### 2012\_esch\_UgAs\_01

### *Can you please start by telling me your name?*

### My name is Gantala Verubi Sudra.

### *So you spell your last name...*

### Eh last name, my surname is Sudra, S-U-D-R-A, Sudra.

### *Sudra and um how old are you Mr Sudra.*

### I am seventy-eight at the moment.

### *Seventy-eight, right. And um where did you grow-up, where were you born?*

### I born in Kakamega in Kenya.

### *Kakamega?*

### Kaka...The name of the town was Kakamega.

### *Kakamega.*

### In Kenya.

### *Right, right and um that was in 19...*

### Eh 1933.

### *My goodness okay in Kenya so um what was it like growing up in Kenya?*

### Kenya was good but you know my father was working as a building contractors and um... and furniture making and everything he was getting contract of all the schools and everything in Kenya first and eh after the time he got big job in Madhvani Sugar Works in Uganda so...we all moved from Kenya to Uganda and uh my Father was building the Madhvani Sugar Factory. Factories...porters...houses for the porters, all those porters who was working with Madhvani were all African, Asian, European, all people was there and working and my father was doing erection of the buildings and everything. Even my father build a big bungalow at Madhvani Sugar Works in Mujarni, still it is there uh um and it was happy in...It was not Madhvani Sugar Works, it was Kakira, it’s near Jinja, nearly ten miles away from Jinja.

### *So how old were you when you moved to Uganda?*

### From Kenya, about...four to five mon...five years old.

### *So what was the difference between Kenya and Uganda?*

### Oh but mostly I spent my, all my childhood in Uganda and I get in school in Kakira. The life even in Kenya was very good, no problem at all but eh it was different in the jobs. Big jobs and moneywise, you know, so good job and moneywise was in Madhvani Factory, big erection, it was a big sugar plant in Kakira.

### *So what was school like, what schools did you go to?*

### Oh school was eh very nice in Kakira...I just do my primary in Kakira, that school was very nice, teachers...very nice, all Asian, some Asian teachers was there and some of the African teachers was...at that time and eh was I learning then and then my secondary was been in Jinja, eight mile away, at eight mile away from Kakira, so Madhvani provided free school to...buses to...all children to go to Jinja for study and that's it and I was learning and after, worked in ah...I left my school in 1952.

### *Right, right.*

### In 1952 I left my school and uh...my father was...he decided he wanted to do his own workshop and own building works and everything, on his own. So in 1952 we moved to, we moved to...Tororo, from Kakira to Tororo, it is really eighty miles far away from...from Kakira so my father was, he build a, he had a timber yard, was selling timbers and same thing he was making furniture for the schools and building works also in Tororo and I just started, I start with the work with the Uganda Cement works in Tororo.

### *Sorry Uganda...*

### Cement works...

### *Cemet?*

### Cement, making cement.

### *Cement sorry, right.*

### Yes cement, they were making uh cement, they was making corrugated eh asbestos sheets, everything there and I work with them and uh good salary and they give the houses and every free of charge house and everything and good salary and uh after the time, I work sometime there and nearly six to seven years in... work in Cement Works then I changed my job to another XXXX firm, they was making fertiliser, they was making fertilisers and uh...it was a Tororo Industrial Chemical and Fertiliser, the name of the firm was that so I worked there...and after the time I was maintenance foreman and African was working with us and everything was very good, no problem at all but 1973, 1973 Mr Idi Amin, Prime Minister of Uganda, kick off all British Citizen but uh they gave me special pass so I can stay in Uganda and myself, my wife, my father and....they had to leave the country so I say to my father ‘I’m going to UK to leave my father and mother and everybody there and then I’m coming back’ but situation in 1972, end of 1972 October you know, everywhere soldiers and situation was no good so killing and this and that and I...I left the Uganda on 21st no...yeah 21st October 1972 we came to Britain as a refugees with one suitcase I had two, my brother-in-law’s, my father’s workshop, everything we left, we come with one suitcase her and British Government help us alot so they took us to [interviewee speaks to wife] near Somerset there was a big camp so we’d been to the camp and then we...came down here and...then again I rent a house and then I started work with Croda Premier Oil Limited in Britain here so I worked with them and I build where I was. I came with one suitcase, I left my own money, everything because money and everything was seized up there, you can’t take the money out of the bank, they left...per family, Idi Amin allowed fifty pound only and...I had the money but nothing, we came with suitcase. I had my three children, one daughter and two son, the youngest son was one and a half year old when we come to this country and now everybody’s happy, my children got educated here and um they are in Los Angeles now, my eldest son and my daughter they are in Los Angeles. She is working with sound system, building the speakers and everything; she’s a director there now and eh my son, eldest son, he is a computer programmer, before he was here; he got a good offer so he moved from here to there five years ago.

