



## SOME WEEP, SOME LAUGH

MEMOIRS OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY IN DACCA 1960-1967

MARY FRANCES DUNHAM

~~~~~ I ~~~~~

OUR HOUSE

আমাদের বাড়ি

SOME WEEP, SOME LAUGH

MEMOIRS OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY IN DACCA 1960-1967

MARY FRANCES DUNHAM

~ I ~

PROLOGUE

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FRONT PAGE TITLE AND PHOTO

The title of these memoirs comes from the lyrics of a Bengali folk song:  
“This world is a market place of pleasures. Some weep, some laugh.”  
You can find the full lyrics for this song on page 281 of my book:  
*Jarigan, Muslim Epic Songs of Bangladesh.*

The title photo on the previous page was taken of my husband and me in 1960 soon after we first arrived in Dacca. We are posed in front of a Moghul style painted backdrop provided by the photography studio.

Editing and layout by Katherine Dunham

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**To all my friends with whom I shared  
the adventures of these years in  
Dacca and especially to my husband,  
Daniel C. Dunham, who made this  
time so meaningful and memorable  
with his humor and common sense.**

## SPECIAL THANKS

There are a number of people I want to especially thank for helping me to transform my eight Dacca scrapbooks of letters, photos and souvenirs into this set of printed volumes which are now much easier to share with family, friends and the public. Daisy Aziz, our long time family friend and descendant of our Dacca landlord, devoted many hours helping on a variety of tasks including scanning the original scrapbooks and being on call to transliterate Bengali words. Our friend, Ellen Lohe, spent a good portion of her summer with us patiently proof reading the first drafts and gave valuable editing comments and advice. To Fatima Terin and Adnan Morshed, I am gratefull for their appreciation of my family’s Bengali patois as they helped with the Bangla translations for this latest 2019 edition. I’m also indebted to my daughter, Katherine Dunham, for her work with the organization and layout of the contents and her perseverance in getting this project done over the years that we have worked on this together.

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Like a stroll through someone’s house, feel free to browse through this book and read any section here or there that catches your eye. There is no need to read the book from one end to the other because I have organized the stories by topics rather than by chronology. By reading bits and pieces of my stories, I hope to provide a glimpse of our daily life and our practical and creative responses to the everyday life challenges we faced.

These memoirs are organized into five volumes. Volume 1 describes how we settled into our life in Dacca and how we set up our house and servants. Volume 2 includes a chapter on each member of the family and what our primary occupations were. Volume 3 talks about our Social and cultural life outside our primary activities and the many projects we did. Volume 4 describes our travels including our outings, our vacations and our home leaves. Volume 5, addresses the large-scale hazards we faced during the 1960’s including cyclones, diseases and wars.

### BENGALI WORDS

Much of my use of Bengali words throughout these texts may seem incorrect to a native Bengali speaker. However, this is intentional. I am attempting to represent the playful way Dan and I transformed the language into our own family patois. For example, to express pluralization of a noun we would simply add an ‘s’ or ‘es’ to the end of it as is done in English eventhough this is incorrect in Bengali. Hence, when we wanted to say the plural of cat we said ‘birals’ instead of ‘biral gulo,’ and for ‘things’ we said ‘jinishes’ instead of ‘jinish gulo’. Throughout the texts I have noted with an asterix whenever I use our family patois instead of the correct Bengali form. Furthermore, my transliteration of the Bengali vowel sounds may also seem atypical because I seek to approximate how the vowels sound in English. I omit indicating the nasalization of vowels when this occurs, and the retroflexive quality of certain dental consonants. The “h” following a consonant indicates a concurrent breath sound, as in “bhari” (b-hah-ree).

### PLACE NAMES & SPELLINGS

Names of some cities in India or their spelling changed after Indian Independence in 1947; e.g. Bombay to Mumbai, Madras to Chennai, Calcutta to Kolkata and Dacca to Dhaka. In the latter two examples the changes represent a more correct transliteration. Although the British “raj” included outstanding linguists, government practice was more casual. I generally have chosen to use the names and spellings that were used during the time (1960s) that we were living in Dacca.

### PEOPLE & ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout these pages you will see many names referring to friends, colleagues, and acquaintances some of which will come up again and again. To learn more about these people, who played a significant role in our Dacca life, you can refer to the Cast of Characters in the Appendix.

To facilitate the writing I have often used initials in place of our family names:

- DCD is Dan Dunham (my husband)
- MFD is Mary Frances Dunham (myself)
- KDD is Katherine Dunham (our daughter)
- CGR is Charles Raphael (my father)

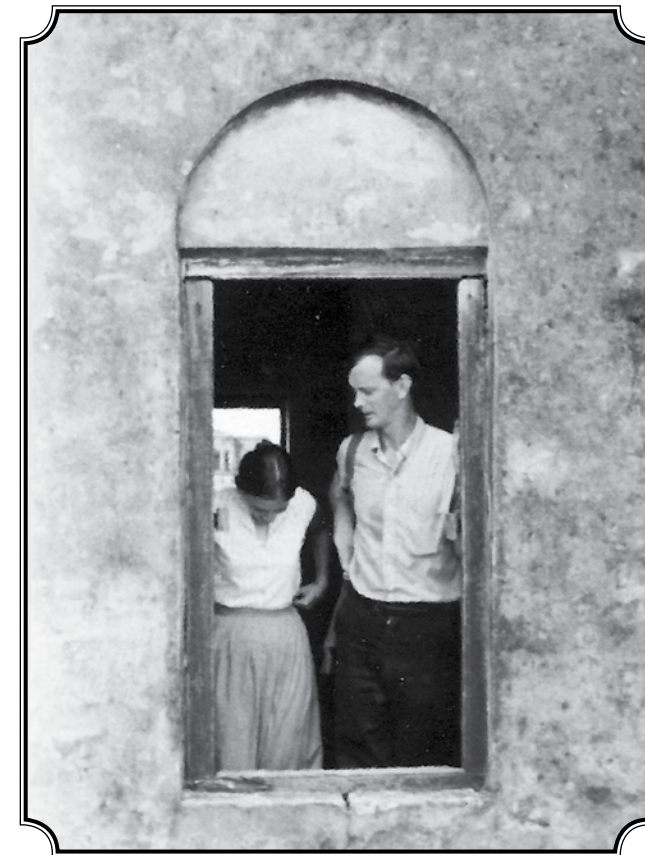
### TEXTS, PHOTOS & IMAGE CREDITS

Most of the photos from the 1960s shown in these volumes are taken by my husband, Dan. The sketches sprinkled throughout the volumes were either done by Dan or me. The black ink sketches of Dacca scenes were all done by Dan for the guide book I co-wrote called Living in Dacca. The images of letters, news clippings and other memorabilia were scanned from my archives of documents collected between 1960 and 1968. I have also included in these volumes a number of texts from friends such as Pat Hill, Bob Mayers and Peggy Azbill.



“A tale begun in other days,  
When summer suns were glowing –  
...  
Whose echoes live in memory yet,  
Though envious years would say ‘forget’.”

[Lewis Carol, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*]



PROLOGUE

আগের কথা

(AGER KOTHA)



## WELCOME TO MY MEMORIES



### EIGHT SCRAPBOOKS

Welcome to my memories of our days in “Wonderland,” as Dan, my husband, called our adventures during the 1960s in East Pakistan, soon to become Bangladesh. The memories have been culled from eight capacious scrapbooks, which have traveled around the world several times until they were falling apart. In the pages of these albums I recorded our lives through letters, photos, sketches, news clippings, and other such mementos.

### “GIVING THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES”

In September of 1960, soon after we arrived in Dacca, I met a French woman who, like myself, had recently arrived with her husband to establish the Alliance Française in the city. She remarked to me that we foreigners would be “giving the best years of our lives” to the region. Indeed, we were in our early thirties, mature but still young; whatever we were going “to give” of our years there turned out to be amply rewarded. Although we saw much political turbulence, poverty, and some of the worst cyclones in history, there was enchantment in that “hellish paradise,” as the region was once described by a 15<sup>th</sup> century visitor from Persia.

### IN THE WAKE OF THE BRITISH RAJ

British rule in India had ended in 1947, leaving a wake which was still evident in the landscape and social fabric of the region when we arrived in the fall of 1960. In many ways, Dan and I found our lives taking up from where the British Raj had left off starting with our choice to live in Ramna, the old colonial part of the city, rather than in Dhanmandi, the new suburb where most of the foreigners lived. Living in Ramna we were surrounded by the tree-shaded streets and Victorian buildings of British design. The portico-ed mansions of the British High Commission and French consulate as well as the colonial government buildings of the High Court and Curzon Hall were all within walking distance of our house. In the office, Dan accustomed himself quite quickly to the British tradition of having office peons (rather than equipment) perform the small unassuming tasks such as sharpening pencils, delivering messages, lighting cigarettes and making tea. Documents were still stamped with ostentatious wax seals and papers were still held together with sewing pins rather than using a stapler. My lawyer father was amused to see the court judges and lawyers still wearing wigs and gowns in spite of the summer heat and party bands were still employed to trumpet old British marching tunes at weddings and events of State.

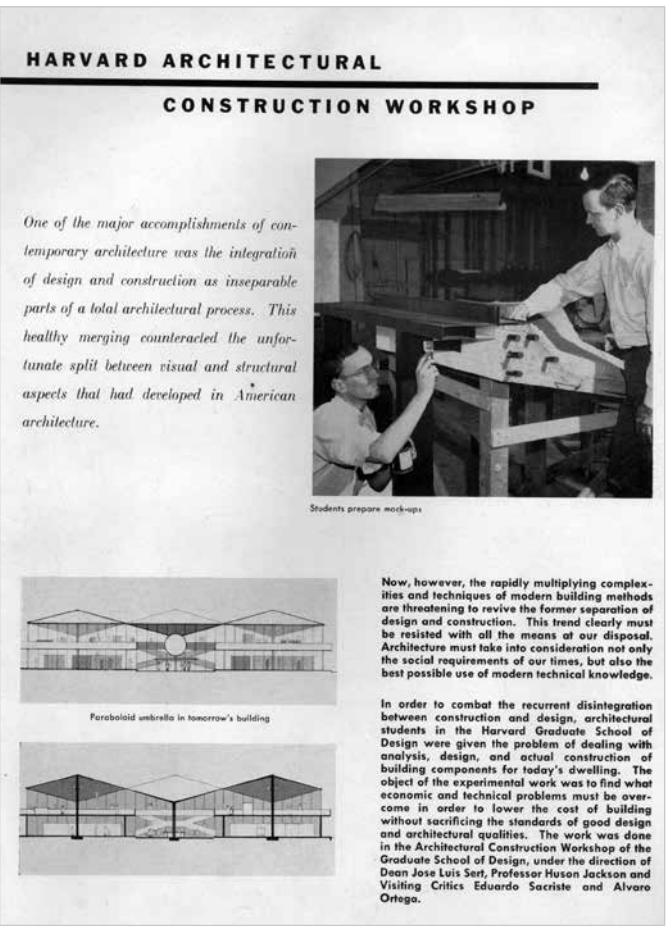
In the fall of 1967, after Dan and I moved back to NYC, I took a course with Professor Ainslie Embree on the history of modern India as part of my MA degree at Columbia University. His guidance through the labyrinth of Indian pre-Independence politics with the added pressures of World War II suggested to me that we Americans, among the other foreigners in Dacca, had stepped into the “shoes” left by the British. The more that I looked at our letters, photos, and other memorabilia from our first seven years in “East Pakistan,” the more they seemed to echo much of the daily life of the British “sahibs” and “mehsahibs” whose buildings, institutions and population of servants we had inherited.

## WHY WE CAME TO DACCA

### DAN’S FULBRIGHT TO LONDON

In the spring of 1959, near the end of Dan’s last semester at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD), Professor Jacqueline Tyrwhitt suggested to him that he apply for a Fulbright grant to study tropical architecture at the Architectural Association (AA) in London. Following her advice, Dan applied and a few months later Dan and I boarded the S.S.Mauretania for England.

*Dan’s mentor, Prof. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, Harvard GSD, retired 1969*



*Dan’s design construction project Harvard GSD, ~ 1959*

### TRAVELING FIRST CLASS FOR THE FIRST TIME

Thanks to the insistence and funding of my father, Dan and I traveled first class on the RMS Mauretania to London. This was the first time that Dan could enjoy the privileges of being a passenger on this trans-Atlantic crossing which he had done several times before as a working seaman. As a teen-ager during the post depression years he had worked on ore boats in the Great Lakes and had acquired “seaman’s papers.” These precious papers allowed Dan to travel to Europe during his college years by working on trans-Atlantic steamers. In fact, it was on one of these work-trips in the summer of 1950, that I first met Dan. By coincidence we were both making our way to Fontainebleau: he to study fresco painting and I to study music. Although Dan was working on the ship, he decided to create some entertainment to help pass the time and recruited students including myself, Mabel, Lydia and Ann to put on a show. Little did I know at that time, that a decade later I would be traveling with Dan as his wife to the far reaches of Asia.



*Cunard Line R.M.S. “Mauretania”*



WHY WE CAME TO DACCA cont.

A YEAR IN LONDON

Dan located the AA on a map of London and drew a circle around it representing the limit of his walking distance. Within that circle we found a “bed-sitter” in Bayswater, just north of Hyde Park. The one-room flat was in a townhouse overlooking Kildare Terrace. Besides the one main room, it had a closet-sized kitchen and a closet. There was a shared bathroom off the landing below. We needed a supply of shilling coins to nourish a gas heater in the fireplace and to operate the bathroom hot water heater. We never met our neighbor who was a cartoonist for Punch, but Dan used to take peeks in his trash in hopes of finding discarded sketches. During that London year we became good friends with Tom Rummler, a fellow “Fulbrighter,” who was studying acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) and with whom we became accomplices in a number of mischievous adventures.

While Dan attended classes at the AA, I taught elementary Latin and French at a small, tutorial school in Hammersmith. The school had been created by Mrs. Cyriol Hugh-Jones for children who had been living abroad and needed help catching up with the UK curriculum. Although Dan and I were quite busy, we did make time to explore London. We enjoyed the proximity of our flat to a movie theater, to the White Swan Market and to Hyde Park.



A ROYAL WEDDING

Dan and I stayed up all night on a crowded sidewalk to get a glimpse in the morning of the royal wedding procession of Princess Margaret and Anthony Hugh-Jones (famous photographer) on May 6, 1960. Coincidentally, the founder of the school where I worked, Mrs. Cyriol Hugh-Jones, was a relative of Anthony Hugh-Jones. Too bad that connection did not give us any privileged access to the royal event.



My visit with Emmy in Bildeston, 1960

DAN’S MARRAKESH RESEARCH

While at the AA, Dan studied tropical architecture with such renowned teachers as Arthur Koenigsberger. For his research, Dan spent many nights on the roof of the school, to the amusement of all, while he measured temperatures of “back radiation” from roof to sky. He also delighted his classmates with the biscuits that he baked in his solar oven invention. In the spring, along with Nabil Tabara, his classmate from Lebanon, and with Tom Rummler, we rented a car and drove non-stop to Morocco. In Marrakesh, Dan spent our two week holiday measuring temperature changes in the traditional courtyard houses of the city. Back in London, Dan wrote up the results of his studies for an article which was later published in *The New Scientist* (9/8/1960) and aired on BBC and became a seminal article on the subject.



Morocco sketch by Dan

**THE NEW SCIENTIST**

8 SEPTEMBER 1960

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**THE COURTYARD HOUSE AS A TEMPERATURE REGULATOR**  
by Daniel Dunham

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THE NEW SCIENTIST, 8 SEPTEMBER 1960

# The courtyard house as a temperature regulator

Houses with central courtyards are traditional in many tropical countries. But aesthetically pleasing they give protection against the environmental temperature evolved from an apparently intuitive application of the principles of radiant heat

by DANIEL DUNHAM  
Fulbright Scholar, Department of Tropical Architecture,  
The Architectural Association, London

**THE** visitor to the hot, dry regions bordering the Mediterranean Sea soon becomes acquainted with one of the most charming traditional features of domestic architecture in those regions: the type of house in which all rooms adjoin a central courtyard, open to the sky.

Traditional housing all over the world has evolved through a system similar to natural selection: the fittest type survives. The courtyard house (also known as the *atrium* or *patio* house) owes its survival and popularity to its special suitability to the climate in which it is found. The internal court encourages heat loss from the living area of the house in the form of outgoing radiant heat. This application of the radiant heat principle contributes to the relative comfort of these buildings during the hottest season.

Variations on the courtyard house have been built on both sides of the Mediterranean; indeed, it is traditional in a geographical belt from the shores of the Atlantic, across North Africa, through the Near East, well into the plains of India. It can be found transcending national and cultural boundaries, but following a zone of similar climate. In these arid and semi-arid regions, at least for a large part of the year, exclusion of heat from buildings is a major problem. Fires can provide extra heat to the rooms in winter, but most buildings must rely on natural cooling to achieve a temperate indoor climate in summer. The features which protect the interiors against high temperatures account for many of the special characteristics of this architecture.

In extremely hot climates the phenomenon of outgoing radiation, whereby the Earth and the buildings on it lose heat, becomes important. Although radiation from the Earth is far less dramatic in nature than that from the much hotter Sun, nevertheless it amounts on average to the same quantity of energy as that reaching the Earth from the Sun (Figure 1). If this were not the case, there would be a gradual rise or fall in temperature of the Earth's surface over the years.

The quality of the radiation from the Earth is quite different from that arriving from the Sun. The Earth radiates long infra-red waves, while the Sun's radiation ranges from X-rays to infra-red. The intensity of radiant energy from the Earth is also much smaller than that from the Sun. The total radiation intensity from a hot body is given by the Stefan Boltzman law, and is proportional to the fourth power of the absolute temperature of the radiating surface. The Sun's surface temperature is about 6,000° absolute, the Earth's about 300°, so that the radiant energy emitted by the Earth is only a "black" effect the amount of energy into space. The atmosphere is transparent and this limits the part of the radi- atmospheric water oxide or dust, at length, and retard and partly back cloud cover cuts from the Earth's

In hot, arid of heat ex- and space is Cloud cover is transparency of amount 4 face from the to leave it into The result is the biggest r- between day

of air, it could be cooled by exposure to the radiating surface, then trans- ferred to interior protected elements to effect cooling during the day. We find natural examples of air transfer in the down slopes and collect passively in depressions in the Earth. Certain built-in holes in the landscape of Central Europe have freezing temperatures even air more than offsets the heat gain from the Earth itself and from the daily warming, and the daily mean temper- ature is considerably less than in exposed areas.

The traditional Moroccan house of North Africa serves as an example of which the principles of radiant cooling are employed. This house, with its one central courtyard, is similar to most traditional urban dwellings in hot dry regions. It, in essence, is a square box open to the sky, with high narrow rooms on all perimeter (Figures 4 and 5). External windows are lacking or of minimal size but most rooms have large windows, doors on to the court.

Figure 1: A quantity of energy equal to that received from the Sun is reradiated by the Earth into space.

Figure 2: A simplified radiating and absorbing unit protected from heat gain but allowed to emit radiation freely would act as a cooling element.

Figure 3: A field cooled by radiating heat from the surface at night could be used to remove heat from other parts of the building during the day.

Figure 4: Cross section through a typical Moroccan courtyard house.

Figure 5: A courtyard viewed from the roof. The daily extremes take place after being driven the courtyard enjoys a more moderate climate.

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WHY WE CAME TO DACCA cont.



Berger Engineers  
Brochure, 1960

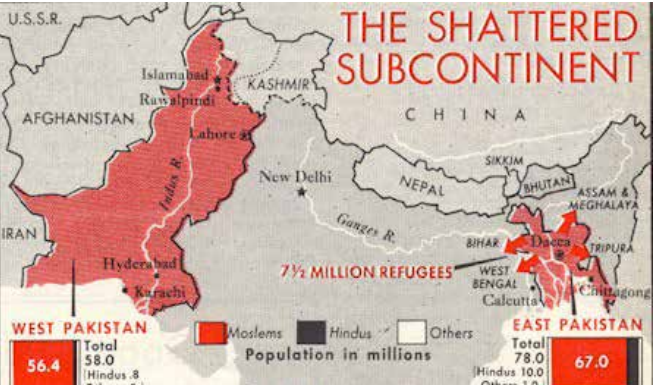
DAN ACCEPTING A JOB IN EAST PAKISTAN

We returned to NYC in the summer of 1961. Dan was determined to find a job that would take us abroad to somewhere where his expertise in tropical design would be useful. Somehow he came across an opportunity at “Berger Engineers,” a civil engineering company that had offices around the world. Dr. Lou Berger, the director, took an immediate liking to Dan at their first meeting, and offered him a job in his “Pakistan” branch office. Because of the severe lack of architects in that part of the world, Berger had a plan to expand the company’s engineering services to include architectural design. Dan was his ideal candidate to lead up the new department.

Knowing that this would be a “hardship post,” Lou was looking for someone like Dan, who was resourceful, smart and willing to take on new challenges. I remember Lou tempting us with promises of a life of luxury: “sheets made of the finest silk” and “a platoon of servants.” But there was no need of such enticements, because Dan was delighted to accept the job and to put his AA studies in hot-dry climate design into use. Little did he realize at the time that there were two Pakistans: a West Pakistan, which was indeed hot and *dry*, and also an East Pakistan, which was hot and *humid*. It was to the East “wing” of the divided nation that Dan was assigned.

THE SITUATION OF EAST & WEST PAKISTAN

When Dan accepted the post to Berger’s office in Dacca, the capital of East Pakistan, we had no idea of what was in store. In spite of all our education, Dan and I were woefully ignorant about the part of the world we were moving to. We did not know about the two wings of Pakistan and how different they were not only in climate, but also in history and culture. The central government was run from Karachi in West Pakistan and its domination was not appreciated in East Pakistan. By the 1960’s, there was growing resentment against the increasing imposition of West Pakistani laws and traditions on the local Bengali culture of East Pakistan. East Pakistanis, or rather Bengalis, were fond of their art, music, theater, dance and especially their language, which were all rooted in their pre-Islamic past. But under West Pakistani rule these cultural values were seen as heretical to Islam and were discouraged and generally banned.





## OUR ANABASIS: NYC TO DACCA

Berger's office would pay for our moving expenses but the only things Dan and I had to ship were our books. Dan found a large cardboard barrel in the trash that served perfectly as a sturdy container to hold our 50+ books. We packed everything else into two suitcases which we took with us on the journey to Dacca. All in all, the trip from NYC to Dacca took several days with stopovers in San Francisco, Hawaii, Tokyo and Calcutta before finally landing in Dacca. We spent a couple of days in Tokyo. After sleeping more than 24 hours on the first day we took an overnight trip to Yokohama where we stayed in the comfort of a traditional Japanese inn and got to experience the thrill of riding the high-speed train while eating complimentary *binto* box lunches. Our penultimate flight took us to Calcutta where we stayed at the airport guest house (more like military barracks than a hotel) so that we could catch the early morning flight to Dacca.



The scene that greeted us when we arrived at Dacca's International Airport, 1960

Conditions in East Pakistan when Dan and I arrived in the fall of 1960

[MFD letter to Brearley friends 01/1961]

Dear Brearley friends, although I have ceased to keep track of time, I realize that if I don't write something to you now you will have dispersed to your various summer lives. I hope those who wrote to me will forgive a general letter for the moment, but I want you to know your letters and good bits of news were much appreciated. My imagination is beginning to falter when I try to picture what you are doing in that tall steel and brick building, where so much productive activity is going on, where there is so much skilled and literate activity, where you can eat those beautiful lunches in that clean cafeteria, where you produce plays, exhibits, concerts, field days, meetings, where I hear you have suffered from blizzards and the cold, where nevertheless everybody wears nothing below their (her) knees. (I haven't been wearing a sari but have been tempted) Right now I am thinking it is exam time and the end of the year and you are tired and eager for vacation. Here most buildings are bamboo huts, it has been summer all the time (except a short cold spell in Feb.), there is 95% illiteracy, no cultural activities, meager diet, and everybody (except the 5% literates) wears skirts or saris down to their ankles. Like your lives ours is full of variety and excitement, no two days alike, but unlike yours nothing gets accomplished. I don't know what to tell you about this country because I can't assume you know as little as I did before coming here and I suppose all underdeveloped countries are much the same, but I am sure that unless one of you has been here there are sights peculiar to Bengal which never get into the tourist books because they can't exist or into geography books because it is such an unimportant and forgotten corner of the world. My more sophisticated friends, including my husband, say jute is the big thing here and beyond that there is nothing but vacuums. I have no basis of comparison but this place is certainly the most fascinating I have ever lived in. If I indulge in a few complaints I want you to know life is really very pleasant and I am not sure we will be ready to go home at this time next year. Of course we have the monsoons yet to experience which seem to be bad enough to color every one else's opinion of the rest of the year.

The facts on E. Pak; c. 1,000 sq.miles, c. 52,000,000 people, mostly farmers but not very good ones, temperatures from 40-110 degrees, six months of no rain, six months of showers including two of monsoon. People eat rice, a little chicken and muttons or goat, chilies, curry, very few vegetables, mostly bananas except there are delicious lichees, mangoes, and pineapple just now. The country depends on exporting jute. The tiny upper class makes a lot of money, otherwise white collar workers and office boys make about 3-5 rupees (1\$) a day. The country people live off the land. A laborer in town must be eating on 21¢ a day which we want to try for a week some time. 1 dozen eggs costs 25¢, 2lbs. beef 40¢, bread 10¢, milk not potable, vegetables and fruits in season, rice 22¢ per lb. Anything else, tools, materials, cloth or paper, metals, wood, exorbitantly expensive. En some a vastly overpopulated underfed unskilled and helpless country. Almost 100% Mohamedans.

The way we are living, being in Dacca, we don't really see how the rest of the country lives although we can get some idea from the remnants of village life that have remained while the modern city grew around them. But it is hard to believe the above conditions as we sit in our seven room "pukha" house, or in our front and back gardens, with a vacant lot where cattle and goats feed to the west, large parks and mansions with gardens beyond, more vacant lots and empty meadows, cattle grazing happily everywhere. The old city where I seem to be the only white person shopping is indeed crowded with its quota of beggars, cripples, unfortunates of every sort, but not any more unusual than the Moroccan medinas we saw. The Bengal we haven't yet seen, but hope to, is really a vast plain of paddy fields, jute, sugar cane, with wide rivers crossing everywhere and dotted by tiny villages of six to eight single room bamboo houses around a courtyard. We don't know where there are places for tigers, leopards, and cobras but we hear of people going off for a hunting week-end to one jungle or another. It's nice to know there is still room for a little wilderness somewhere, and a few Bengal tigers.

We are in a somewhat unique position. We are part of the new style of Western colonialism (business concerns and technical advisors) but we are the only private American firm (unconnected with the US Government in anyway) and until recently Dan was one of three



*My thoughts reflecting back on our years in Dacca  
when we were preparing to leave  
[MFD draft essay, 1967]*

I am a foreigner, a stranger even after six years, in Bengal. I still can take nothing for granted and, like those animals in Northern climates which feverishly collect and store away a winter's supply of food before that season over takes them, I have feverishly tried to store as many sights, sounds, and experiences which I have had ~~in Bengal~~ here, knowing that some day we would be leaving; wanting, almost instinctively, to be prepared for the long years away/ from this strange and enchanting country. Photos, sketches by my husband, slides, newspaper clippings, and mem<sup>o</sup>ir<sup>s</sup> of all sorts fill several shelves of our library. I have tried to take back something ~~of the sounds~~ through ~~music~~ learning <sup>music and</sup> ~~something of~~ the language, literature, and music, but these which are dearest to me have been the hardest to capture. Even a tape recorder does not do justice.



## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Throughout these volumes of Dacca memories you will see a lot of names. The people most often mentioned are listed on the following pages by their association with us. They include family members, our household staff, friends, acquaintances and visitors. I hope this helps serve as a quick reference. There is more information on all these people in the Appendix at the end of Volume 5.





Dan



Mary Frances (me)



Katherine



Mother D



Charles Raphael



Emmy

OUR FAMILY MEMBERS

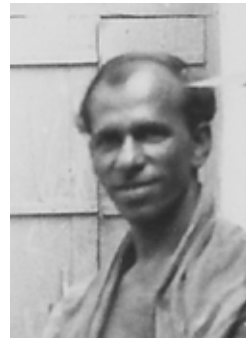
DANIEL C. DUNHAM (DCD, my husband, Dan)  
MARY FRANCES DUNHAM (MFD, me )  
KATHERINE DUNHAM (KDD, our daughter)  
ESTHER DUNHAM (“Mother D”, Dan’s mother)  
CHARLES G. RAPHAEL (CGR, my father)  
MARY FLORENCE EMERSON (“Emmy”, the woman who raised me)



Cook



Theresa



Mali



Mohan



Wohab

“OUR GANG” AT HAFIZ VILLA

PHILLIP GOMEZ, “Cook” (Cook)  
THERESA GOMEZ (Ayah)  
ABDUL MASJID, “MALI” (Gardener)  
MOHAN SHIDDHA (Bearer)  
ABDUL WOHAAB (Bearer)  
RUPLAL DURIA (Driver)



Ruplal



Barth Healey



Hugh Murphy



Mabel Shanon



Peggy Azbill



Fran Larkin

FRIENDS  
NEAR BY TO  
HAFIZ VILLA

JOCK COPLAND  
BARTH & LEE HEALEY  
MATZAKIS  
MURRAY & SYLVIA MILNER  
HUGH MURPHY  
MABEL SHANON

SEAGULL  
HOUSE:

PEGGY AZBILL  
FRAN LARKIN  
MARY KEFGEN



Pat Hill



Danielle & Maurice Rouch



Dee Rutherford

DHANMANDI  
FAMILIES

PAT & RALPH HILL family  
GUS & MARIS LANGFORD  
PAUL & SHEROO RUSBY family  
SCOTT & DEE RUTHERFORD family  
MAURICE & DANIELLE ROUCH family



Roy Vollmer



Maris Langford



Kay Donaldson



Ann Werkheiser

LOUIS KAHN’S  
TEAM

GUS & MARIS LANGFORD  
ROY & CAROLINE VOLLMER

OTHER FOREIGN  
FRIENDS

KAY DONALDSON  
MARY ANN HIRSCHORN  
GAIL MINAULT  
DICK & ANN WERKHEISER



Assanullah Sheik



Bob Booghey



Golam Rob Khan



John Schiff



Bob Mayers

**BERGER DACCA OFFICE TEAM**

LOUIS BERGER (Director of Berger Engineers International)  
MAKBUL RAHMAN (Co-partner of Berger Dacca office)  
ASANULLAH SHEIKH (Co-partner of Berger Dacca office)  
BOB BOUGHEY  
DANIEL C. DUNHAM  
GOLAM ROB KHAN  
BOB & FLORENCE MAYERS  
MOTSUDI  
JOHN & ALISON SCHIFF  
AND OTHERS ...



Dan Dunham



Sam Lanford



Dick Vrooman



Jim Walden



Jack Yardley

**EPUET – TEXAS A&M  
ARCHITECTURE FACULTY**

DANIEL C. DUNHAM (USAID contract)  
SAM LANFORD (Texas A & M teacher)  
DICK VROOMAN (Texas A & M Dean)  
JIM WALDEN (Texas A & M teacher)  
JACK YARDLEY (Texas A & M teacher)  
DR. RASHID (Vice Chancellor of EPUET)



Nurul Huda



Jasimuddin



Chief Justice Murshed



Shahidullah



Ahmed Sharif

**BENGALI DIGNITARIES  
THAT WE KNEW**

NURUL HUDA (Director, BAFA)  
JASIMUDDIN (Poet laureate)  
CHIEF JUSSTICE MURSHED  
AHMED SHARIF (Dacca University)  
SAADUDDIN (Scholar/Ethnomusicologist)  
SHAHIDULLAH (Scholar/Linguist)



Dolly Chowdhurry



Shah Alam Zahiruddin

**OTHER BENGALI  
FRIENDS**

‘DOLLY’ BAHAR CHOWDHURRY (EPUET student)  
SELINA BAHAR CHOWDHURRY  
GOLAM ROB KHAN (Berger Office)  
SHAH ALAM ZAHIRUDDIN (Berger & EPUET)  
AND OTHERS ...

THE song that I came to sing remains  
unsung to this day.

I have spent my days in stringing  
and in unstringing my instrument.

The time has not come true, the  
words have not been rightly set; only  
there is the agony of wishing in my  
heart.

The blossom has not opened; only  
the wind is sighing by.

[Tagore, from a *Gitanjali* poem]

