

All the other delegates are Caucasian Americans. The staff teaching us *Ayurveda* and meditation are all Americans too. I was brought up in the Indian Ayurvedic health tradition, but completely lost sight of it when I came to England. Now, as a person of Indian origin, I am being brought back to my roots by Americans!

My daughter and I have the *Panchakarma* treatments. We learn that ‘*Panchakarma*’ is a Sanskrit word that means ‘five actions’ or ‘five treatments’. The digestive processes which regulate the body's internal homeostasis often become disorganised as a result of disease and poor nutrition, dietary indiscretions, poor exercise patterns, lifestyle, and genetic predisposition, and *Panchakarma* is used to clean the body of toxic materials. We are taught that the process purifies the tissues at a very deep level through daily massages and oil baths,

herbal enemas, and nasal administrations. The best part, we are told, is that *Panchakarma* treatments have been shown to create measurable brain wave coherence and to lower metabolic activity.

My daughter and I find the retreat a very pleasurable and relaxing experience. We enjoy the massages, yoga, meditation, Ayurvedic food, hymn-singing and other creative activities. By the end, I certainly feel stronger, am sleeping better, have improved concentration, clarity and focus, and enhanced creativity and greater confidence. The personal journey that my Western colleagues have started me on is more pleasant and relaxing than the one I went through in my university days. Both, however, have been instrumental in building my character, good health and personal empowerment. I can honestly say I feel like a new person.

## **Chapter 13 – Food, Medicine, Carrot Cake, and Vadaas**

### **Birmingham, England, 2010**

I am fifty-five years old now and, today, I am standing in an independent Asian grocery store figuring out the right food to buy.

I just love fruit and nuts and have acquired the affectionate pet-name of 'Fruit-and-nut-case' from my work colleagues. My eyes wander off to the fruit section where there are all sorts of enticing, exotic, oriental fruits: mangoes, jackfruit, dragon fruit, star fruit, passion fruit, pineapples, guava and kumquats, as well as British varieties of apples and pears, European oranges, satsumas, and melons, and so on. It is hard to decide what to buy today.

I think back to my childhood when Baa had about five items to choose from Jerome's home-grown patch, whereas I have about fifty, albeit some artificially ripened en-route from various other parts of the world. As children, we looked forward to Baa sharing the bananas she had bought from Jerome – how we savoured and appreciated these little treats! With my children, I still have to persuade them to eat fruit and vegetables as part of a healthy diet and it's not uncommon to throw away overripe fruit that has not been consumed.

Food is a universal language for the expression of love, and so much so in the Indian tradition. It is considered rude not to offer food to visitors or share a meal with them. For most Indians, it is natural to expect that a guest or visitor will share meals and be given food parcels at the end of their visit. When I first moved to the UK, I felt hurt when my British counterparts did not return my food gestures. It was only later that I understood this cultural difference.

This reminds me of Jane's carrot cake and I recall one of her visits when we are chatting in the living room.

'Oh... cake! I forgot all about the carrot cake that I brought for you.' Jane bolts up and scurries out to get the cake from her car. She knows we are all partial to her carrot cakes.

'Mmm... this is yummy. Thanks, Jane,' I say as I bite into a chunk. 'We do not have a family tradition of baking, we did not have an oven when I was growing up. To me, it is a very British thing. Back in Kenya, my mum cooked using coal in her *sagdi*. When we had guests and there was a lot of cooking to do, she would use a portable kerosene cooker. We used to call it a 'primus', but that must be a brand name – like the ones you take camping.'

I take another bite of the carrot cake and carry on.

'Shall we have some more cake and your special Indian *chai*?'

I go into the kitchen, get the aluminium *sufuriyu* that is put aside just for Indian *chai*, and fill it with two cups of water and a cup of milk. I then add three teaspoons of loose tea leaves and fresh ginger pieces, (in summer I would use cardamom pods), and let it heat up for a while. Once it comes to the boil, I leave it to simmer for a few more minutes.

'I know you don't take sugar in your English tea, but would you like it in your *chai*?' I shout to Jane from the kitchen.