### *That's wonderful. Where was your um your father from?*

### My father from India.

### *Where abouts?*

### India Porbandar. He was from Porbandar. He went to East Africa I think in 1927 or 1927 or ’26 I think, I can’t remember at the moment, but he...he was...nearly fourteen years old when he came to Kenya and eh he was working with one of his uncle who was a carpenter and he was a contractor at the XXXX there and he joined him and he worked there. First he was employed with his uncle and after the time he done his own job and everything.

### *So what was it like working the cement factory?*

### Oh, lonely, I was enjoying it. [Interviewee laughs] I was a cementer, senior cement kiln burner, making XXXX which is eh making, first of all when I started a job I worked with the quarry, big quarry where the blasters, all rocks and everything and loading the rocks onto the trucks, taking to the cement works and from the river they was taking clay and uh loading clay and taking to the cement works and everything like that.

### *What was Uganda like then because it was still under; well it was still under British rule wasn’t it?*

### Yeah it was British rules, it was very nice, no problem at all, no problem, no problem at all.

### *So you had quite a good life there.*

### I had a good life there and I retired life here now I worked there with Croda Premier Oil Limited and I’m retired now.

### *So when Idi Amin came to power um did you know that he was going um expel people and...?*

### Yeah, yeah, yeah Idi Amin was when he came to in power. I’m telling you truth even in... at that time in Uganda, if you were me and you taking, talking something about Idi Amin, next morning you won’t find me or you, sometime won't find you, that was the cruelty everything like that in Uganda.

### *So people disappeared.*

### People was disappeared and you don’t where they go. He go somewhere, his own people, his own people and even you know he killed his son-in-law, his daughter-in-law and....

### *Yeah, how long were you given notice to leave Uganda?*

### Three months, ninety days. Within ninety days you had to kick off, go away from the Uganda War. He was building the big...big eh open XXXX to put all the refugees in there.

### *So at that point you just had to go.*

### Yeah, yeah.

### *So you came to the UK because you had a passport or...*

### I had a British citizen’s passport myself, even my father had a British Citizen passport so...because we were British citizens and therefore we cared to come to here, otherwise we had to go India, if I had an India passport.

### *So what was it like when you first arrived in the UK?*

### Oh... here you know first of all I’m telling you I was...when I came to...it was cold and weather-wise because Uganda weather is very nice, warm and nice and cool and everything. In my life all that I didn’t where a sweaters or anything but here first of all I had to wear the sweater and all coat and everything and another thing over there...come from XXXX coming to pick me up from the house, taking me to the firm, bringing me twelve o’clock for lunch then in the evening...bringing me back by car. Life was luxury, very luxury life was there.

### *So you had a chauffeur in Uganda.*

### Yeah, a driver, drive to cars and...

### *And take you home.*

### In company’s car.

### *What was your house like in Uganda?*

### Oh house was very nice, you know, four bed room house.

### *And that was provided by the company?*

### Yeah.

### *Wow and all that you had to leave behind.*

### Uh um.

### *So when you first came to the UK, you went to sorry you went to Sussex, was it Sussex?*

### We went near Skegness so what is...Lincolnshire, we went to Lincolnshire. We arrived Heathrow Airport and after the time they took us to the Lincolnshire and I live nearly one month in the there in camp just to find out what to do now and...from there we was, there was trying to get a job and everything so at the moment then my brother was living next street, he was living in next street here, India Road.

### *Right, did he come over at the same time?*

### No, no, no, he came before me, two years I think, before me.

### *And what did he do?*

### He was a... he was a electrical engineer, electrical engineer he was,

### Right, right.

### So he was living and then I ask him, I got some places to go and then he said ‘no you better come and live with me here’ so I lived nearly four months with him then I got a job, rent a house and after the time, bought a house, when got money, mortgage and everything and the job was good so this was a life...in Britain.

### *Yeah so was it difficult getting a job when you arrived?*

### No, no it was...at that time it was not difficult, even my wife is not educated, she can’t speak too much English or anything but she got a job, we both got a job.

### *What did your wife do?*

### She worked with the XXXX where there was making upholstery, upholstering metro cars and everything, she joined there, she worked other there.

### *Was that machining?*

### Machining, machine operator.

### *So it was quite easy, so can you describe your job, when you first started in...what was the company again sorry?*

### Croda Premier Oil Limited in Barking, they was making uh...the cooking oil and lard oil and corn oil, all vegetarian, vegetable oil they was making and lard oil even and eh they was making...they had a another branch in the Barking where they was making varnish, varnish for the painting you know and paint, they was in, in Barking, there was two firms that was there.

### *And what did you do there, what was your job?*

### My job was a maintenance foreman as well as maintaining the pumps, oil pumps, water pumps, oh boiler, big boiler, you know, steel boiler, repairing anything wrong with it, I had to repair it and that's it.