~~~~~ I ~~~~~

OUR HOUSE

আমাদের বাড়ি

(AMADER BARI)

- 1. GETTING ACQUAINTED
- 2. MAKING A HOME
- 3. MUSTERING ‘OUR GANG’

SOME WEEP, SOME LAUGH  
MEMOIRS OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY IN DACCA 1960-1967  
MARY FRANCES DUNHAM



# GETTING ACQUAINTED

ঢাকা সালাম\*  
(DACCA SALAM)



*“Getting to know you,  
Getting to feel free and easy ...”*

*[Song from “The King and I” by Rogers and Hammerstein]*



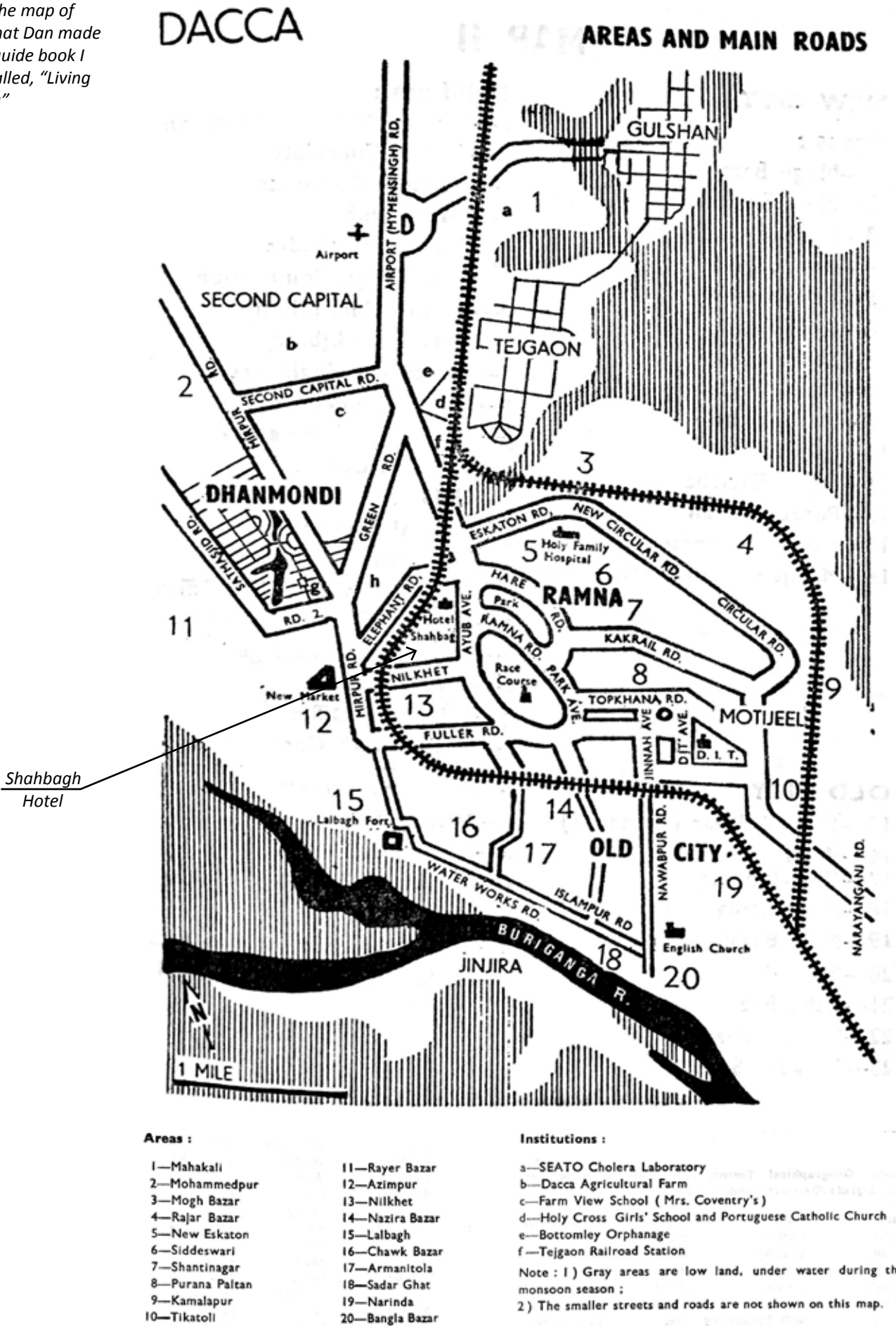
*[Photo by Anwar Hossain, Dhaka Portrait 1967-1992]*

*\* This Bengali wording is from our personal family patois*



Dacca Airport, main building facing the runway, 1960

This is the map of Dacca that Dan made for the guide book I wrote called, “Living in Dacca”



## ARRIVAL IN DACCA

### DACCA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

As we descended from the plane, we were greeted with the scene of a mass of spectators, standing on the roof of the terminal. For most newcomers to the country the sight of this assembled crowd, curiously watching our every move, was a strong impression. We had heard about an American couple that upon experiencing Dacca airport for the first time turned around and took the next plane out. However, for Dan and myself, the arrival scene at Dacca airport was our first glimpse of the lives we were soon to take on as foreigners living in Dacca and we welcomed it.

After collecting our two suitcases we passed through customs to find no one to greet us and no idea where to go. Surrounded by mobs of men watching us, jostling us, soliciting us at every turn, we managed to make our way eventually to a taxi. The taxi driver took us to the Shahbagh Hotel, the only hotel to cater to foreigners providing amenities such as a private bathroom and oatmeal at breakfast.

At the hotel we immediately phoned the Berger office to find out what to do. Makbul Rahman, the local partner in charge, was quite surprised to hear our voices and apologized that they had not expected us until the following day. They had forgotten to account for the time zone changes of our travels. Without wasting a moment, he came to our hotel to greet us and immediately wanted to take us on a tour to look for a house to rent. Still bleary eyed from our journey, Dan and I made a plea to postpone this task and to stay at the hotel. We ended up living at the hotel for two months before finding a house.



THE SHAHBAGH HOTEL

DAILY LIFE

The Shahbagh was a relic of British Victorian times with an entry portico out front, high ceilings and rooms well shaded by verandas. The building was about six stories high with no elevators. Elevators were rare at that time so most buildings were less than three floors. Although each room had its own bathroom, there was no hot water without calling for a servant, a bearer, to bring it up in buckets.

For our first two weeks, our room on the top floor at the Shahbagh was our home. Its grandiose name referred to a bagh (garden) of a sultan in the past. Indeed, we felt like royalty when we saw our room with its two four-poster beds, draped regally in white mosquito netting. Along with our room came a young man, our own “bearer,” to draw the netting aside when we were ready to sleep, or to fetch hot water by the bucket when we were ready to bathe. He was also responsible for dusting, sweeping, swabbing, and bed-making, in addition to draping and un-draping the mosquito nets whenever we had the urge to lie down.

All meals at the Shahbagh were served in a banquet sized dining hall with a small platform at its head, where an aged man played the same melodies every evening on an aged grand piano that sounded as if it had been made of tin. The hotel also boasted the only pastry shop in the country where one could get “western” style baked goods such as bread in loaves and frosted layer cakes.

Lady Mary and Lord Curzon with a car fleet in front of the Shahbagh Hotel, 1904. Photo by Fritz Kapp



BOB MAYERS’ DESCRIPTION OF THE SHAHBAGH HOTEL [Bob Mayers’ Memoirs]

“Hotel Shahbagh was the original end of the world “flea bag” hotel, similar to places described in Graham Greene novels. Large whirling fans hung from the dining room ceiling. A midget dressed in white with a large white turban on his head stood guard at the dining room doors. As you approached the doors he “salaamed” a greeting and opened the doors. On the stage, during lunch and dinner an ‘orchestra’ composed of five old geezers played ancient Western tunes on decrepit instruments. We dined to such hits as, “Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue” and “Melancholy Rose”. The whole ambiance was beyond belief. One day we came down for dinner and noticed the dining room doors being held open by a large potted palm. Our midget had been replaced.”

HOTEL SHAHBAGH

for well over a decade

It had been famous for excellent cuisine and personalised service

The management of Hotel Shahbagh remains,

cordially yours

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS: SHABAGOTEL  
TELEPHONE NO. 3151-3155

**HOTEL SHAHBAGH**  
(Direction : Pakistan Hotels Ltd.)  
RAMNA, DACCA.  
PAKISTAN.

BILL No: W 7689  
Dacca.....1960

WEEKLY BILL

Name: MR + MRS. DANIEL DUNHAM.

Arrived at 2/11 on 6-11-60

Left at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Room No. 306.

Rate 55/- Feb 2/- 57/-

| Date  | Board & Lodging | Food | Wines | Minerals | Cigarettes | Telephone Phonogram | Laundry | Sundries and Service | Sales-tax | TOTAL |     |   |
|-------|-----------------|------|-------|----------|------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|-----------|-------|-----|---|
| 6/11  | 55-             |      |       |          |            | 13-8-6              |         |                      |           | 68-   | 8-  | 6 |
| 7/11  | 55-             |      |       | -12      |            | 2-                  |         |                      |           | 57-   | 12- | - |
| 8/11  | 55-             |      |       |          |            | 2-                  |         |                      |           | 57-   | -   | - |
| 9/11  | 55-             |      |       |          |            | 2-                  |         |                      |           | 57-   | -   | - |
| 10/11 | 55-             |      |       | 1-2      |            | 2-                  |         |                      |           | 58-   | 2-  | - |
| 11/11 | 55-             |      |       |          |            | 2-                  |         |                      |           | 57-   | -   | - |
| 12/11 | 55-             |      |       |          |            | 2-                  |         |                      |           | 57-   | -   | - |
| Total | 385-            |      |       | 1-14     |            | 25-8-6              |         |                      |           | 412-  | 6-  | 6 |

Bills are payable on presentation or to be (4 vouchers attached) forwarded for payments to

M/S.....

Signature.....

Account Rendered

Total 412 6-6

Less Payments

Less Credits

Balance Due

Tips

4 bearers 40-0-0

2 elevator 10-0-0

sweeper 6-0-0

servers 20-0-0

music 10-0-0

headwaiters 30-0-0

116

extra

hair 7 rps.

movie 6 rps

fees

Xmas tea

rickshaws

"Back at the hotel, I have boys bringing in tea, flowers, and ready to give any help they can. When I asked where I could buy a plug for my iron, one boy immediately went about stripping one of the lamps of it plugs and putting it on my iron. When we get a house, we will be expected to have a cook, "bearer", and a whole list of retainers of one sort and another."

My description of the Shahbagh Hotel [MFD letter to CGR 11/13/1960]

"I have seen some of the American colony from the people in this hotel and from visiting the tiny American School where they need a first grade teacher for a class of three (if you can believe it) and also from visiting the dean of the new education school being set up here. They have all been very helpful or, rather, kind about our getting settled, ... but they certainly seem to assume that Americans will live in their own community, attend the Sunday school and go to bridge parties. We keep comparing the hotel to being on a boat and, of course, if you have to be with the same group long enough, you can become quite fond of it, but I am all for giving independent life (anti-social if you like), as much of a chance as the other."

MFD letter to CGR 11/13/1960



DHANMANDI vs RAMNA

REJECTING DHANMANDI

Within days of our arrival, our Berger hosts, Makbul and Sheikh, insisted on giving us a tour of the newly developed suburb, Dhanmandi. Being the newest area, it was the most prestigious neighborhood of Dacca to live in at that time, and our hosts, naturally assumed this would be where we would want to live. But compared with the elegant British colonial setting of our hotel neighborhood, Dan and I were disappointed with the bland newness of Dhanmandi. Being such a new district, its roads were barren and lifeless without trees, shops or vendors inhabiting the sidewalks. The houses, too, lacked character and life. Many of them, although inhabited, still had reinforcing rods rising out of their roofs like stray hairs in expectation of another floor some day. Over the entry gates the houses displayed pretentious names like “Pickwick House”. The sight of rows upon rows of suburban, American ranch style houses seemed like Levittown, USA, à la Bengal. “A hopeless suburbia” is what Pat Hill later called it. This was not the vision that either Dan or I had for our new life together when we decided to move to Asia. Makbul took us to his house on Road No.7 and proudly showed us its new conveniences, including AC, terrazzo floors, screened verandas, and large furniture. Seeing his house further confirmed for us that this was not the neighborhood for us and we would have to look elsewhere.

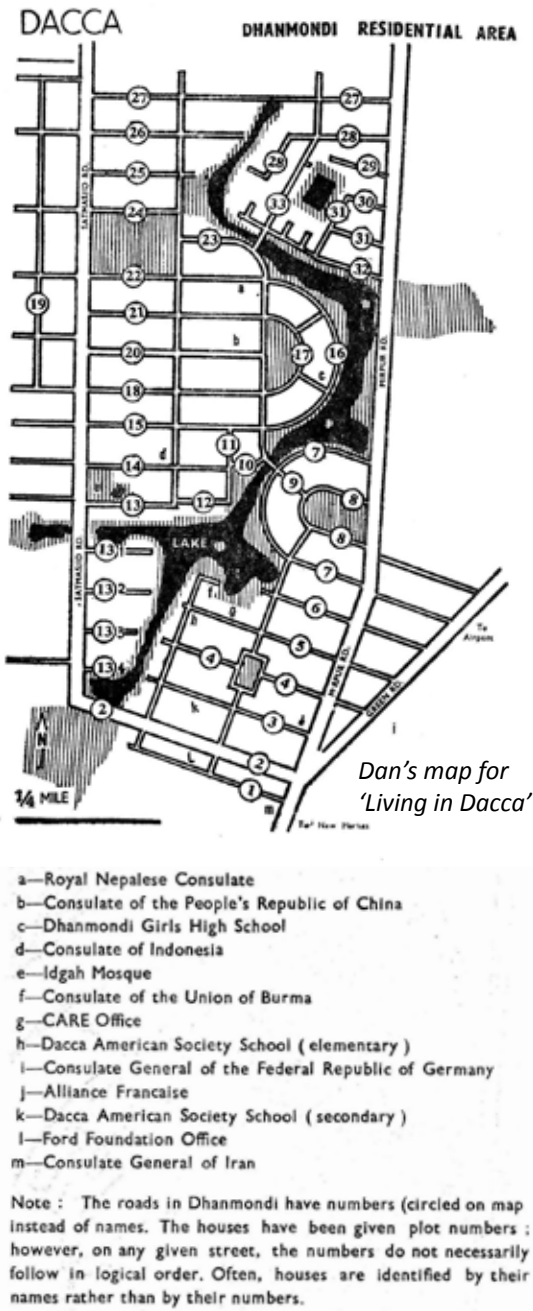
“A hopeless suburbia” is what Pat Hill called Dhanmandi

My first impressions of Dhanmandi  
[MFD letter to Elizabeth 04/18/1961]

“All the Pakistanis expected us to live in that area [Dhanmandi] and we looked hard but it is a treeless desert with ugly modern houses which will take years to cover with greenery ...”