'Just a bit, half a teaspoon,' she answers.

In the meantime, I put the teapot, strainer and mugs on a tray.

‘Would you like some *vadaas* with your tea?’ ...The kind I brought to work on your birthday... I made them yesterday.’

‘Of course! Why not? Can never have enough of your ve...dda...ss.’

Her pronunciation of ‘*vadaas*’ amuses me. As I bring the tea and snacks into the living room, I say, ‘It’s va...daa, with a soft “D”.’

‘Vaa...dda,’ she tries.

‘No, soften the “D”.’

‘Va...daa,’ she tries again, amid chuckles.

‘Actually, there is a sound in the Indian spoken language that cannot be replicated with English phonetics. It is like a “n”. In written English, it is replaced with a “D”, “R”, or “N”, whatever the closest sound is. In the case of “*vadaas*”, the closest is “D”.’

Jane has a few more attempts, and we have more howls of laughter.

Then I hear a *ping!* on my phone. It’s Bhai. He is in Thika.

## **Chapter 14 – Coming Full-Circle**

**Birmingham, England, February, 2018**

I am sixty-two years old now. I am sitting in my study working on this book when my phone, usually turned off when I am working but I must have forgotten to do this today, pings. Bhai has just shared an article from the Thika local press.

Bhai is a member of The Thika Alumni Trust (TTAT), a group of former attendees of Chania Boys’ High School now living in the UK who have joined together to raise money for

infrastructural and educational improvements at our old school. Apparently, working with the school's principal and the *Kiambu County C.E.C. for Education ICT, Culture and Social Services*, TATT has just opened a new school e-learning centre. The school is piloting a ground-breaking technological platform developed by TATT called 'RACHEL' – *Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning* – a prototype offline digital repository for delivering free educational resources to developing communities. Because RACHEL is built as software and installable on any computer, it is ideal for communities without steady access to the internet, and the staff and students are palpably thrilled with the tools, skills, and opportunities this will provide for them to adapt to the increasingly global environment.

I think about Bhai there in Thika and wish I was there too.

My phone pings a few more times. Bhai has posted pictures of the school, the post office where Motabapuji worked, the debilitated grass square, the park in the centre of town, Motabaa's flat, the high street, and a few other spots.

I feel my heart ballooning and I text him:

Where is the picture of our house?

He texts back:

House has been demolished...

...New building being built there.

My heart shrinks and hits my stomach with a loud thud.

I stop writing.

### **Birmingham, England, March, 2018**

I put on the television to catch up with today's news. The snow and blizzards in Britain are the main story, Britain is having its worst weather in many years.

I recall my first experience of snow in England. It is everywhere: on the drooping branches of the trees, rooftops, cars, pavements, lampposts. I stand by the patio-door for hours watching the soft flakes falling to the ground until the green of the grass and the grey of the patio eventually transform into a brilliant thick white carpet. It is pleasing to the eye, in fact very pleasing. When I venture out and lay the flats of my palm tentatively on it, my nerve endings race, jingling all the way to my brain. It is cold, squidgy, damp and soft, but very soothing to the touch.

I have fond memories of taking walks in the snow with my children and making snowmen, all of us in wellies up to our knees, our faces peeping out of the layers of warm clothing we are draped in. In the days of my equator sun, a thick winter coat, woolly hat and gloves were as alien to me as *turiya* curry and a pile of *rotis* would be to an Eskimo. But the kids squealing in delight on their snow sledges takes me back to my days in Thika when my brothers would push me on their homemade carts and I would let out the same high-pitched delighted squeal.

A question sneaks into my brain: seeing all this, have I missed my equator sun for the past forty-seven years of my life?

The answer is yes, and no.

## **Chapter 15 – The Shape of the Future: a glance into the next phase of history**

**London, UK, August 2018**

My three-year-old granddaughter, Ana, has over thirty teddy bears and knows their names: Freddie, George, Shyam, Sima, Princess, Eon, Pinky, Ella the elephant, Snowy, Doggy, Horsie, and so on. It is a different world altogether she is growing up in.