### *And how long did you work there?*

### Um I worked nearly eight, nine years there.

### *Did you learn English when you started or did you speak English...?*

### No I speak English, when I was in Uganda I just...I know Swahili, Ugandan language and Guajarati, I am an Guajarati Hindu and we was, not too much, but I know I can speak and I can make someone understand because I was a foreman in the firm. So I had three English guy feature with me and two electrician. I had to manage all the jobs and I was sitting in the office and they rung me such and such a thing is not working so I’d had to send my electrician there.

### *So really your job was really more of an engineering job?*

### Yeah.

### *So that’s what you trained as, an engineer?*

### Yeah.

### *And that was in Uganda?*

### Yeah.

### *So how long was your training in Uganda as an engineer?*

### It was practical, it was a practical job and practical things you know because here in London is like one man, one job, London, in London is one man, one job. In East Africa it wasn’t one man, one job, you had to do all the jobs, whatever come in to do, motor mechanic, electrician and carpentry, whatever and even clean the workshop, you know [interviewee laughs]. Not one job here you can say, go and...go and sweep the sink, he say ‘it is not my job, its cleaner’s job, cleaner will come and do the job’ but over there you are a cleaner, you are a maintenance, you are whatever, you are everything.

### *You just had to get on... Were the hours alot longer in Uganda?*

### No eight hours, eight hours.

### *So you basically trained on the job.*

### Mm.

### *Right and here it was very different was it then so...?*

### Bit hard was here, you know, a little bit hard but I know the jobs and everything so...they give me here first job as a maintenance fitter just to...fitter was...I had to carry the tools for the fitters but after the time when the factory management and foremans and everybody they see my jobs they said...‘he knows everything’ and he gave me the job.

### *Right, right.*

### Because I first of all, I just started the job there you know, what job I’m getting I don’t care because I want job, I want some money because my kids are here and I need a job therefore I decided maintenance fitters, just to carry all tools for him and then after the time, maintenance fitter, maintenance foreman.

### *And what were your colleges like working with? Were they friendly was it a...?*

### They was friendly.

### *So there was no racism?*

### No at that time. I luckily because it’s depending...depending how you’re talking, how your appearing, if you...you are a good, everyone is good but you behave like a...then nothing.

### *Were you part of the union or anything....?*

### Yes I was with union. Still I am in union, they are sending me cards and everything.

### *What union were you were a member of, what union, the T&G?*

### And G.

### *Yeah, yeah, yeah. Did they help at all with...?*

### Oh yeah, yeah with...they help because even you know first of all here when we come here to join the union also if you got a job or anything and you didn’t join the union then...big problem. You had to join the union so we joined the union, I joined the union.

### *In the company you worked in Barking, we’re there alot of Asian Ugandans?*

### No, two. Myself and there was another guy. There was two Asian, four Europeans, machine operators and everything all Europeans, at that time no there's wasn’t any coloured guy, only myself and another guy that's it.

### *And were they friendly?*

### Yeah friendly, no problem.

### *So life was obviously very, very different from Uganda.*

### Mmh.

### *So how long did you work there, was it ten years?*

### Mmh.

### *Right, right and what did you do after that?*

### After that I’m just retiring because totally knee both replace myself and it was difficult to me for walking and everything and just...

### *Well your job was very physical wasn’t it?*

### Mmh.

### *You were doing alot so it must of been a difficult to manoeuvre. So how different would you the UK is to Uganda?*

### Mmh?

### *How different is the UK to Uganda?*

### UK to Uganda is...I say...Uganda weather-wise and everything was okay, job-wise even. If you want to job or anything, it’s up to you...even in Britain also...it’s a good thing but now there...I hear young people sitting at home, no jobs so many people...XXXX and before when we came to UK here, everywhere in Dagenham, Barking, so many industries was there, even if Ilford, in here, Gerbils farm was just one mile away from here, my wife was going there because she was working but now there is no industry here at all, all industry has been gone, even my industry where which I was working with Corona Premium Oil Limited, they moved to Yorkshire.

### *When did they move?*

### Oh they moved nearly fi...four to five years now.

### *Do you keep in touch with anybody who used to work there?*

### No I got...you know they’re sending me...that magazine of them, every year. [Interviewer speaks to wife] I work with his firm. It’s internet, its everywhere.

### *Yeah. Were they a good firm to work?*

### Yeah. [Interviewee laughs] They making costumes, they make everything.

### *So it’s still growing isn’t it?*

### Yeah, it’s still growing.

### *So when you came over did Ugandan Asians kind of stick together because there was so many who entered the country?*

### Yeah but there was so many in XXXX in Lincolnshire, very big camp, we was there and af6ter a time people got job there and people tried to move and move and even the British Government says the people came from Uganda is hard worker.