Typical Dhanmandi houses in the late 1960s after their gardens had a chance to grow.



ENAMORED WITH RAMNA

Dan and I learned that the area around our hotel, which we had liked from our first day, was called Ramna. It was named, after Ramna Park, the Victorian British landscaped park at its center. We had taken an immediate liking to this area because of its history and greenery, which were much more attractive to us than the new construction of Dhanmandi. Once settled at the hotel we took to our feet (without any guides) to explore Ramna and to acquaint ourselves with its landmarks and daily activities. We appreciated the lushness of Ramna Park, the historic significance of the maidan (the central commons) next to it, and the shade of the surrounding tree lined streets. Although the area displayed some of the most beautiful and impressive colonial architecture, including elegant mansions behind high walls, we hoped that we might find something a bit more humble to suit our means and our lifestyle.

My description of the Maidan  
[MFD letter to CGR 11/13/1960]

“Right near the hotel, spreading out in different directions, are a big race course and a lovely garden. We arrived on Sunday, the day of the races, and we could see the crowds swarming to the field around noon and then, at sunset, dispersing in all directions, some leading the horses home, small but beautifully shaped animals. They are also used to draw the small stage-coaches the Daccanese use to get around.”



DCD sketch, ‘Living in Dacca’  
At the center of the maidan was a little Hindu temple with its cone-shaped spire. It was sadly destroyed in 1971 during the war for independence

THE MAIDAN

Directly to the south of the hotel, lay a large open space typically found in Indian cities called the maidan. This public space was used for military events as well as large markets, fairs and holiday festivities. A functioning British built racecourse track ran around it. On our first Sunday morning we watched a horse race with amusement. The horses were so small that the bare feet of the riders scraped the ground, but the crowd watching cheered them on as if it were the Kentucky Derby.

RAMNA PARK

Not far to the east, we strolled through a park, which was in the style of a typical British botanical garden, with tall, shade trees and a small lake. It seemed surprisingly unoccupied for such pleasant surroundings, but we learned later that local people sometimes avoided sitting under trees for fear of snakes that inhabit trees.

DACCA’S COLONIAL BUILDINGS

The notable buildings of Ramna were the governmental and cultural institutions of British colonial Dacca. Among these were Curzon Hall (named for Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of British India in 1905) and the old High Court Building, both built in high Victorian colonial style. We could glimpse old British mansions set in gardens behind high walls.



High Court Building



Curzon Hall



DACCA ENVIRONS

A CITY–CUM–VILLAGE

Dan once remarked that the city of Dacca resembled a farm on which a city had landed, leaving patches of agricultural life in its midst. Dhanmandi, once a vast paddy field as its name translates, was becoming suburban, while Dacca was sprawling northward sidestepping patches of rural life. Paved roads and *pucca* (solid) modern buildings were engulfing *kacha* (fragile) settlements. Throughout the city you could see juxtapositions of new urban structures along side small farms with their chickens, goats and cows.



My first impressions of Dacca  
[MFD letter to CGR 11/13/1960]

"As much of the town as I have been able to see so far is most charming. Very pictorial. I think we are in the garden district and I have not explored far enough to find the squalor that is supposed to exist abundantly, but as far as the business district is from here and as far as the university in the other direction there are meadows, fine modern buildings, wide avenues lined with tall green trees, small cows and goats grazing everywhere. The land is very flat, and from the hotel we can see far in all directions, but it looks like mostly trees and meadows. ..."

"...There are many stagnant pea-green pools around in which people bathe and wash the laundry. Dan found out that every time a house is built, by law a "tank", as they are called, must be left."



DCD sketch , 'Living in Dacca'



Dacca Improvement Trust (D.I.T.) Building



DCD sketch , 'Living in Dacca'



Adamjee Building, home of the US Consulate

MOTIJHEEL – DACCA'S CBD

Dacca had a growing commercial district, Motijheel (literally "Pond of pearls"), named after a lake that once was there. Like so many of the new urban districts in Asia at this time, it lacked greenery and was characterized by a hodgepodge of concrete office buildings, some of which even had elevators. The most notable among these structures were government buildings such as WAPDA (Water and Power Development Agency), the D.I.T. Building (Dacca Improvement Trust) and Adamjee Court where the US consulate occupied two floors.









DAN’S FIRST DAY AT BERGER

DAN’S “BAPTISM BY FIRE”

Our first morning after we arrived in Dacca, Dan was met by Makbul’s car and driver to take him to the office. From that moment on, he was immersed in the office work and was shuttled back and forth from the hotel to the office everyday by Makbul’s car.

The “office” of Berger Engineers occupied two floors of a building on Jinnah Avenue (a street named after Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the “father” of Pakistan). Dan was given a large room on the lower floor and two peons to sharpen pencils, provide him cigarettes and serve tea. Although he had no design team or draftsmen, and no equipment, Dan was handed his first assignments – the master plan of Rajshahi University and the total redesign of numerous buildings at Rajshahi University, Mymensingh Agricultural College and Barisal Medical College. All of these projects were already under way at Berger under government contracts. However, they needed urgent redesign without extending the original deadlines. Hence, Dan was faced with a Herculean task – to complete a group of projects that normally might take years with a team of trained designers – in less than a couple of months with no support staff or supplies and very little knowledge of the local construction systems and habits. Needless to say, during our first few weeks, Dan’s time was consumed by his office work, leaving him little time to acquaint himself with Dacca.



“At our first meeting with Mr. Rahman (head of Berger Co., Dacca) and “Sheck”, his right hand man, we got the news that Doxiades was expected in town to try for a contract for housing. It still remains that Dan is the only degreed architect in residence, so there should be an open field for him once the firm gets started building. He says they seem too ambitious right now, wanting to build a college, Chittagong, a town hall, etc.

Dan’s first assignment was to design himself a drafting desk. They soon got him to work, however on the design they had made themselves for a college. It looked pretty primitive to Dan and he has suggested changes cautiously so not to hurt them, but they seem very pleased and ready to have him take over.

“... To compensate for the expense of this hotel, we are getting all the fabled services of the tropics. The company has a car and chauffeur, which fetches and brings Dan home and takes him in town wherever he must go and whenever he wants. He also has two office boys who strike him more as slaves, as they will not allow him to sharpen his own pencils, fetch him coffee, get him cigarettes and execute his slightest wish, sometimes a little too soon before he knows it clearly himself.”

[MFD letter to CGR 11/13/1960]

Dan’s map for ‘Living in Dacca’

**NEW CITY**

**Areas :**

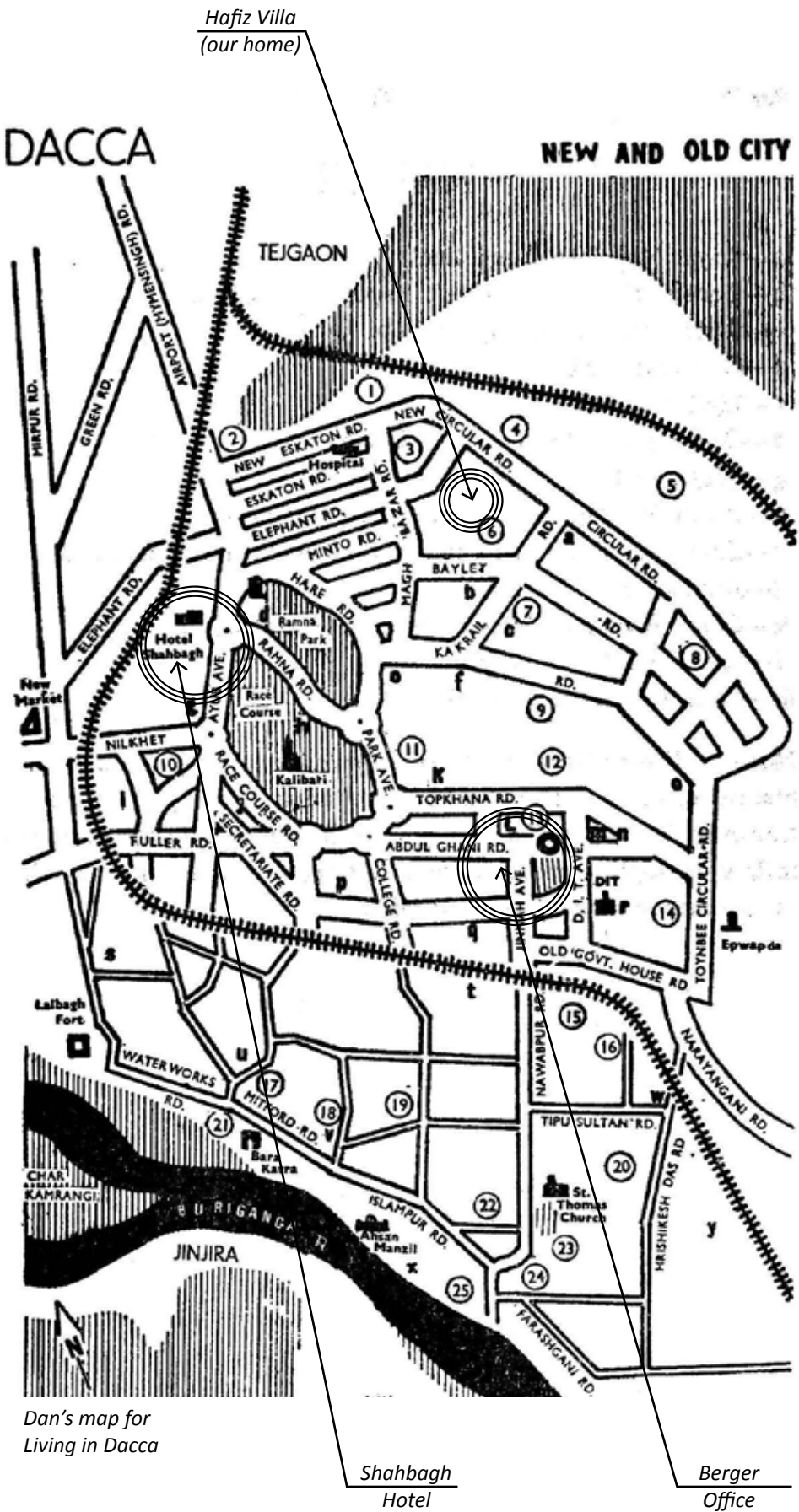
- 1—Mogh Bazar
- 2—New Eskaton
- 3—Ispahani Colony
- 4—Mali Bagh
- 5—Rajar Bagh
- 6—Siddeswari
- 7—Shantinagar
- 8—Motijeel Colony
- 9—Naya Paltan
- 10—Nilkhet
- 11—Segun Bagicha
- 12—Purana Paltan
- 13—Baitul Mukarram
- 14—Motijeel Commercial Area

**OLD CITY**

- 15—Thatari Bazar (Captain's)
- 16—Wari
- 17—Chawk Bazar
- 18—Armanitola
- 19—Naya Bazar
- 20—Narinda
- 21—Babu Bazar
- 22—Sakhari Bazar
- 23—Bahadur Shah Park (Victoria Park)
- 24—Bangla Bazar
- 25—Sadar Ghat

**Buildings :**

- a—Foreign Police Registration
- b—French Consulate
- c—Japanese Consulate
- d—Dacca Club
- e—Catholic Cathedral
- f—Indian High Commission
- g—Dacca Public Library
- University Library
- h—Institute of Engineers
- i—British Council
- j—Bengali Academy and Atomic Research Center
- k—USIS
- l—General Post Office
- m—American Consulate (Adamjee Bldg.), U.N. Office
- n—German Cultural Center
- o—Notre Dame College
- p—Dacca Museum
- q—Telegraph Office
- r—British High Commission
- s—Dakheswari Temples
- t—Railway Station
- u—Central Jail
- v—Armenian Church
- w—Baldha Gardens
- x—Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts
- y—St. Joseph's Technical School



Dan’s map for Living in Dacca

MY FIRST DAYS ASSIMILATING

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE

While Dan spent long days at the office, I started learning a little Bengali from our hotel room bearer. I learned to say “*Thik ache* !” (well done) and “*Bhalo na!*” (not so good). But I wanted to learn more. Since a childhood in France, I have always loved learning languages and was eager to add Bengali, the local language (not Urdu, the government imposed language), to my collection. Having specialized in and taught ancient Greek and Latin, I felt a special affinity for Bengali because of similarities in its vocabulary and grammar. Dan jokingly praised my efforts when he learned that under colonial times, British government officers received a pay raise if their wives learned the local language.

FINDING A TEACHER

Since I didn’t know anyone to teach me Bengali formally, I decided to seek out a university that might have an English, or even Bengali, Department where I might find a student who could help me. The most likely option was Dacca University. The campus of Dacca University was beautiful to me with buildings placed among groves of large shade trees: banyan, coconut and eucalyptus. The buildings were constructed of red stone, about four to five stories high, with generous verandas along their south facades providing shade and ventilation.

“All newcomers to the civil and military services were required to sit down and learn the local language...”

[Charles Allen, *Scrapbook of British India*, p.79]

*My acquaintances and efforts to find a job during our first months in Dacca:*

"As usual, I am friends with the workers, and today (a day since I began this letter) I went to our boy’s home, a compound of bamboo-matting cottages with mud floors set in a space amongst modern apartment buildings for government employees, filled with dirty and adorable children and young wives, and our boy’s family consisting of a young expectant wife, a middle-aged mother and a three year old daughter who was put into two dresses for my benefit, one on top of the other. The people seem secretive or very friendly, and I am eager to learn one of the two languages, Bengali or Urdu, as soon as possible."

While we were living at the hotel I had time to explore job opportunities and finding they were limitless in the teaching line I decided there was no hurry. I took Bengali quite intensively from a University professor so that by Christmas I could read second grade books with a dictionary. I enjoyed learning very much and hope to go on soon with ambitions of reading Tagore in the end. Although there are over forty letters in the alphabet the grammar seems quite regular, compared to Greek especially. Bengali has been made the national language of E. Pakistan over Urdu, but of course English still remains the business and educational medium. Indian English is a language of its own as you have probably hear, quaint and often ungrammatical. There are many students, business men, housewives eager to improve their English so I may end up opening a little school at home. A surprising number are interested in learning French but none of course in learning the Classics. An averager teacher's salsy in secondary school is \$20 a month so I don't mean to say the opportunities are limitless from the point of view of making any money.

[MFD letter to Brealey friend 01/1961]

LEARNING BENGALI

LESSONS WITH PROFESSOR SHARIF

I asked students randomly where I might find a Bengali department. They all spoke English and I was directed to an office where I met Professor Ahmed Sharif, an eminent scholar who was pleased to have the opportunity to tutor me in Bengali. When Professor Sharif first came to our hotel room to help me get started, I was happy that he did not pontificate in the least. He quickly grasped that I needed more help with pronunciation than with vocabulary and grammar. Best of all he brought Bengali prose and poetry texts that he liked himself. Together we studied the description of a Swiss holiday by a Bengali writer and a poem by Tagore whose rhythmic first line I still remember:

“Ontoro momo bikoshito koro ...”

অন্তর মমর্শবিকশিত করো .  
অন্তরতর. হে।  
নির্মল করো, উজ্জ্বল করো,  
সুন্দর করো হে।  
জাগ্রত করো, উদ্যত করো,  
নির্ভয় করো হে।  
মঙ্গল করো, নিরলস নিঃসংশয় করো হে।  
অন্তর মম বিকশিত করো,  
অন্তরতর হে।

[Tagore: *Gitanjali*, p.19]

During those first weeks that Dan and I lived at the Shahbagh Hotel, Professor Sharif came over almost every day in the late afternoons to give me my lesson while we had tea. I enjoyed these sessions and even though they only lasted for a couple of weeks, Professor Sharif and I remained good friends.



This book called “Tender Tales” is one of the local children’s books I used to learn Benglai.

TEACHING MYSELF

For the most part, I was teaching myself the alphabet and basic grammar of Bengali on my own time. I appreciated the logical construction of the Bengali alphabet based on a system, which organizes the letters according to where their sounds are made in the upper body from the deep throat up to mouth. I practiced deciphering shop signboards, often to find out they were merely transliterations of English words.

ফার্মেসী      প্রিন্টিং শপ  
"FAR-MEH-SEE"      "PRI-NTING SOP"  
(Pharmacy).      (Printing Shop)

I used Bengali illustrated primers for children to help increase my Bengali vocabulary. I practiced my pronunciation with hotel clerks, rickshaw wallahs and shop keepers. The Bengali grammar is largely based on Sanskrit which is one of the Indo-European languages, so my background in Greek and Latin helped me.





DCD sketch , ‘Living in Dacca’

DACCA TRAFFIC

Most transportation in Dacca in the 1960s was on foot, yet there were almost no sidewalks. Pedestrians walked along side of the wheeled traffic, consisting mostly of bicycle rickshaws, “baby-taxis” and bicycles. Cars were a luxury and there were relatively few on the streets. When there was a car accident, it was proudly featured in the news as evidence of the country’s development. Within two or three years after our arrival, traffic began to increase rapidly and soon seemed to double if not triple. Today it provides some of the worst traffic jams in the world.

“Bicycle Mensah’b



“There are many motor driven vehicles but the roads and driving is so bad that they are rattling and threaten to fall apart. A taxi ride, even if you can afford it, is terrifying adventure. Dan is supposed to be driven to and from the office by a driver but he can never be counted on so he frequently has to take a bicycle driven rickshaw. I depend on no one and bought a bicycle...”

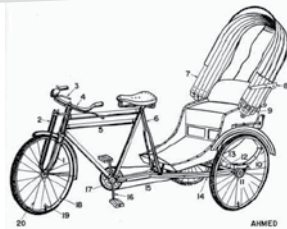
[MFD letter to Elizabeth 4/18/1961]

BOB MAYERS’ WRITING ABOUT TRAFFIC  
[Bob Mayers’ Memoirs]

“... The streets were jammed with bicycle rickshaws, wooden ox-carts and noisy, smoky old trucks with loud constantly blaring horns. Those horns became a real icon of our days in Dacca, they were the old type that honked when the driver squeezed a large black rubber ball, and they never stopped squeezing these balls. There were also “baby taxis” made by wrapping a metal shell around a grinding wheezy motor scooter. Two people could squeeze onto a small bench covered in red plastic behind the driver. The innumerable bicycle rickshaws were powered by the thinnest men we’d ever seen; their shiny black legs strained and glistened in the heavy monsoon rains as we sat in the open behind them trying to cover ourselves with large torn pieces of plastic wrapping material. There were no sidewalks; the muddy street ran right up to the face of the buildings.”

RICKSHAWS

Starting with my first bicycle rickshaw ride to Dacca University I chose rickshaws as my preferred form of transport until I could find a lady’s bicycle. Although the negotiation with the rickshaw-wallas over the price could be awkward until I learned the normal fares, in time this became easier.



THE FOREIGN COMMUNITY

“English men and women in India are, as it were, members of one great family, aliens under one sky.”

[Quote from Maud Diver, The Englishwoman in India 1909. Allen, Plain Tales from the Raj, p.54.]

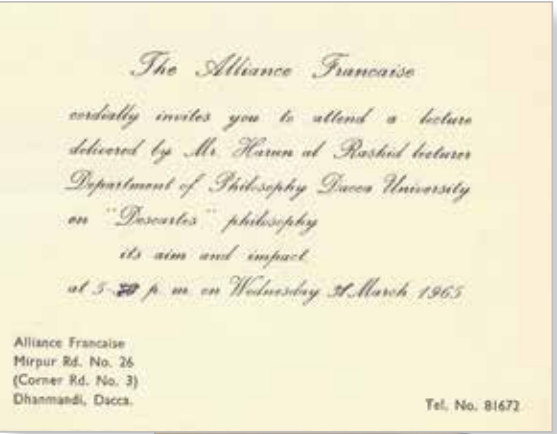
WERE WE FITTING IN ... ?

Foreigners in Dacca of the 1960s were not so much “of one family,” but, in fact, represented a mixture of nations. The majority (more than 1,000), however, were Americans with no more than a hundred or two at the most from other countries (including Britain, Germany, France, Greece and Sweden). Most of the foreigners lived in Dhanmandi, the only location their employers would consider. They were generally attached to government employment whether on the consular staffs or with missions - an “alphabet soup” of organizations commonly known by their respective initials: USAID, USIS, UNDP, UNICEF, SEATO, CARE, WHO, etc. Other NGOs included: Ford Foundation, Save the Children, Catholic Relief Services, World Church Services, etc. Then there were the few private engineering consultants, such as Berger Engineers and Ralph Hill’s company, Leeds, Hill, DeLeuw. Unlike the situation for most foreigners, Dan and I were always grateful that the Berger office allowed us a freedom of choice in where to live.

My description of the foreign community in Dacca  
[MFD letter to CGR 11/30/1960]



DCD sketch , ‘Living in Dacca’



“The invaders here beside ourselves are WAPDA with its foreign consultants, CIA, FAO, and I suppose other initialed concerns I know not, all doing super projects under super contracts. Our Mr. Burningham (consulting engineer Berger Associates, Inc., of Salt Lake City, Utah, working on a dam project) briefed us well at our early dinner acquaintance here. He can make it all sound very dramatic by his inside information about where companies seem to be overlapping and who will be competing for what contract. I think he must spend as much time figuring out where his field of operation is as he does in hydrology.”