I am sitting in the lounge of my son's house and it is half full of toys: building bricks, musical and educational toys, talking toys, a toy kitchen, toy cleaning set, toy golf set, a large toy car,



a toy computer, toy kindle, toy mobile phone, toy-this and toy-that. There are loads of children's books too. And that's not all. The next room is half full of her stuff as well: car seat, buggy, pushchair, winter coat, summer coat, baby bike, baby scooter, box of disposable nappies, disposable baby changing mats, baby wipes. And then there's upstairs where the nursery is full of yet more baby things.

I reflect on my days as a child. Not a baby thing in sight in the house except for the homemade *ghodiyu* my siblings and I grew up in. Ah yes, and I must not forget the homemade nappies Baa made from old clothes. My own children had a handful of store-bought toys alongside their homemade ones. As a toddler, my son was happy to bang a wooden spoon on some plastic containers I had laid on the kitchen floor to keep him occupied and distracted while I cooked the dinner. He much preferred this to rattles and soft toys. As for my daughter, she preferred her handmade doll given to her by a relative over the expensive Barbie doll she got for her first birthday. I suspect present-day parents have a lot of peer and commercial pressure to have the latest toys and technical gadgets, which have a short user-span and yet take up lots more storage space in the house.

I watch Ana from across the room as she shuffles over to the sofa where all her teddies are lined up. She is looking adorable in her yellow jumper and navy dungarees, her hair tied in a bunch held by a yellow bauble. She has the makings of her mother's striking beauty: the creamy-milk complexion, the lotus-shaped lips, the silky hair. She emits a torrent of baby-talk and sweet laughter. Ana's laughter to my ears is like the chime of church bells. I chuckle to myself as I eavesdrop on her chattering to her teddies:

'Sham... Come and sit by Snowy. Do you want to go la...la...? Here, I shall wrap you with a blanket so you can go la la, aaahhh.'

She fumbles with a small blanket and clumsily pulls it over Shyam as she attempts to tuck him in, ready for bed.

'Now go to sleep, Shyam. Go la la,' she says a few times.

She looks up and notices I am watching her fondly. She runs up into my arms and into my embrace. I am touched by her innocence and I kiss her softly on her forehead. The embers in

all the cells in my body come alive with a life of their own. A wave of joy cascades from somewhere in my heart down through the whole of my being, and I am reminded of the waterfalls of my ten-mile-radius world. It is like this every time my eyes fall on her.

‘Ana, I love you,’ I say to her.

I am not sure she would understand the unarticulated ‘felt in the bones’ kind of unconditional love I feel for her, that I was blessed to feel from Baa and Baapuji, but I feel blessed again to experience yet another manifestation of love and human connection.

Ana curls her little silky-smooth fingers to my wrist and beckons with the magic of her eyes. She has her father's eyes: curious, mischievous, playful.

‘Freddie... Ta ta?... Freddie ta ta?’ she pleads.

‘No, Ana. Freddie cannot go ta ta yet. It is raining,’ I say as I look up out through the patio-door.

\*

Back in the kitchen, I am sweeping the floor with a *fagiyo*, clearing up the detritus of our *roti*-making lesson.

‘Dama, I want the *fagiyo*.’ Ana tries to grab it, she wants to do the sweeping.

It is hilarious watching her trying to manoeuvre the sweeps with a *fagiyo* three times her size.

‘Look Ana, look by the door, there's a “*dudu*”.’ I point to a small insect at the corner of the door leading to the garden.

Following my finger, she repeats like a parrot after me, ‘Du...du... Dudu!’

Without being aware of it, I am passing on the Swahili language to her. It would never occur to me to call the *fagiyo* a broom or a *dudu* an insect, unless I am speaking to an English person.

She continues to persevere with the *fagiyo* with delight. I take a video and post it to our family WhatsApp group so we all can savour this moment of Dama-and-Ana fun. I love these moments.