### *Yeah.*

### They told themselves...even they say even because even some people are not thinking to buy house. They will live on the rent and everything like that but all people came from Uganda or anywhere, Kenya, buy a house.

### *Yeah, yeah. Your father came over as well, what did he do when he came?*

### No my father was just retired, he was old-aged you know. He didn’t earn anything here. He...my father and my mother, they was retired.

### *That must of been very hard for them.*

### Because I was just...they was my dependants.

### *So you had three children and your parents.*

### Yeah.

### *That's quite a responsibility.*

### It is. I work...I start six o’clock in the morning from here, come at four five because at that time I was doing so much overtimes, I was doing overtime there to...

### *Overtime to pay.*

### Yeah and then the firm in the Croda is not there in Barking there because at that time the building erection was going to...and everything like that. It was a brand new firm, brand new plant over there.

### *Did you have to learn how to do things differently, were there different equipment from Kenya and from Uganda and so on?*

### Yeah the equipment is like that. The equipment is coming, even the pumps or anything coming is coming with the drawings and everything and you have to understand the drawing of it and another thing is you have to use your own brain.

### *Yeah, so you did alot pf overtime, you started at six. What time did you finish?*

### Six to six, twelve hours doing when I started but after that time and I got a bit better then I just.... and I was...I was on-call out even. The call-out, they called me if something been wrong at night, I had to go to the job but then again I’m doing that job.

### *So basically your job was if anything broke down, you would mend it.*

### Umm.

### *That must of been such a responsibility.*

### Umm because if I don’t go quick, they’ll use so much production of oil.

### *How many people did the company employ? Do you know?*

### Oh the company was about forty people at the moment, at that time, and after the time uh there was another firm they made XXXX. All XXXX and packing and everything was there.

### *Were there any accidents at work or was it dangerous?*

### No, no.

### *No because health and safety wasn’t that great then was it?*

### No.

### *Not as good as it is now.*

### No.

### *No. Did you ever go out on strike or...?*

### No, no strike.

### *So it was a good employer?*

### Good employer and we had a meeting every month, end of the month we had a meeting thinking in next month what we want to do, what is this, any problem with anyone.

### *Yeah, yeah, yeah. So would you say the Ugandan Asians stayed together as a community, were you still in touch with everybody you were in Uganda with?*

### When I left no...Uganda when I was working with them I was alright but after the time I...no connection with anyone there now.

### *Yeah. It must have been very difficult so you had to completely start again didn’t you?*

### Umm.

### *So what help did the British Government give you?*

### Uh British Government give us you know when we come to this and...nearly one month we live in the camp there and they provided clothes and everything, clothes and then the child benefits and everything started so...that’s it.

### *Yeah.*

### Job Centre, I have been two, three, four job centres and then we got the job at this firm and started work, that’s it.

### *Did you find it difficult to find home or accommodation when you came over? Was it difficult to rent a house or...?*

### Yeah it was difficult at that time, there wasn’t so many house empty you know but uh luckily I found a...it was difficult at that time.

### *We’re people welcoming?*

### Yeah.

### *Yeah. Gosh. Have you ever been back to Uganda?*

### No because I live anywhere, I’ve seen very bad experience of soldiers and all that you know and uh I’m...once you got something, afraid you know, so... I want to go back, my son says in September we might go back there to have a, just to have a holiday, going for one week there and coming back like that because you know I’m talking about 1973...’78, 1978 one of my friend he had an automobile garage in Jinja and uh he just thinking to go there and want to get it to do the job again over there but even in the hotel and African guys knows there's the owner of the garage is come down here now. They’ve been in the hotel in XXXX so since that time [interviewee laughs] I says it’s no good, even if you’ve got your own property.

### *Did you have your property in Uganda?*

### I owned property but I didn’t got it yet, nothing, no because I write letter and letter and letters and this and that.

### *They just confiscated everything did they?*

### Yeah...even the money I had 80 000...80 000 Ugandan shillings in the bank, gone.

### *There was no way of getting the money out of the country at all? No.*

### No.

### *Must of been a very difficult time...Well he’s no longer there is he Idi Amin.*

### [Interviewee laughs]

### *Gosh. That's...yeah. So during that time...was it as soon as he came to power people were frightened?*

### Umm.

### *Yeah, gosh. Is there anymore you’d like to say?*

### Uh that’s it nothing, thank you for coming.

### *Thank you. That was really, really interesting.*

### The End

### Transcript not to be used without copyright

### 

**Interview details**

**Name of interviewee: Gantala Verubi Sudra**

**Project: Ugandan Asians**

**Date: 27/01/2012**

**Language: English**

**Venue:**

**Name of interviewer: Judith Garfield**

**Length of interview: 35:21**

**Transcribed by: Joel Crowley**

**Archive Ref: 2012\_esch\_UgAs\_01**