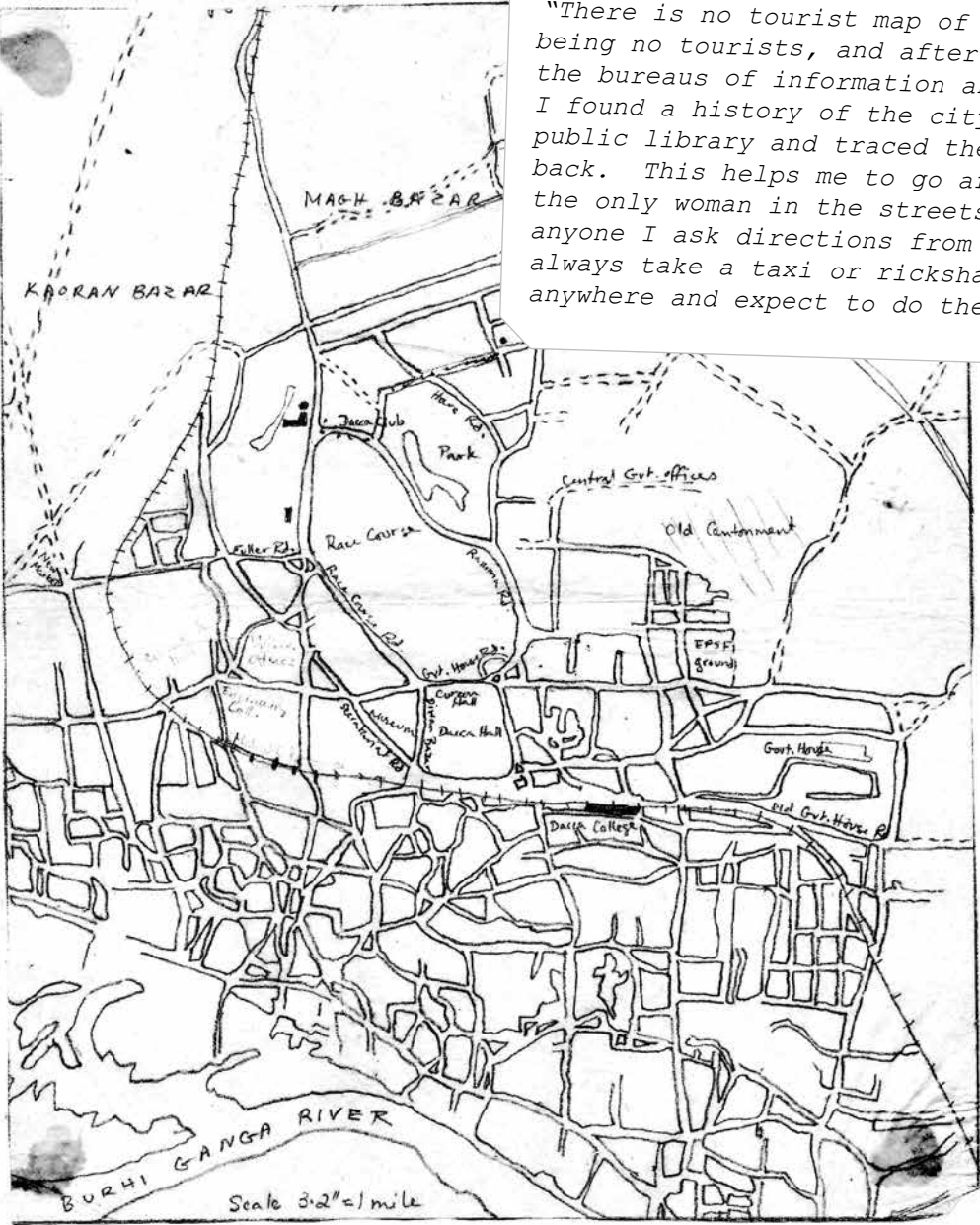
My first impressions of Dacca after living there 6 months  
[MFD letter to Brealey friend 01/1961]

Dear Brealey friends, although I have ceased to keep track of time, I realize that if I don't write something to you now you will have dispersed to your various summer lives. I hope those who wrote to me will forgive a general letter for the moment, but I want you to know your letters and good bits of news were much appreciated. My imagination is beginning to falter when I try to picture what you are doing in that tall steel and brick building, where so much productive activity is going on, where there is so much skilled and literate activity, where you can eat those beautiful lunches in that clean cafeteria, where you produce plays, exhibits, concerts, field days, meetings, where I hear you have suffered from blizzards and the cold, where nevertheless everybody wears nothing below their (her) knees. (I haven't been wearing a sari but have been tempted) Right now I am thinking it is exam time and the end of the year and you are tired and eager for vacation. Here most buildings are bamboo huts, it has been summer all the time (except a short cold spell in Feb.), there is 95% illiteracy, no cultural activities, meager diet, and everybody (except the 5% literates) wears skirts or saris down to their ankles. Like your lives ours is full of variety and excitement, no two days alike, but unlike yours nothing gets accomplished. I don't know what to tell you about this country because I can't assume you know as little as I did before coming here and I suppose all underdeveloped countries are much the same, but I am sure that unless one of you has been here there are sights peculiar to Bengal which never get into the tourist books because they can't exist or into geography books because it is such an unimportant and forgotten corner of the world. My more sophisticated friends, including my husband, say jute is the big thing here and beyond that there is nothing but vacuums. I have no basis of comparison but this place is certainly the most fascinating I have ever lived in. If I indulge in a few complaints I want you to know life is really very pleasant and I am not sure we will be ready to go home at this time next year. Of course we have the monsoons yet to experience which seem to be bad enough to color every one else's opinion of the rest of the year.

The facts on E. Pak; c. 1,000 sq.miles, c. 52,000,000 people, mostly farmers but not very good ones, temperatures from 40-110 degrees, six months of no rain, six months of showers including two of monsoon. People eat rice, a little chicken and mutton or goat, chilies, curry, very few vegetables, mostly bananas except there are delicious lichees, mangoes, and pineapple just now. The country depends on exporting jute. The tiny upper class makes a lot of money, otherwise white collar workers and office boys make about 3-5 rupees (1\$) a day. The country people live off the land. A laborer in town must be eating on 21¢ a day which we want to try for a week some time. 1 dozen eggs costs 25¢, 2lbs. beef 40¢, bread 10¢, milk not potable, vegetables and fruits in season, rice 12¢ per lb. Anything else, tools, materials, cloth or paper, metals, wood, exorbitantly expensive. En somme a vastly overpopulated underfed unskilled and helpless country. Almost 100% Mohamedans.

The way we are living, being in Dacca, we don't really see how the rest of the country lives although we can get some idea from the remnants of village life that have remained while the modern city grew around them. But it is hard to believe the above conditions as we sit in our seven room "pukha" house, or in our front and back gardens, with a vacant lot where cattle and goats feed to the west, large parks and mansions with gardens beyond, more vacant lots and empty meadows, cattle grazing happily everywhere. The old city where I seem to be the only white person shopping is indeed crowded with its quota of beggars, cripples, unfortunates of every sort, but not any more unusual than the Moroccan medinas we saw. The Bengal we haven't yet seen, but hope to, is really a vast plain of paddy fields, jute, sugar cane, with wide rivers crossing everywhere and dotted by tiny villages of six to eight single room bamboo houses around a courtyard. We don't know where there are places for tigers, leopards, and cobras but we hear of people going off for a hunting week-end to one jungle or another. It's nice to know there is still room for a little wilderness somewhere, and a few Bengal tigers.

We are in a somewhat unique position. We are part of the new style of Western colonialism (business concerns and technical advisors) but we are the only private American firm (unconnected with the US Government in anyway) and until recently Dan was one of three qualified architects for the whole of Bengal. Since we are not government supported we feel no social obligations with the rest of the American colony who live in a suburbia on the other side of town, a treeless, gardenless, and I beg to say ugly district. However, setting up an office and remodeling a house has been too time and energy consuming by relying on Pakistani materials, tools, and labor. Our boss (US) feels we live close enough to the "people" to be members of the Peace Corps, and I really think we do when I compare the gravity of our complaints to what we hear from the government employees and their wives. This place is almost a paradise for an architect and a teacher but we wonder if the Peace Corps will find improving the land any less frustrating than we have.



"There is no tourist map of Dacca, there being no tourists, and after asking at all the bureaus of information and libraries, I found a history of the city in the Dacca public library and traced the map from the back. This helps me to go around on foot, the only woman in the streets, but confuses anyone I ask directions from because they always take a taxi or rickshaw to get anywhere and expect to do the same."

[MFD letter to CGR  
11/13/1960]

Since there were no tourist maps of Dacca in the 1960's, I had to draw my own.

## MAKING A HOME

বাড়ি ঠিক করা\*  
(BARI THIK KORA)

“In the land of the Bungalow  
Away from the ice and snow  
Away from the cold  
To the Land of Gold  
Away where the poppies grow.”

[Song lyrics from  
King: *The Bungalow*, p.268]



\* This Bengali wording is from our personal family patois



FINDING A HOME

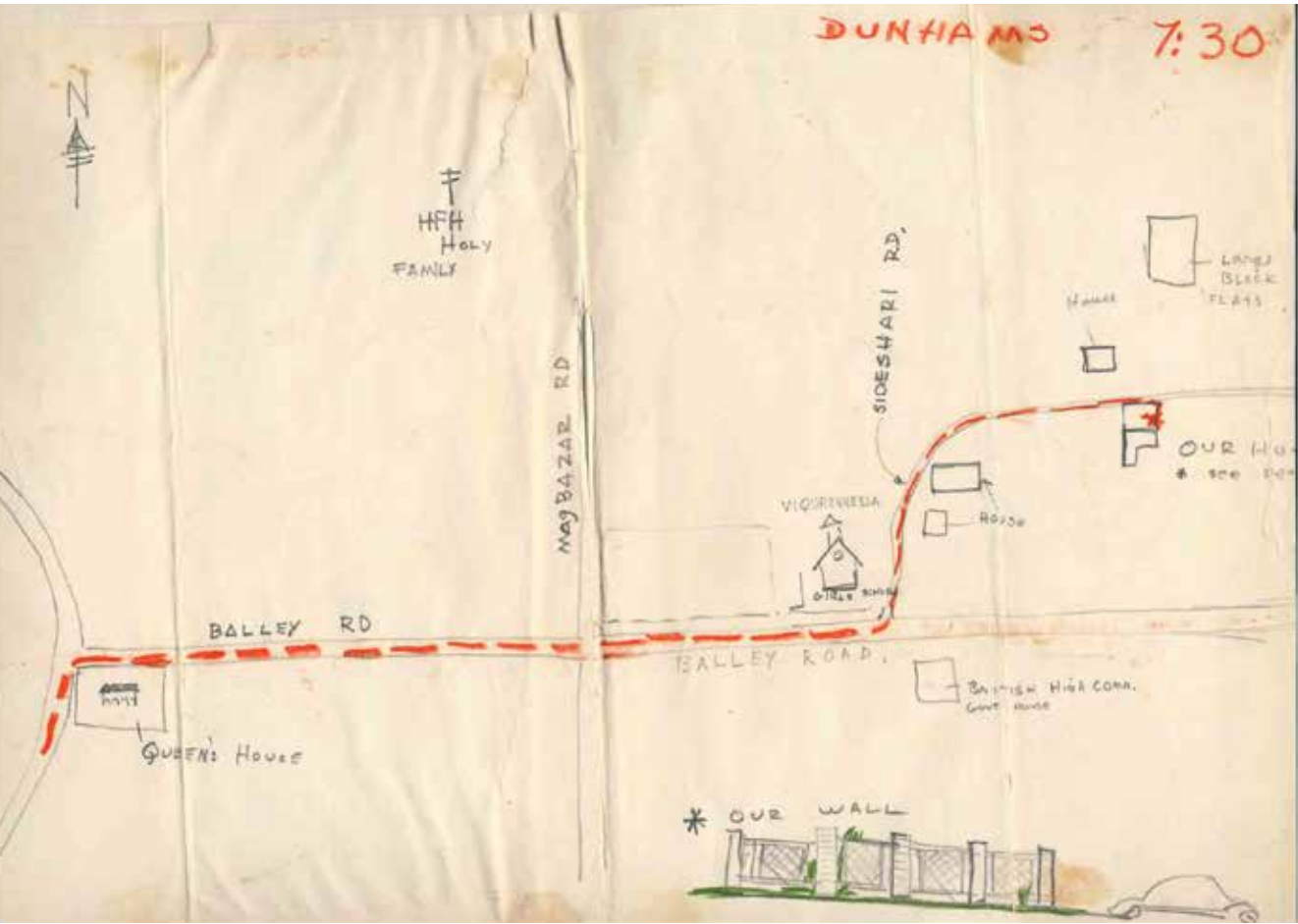


Front entrance of Hafiz Villa

HAFIZ VILLA

By chance on one of our Ramna explorations, we came upon Siddheswari Road (pronounced Shideshwari), a dirt road leading off Bailey Road. A little way along this road, beyond the prestigious Viqarunnissa Girl's School, we saw a quaint house with a garden space in front. It seemed unoccupied. "Hafiz Villa" was inscribed above the front portico. Curious, we entered the little lane along the side of this "Villa" to see if we could find someone who knew about the possibility of renting the house. On finding the owner, living in a house nearby, we asked him if he might consider renting to us. For me, this was a chance to try my Bengali, but the owner replied in King's English that defied my efforts. He seemed happy at the idea of renting to us, but needed time to get the consent from all his family members first before making an official agreement. By the next day, Dan was signing a lease. When Makbul learned of our choice of abode, he laughed saying that if we wished "to go native," it was fine with him. This was to be our happy home for the next seven years.

Dan and I liked the grandiose name that came with our humble abode, "Hafiz Villa," and its location close to sites with romantic references. Our address street, "Siddheswari" was named for the Hindu goddess, Kali, who was an avatar of Krishna created to protect his beloved Radha. Ten minutes walk to the north was the intersection, Mogh Bazar, the legendary outpost of the notorious Moghs, pirates, of Bengal's early history. Crossing Mogh Bazar was, Elephant Road named for the lake where Dacca nawabs used to bathe their elephants. To the east of us, was an area called Shantinagar, meaning "town of peace."



Dan's map for how to find Hafiz Villa.

PAT HILL'S DESCRIPTION OF HAFIZ VILLA  
[P. Hill, Moon Bazar, p.140]

"They had no school-age children, and hence no compelling reason to live in Dhanmondi, which they looked upon as a hopeless Suburbia. Resisting all pressure, they stayed on at Hafiz Villa, wedged among a kaccha tea shop and a vacant lot, and their landlord's house, an untidy ruin swarming with women, babies, and tattered animals."

Renovations at Hafiz Villa:  
[MFD letter to Hugh Jones, 1961]

I was eager to teach in a Pakistani school and could have done so in a private girl's school very near our house this term, but I soon realized that until we got settled that the house would be full time and I could never schedule hours to leave it. After two months of house hunting Dan found a ten year old house, old by Pakistani standards because they become so quickly run-down, badly run-down, but of rational design, offering an enclosed courtyard in the back like a Greek patio, and a lawn and trees in the front. Several rose bushes were in full bloom and the trees were tall and promised shade. There is a vacant lot on one side where cows and dogs play and the neighborhood is full of lovely trees, gardens, and other run-down homes. We can ask for no sympathy for the time, energy, and frustrations, we have had to suffer to get into living condition (and now surrounded with cemented and water



MOVING IN

OUR “WALK-IN” BED

Before we could move into our house we needed a bed. Speaking his rudimentary Bengali, Dan found a *khat mistri* (wood master) at a local market and ordered an extra wide version of the most commonly found local bed design (a platform of wooden planks on short legs). This seemed simple enough. However, when the bed was finally built and delivered, we realized that the dimensions had been “exaggerated” and what was our bedroom became a “walk-in bed,” as Dan called it. Our “wall-to-wall” bed fit so closely against the four walls of the room that we had to climb over each other to move from one side of the room to the other.

To go with the bed, Dan had also ordered a local style of mattress about three inches thick, stuffed with coconut fibers. The mattress was heavy and so firm that Dan used to boast that he could bounce on the bed with a cup of coffee and a record playing on the mattress next to him without causing either one of them to jiggle.



Local tradition of making mattress and quilts to order from coconut fiber and capok. [Welch, p.165]



Our first bedroom before it became the storeroom

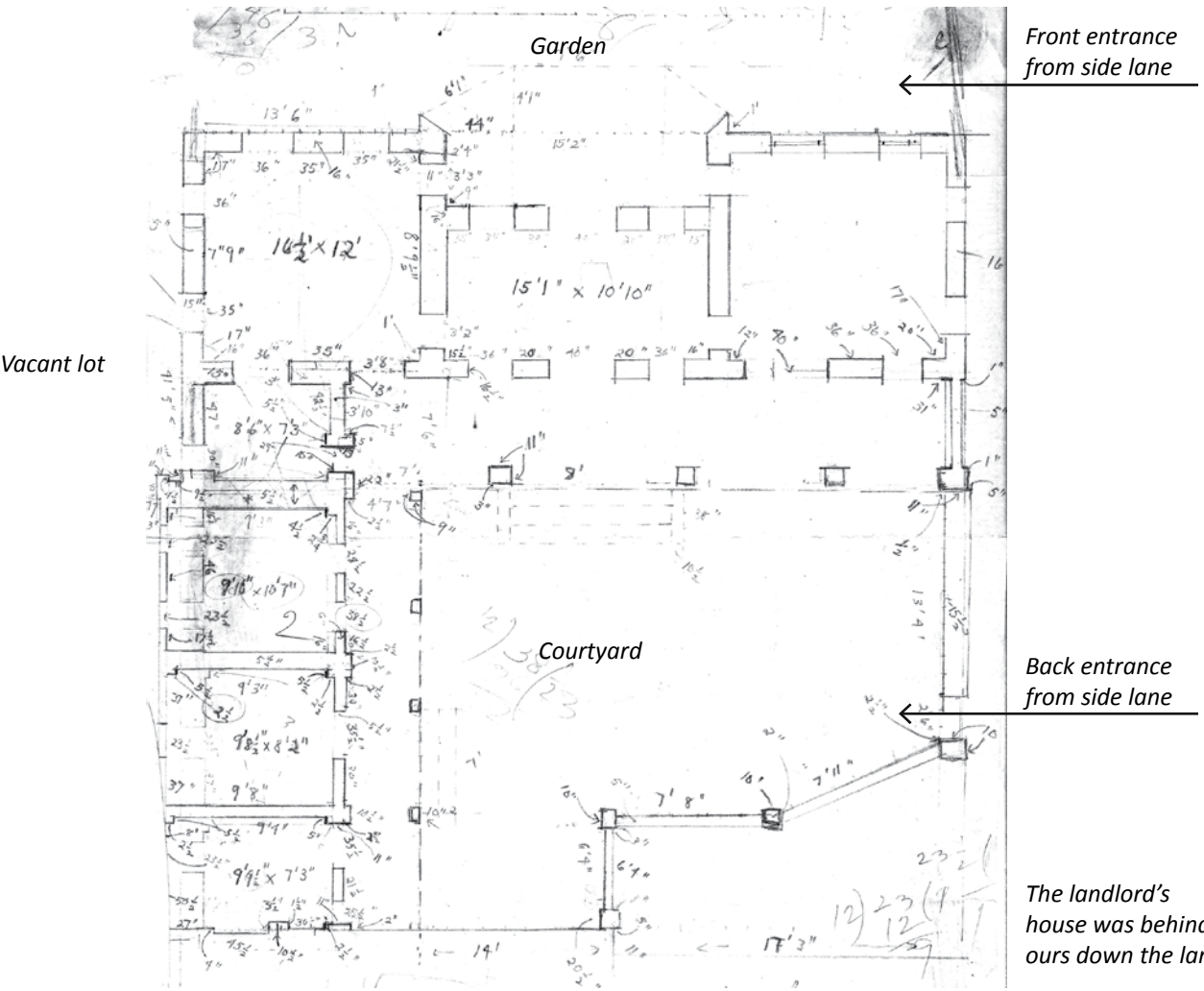
OUR FIRST NIGHT

Dan usually slept on the side of the bed near the door, which meant I had to climb over him to get to my side. When I lay down, my head was on a level with the little window that faced out onto the vacant lot next door. As we drifted off to sleep on our first night, we could hear the sharp barking of jackals in the distance. But that did not scare us half as much as the sight that greeted me the following morning. Upon opening my eyes I saw the haggard face of an old woman staring at me through the bars of the window. Her face was only a couple of inches from mine. Startled and embarrassed, I forgot all my Bengali. She stubbornly continued her staring while Dan urged her to retreat so that he could close the shutters.

THE HOUSE DESIGN

As we became familiar with our “villa,” it seemed to blossom with possibilities and advantages. Its L-shaped layout of rooms, allowed for excellent light and ventilation to every room. The solid, thick construction of its old walls provided insulation, keeping the house cool in summer and warm in winter. We loved the humble polished cement floors – a peaceful change from the multi-colored terrazzo floors of Dhanmandi houses.

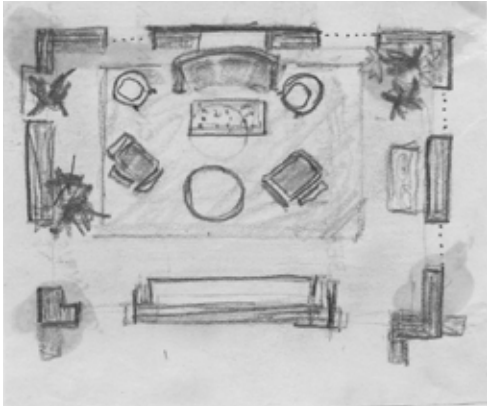
The outside spaces of the garden, back courtyard and verandas allowed us to live an indoor-outdoor lifestyle we enjoyed. All the interiors were unfinished shells with no closets or cabinetry. Hence we were free to assign whatever uses we liked to each room. Over time this flexibility would allow us to have multiple uses for the different rooms; a store room could become a guest room, a living room could work as a bedroom, a veranda could serve as sleeping quarters for servants, the front porch could be a stage for theatrical parties. The house seemed perfect to us.



The floor plan of Hafiz Villa  
Our house was accessed from a small lane that ran along the east side of our property. A gate lead into our front garden and we had a back door to our courtyard in back. At the end of the lane, past our house, lived our landlord with his family. The property to the west of our house was a vacant lot. The house had seven rooms forming an L-shaped layout; three large rooms ran east-westward along the front garden while four smaller ones ran north-south framing a back courtyard. The house itself was raised on a plinth, about five steps off the ground, with verandahs connecting all the rooms.



THE HOUSE DESIGN  
cont.



The Living Room



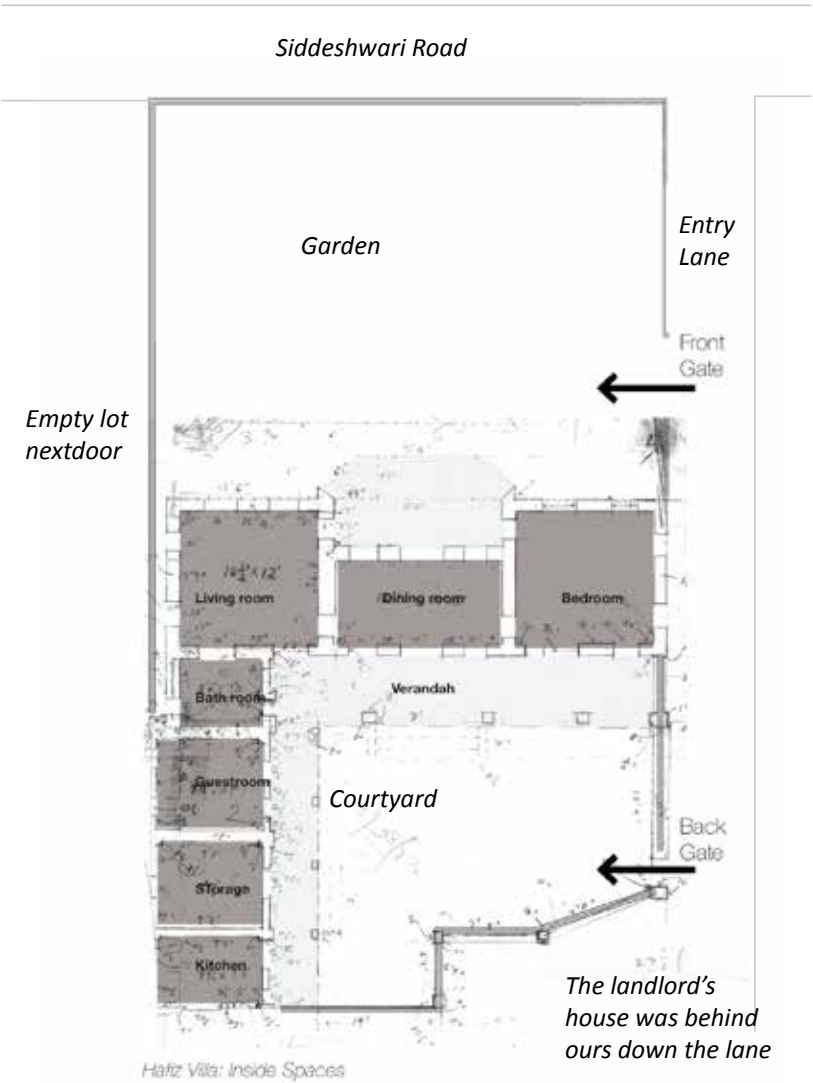
The Entry Lane  
We entered our house from a small lane leading off of Siddeshwari Road. The lane ran past our house to the landlord's house behind us.