\*

Later that day, Ana is on the swings in the park. I am pushing her and she is in fits of laughter. Nearby, the church bells are ringing and I think of the bells at the *Mandir* in Thika.

‘Whee!... Dama... Faster... Whee!... Faster!’

As the swing gathers momentum, I hear her squeals of joy, much sweeter than the sound of the church bells. I see the dazzling twinkle in her eyes, innocent gestures of her little arms and legs fluttering in motion to the rise and fall of the swing. And the ascent becomes effortless, with even more magnificent twists, tumbles and treasures to come.

I am very happy. I feel at home.

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## **Epilogue by an Anonymous Friend**

This is how we Indians grew up in Kenya! And what a life it was!

We were innocent, frank and straight with people at home, at school and within the community and society. Our childhood was like an adventure, exploration, and expedition – an unassigned project to accomplish without the present-time luxuries, hi-fi tools, and unbelievable facilities, and with not so much help provided – no school loans, grants, financial aid or scholarships. Instead, it was filled with lots of fun, excitement, enthusiasm, trust, expectation, commitment and responsibility.

Although not so very easy always – and filled with some hardship – life was beautiful!

Our love and respect for our parents were second to none, and our respect for our teachers and elders in the community and society was in our genes. We gladly looked after our younger brothers and sisters without any selfish motive and fuss – we felt it was our prime and moral duty. We attended temples, *Gurudwaraas*, churches, mosques, *Jamat Khannas*, and prayed regularly and respected all religions.

We had mothers who did not check our blood pressure or temperatures every few minutes. We never saw or wore the present-time diapers, nappies and liners. We bounced ourselves without a bouncer and peacefully slept without a baby cot. We sucked cow's milk from a soda bottle without being sterilized or warmed in a bottle warmer. We slept during our sleep times be it day or night without monitors or beepers. There were no nurses or doctors to pamper the mums, babies and children all the time.

Our baby cribs were covered with bright coloured lead-based paints. We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors or cabinets. We rode our bikes without helmets, gloves and guards. As children, we would ride in cars that had no child-safety door-locks, seat-belts or airbags. Sometimes we sat on each other's laps for God's sake!

## **Glossary of Gujarati and Swahili Words**

**Family** - Gujaratis, unlike Westerners, do not use the blanket term of uncle and aunt for all parent's siblings. Mother's side and father's side have different terms of address.

*Baa* – Mother. Originates from North West Indian province of Gujarat

*Baapuji* – Father

*Motabapuji* – how one addresses a father's older brother, meaning 'Big Father'

*Motabaa* – how one addresses the wife of a father's older brother, meaning 'Big Mother'

*Bhai* – Brother

*Fai*- Father's Sister

### **Spiritual**

*Mandir* – Hindu Temple

*Mantra* – A group of words that impart positive and healing energy

*Maharaj* – A Hindu priest

*Aarti* – An inseparable part of Hindu worship rituals. This ritual is said to descend from the ancient Hindu Vedic Fire Rituals. The word '*aarti*' comes from '*aa*' which means '*complete*' and '*rati*' which means '*love*'. It is not only limited to God but performed to all forms of life, inanimate objects, and people to invoke love and blessings.

*Gurduwara* – Sikh Temple

### **Food**

#### **Kenyan**

*Mogo* – African yam also called cassava

*Ugali* – A cornflour dish cooked with milk and water to a firm consistency

*Sukuma Wiki* – A combination of chopped leafy-green vegetables that is fried with onions and tomatoes and seasoned with salt and pepper.

*Irio* – Corn and kidney beans cooked with potato and spinach

*Bhoga*- fresh vegetables

#### **Indian**

*Roti* – Chapati

*Rotlo* – Millet, barley, or corn flatbreads

*Bhajiya* – Vegetable fritters, a cross between vegetable tempura and *pakora*

*Garam garam* – ‘Piping hot’

*Kadhi* – Yoghurt soup

*Khichari* – A dish made of boiled rice and lentils

*Ondwo* – A baked savoury dish made with soaked ground rice, chickpeas, yoghurt, and spices

*Sambharo* – Sautéed carrots, cabbage, and green chillies

*Siro* – A dessert made from semolina

*Turiya* – A ridged green gourd eaten as a vegetable

*Vadaa* – A flat two-inch-round spicy savoury made from millet or cornmeal (or both) flour, fried. The Keralan (south of India) version of a *vadaa* is different.