**The Bathroom**  
Our first renovation task was to convert the existing bathroom into a western style facility. We added a shower, renovated the chain operated toilet, and turned a niche for Hindu figurines into a toothbrush shelf. We kept the existing small sink where I remember hearing a strange scratching sound in the drainage pipe, which turned out to be one of the largest black beetles that I had ever seen. It must have looked like one of the “miniature monsters” that Joseph Conrad describes in “Lord Jim”. Id mistris (brick and cement workers) rebuilt the bathroom floor so that it would drain water from the sink and shower to the outside. There was a wood door that led to the outside vacant lot from the bathroom.

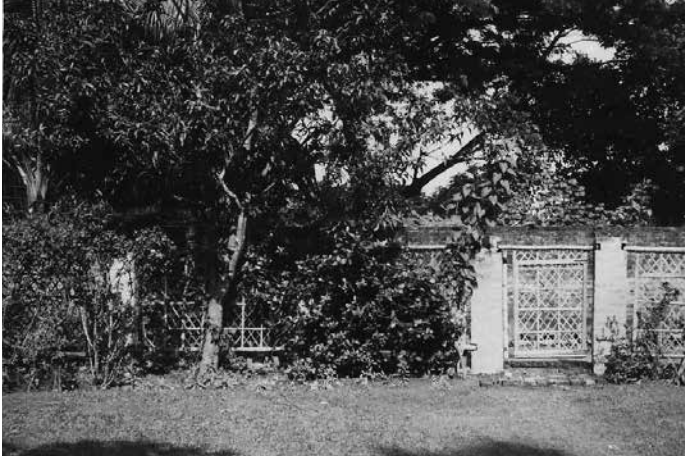
**The Spare Room**  
Dan and I initially intended to sleep in the small room next to the bathroom. However, since our bed turned out to be much bigger than planned, we soon realized we had to move it to one of the larger rooms in front. This allowed us to use the small room for guests and eventually it became our daughter's bedroom

**The Godown**  
Dan designed one of the smaller rooms next to the kitchen to be a storage room-cum-clothing closet. This room was the only room in the house to have a padlock on the door, which we locked at night. This room also was the only space where the servants could store their few belongings..

**The Kitchen**  
We refurbished the kitchen with a local kerosene two-burner stove and a box-like contraption, which worked as an oven when placed on the stovetop burners. Other than that, we left the kitchen as it was. Outside next to the kitchen back door we had a water tap for washing dishes and clothes. The staff also used this outdoor waterspout for bathing.



The landlord's house was behind ours down the lane



The Garden  
The front garden was square shaped containing a spacious grass lawn. However, it was quite bare with only a clump of trees including a papaya and banana tree, and a large elephant ear plant.



The Verandahs  
The house was blessed with verandahs, which not only gave access and shade to all the rooms, but also served as living and work spaces for our family and staff. In addition to providing a pleasant place to eat and relax, the verandahs were actively used by our staff for cooking, laundry, and sleeping at night.



The Courtyard  
The little courtyard at the back framed on two sides by verandas was one of the most charming features of our house. This courtyard was private and served as an outdoor living space. It had a guava tree, a Frangipani tree and a flowering Jasmin bush.



The Dutch Doors  
The final touch to the bathroom was the conversion of its exterior door leading to the vacant lot into a “Dutch door”. By cutting the door in half horizontally we could keep the top half open like a window to give light and air and yet maintain some privacy. This proved to be so pleasant that Dan saw to cutting the back door of the kitchen in the same way. A shower-head was installed on the exterior wall of the kitchen.



RENOVATING THE HOUSE

We arrived in Dacca with only two suitcases between us, so the move into our house was quite easy. Furnishing the house was also relatively easy since we only wanted essential items such as a bed and a stove. However, painting the walls and remodeling the bathroom and kitchen spaces required a lot of help from outside day-labor and *mistris* (craftsmen).

THE MYSTERIOUS WORK OF THE *MISTRIS*\*

We hired *mistris* (masters) to handle all the work that needed particular skill and expertise, such as a *khat mistri* (wood master) to do carpentry, an *id mistri* (brick master) to build brick walls, and an electric *mistri* to wire the house. Foreigners used to joke about the “mysterious” work of *mistris* who did what they did without any effort to understand the purpose of the task, often misunderstanding instructions, but politely carrying on their work in spite of obvious mistakes.



Cement mistri



Dan’s skteches of bamboo mistris at work building the garden wall

The labor and lye poisoning story  
[MFD diary entry, fall 1961]

While I am reminiscing about the painting period, I would like to mention one of the early tragedies. We wanted all the wood work to be perfectly clean before the painting was begun and we started requiring the old paint to be removed with lye, something rarely done, but the paint contractor seemed to understand and provided the lye which we put into a clay pot such as we use for flowers. The contractor had cleaned with sandpaper and painted one window to our satisfaction, and now he was to do all the others likewise. The first worker was young but had dead eye and the other very watery. Somehow I found a small rag for him with which to apply the lye or wipe off the excess since he did have a fiber brush with him to apply it. Toward the end of the morning, he came to me to show me his fingers which had begun to have little cuts in them. I made him stop his work, went to the landlord’s for disinfectant which didn’t have, and sent the worker home, neither of us knowing that he had been using lye. When Dan got home and I told him about the worker’s hands, he was very worried and as soon as the contractor arrived in the afternoon we told him the worker was to go to the doctor’s and certainly not come back with his hands being possibly eaten away forever. The contractor admitted this man did not know what he was working with. After that we began to take off less and less paint. The painters wouldn’t scrape or sandpaper, at least not properly, so after over a week we let the whole cleaning campaign go and had the house painted over rough and smooth, which ever.

Renovations  
[MFD diary entry, fall 1961]

“... When there is a change to be done, the laborers all seem to be shouting at each other all at once. It has taken two complete months to remodel the kitchen and bathroom and to get all the doors and windows painted. Dan has decided that the fastest way to get anything done is to let the workers work in a rough fashion, then have them undo whatever has to be undone in order to get in the details, such as drains, straight lines or painted borders, clean cement surfaces with no paint drips or overlapping cement.”

“Pakistani labor is proverbially slow but the frustrations of unskilled labor and no proper tools or materials available can shake the strongest patience...”

“Painters and masons are like five year old children and unless supervised every minute they make more mess than the work they do...”

“Laborers were hard to get during the preparations for the Queen’s visit when a mansion was built in 3 months, two highways, and elaborate decorations for the city.”

Beautiful parts of Dacca which were worth exploring first. We are just beginning to be able to have friends visit and there is much to do yet. Pakistani labor is proverbially slow but the frustrations of unskilled labor and no proper tools or materials available can shake the strongest patience. At the time we took the house, Dacca was being transformed for the Queen’s visit and we witnessed her house, near by, going up in no time with as much as it took to build the pyramids working night and day. We hoped that after her visit we could find better laborers for our house. The Ramadan fast followed closely on her departure and you couldn’t depend on anyone showing up and there was the expected reduction in energy. I must say, some of our workers kept going in spite of the rigorous fast. Now the warm weather has begun Painters and masons are like five year old children and unless supervised every minute they make more mess than the work they do. We hired a supervisor finally and things seemed to be going better when he tried to fix our kerosene run refrigerator, catching his shirt on fire, and becoming so badly burned that after three weeks in the hospital he still has a month of recuperating to go. As a result, we are still living in the four tiny back rooms with three front rooms still to be painted and furnished. We hope to finish a front wall this week which was begun a month ago.

Hafiz Villa renovations  
[MFD letter to Hugh Jones, 1961]

\* This Bengali wording is from our personal family patois



RENOVATING THE HOUSE cont.



Photo by Anwar Hossein

“LABOR”

A day-laborer could be chosen from a pool of men who gathered every day at locations along roadways where potential employers would pass. These men could be counted on to do hard manual labor such as carrying materials, breaking bricks, white washing and other such tasks. Dan and I adapted the local tradition of calling these transient day-workers “labor.” So, if Dan or I needed an extra hand with any house related work, we would send someone to fetch a “labor”.

“laborers, generally eager to please, unskilled in whatever they had been hired for and adept at causing disasters the moment they are unsupervised.”

“... When there is a change to be done, the laborers all seem to be shouting at each other all at once. It has taken two complete months to remodel the kitchen and bathroom and to get all the doors and windows painted. Dan has decided that the fastest way to get anything done is to let the workers work in a rough fashion, then have them undo whatever has to be undone in order to get in the details, such as drains, straight lines or painted borders, clean cement surfaces with no paint drips or overlapping cement.”

[MFD diary entry, fall 1961]



MFD sketch of a day labor breaking bricks for construction



“Sometimes, ... we were glad when our workers didn’t turn up and we could have a peaceful day.”

“To a Westerner it is this unpredictable labor which perhaps is the hardest hardship and people have been known to go insane or leave the country in spite of anything to keep them here.”

Dan not only had to design and supervising/ the construction of his office furnishings but he did some remodelling on the house we rented which in America would have taken a week to put into shape. We are still working on it four months later and have been in very close contact with the Bengali laborers, generally eager to please, unskilled in whatever they had been hired for, and adept at causing disasters the moment they are not supervised. Our first experiences with painters showed that no one knew what a straight line was and included one painter nearly burning his fingers off in lye which we didn't know he had never used before. Dan thought he would use the talents of one laborer who seemed to enjoy digging holes in unwanted places to dig a garbage hole in the neighboring field. Dan demonstrated to him what this hole would be for by showing him a banana peel and where it would go. The man dug a hole chest deep, buried the peel, then filled the hole up again. We have spent many hours scraping off unwanted paint, cement, and we have had to lament the loss of precious limbs hacked from trees, mistakes made in the construction of walls. When we finally hired a supervisor who would translate our wishes and watch all the time he managed to burn himself seriously trying to repair our kerosene refrigerator and has been unable to work since. Laborers were hard to get during the preparations for the Queen's visit when a mansion was built in three months, two high ways, and elaborate decorations for this city. Then it was Ramazan, 30 days of fasting, no food or drink between sunrise and sunset, not encouraging for work. Then the hotter weather came and soon it will be the monsoon. Sometimes, however, we were glad when our workers for some reason didn't turn up and we could have a peaceful day. To a Westerner it is this unpredictable labor which perhaps is the hardest hardship and people have been known to go insane or leave the country in spite of anything to keep them here. It has been a good experience for me as I have learned many practical things such as white-washing techniques, brick laying, carpentry, terrazo laying, and how to show anger and exasperation. We also think that we will have a pleasant house before it is time to leave.

[MFD letter to Brearley friends 01/1961]





RENOVATING THE HOUSE cont.

WHITE WASHING WALLS

We had all the rooms whitewashed according to local practice. Dan and I loved whitewash for it's ultra whiteness when first applied and we strove to preserve its fresh Mediterranean island look in our house. However, this was difficult to do in a culture that was accustomed to walls stained with *pan* juice and mildew. We were also sticklers for how the whitewash was applied. The painters never understood our passion to have clear straight edges where the white wall met the cement of the floors. Instead they happily let the paint drip as it may and made no attempt to keep their lines straight. As a result, I spent much of my time following after the painters with stiff brushes and rags to clean up their work as best I could.



*"... Pakistani labor is proverbially slow but the frustrations of unskilled labor and no proper tools or materials available can shake the strongest patience."*

My description of the painting work  
[MFD diary entry, fall 1961]

We have spent many hours sandpapering, washing, fretting over the cement floor and wall bases because white-wash was allowed to run over and drip on them, making the place, our eyes, look derelict. This paint situation is true most everywhere and, although our painters were all that could be got while everyone was working on the Queen's house, still we doubt that there are any skilled painters, certainly not trained, in this part of the country. Usually they are farmers who have come to the town for a job, are hired cheaply by a contractor, and are called painters for the time they have a paint brush in their hands.

Besides the lack of training, there are no proper tools and it is difficult to demand a straight line from a "painter" who not only does not know how to hold a brush, but whose brush is so poorly made it can't make a straight line anyway unless he goes very slowly. ...

There is a scarcity of rags to wipe off excess paint from floors, where paint pots have stood, brushes to be cleaned, and hands. The workers' clothes are in rags, and to buy cloth to tear up is not only expensive but seems irrational given it would be better to give the workers the new cloth and take the T-shirts, riddle with holes, off their backs. As the painting and masonry work progresses, it gets to be a vicious circle of surfaces being tidied up while the next ones are messed up.

AN ASIDE ABOUT THE ROOF LABOR SONG

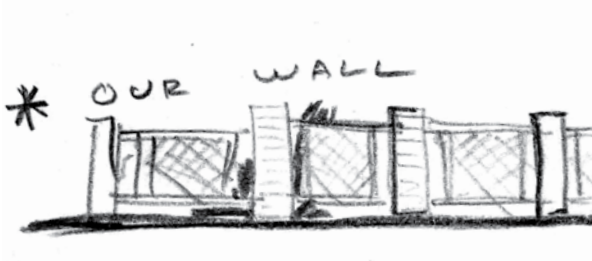


PAT HILL'S DESCRIPTION OF THE THE ROOF LABORERS' CHOIR  
[P. Hill, Moon Bazar, p.14]

Outside our gate, for many days, a laborer squatted, shirtless, upon a pile of brick. The umbrella which sheltered him from the sun had faded from black to mushroom gray. From daybreak to nightfall he pounded, breaking bricks into small dull red bits. Later these would be used to seal the roof of a new house. One day the tenants might be astonished to find a troop of small boys, maybe six or seven years old, squatting on the roof. A fiddler stood among them, playing a tune to which the children alternately sang a line in high young voices, and beat a line rhythmically, pounding ground brick into the tar for insulation. An older resident told me that the songs are usually obscene. A few larger boys, perhaps ten or eleven years old, acted as overseers, cuffing the little workers who got out of line or rhythm. It was an extraordinary sight, at the same time gay and appalling.



RENOVATING THE HOUSE cont.



BUILDING THE GARDEN WALL

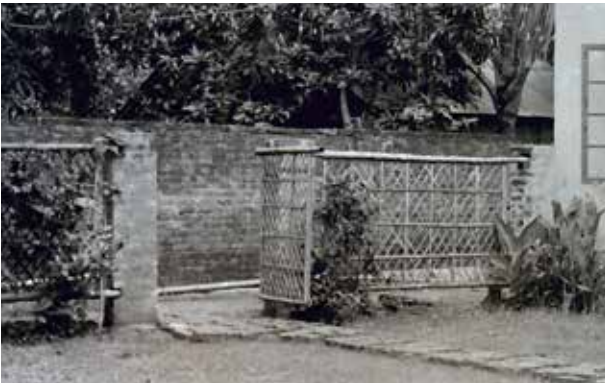
Soon after we moved into our house, Dan designed a brick and bamboo wall around our front garden that was unusually open by Dacca tastes. Our servants were much perturbed by this ‘openness’ of his design. They were accustomed to the high and solid walls of all the other houses in our neighborhood and worried that we would not have enough privacy. Mali was especially perturbed by the humble, *kacha* style of Dan’s design with its exposed bricks and woven bamboo panels.

The construction of the wall became a neighborhood attraction in itself. People on their way home from work, some in formal office attire, would pause to watch as a *sah’b* and his *mali* applied cement to bricks or cut the bamboo for the woven panels.

Sadly, when the wall was finally finished, it was immediately broken down. A driver had carelessly backed his car into our new wall when he was chauffeuring American Embassy ladies home to their flats in the compound across from us. Perhaps he didn’t like our wall either, but Dan and I did, and we rebuilt it immediately.

Building the garden wall  
[MFD diary entry, fall 1961]

“The last interruption lasted a day, and it is now Monday morning. Almost all the holes have been dug for the pillars in front and two trial pillars have been completed. Yesterday we had the same battalion out front as well as many on-lookers. One of the two masons, young with a trim little beard, seems to understand quite well what Dan is doing and has shown more exactness in his work than most have had.”



Desicription of Dan’s design for the garden wall  
[MFD letter to CGR, 09/01/1960]

... he seems to have cut down on the Pakistani visitors since Dan designed and built his front fence-wall with gate. They used to come at all hours of the day, unannounced, and stay for ever until it got quite a strain. My vocabulary is still too small for conversation with any interest and our guests are no help. We prefer the uneducated Pakistanis to the educated ones, nevertheless, as the educated ones are real snobs generally and not interesting. There are good exceptions, of course.

DIGGING THE GARBAGE HOLE

Dan had an idea to use the vacant lot next on our west side to dig a deep hole for the initial household garbage until we found a better disposal system.



Shopula and a friend

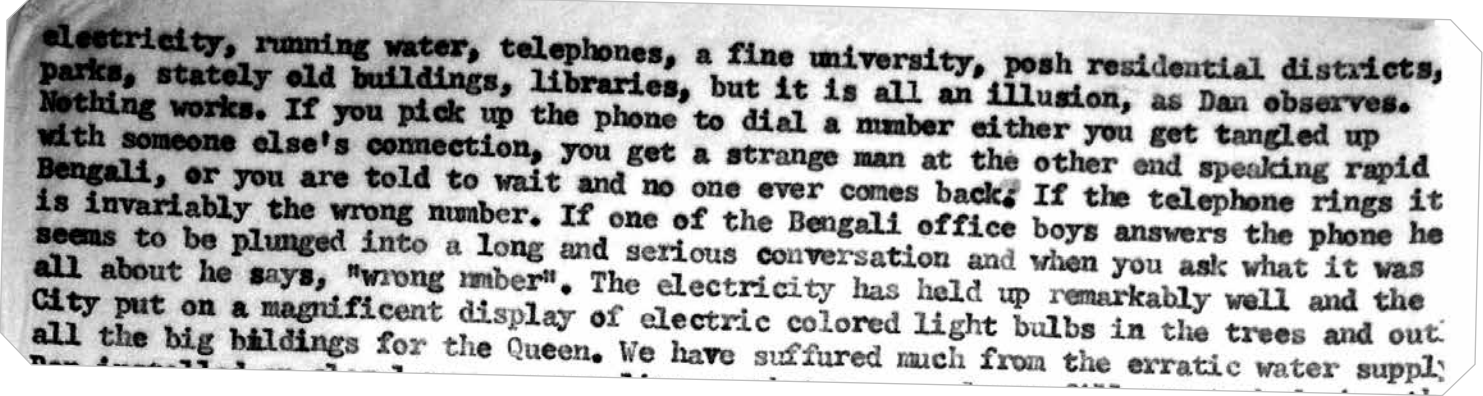
“Our household staff now consists of our cook and his teenage son. He has four other children. The son is replacing Shopula, the worker the landlord gave to us in the beginning to help out. He was no help at all, in fact did a lot of damage, but was a cheerful person around the house, always singing, always making comic mistakes, always willing and eager to do everything even although he lacked any skill or sense.

Dan to make use of his love for digging holes in the garden even where they were not wanted, told him to dig a hole in the neighboring field for the garbage. During the morning I went out form time to time to see how he was progressing. He dug a hole chest deep and four by four, a much bigger hole than I thought necessary, but he assured me the sahib had directed him to do so. I told him I really thought he had worked very had and done enough and went away. After a while, wondering why I didn’t see him busy somewhere else, I went out again and to my horror found him cheerfully putting all the dirt back into the hole, practically filling it in. At least no damage had been done. It wasn’t like the disastrous pruning job he did on the precious bushes in the courtyard during his early days.”

[MFD diary entry, fall 1961]

OUR ILLUSORY UTILITIES

The challenges of using the telephone  
[MFD letter to Elizabeth, 08/18/1961]



“... but tis all an illusion, as Dan observes.  
Nothing works....”

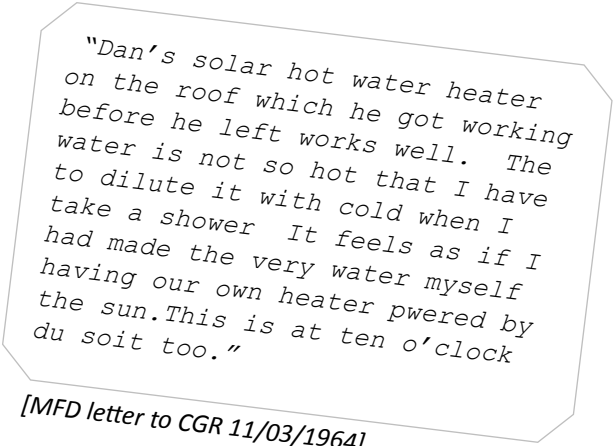
“...If the telephone rings it’s invariably the  
wrong number”

THE ELECTRICAL WORK

Before white washing the walls, Dan installed electric outlets in chosen locales for operating the ceiling fans in the three front rooms and for electric lighting in all the rooms. He opted for leaving wiring exposed rather than hidden inside the walls where it was hard to reach for repairs. Dan drew clear chalk lines on the walls where he wanted the wires to be placed. The electric mistri, following the local practice for installing wiring, carved trenches for the wires to be embedded in spite of Dan’s orders. Dan had to make him redo the work so that wiring stayed exposed, as he wanted. Our cook was delighted with the electric outlet in the kitchen, which meant he could use the little electric mixer that we had brought with us from New York.

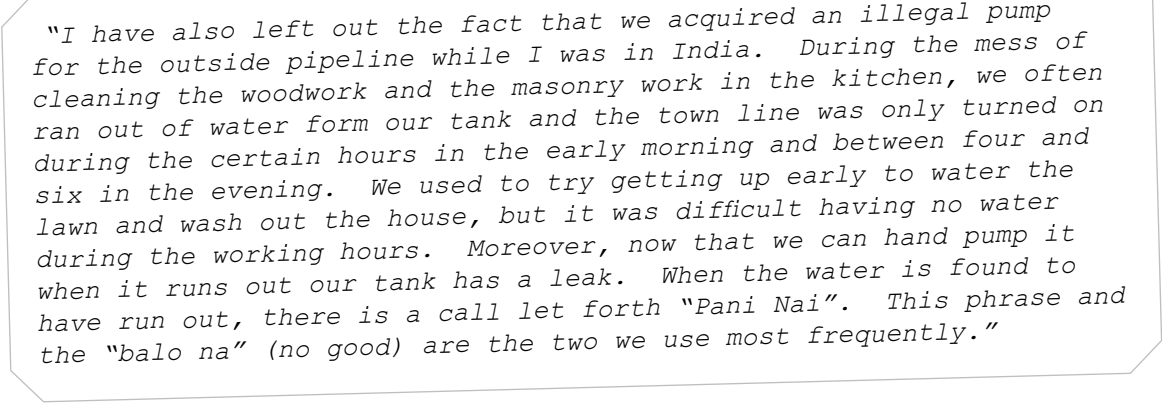
HEATING OUR WATER WITH THE SUN

The water from our rooftop tank was cold, especially in winter. Dan decided to use the sun to heat it up. He designed and supervised the installation of a solar water heater made from local materials. Whenever I took a shower, I imagined the warm water was carrying vitamins from the sun directly to me.



[MFD letter to CGR 11/03/1964]

“Pani nai ” - and the story of our illegal pump  
[MFD diary entry, fall 1961]



GETTING OUR WATER

Our household water supply came from a tank on the roof that was filled in the late afternoons by the municipal water system. Although the tank seemed large enough, it persistently ran out too quickly each day during our first weeks. To keep it filled we resorted to pumping water up to it ourselves with the hand pump that we found attached at the foot of the house wall. This was hard work for which we took turns with our staff to do every evening. One day, Dan discovered a pipe leading out of our tank to the landlord’s house. Realizing that our landlord’s large family was “sharing” our water supply unbeknownst to us, I had the courage to release my temper on our landlord and his family. In my anger I shouted at the landlord’s wife in my best Bengali that it was not right for us to be spending so much time and energy pumping water for ourselves if they were freely siphoning it away to their own tank.



The water pump in front of the house.



OUR ILLUSORY UTILITIES cont.

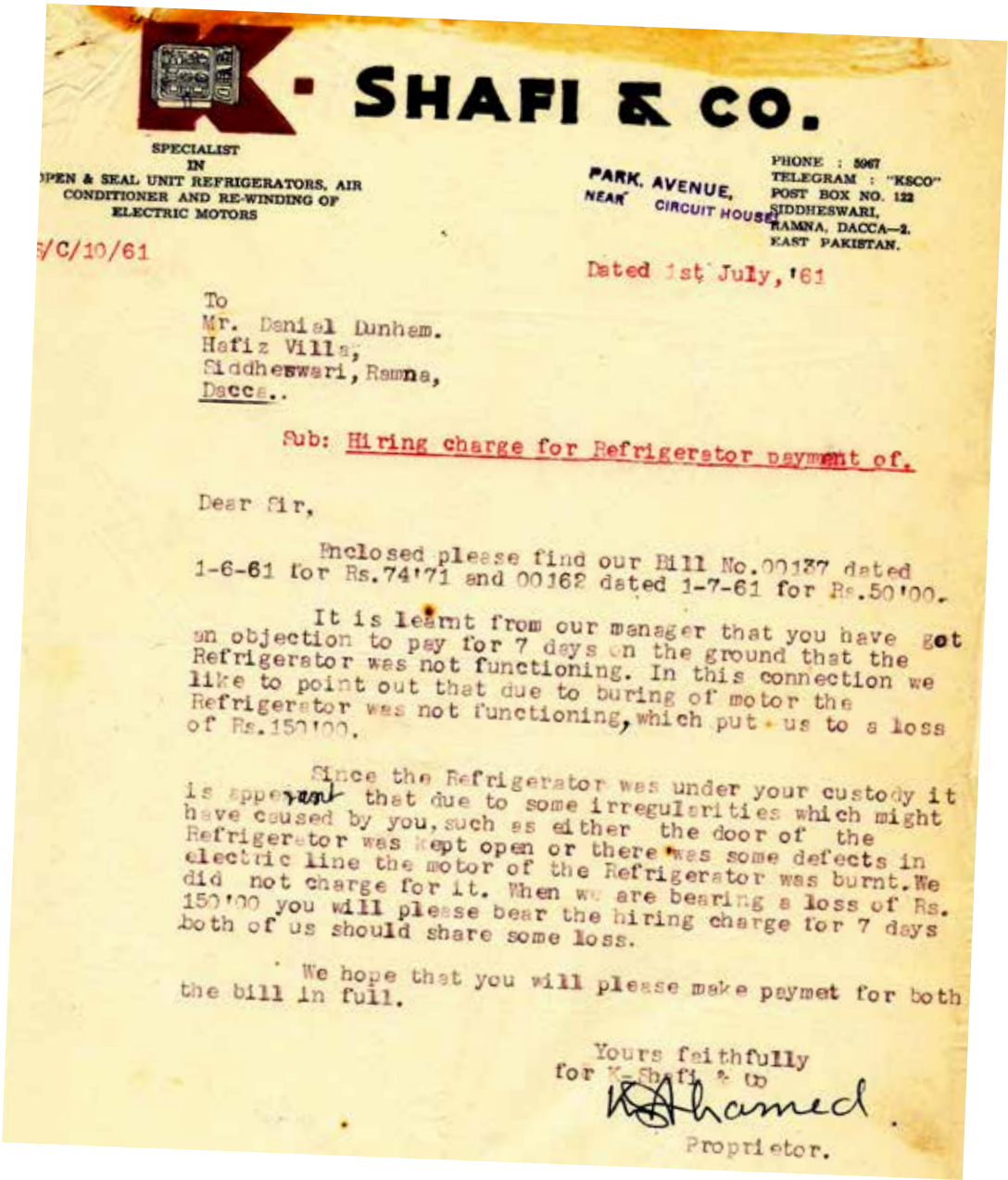
THE REFRIGERATOR FIASCO

One of our most unfortunate household adventures occurred early on when we rented a refrigerator. During our first months at Hafiz Villa the weather was hot and humid. Ceiling fans helped cool the large rooms, but Dan craved ice for drinks. Dan enjoyed the ice cubes that Mrs. Matzakis used to bring him in a large thermos at the end of a workday, so that he could relax with a cool drink. When the Matzakis left, he decided we would need a refrigerator.

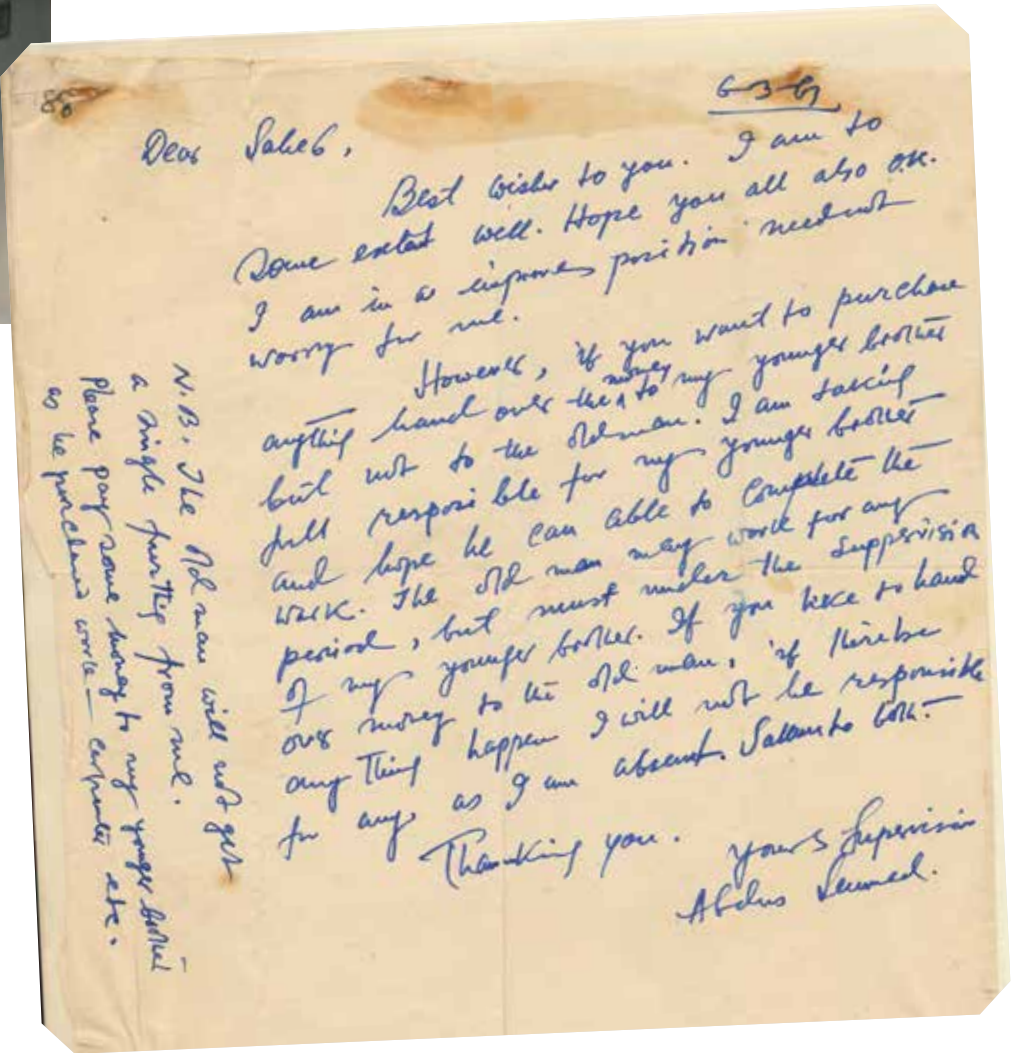
We rented one from a refrigerator company near us. The refrigerator operated by a burner below the bottom of it, where it had to be re-lit periodically to keep it running. One day, when an electrician *mistri* working at our house tried to relight the refrigerator motor, because it had gone out, his *lungi* caught on fire. We got him to the hospital where he recovered over three weeks.

The story of the refrigerator fire  
[MFD letter to ElizabethH, 04/18/1961]

And since I am on about equipment that doesn't exist here and our civilized life in London by contrast, let me tell you about our kerosene refrigerator. Dan bought it along with some other furniture which an American family moving out wished to sell, so it was cheaper than anything we could buy or rent and we thought we would save on electricity. We put it in the store room where we keep everything including our clothes which are hung from a bamboo pole stretching the length of the room. Dan polished and cleaned the refrigerator and got the little lamp to burn quite nobly and for a few days it was cold and made ice, to my amazement as I am not adept at making the connection between fire and ice. One day the cook noticed the flame was burning abnormally bright and we hauled it out and put it out. Dan got it going normally again. Then another day the man supervising the remodelling and works on the house also suspected something was wrong and in trying to bring the lamp out his shirt caught on fire and he rushed out to protect the clothes and consequently got badly burned. Fortunately we are only five minutes from a modern hospital where we kept him for three weeks. Now, if they would only deliver it, we are getting an electric refrigerator. Generally and superficially Dacca looks like an up and coming city, modern buildings



The worker's father wrote a formal letter of apology and suggested that he could work in his son's place to make up for his son's absence. In time, the electrician's burns healed well and he stayed in touch with us making occasional visits to our house from time to time.

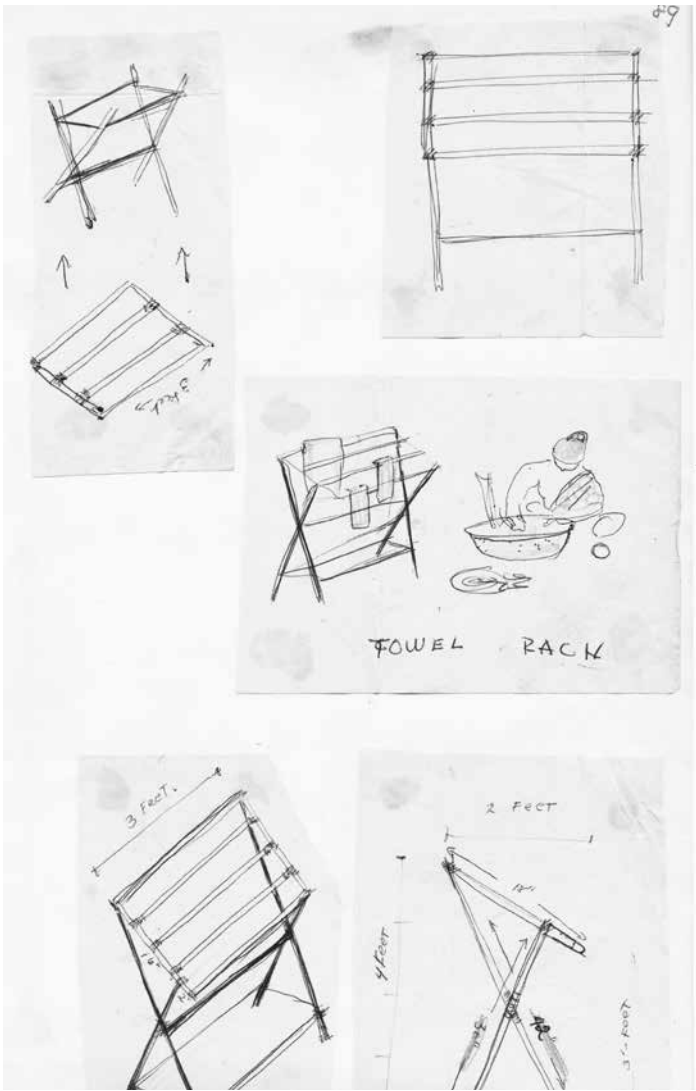




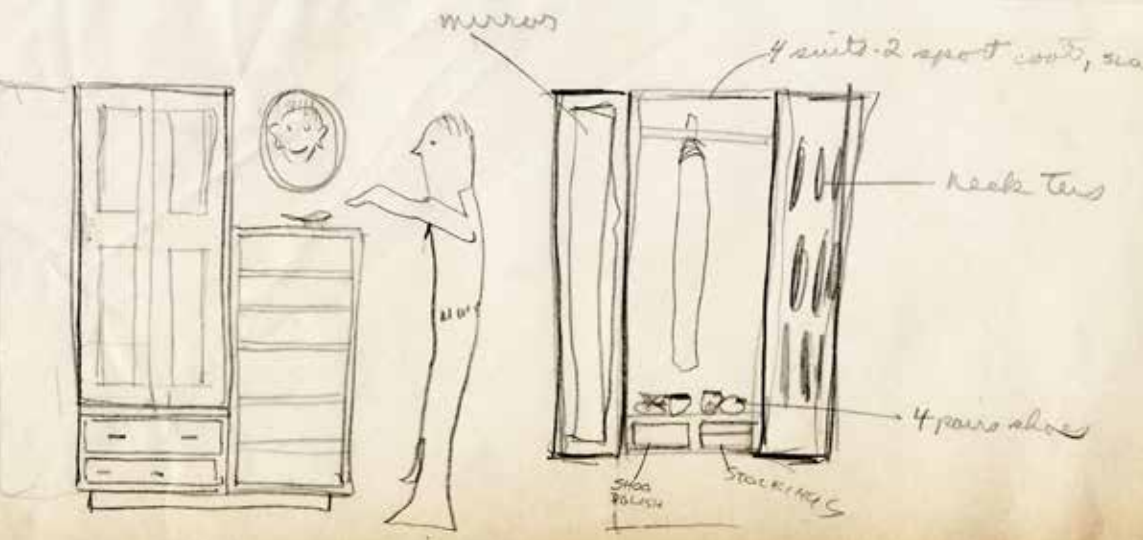
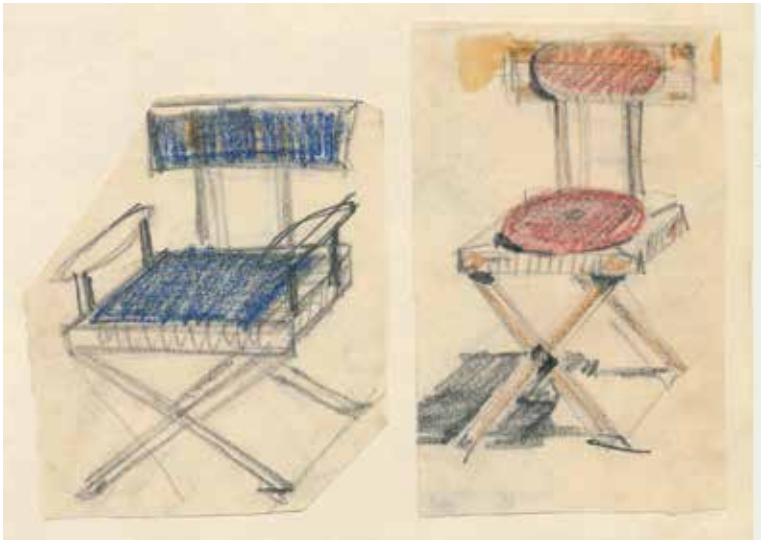
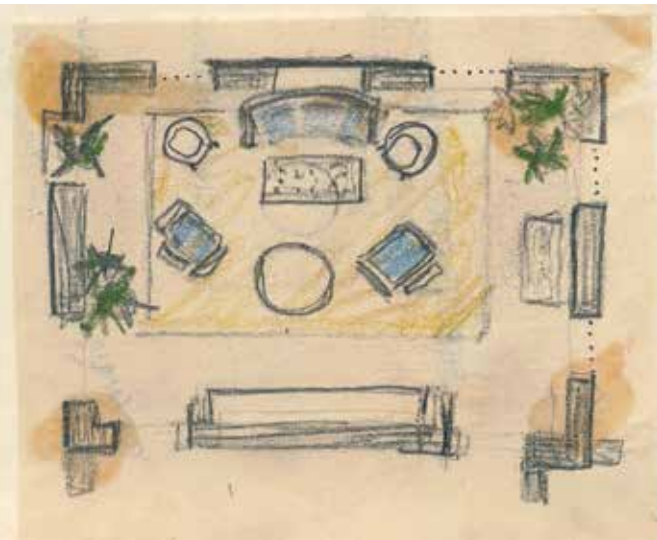
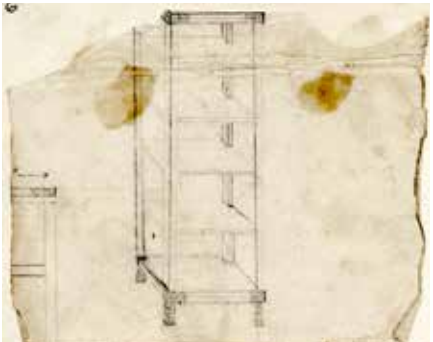
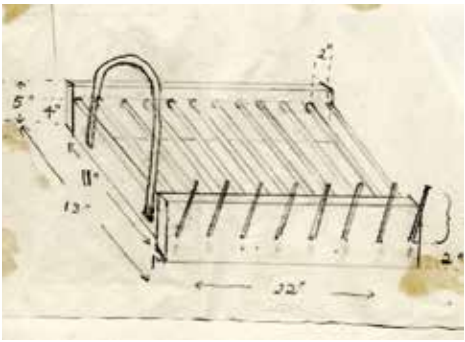
FURNISHING OUR HOUSE

We arrived in Dacca with only two small suitcases. The only other possessions we had from the US were sent to us in a barrel, which arrived after we moved into our house. It contained my books from New York and a substantial supply of toilet paper, a gift from the paper-goods company of my Uncle Phanos. At that time, we never would have imagined that seven years later we would have acquired enough belongings to fill two shipping crates, as we did when we moved back to New York.

When we were moving in, our Greek neighbors, the Matzakis, were due to leave. They gave us some of our best furniture: two comfortable folding arm chairs, a coffee table and bookshelf. Mrs. Matzakis gave the cook some kitchen equipment. Dan added to our furnishings a dining table and a drafting desk (both made from office drafting boards). Since we didn't have any closets we bought locally made clothing racks.



- 2 electric fans  
100 ft. hose  
1 ladder  
1 shovel  
1 bucket  
1 garbage bucket  
tools gardening  
hammer  
saw  
screw drivers
- one yellow casserole  
1 red oval " 46B  
1 " " dish  
1 green " "  
1 green pot + lid  
1 kettle  
saucepans  
bowls  
3 aluminum basins  
2 enamel basins  
1 large clay jars
- Kitchen  
kerosene stove  
low cabinet  
high cabinet  
oven
- Store room  
ice box  
plastic closet  
11 wooden cases  
1 bamboo shelves
- Bathroom  
towel wrack
- 3 large rooms  
carpet  
work table  
china cabinet  
bamboo table  
bamboo table + iron  
leg.  
bench  
2 bamboo stools  
work table  
2 folding chairs
- China + glassware  
soup plates  
large plates  
small "  
glasses  
fork  
knives  
spoons
- glasses  
platters  
Chinese bowls
- Bedroom  
bed  
mattress  
bench  
2 pillows





ACQUIRING *JINISHES*\*

Throughout our time living in Dacca, Dan I and I enjoyed collecting locally made artwork and household items. We called these things our jeeneeshes (things) and to this day we cherish and display them. Our collection includes things that range in value from common utilitarian things like clay pots and glassware, and creative works including folk art and pieces worthy of museums. During our first weeks in Hafiz Villa, Dan managed to spare time from his busy office schedule to explore the local household goods markets.



**CARPETS**  
*For our living room, Dan decided we should splurge on a large plush jute fibre carpet. The ready made carpets were in harsh colors, so he had a light beige rug made to order from a local jute factory.*

*We also bought a few small Persian rugs, which we didn't keep but gave to my father for his new house on Long Island. We bought the rugs from itinerant carpet wallahs who would come by from time to time, mostly targeting foreign households that could afford their prices. It could take several visits from the vendors before a final choice and price were reached; we almost always bought at least one or two rugs. Dan prided himself in learning how to judge the quality of the carpets and the ones he chose have lasted well to this day. (See Pat Hill's amusing description of a typical visit from a carpet wallah in Chapter 3).*



**GAMCHAS, LUNGIS & MUL MUL**  
*Dan and I loved the variety of patterns of locally woven cotton fabrics that we saw people wearing everyday around us – as their lungis, saris and headgear. We appreciated the fine quality of the Bengali muslin, called mul-mul (muslin), for which the country was famous and we enjoyed the brightly colored plaid patterns of the gamcha (a short length of cotton cloth used for various purposes). Our Bengali friends were amused to see us using a sari for a table cloth, chadors for curtains and gamchas made into napkins for formal table settings.*

We were fussy in our choice of tableware. We disliked the imported and highly decorated plates and bowls and searched in vain for dishes and bowls that were purely white, with no flowers or golden flourishes. We let our cook choose his kitchen equipment: a kerosene stove with two burners and a metal box with glass door that could be set on top of the stove to work as an oven. For curtains in our front rooms, we bought cream colored chaddors( (silky cotton shawls)



**CLAY POTS**  
*Dan and I both admired the kuccha, un-glazed pottery we saw in the local markets and bought a variety of sizes to serve as ashtrays, nut and fruit bowls. We liked to leave these items in their natural red clay color rather than painted as expected.*



**GLASSWARE**  
*Dan ordered hand-blown glasses of a variety of sizes from a local factory in the Old City. We loved the kuccha, rough hand-made quality of these glasses with their embedded bubbles and have saved them to this day. No two glasses were the same: each was of a different thickness, height and shade of green. Our Bengali staff never quite understood why we preferred these glasses to the more expensive, imported, crystal ware available in the markets.*



**BRASS WARE**  
*Dan collected brass ware including pitchers, bowls, and large Hindu talis (dinner plates) that when polished looked like they were made of gold. I enjoyed the elegance of our dinner table when we set our brass ware for dinner guests.*



**MORAS & STOOLS**  
*The best quality moras were made by the prisoners at Dacca Central Jail.*

\* This Bengali wording is from our personal family patois

ACQUIRING ‘PETS’

BIRALS \*

The only household ‘pets’ Bengali families seemed to like were caged birds (such as parrots and myna birds). We, however, started acquiring “pet” *birals*, (cats), starting with two kittens, who were born in our garden. Once we started putting food out for them, they stayed and from year to year we never knew how many *birals* we would have in our house.