### **Dress**

*Saree* – A female garment from the Indian subcontinent that consists of a drape varying length, from five to nine yards, and two to four feet in breadth, that is typically wrapped around the waist, with one end draped over the shoulder, baring the midriff. There are various styles of manufacture and draping.

*Salwar Kameez* – Attire for women from South East Asia. *Salwar* is a trouser and *Kameez* is a long hip-length shirt of varying styles.

*Shervani*- Long embroidered shirt worn by men on special occasions

*Kikoys* – A traditional wraparound worn by men along the East African coast and inland

*Kitenge* – An African textile, typical of the Swahili tradition, used in Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, as well as in many other African countries. It is a long rectangular piece of cotton fabric, wax-printed, commonly used for making skirts, dresses, shirts and fittings.

### **Miscellaneous**

*Ghodiya* – A homemade cot that is like a hammock, a piece of rectangle fabric attached to four hooks on a wooden stand, used as a cot.

*Sufariyu* – Swahili for ‘cooking pot’

*Fagiyo* – Swahili for ‘broom’, typically a long bunch of dried shoots secured at the top

*Goma* – A traditional African dance

*Dudu* – Swahili for ‘insect’

*Bwana* – Swahili term meaning ‘Sir’

*Sagdi* – A round mini-barbecue. Coal is put through a little opening in a round metal container topped by mesh and a stand where you place pots when cooking.

*Tavdi* – Around metal or clay griddle

*Santa Kukdi*- game of Hide and Seek.

*Patli* – An about ten-inches round, flat board with small knobs at the bottom on which *rotis* are rolled.

*Patlo / Patla* (singular / plural) – A two- to three-inch-high, flat stool for sitting on the floor.

*Sumuni* – Five cents in Kenyan currency when I was a child.

*Tabla* – An Indian percussion instrument like a drum.

*Velan* – A rolling pin, thicker in the middle and tapering out, used for rolling *roti*

### **About the Author**

Hansa Pankhania was born a British citizen to parents of Indian origin in Thika, a small town in the British Colony of Kenya. She is an author, speaker, coach and trainer. She is a Fellow of the International Stress Management Association and Director of AUM Consultancy. She lives in the UK with her husband, children, and grandchildren.

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## **Also by Hansa Pankhania**

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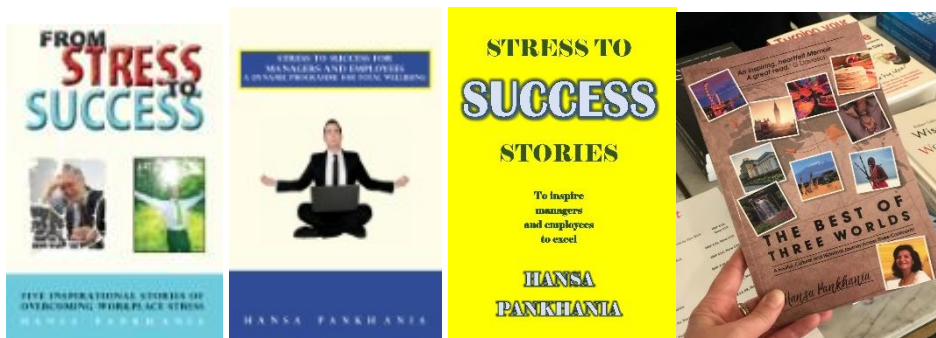
In her first book, Hansa draws on her extensive experience of working as a Stress and Well-being Consultant with individuals and groups in private, public and voluntary sectors. The stories are inspired by her day-to-day work and contain powerful messages and simple coping strategies in five different areas: stress management, resilience building, anger management, mediation, and change management.

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