I remember our mother cat mewling piteously while giving birth to her current batch of kittens during one of our evening dinner parties. A couple of our mature cats were adopted by friends.



MFD letter to CGR 09/01/1960

We acquired 2 tiny kittens about three months ago. Left on our doorstep. I have never had pets before and am surprised at the attention & lavish on these almost cats. We have toads and frogs in quantity who come out in the evenings, hopping around after insects in the garden, and the very small ones enjoy the living room. The cats pounce on the insects.

The kittens are eating meat, so I hope their days in our house are numbered. I have announced to the mali, that mali duties include finding homes for small kittens.

[DCD letter to MFD 09/20/1962]



“Mister Bhuto,” our pet goose



DUCKS

Our most remarkable “pets” were the ducks that Cook kept alive in our courtyard for an eventual meal. We found that these ducks made excellent watchdogs when they helped us catch a thief one night with their loud quacking. The only dogs we ever saw were “pie dogs,” stray dogs wandering the streets and we learned to stay clear of them because they commonly carried diseases like rabies.

TIK-TIKS\* & A BEJI

For wild life we had tik-tiks, the small, friendly little reptiles that wandered about high up on the walls, catching mosquitoes and emitting their soft “tik tik” call. One time we found a beji (mongoose) in our garden. We left bowls of milk for him and he hung around for a few days.

\* This Bengali wording is from our personal family patois

SETTLED IN AT HAFIZ VILLA AT LAST ...



We have a seven room L-shaped bungalow, white-washed inside and out, polished cement floors, thick walls, high ceilings, windows set low and barred like prison windows, ~~thick~~ deep verandas, and a garden in front and a patio in back. We have mango, guava, papaya, and coconut trees, lilac bushes, lovely rose bushes, and many potted plants, many of which we use to fill the bare spaces inside. Dan redesigned the black hole which was the kitchen changing the wood-burning clay structure into a terrazo lined platform for our kerosene stove and installing a terrazo counter and sink. I designed some cabinets that took over a week to build. Dan also remodelled the bathroom so that it could be entered from the veranda and generally accessible and so that it was more efficient inside. We store all our clothes and instruments as well as the ice-box in one store room and we sleep in another on a board bed. We had a parrot but he escaped. We wanted a goat and a mongoose but so far only have two kittens and two doves, both gifts, unwanted. We have frequent Pakistani visitors to such a degree that we have had to turn some away. We have a cook who is exceptionally skilled and resourceful, cooking on whatever floor space he could find during the remodelling days, using two pots and a knife and fork, and turning out full course meals. His son is supposed to keep the house clean and wait on table, but he is incompetent although he makes fine designs with colored pencils and has an engaging smile. When not too many things go wrong you can imagine life at home is quite pleasant.

[MFD letter to Brealey friend, 01/1961]



## MUSTERING 'OUR GANG'

বাড়ির লোক \*

(BARIR LOK)

3.1 HIRING STAFF

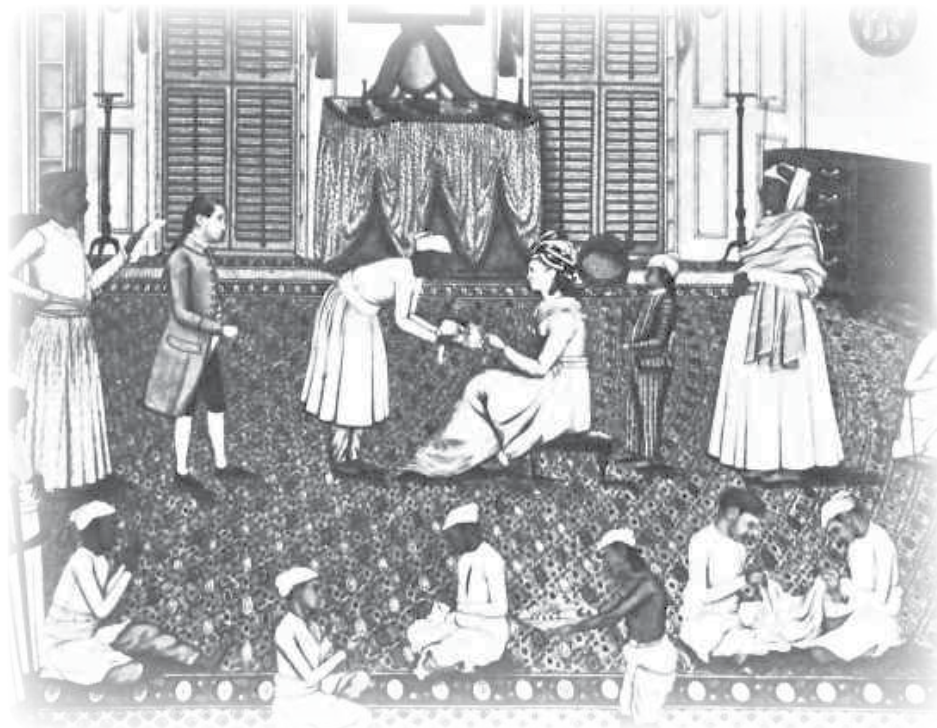
3.2 HOUSEHOLD ROUTINES

3.3 STAYING PUT AT HAFIZ VILLA

"I keep six honest serving men  
(They taught me all I knew):  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How, and Where, and Who.

.....I let them rest from nine to five,  
For I am busy then,  
As well as breakfast, lunch and tea,  
For they are hungry men.  
But different folk have different views.  
I know a person small –  
She keeps ten million serving men,  
Who get no rest at all..."

[Rudyard Kipling's *Verse*, p.607]



\* This Bengali wording is from our personal family patois

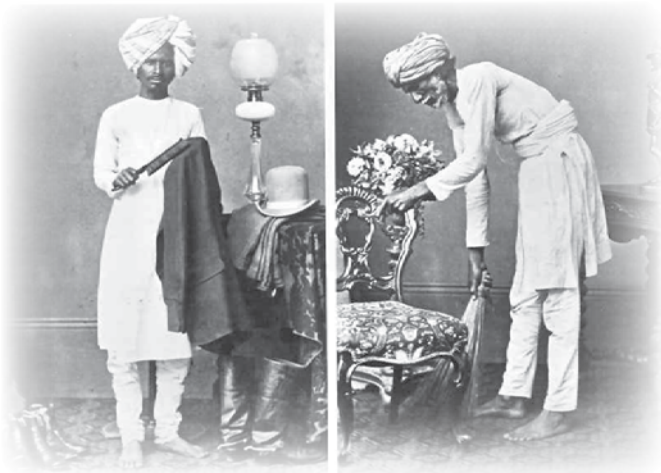




3.1 HIRING STAFF

HIRING HOUSEHOLD STAFF

Before we moved into our new home, we started hiring our household staff. When Louis Berger was courting Dan for the Dacca job, he bragged that we would have silk sheets and a house full of servants. We laughed at the vision of this, but in fact, he wasn’t far off. We started out with a core group of four, but by the time we left seven years later, we had six “honest serving men” (as Kipling might have said), and sometimes as many as a dozen, depending on the occasion. Like many other foreign families before us, including the Mughals and British colonials, we resigned ourselves to hiring and boarding a crew of domestic help, even though our house was relatively small and humble.



| Sep. 2  | Pay                   | Prev. Adv. | Adv.    | Bonus | Ached    |
|---------|-----------------------|------------|---------|-------|----------|
| Cook    | 160                   |            |         | 5     | ✓ 138.35 |
| Wahab   | 135                   |            |         | 5     | ✓ 115.57 |
| Mali    | 120                   | 50+10+90   |         |       | ✓ 130.00 |
| Theresa | 130                   |            |         |       |          |
| Milk    |                       |            | ✓ 34.50 |       | (P. 1)   |
| Newsp.  |                       |            | ✓ c. 10 |       |          |
| Sep. 7  |                       |            |         |       |          |
| Tailor  | 3 days                | Rs 30      | ✓       |       |          |
|         | 1 day                 | Rs 10      |         |       |          |
|         | More pay as stayed up |            |         |       |          |

My notes on staff salaries

Manpower rather than appliances  
[MFD letter to Stephen 05/25/1963]

a mali. The economic system being as it is, it is as cheap to have a servant as two maintain an air conditioner, and although we are entitled to two air conditioners we prefer to send our allowance on man power. We are thinking seriously of taking

PAT’S DESCRIPTION OF SERVANT HIERARCHIES & SALARIES  
[P. Hill, Moon Bazar, pp.50,61,62]

Everywhere in the world, foreign residents relieve their tensions by complaining about the local residents; and tensions were endemic in East Bengal. To a friend engaged in this popular exercise, Dan once said, "How can you? Look at Wahab—at Philip—how loveable--"

"But they're different," his friend said impatiently. "They're your servants."

"And that," Dan explained later, "is the difference in point of view. Most people think of Bengalis, and their own servants, as separate and different; whereas we project our feeling about our servants toward all Bengal."

Among the foreigners who were held by a persistent irrational affection for Bengal, the deepest attachments were often toward their domestic staffs. When I first arrived, Ralph told me of

"British time, they have chief cook, second cook, third cook, kitchen boy, like that. When chief cook retire, everybody move up one place and we bring another boy from village for kitchen boy. British time," he added pointedly, "if they have ten guests, then ten cook in kitchen too."

planning to do so. I read innumerable chits, those precious letters of reference which give the history of a man's working life; I learned to pronounce most of their names; I heard about their villages and their children. By the time I realized that I was a career agent, and they had decided to take the extra money after all, they had engaged my interest irrevocably.

“While a senior servant such as the head bearer... might be known and addressed by his name, the others were referred to by their occupations only. The servants had their own hierarchy dominated by the twin figures of the head bearer and the cook ...”

[Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj*, p.87]

PAT’S DESCRIPTION OF STAFF SALARIES  
[P. Hill, Moon Bazar, p.192]

The begums of this cast were startlingly blunt.

"How much do you pay your cook?" was a popular ice-breaker when they met a foreign woman. I was usually too disconcerted to be evasive, and sometimes I told them. The eyes gleamed. "And how much does he steal?"

"He doesn't have to steal," I snarled at last, "we pay him a salary."

For one thing, we were not working with precisely the same definition of "stealing". They looked at it this way: when their husbands took bribes, or adulterated the cement to fatten the profits on a construction contract, that was business acumen. When a servant paid four annas for something in the market and charged his employer five annas, that was theft. (This comforting dual standard had its adherents among some foreigners too.) Our own school of thought made a distinction between a servant who padded the expense account a little and one who committed grand larceny. The former would slip your onion into his curry and make a modest commission on the marketing money. We believed it better to ignore this. The latter would sell your liquor, steal your camera, and triple the bazaar prices. We did not ignore it.



HIRING HOUSEHOLD STAFF cont.

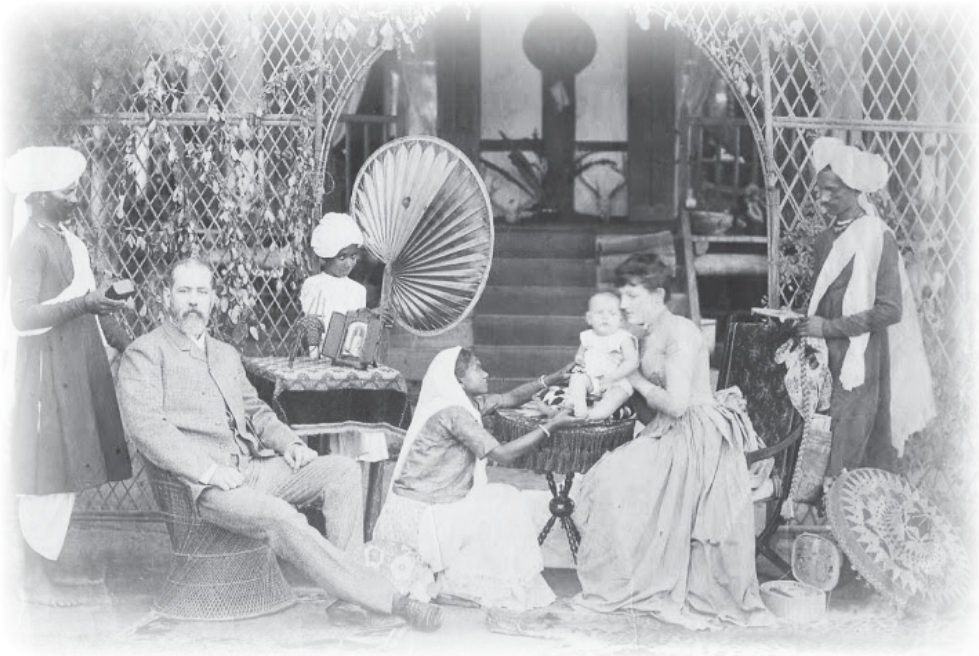
THE MAYERS’ HOUSEHOLD STAFF  
[Bob Mayers’ Memoirs]

"We soon found the staff we needed: Abani Kumar Barua, our Buddhist cook; Clement Purification our Christian bearer, Barua our Buddhist sweeper, and a series of Muslim malis (gardeners), chokidors (guards) and an occasional masseuse.

Our cook’s father and grandfather had been cooks. They and he had always cooked for English families and as a result our first meal was some sort of boiled tasteless meat. Florence explained to Abani that we were Americans, not English and we liked spicy food; we wanted to eat real Indian curries. Abani replied, "But, Memsahib, Indian food not proper for you; too much spicy and sickening you". After he served us another awful English meal, we warned, "Abani, either serve us Indian food or we’ll have to find another cook." From then on we dined sumptuously on fish curry, coconut curry, all sorts of wonderful spicy curries.

We had installed a modern kitchen inside our living quarters; this must have been a novelty in Dacca and Florence was able to oversee Abani’s movements. She started by explaining to him about hand washing and germs. "But, Memsahib where is the germ?" he asked. Florence replied, "They’re here on your hands, under your fingernails and so you have to wash them off with soap". "But, Memsahib" Abani asked again, "Where can germ be if I cannot see it?" He looked at Florence as though she were deluded.

Because there was no refrigeration in the market Abani went at 6 AM every morning to buy the food, including live chickens and fish. Sometimes, as Florence worked in her painting studio there would be a wild chicken running around the house. Because Abani was a devout Buddhist he could never kill an animal; he depended on Clement Purification, our Christian bearer for this chore. One day, Clement was out sick and Abani alone ran the household. When I came home for lunch there was a wonderful fish curry waiting for me. But, I had a question: "Abani", I asked, "Is this fish fresh?" "Of course, Sahib," he replied, "I would not make not fresh fish". "But, Abani," I asked, "Who killed the fish?" His reply resonates to this day: "Sahib, I Buddhist, I not kill fish. I take fish out water and he die automatically".



BECOMING SAH’B & MEMSAH’B

While some foreigners, especially Americans, were disturbed by social inequity around them, and were uncomfortable with the tradition of hiring servants, Dan and I tended to accept situations as they came to us and adapt ourselves to them rather than the other way around. We had no problem being called “Sah’b” and “Memsah’b” by our staff and even took to calling each other by these titles. Before too long, even our foreign friends had nick-named us by these titles. They became names of endearment, which to this day our Dacca friends still use when they refer to us.

OUR FIRST HIRE

There was so much unemployment in Dacca that we had men at our door applying for work before we even had moved in ourselves. They often showed “chits” (recommendation letters) from former employers, with reports that were so glowing as to be suspect. We turned all away, except one elderly man who had a “chit” vouching for his cooking skills that sounded quite authentic. Upon meeting him, we were impressed: he seemed to know a few dishes by name. When he proceeded to make us tea on the spot, what could we do but hire him. However, our first cook didn’t last long. His English was too minimal, his cuisine was limited to egg “momelettes,” and he had a tendency when shopping at the bazar to include items that I had not expected or budgeted for. Thanks to help from our Greek neighbors, the Matzakis, we were able to replace him with the cook we would have for the rest of our years in Dacca, Philip Gomez by name.



Cook #1







Dan's collaged image of Katherine with "our gang" from the book he made for her titled "Amars" (see v2 ch. 6)

## ESTABLISHING "OUR GANG"

Through the cook, we soon acquired three more staff members: Wohab, our bearer; Mohan, our sweeper; and Mali, our gardener. All four of them came from the same village, Hosnabad, about a twelve hours trip from Dacca. The cook was the only one among our staff who could read and write some words in English. He was also the only one who had prior work experience working for foreign families. As for our other three, we were their first employers, not to mention their first contact with foreigners. Dan called our staff of four, "our gang," and put them in matching *lungis* to give them some sense of formality in spite of their bare feet.

After some initial quarrels as to who was responsible for which duties, routines became established. We kept our same staff of four with us for our entire seven years in Dacca, which was unusual in those days. The typical foreign family changed servants frequently. Dan attributed our staff's strong loyalty and willingness to stay with us to their "freshness" to the job, having arrived untrained and without expectations straight from the countryside. We were impressed also by how well our staff worked together. Compared to what we heard was happening in other households (both foreign and local), our staff only had a few minor disputes.



'Cook,' Wohab, Mali and Mohan



Wohab, 'Cook', DCD and MFD

THE DUNHAM'S 'GANG' AS DESCRIBED BY PAT HILL  
[P. Hill, *Moon Bazar*, pp.62-63]

I was not alone in my bondage. Mary Frances and Dan Dunham ran a similar operation on the other side of town. They lived on Siddeswari Road in a Bengali-style villa, a string of rooms surrounding a pleasant courtyard, and were regarded as the Left Bank element among the Americans. Their servants were of a different mold from ours, too. Their uniforms were *lungis*, white shirts and bare feet, which would have provoked instant rebellion in our bourgeois ranks. They slept in the garage because there were no servants' quarters, and they spoke only Bengali.

It was naturally more difficult for the Dunhams to find jobs for their servants' relatives, who didn't speak English, and Dan often wound up adding them to their own payroll. They started with Wohab, their long thin Muslim bearer. They hired his indigent cousin as *mali*, a short homely cheerful man whose knowledge of gardening was limited to watering the lawn with bamboo walls of their compound, a wild assortment of leafy shrubs around the front and flowering bushes in the rear, where a frangipani tree hung over the courtyard. Anxious for its welfare, they found Mali another job as *chawkidori*, but he refused it, preferring to stay with them. At last they rescued the garden by bringing Mali indoors and teaching him to serve. They preserved the Old World custom of calling their servants "Mali" and "Cook" instead of by their names, and it gave one rather a start: "What will you have to drink? Oh, Ma-li! *Ak Daiquiri ano!*" The effect was even more striking the year they grew attached to a laborer who had come to sand the teak furniture and added him to the household staff. "Oh La-bor!"

Wohab's brother Mohun came from the village to work as a helper under Wohab's tutelage. His perpetual smile was bracketed by enormous dimples, and his hair fell to his shoulders in abundant curls. When Dan suggested a haircut, Mohun was reluctant until Dan pointed out that he was to work in foreign houses, he would have to be shorn. Mohun yielded. His father had assured him that if he never cut his hair he would go straight to heaven when he died, but the prospect of employment with foreign gentlemen was a more immediate and therefore weightier inducement.



“OUR GANG” OF FOUR

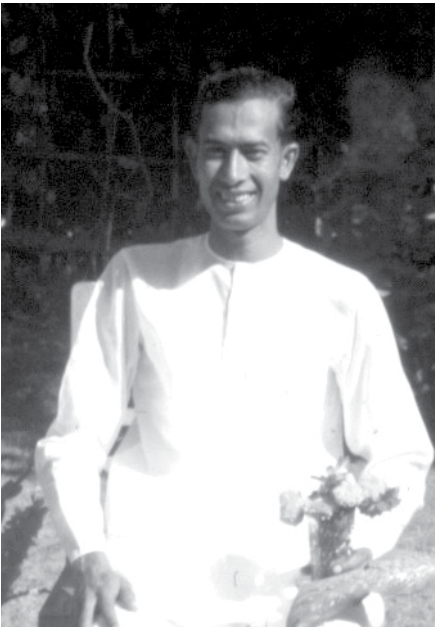


“Cook”- né Philip Gomez

OUR COOK

We soon learned to call our cook “Cook,” his preferred title, rather than his given name Philip Gomez. As his name indicates, he was among the small, but well established, minority of Christians in the country. His home village, Hosnabad, although primarily a Muslim village, was notable for its Catholic church and Christian population. Cook, who was in his fifties, was the oldest of our staff. He was stately and dignified in how he went about his work never complaining when faced with shortages or inadequate help.

We were lucky to employ Cook so quickly and easily. He was able to turn out tasty dishes (albeit British cuisine) and could read and write enough in Bengali to make a shopping list. He learned his basic skills from his father who had worked as a cook on the prestigious “P & O” (Pacific and Orient) British passenger ships that plied the seas of the Far East. Ironically, he also knew some Greek dishes, which he had learned from the Greek family for whom he had worked before us. He could also turn out a perfect flan, one of Dan’s all time favorite desserts. My Greek father, when he first visited us, was pleasantly surprised when our cook served him avgolemono (egg and lemon) soup.



Wohab - our “Jeeves”

OUR BEARER

Wohab, our bearer, although he was illiterate and had not worked for a foreign family before, was clearly intelligent and adaptable. His duties included more than fetching (“bearing”) anything we called for. We relied on him for his resourcefulness – he didn’t shy away from any challenges such as what to do when the garden flooded or how to politely prevent unwanted guests from staying too long. Being so good natured, he often served as the peacekeeper in minor household staff disputes as he took on the role of the Victorian “butler” supervising the rest of the staff. Dan having done a butler job himself at Wohab’s age enjoyed coaching him in the details of proper butler-hood.

on man power. We are thinking seriously of taking Wohab back with us on our next home leave and letting him work for Daddy and Dan's mother, giving each a half a year. He wants desperately to go and is not impressed when we tell him how lonely he would be.

[MFD letter to Stephen 05/25/1963]

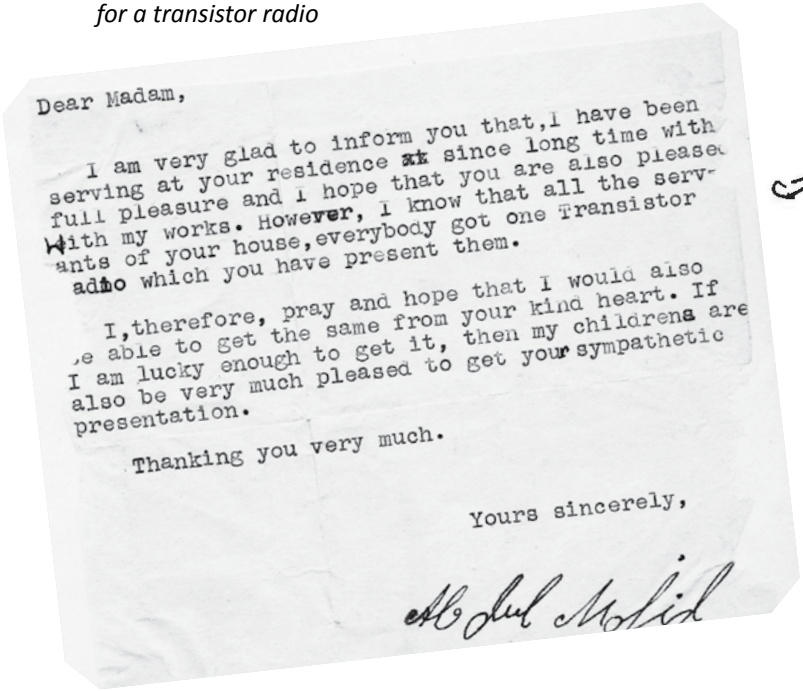


“Mali” - né Abdul Majid

OUR GARDENER

Like Cook, our gardener preferred to be called Mali (gardener), or Mali-bhai (gardener-brother). Having had no previous experience working with foreigners, he did not understand some of our foreign ideas and aesthetics about gardening, but nevertheless did his best. He had a sound background in basic farming, which meant he preferred growing vegetables to flowers and saw our trees as snake hazards.

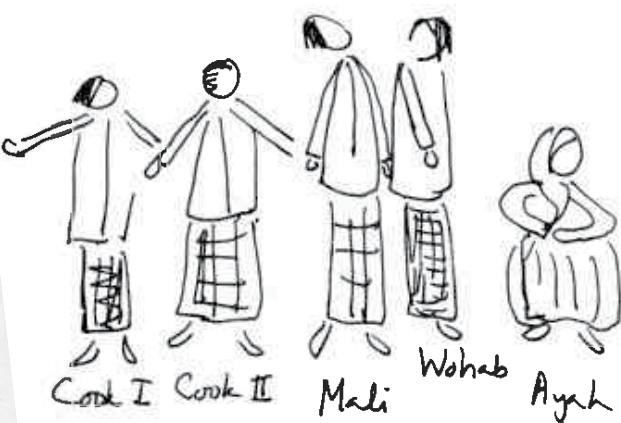
Mali’s letter to me asking for a transistor radio



Mohan - our “passe partout”

OUR ‘SECOND’ BEARER

Our sweeper, Mohan by name, swept our entire domain early in the morning, sometimes swabbing down the floors as well. The rest of the day he helped Cook and the gardener, provided that Wohab approved. He was capable of doing so many different tasks that we thought of him more as ‘second bearer’ than sweeper. Dan used to say that Mohan had a smile so radiant that you could see it from the end of our street.





“OUR GANG” GROWS TO SIX



Ruplal Duria

RUPLAL - OUR DRIVER

When Dan was hired to join the team of architecture teachers from Texas A&M, he was entitled to use a Consulate car and driver. He had already experienced rides with some of the drivers from the consulate “pool” and so he knew precisely the driver that he liked best: Ruplal. Although Ruplal was perhaps the youngest and most uneducated, he seemed to understand English more readily than the other drivers. His excellent driving skills and mastering of English had made him the driver in greatest demand. Nevertheless, Dan was able to get Ruplal for himself.

Around 1957, when Ruplal was about 17 years old, he got a job as a sweeper for an American couple. At this time Dacca had become the capital of East Pakistan, and many foreigners, especially American consultants, were coming to Dacca to aid in the development of the new country. Soon Ruplal was promoted to being their head bearer. Over time his American employer began training him to drive.

Ruplal learned to drive so competently that he gained his driver’s license quickly. His American employer was so proud of him that he rewarded Ruplal with an imported American uniform which was more impressive than the locally made army gear. Ruplal was the envy of all the other drivers. When that employer left, he helped Ruplal get a job in the US Consulate motor pool of drivers. By then Ruplal could speak more English than the others and hence became the driver who was most in demand. When Dan joined the USAID team of architecture teachers, he was entitled to have a car and driver and he quickly chose Ruplal. Thus Ruplal became the fifth member to join “our gang”.



Ruplal with our Volkswagon in Europe the summer of 1967 en route to New York.

THERESA - KATHERINE’S AYAH

Theresa joined us when Katherine was born. Lou Berger had told us with a grin that we would enjoy an army of servants when we lived in Dacca, but after hiring our fourth team member, mali, and after Dan acquired Ruplal as his driver, I thought that we had reached the limit of outside help. However, in November of 1963, the moment that word got around that I was pregnant, candidates for ayah work were at our door, but they soon learned that “our gang” all came from the same village and that our ayah was likely to follow suit.

When Dan and I returned from New York with baby Katherine in tow, Cook’s niece, Theresa Gomez, was waiting to receive us. She came from his hometown, Hosnabad, and we hired her on the spot. We never had a chance to interview anyone else, but fortunately she worked out well for us. Thus “our gang” had graduated to encompassing six members, although I had laughed at the thought of more than two when we first came to Dhaka three years ago.

Theresa seemed to be intelligent and competent, but no more educated than the rest of our team. Village life had trained her to take care of small children and she was still unmarried and free to work for us. She had no qualms about sleeping on a mat on the floor next to Katherine’s crib and she tended to Katherine like a mother.

We felt secure leaving Katherine with Theresa when we needed to, but we were not always in agreement with her about how she managed Katherine. She would often spoil Katherine, giving her whatever she wanted whenever she wanted it, or bribe her with false promises of sweets to get her to behave. Although we disapproved, we knew it was hopeless to try to change her typical Bengali ways.



Theresa

“She is very quiet, ghost like and clean and competent ...”

Hiring Theresa  
[MFD letter to CGR, 11/03/1964]

A relative of the cook turned up our first mornign seeking to be employed as an ayah. She looked good and had very good referneces from people we know. I didn't want to relinquish Katinko so soon so I held her off for two weeks. Now that she is here she has taken over completely. She is very quiet , ghost like, but clean and competent. She will also help Mrs. Dunham and sleep over there.



“A good husband you can do without  
but not a good butler.”

[TV mini-series of the “*Forsyte Saga*”]



3.2 HOUSEHOLD ROUTINES



COOK’S ROUTINES

A typical morning for me began with conferring with Cook as to the day’s menu and marketing needs. He could tell me what vegetables and fruits were in season and we would decide on the lunch and evening menus. He made a list and I would give an estimated amount of cash for the anticipated purchases. On his return, he would show his written account and give me some version of the correct change. I soon learned that it was traditional for cooks to make their own estimate of the correct change so as to pocket a bit for themselves. In time, I learned to accept this and no longer puzzled over the cook’s documentation of the prices or of his math.

Our daily routines  
[MFD 1961 diary entry, p.10]

“... at night we eat around seven and are usually in bed by ten. Even so, we find it difficult to get up at seven thirty when the cook arrives and rings the courtyard doorbell. (Dan made a very Indian looking bell by wiring a series of little brass bells together in a pretty pattern). Sometimes we go to the movies at the Gulistan or the Max (??), near the Berger office. The driver comes for Dan at eight thirty in the morning and he usually has his shirt and tie still to put on if not do his shaving. When Berger is in town he dresses more consciously and I have to be doubly sure of the timing on his two suits being cleaned.”

Glossary of useful household words  
from our “Living in Dacca” guide book

Glossary

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**Laundry and Dry Cleaning**

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| water             | pah-nee, johl                                   |
| sun               | shoor-joh                                       |
| sunshine          | rohd  |
| wind              | how-ah, bah-tash                                |
| iron              | ees-tree  |
| starch            | mahr  |
| soap              | sah-von   |
| bleach            | "acid"  |
| rope              | roh-shee  |
| washing           | doh-wah, doh-lah-ee kor-ah, por-eesh-kar kor-ah |
| pressing, ironing | ees-tree kor-ah                                 |
| sprinkling        | bee-jahn  |
| folding           | bahs kor-ah                                     |

**Sewing**

|        |          |                    |        |
|--------|----------|--------------------|--------|
| needle | shoo-ee  | silk               | silk   |
| thread | shoo-tah | tailor, dressmaker | dorjee |
| cotton | too-lah  | sewing (noun)      | shelay |
| wool   | wool     |                    |        |

**Gardening**

|          |                   |                   |                |
|----------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| garden   | bah-gahn          | dry               | shoo-kah       |
| flower   | fool              | wet               | bee-jah        |
| seed     | beej, bee-chee    | earth, soil       | mah-tee        |
| seedling | chah-rah          | manure            | goh-bar        |
| plant    | fool-gahch        | hole              | gor-toh        |
| tree     | gahch             | dig               | gor-toh kor-ah |
| shade    | chay-oh-ah        | cut               | kah-tah        |
| sun      | shoor-joh, rohd   | grow (become big) | bor-oh how-ah  |
| water    | pah-nee, johl     | ripe              | pah-kah        |
| rain     | breesh-tee        | unripe            | kah-chah       |
| wind     | bah-tahsh         | short handled     | koh-dahl       |
| season   | ree-too, shoh-moy | hoe               |                |
|          |                   | small scythe      | kah-chee       |

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Glossary

**Seasons. See Climate.**

**Remodeling and Repairing**

|           |            |              |             |
|-----------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| brick     | eet        | paint, color | rong        |
| sand      | bah-loo    | window       | jah-nah-lah |
| glass     | kahsh      | door         | dor-jah     |
| metal     | dah-too    | floor        | jaw-meen    |
| brass     | pee-tol    | ceiling      | chahd       |
| aluminium | al-mon-lam | wall         | day-oh-wai  |
| iron      | loh-hah    | roof         | chahd       |
| copper    | tah-mah    | room         | ghor        |
| stone     | pah-tor    | house        | bar-ee      |
| wood      | kaht       | hammer       | ha-too-ree  |
| bamboo    | bahsh      | saw          | kor-at      |
| screen    | wire net   | bucket       | bahl-tee    |
| wire      | tahr       |              |             |
| nail      | peh-rak    |              |             |

**Some Geographical Terms. (See Sightseeing for the meanings of suffixes on the ends of names.)**

|         |                 |        |                  |
|---------|-----------------|--------|------------------|
| rasta   | road            | maidan | large open space |
| bazar   | market          | manzil | villa            |
| dalan   | building        | nodi   | river            |
| mosjid  | mosque          | khal   | creek            |
| mondir  | temple          | deeghi | tank (large)     |
| girja   | church          | pukur  | tank             |
| katra   | walled compound | jeel   | lake, swamp      |
| kothi   | residence       | pul    | bridge           |
| mahalla | area, quarter   |        |                  |

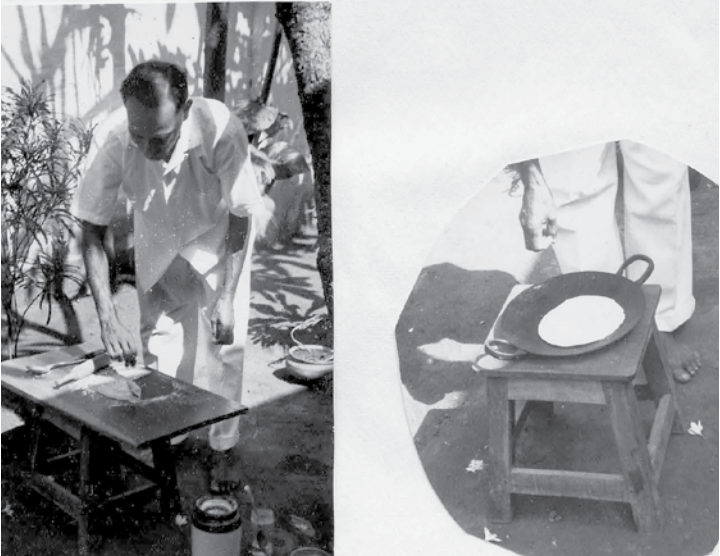
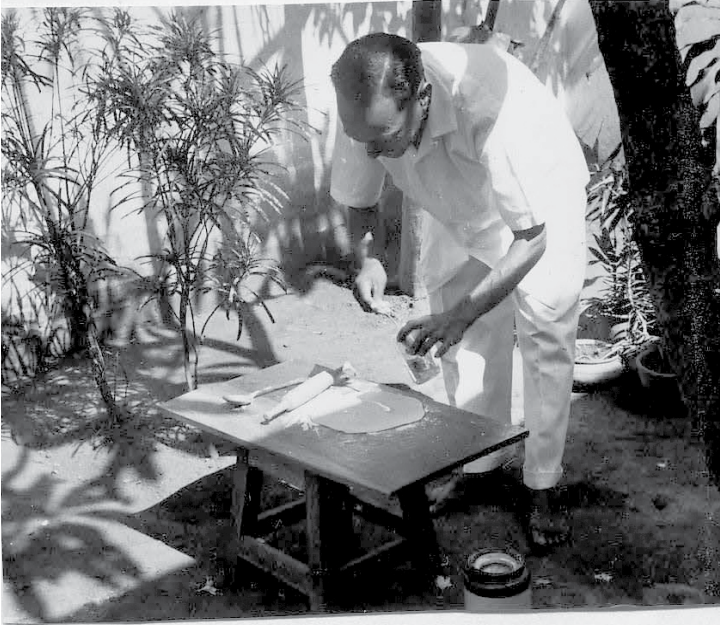
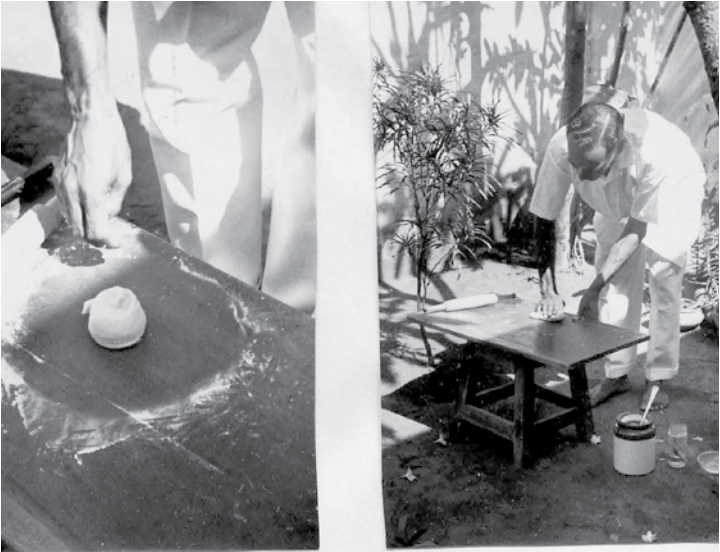


COOK’S CONCOCTIONS

We were continually amazed at what our cook produced from our primitive kitchen. Our breakfasts were at first British in style with fried eggs and toast, but of course, no bacon. Since we were in a Muslim country, bacon was “paowa jai na” (“not available”) in the meat markets. We had declined the ritual morning tea ever since our first morning when we were woken abruptly by Wohab ready to serve us ‘bed’ tea in proper British style. Now and then for breakfast, Cook surprised us with parathas or japatris, which he made in the courtyard. This took time and skill. We tried to record the steps on film.

In the evening, Cook typically served a beef stew or chicken curry. Meats tended to be tougher than in America because they did not come from large scale factory-style farms as they did in America. Dan preferred the taste of the local chickens which had run freely as opposed to American super-market chickens that had probably never walked. Beef was hacked at the markets without care for different types of cuts, so that it was difficult when making a stew or curry to get a uniform quality of meat. During the winter dry season, fresh produce was available such as beans, carrots, lettuce, cucumbers and tomatoes, which gradually became scarce. Cauliflower was especially tasty in the fall and brinjal (egg plant) was available the year round. We looked forward to seasonal fruits: tangerines in December, lychees in April and May, mangos in June and July. All year round apples and grapes came from India and West Pakistan.

The supper menu was similar to lunch with the addition of a “pudding,” a custard or flan (yet another British culinary custom). For Dan’s sake, Cook would sometimes take the time to make the frozen ice cream-like “mango-fool” (perhaps a local desert). For guests sometimes we had haute cuisine such as a pudding topped with spun sugar. When we asked our local friends how Bengali cooks could make such dishes, we learned that many had had fathers who worked for foreigners in the pre-Independence days and had passed on their art to their sons.





COOK’S ROUTINES cont.

“Our oven consists of a box with a two port holes which you set on top of the kerosene burners which we call a stove.”

“Lychees which were new to me and I couldn’t get enough of them I like them so much, now mangoes and pineapples.”

The other lessons I need are how to cook to keep alive on poor rice, hardly any vegetables, powdered milk, cooking butter, cream at rare intervals, scarcity of sugar meat three times a week, the rest of the time prawns, a dull fish, and chicken, no chocolate, poor quality baking powder, no yeast, and so forth. I may not have used up all the sixteen ways to cook chicken yet but right now there are no tomatoes or carrots, peas etc so that cuts out a lot of stew types. Dan has lost 30 lbs. since we arrived, due also to overwork and worry. I am glad to read in the paper that UNESC found the Pakistani to be the world's smallest eaters and that it isn't all my bad cooking. (Our cook cooks whatever I direct him to do) Us housewives was a little faint when we look at a copy of McCall's, or Good Housekeeping and see those photographs of of delicious "easy to make" casseroles and fancy deserts. If there is a recipe attached it invariably begins with "set the oven at 375 degrees " (our ovens consist of a box with two port holes which you set on top of the two kerosene burners which

we call a stove.) or it may say "with your mixer set at high speed " (no mixer here of course. Matzakis, our neighbor, is French and does considerably better than I do with what is available and I am learning to make my own mayonnaise, gnoecchis, etc, some things with the help of expensive imported canned goods. But we find our conversations frequently centered on what we have found in the market, what we made for the last meal, what to hope will come on the market, any tricks for handling the strange Pakistani fruits and vegetables. We have had some delicious fruit recently. Lychees which were new to me and I couldn't get enough of them I liked them so much, now mangoes and pineapples. Fresh pineapple is also a revelation. To add to our culinary hardships our first kerosene ice box was the cause of a bad accident and now that we have rented (50\$ a month) an electric one it is on the blink so no cold water, ice cream, meat tenderized after a day in the ice box, puddings served chilled, and other luxuries I became all too quickly accustomed to. Still haven't started teaching. Still can't keep a schedule. We still need a dining rm, a table and set of chairs, and a divan in the living room. We have just gone through a bad cyclone and had to rebuild our wall which meant daily supervision. There has been another celebration and no workers for five days. So life is still "unpredictable " as you said. I have two French pupils privately which area joy and may start a small tutoring school here. I would prefer any easy part time job in a college or high school but he haven't heard of any. I also want to resume my Bengali lessons before I forget everything I learned.

[MFD letter to Rose, 1961]

FOOD RATIONS

GOVERNMENT OF EAST PAKISTAN

Form B

Application for Temporary Ration Card

(The Enquiry Clerk will instruct you how to fill up the form if you are in doubt over any of the entries)

Name of applicant in full: Mary Frances Dunham

Address—House No. 51 ("Hafiz Villa")

Sub-Area: Ramna

Street/Road/Lane: Siddeswari Rd.

Holding No./C.S. Plot No.

| Name in full of the members living on the premises and taking food with the family including the name of the applicant, if he/she requires a Ration Card. | If any Ration Card was issued before, has it been surrendered? If so, to whom? | If his/her stay in the rationed area is more than two weeks, the reason for not taking a ration card before, should be stated. | Relationship with the Head of the family. | Previous address in full (Vill., P.O., P.S., etc.). | Age. | Husband's Father's/Husband's name. | Occupation in full (Name of the Office/Firm/Business should be stated if the applicant is an employee). | The date of arrival in the rationed area. | Purpose of visit or stay in the rationed area. | Mainly rice-eater or wheat-eater. |
|---|--|--|---|---|------|------------------------------------|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Mary Dunham  | 1961   | Too busy and prices not so high as now.  | Housewife                                 | 520 E. 86 St. NYC USA                               | 34   | Daniel Dunham                      | Housewife   | Jan. 1961                                 | Residence                                      | Rice                              |
| 2. For others   | lost.  |  |   |   |      |                                    |   |   |  |                                   |
| 3. see  |  |  |   |   |      |                                    |   |   |  |                                   |
| 4. attach-  |  |  |   |   |      |                                    |   |   |  |                                   |
| 5. ed list.   |  |  |   |   |      |                                    |   |   |  |                                   |
| 6.  |  |  |   |   |      |                                    |   |   |  |                                   |

Filed on: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of applicant: MARY FRANCES DUNHAM

Address: "HAFIZ VILLA", 51 Siddeswari Rd. Ramna, Dacca

Dated: 19 \_\_\_\_\_

Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_

N. B.—This counterfoil should be produced in this office on \_\_\_\_\_ when a reply will be given.

\*Please attach a blank sheet of paper if the space provided in the form is not sufficient to include all the names and particulars.

Assistant Rationing Officer.

(P.T.O.)

The available foods in the market

to be the picture of health, tan and rosy cheeks so I hope it lasts. We can get meat three times a week, chicken and a dull fish, sometimes prawns, the rest of the week we can have chicken. Even the rice isn't good quality. With the hot weather eggs are frequently rotten. I am learning where I can get good cow's milk (which we will always boil of course) but until now we have been using expensive powdered milk which has a strange taste, not pleasant for drinking alone. We use butter for cooking but it we haven't got used to the taste plain. The only vegetables on the market now are cucumbers, potatoes, some kind of squash, and spinach. Sugar is rationed insufficient.

I wish we could magnify the post cards you sent to decorate our walls. They really need a few Pissaros and Monets. We have noted that thick white-washed walls don't take delicate black and white sketches, unless they could have gold frames, and I am waiting for Dan to use that box of oils you sent. How did Mrs. Chrystie enjoy her trip to Williamstown and the Byes? Does she want to go again? Did you leave Mrs. Walker behind?

[MFD diary entry 04/29/1961]



COOK’S ROUTINES cont.

COOK’S DAILY ROUTINES & MARKETING

Cook’s daily duties in addition to shopping and cooking included boiling milk and water every morning for drinking. He made sure our clay pitcher, which kept our drinking water cool, was always full. Every morning I had a routine with him where I would lay out the day’s meals and make a shopping list for the market. He would take a rickshaw to the local market, such as Malibagh or Shantinagar. For Dan’s imported instant Nescafe and prime cuts of meat and fish, Cook would go to the big markets in the Old City and sometimes not return home until afternoon. It never occurred to me, as it did to several other newly arrived American housewives, to attempt to do the food shopping and cooking myself. They soon experienced the difficulties of not knowing the language nor the customs of bargaining and resigned themselves to the local custom of hiring a cook to manage those tasks.

Cook’s cooking  
[MFD letter to Elizabeth, 04/18/1961]

While Dan was remodeling “... there was a perpetual mess everywhere. The cook, not in the least bothered, would carry his little stove to whatever room was cleanest that day and with a pot and a kettle produce Cordon Bleu meals. ... these meals seemed like miracles. When all the repairs were going wrong and it seemed like we would never get finished these meals seemed like miracles.”

PAT HILL’S  
DESCRIPTION  
OF DACCA MARKETS  
[P. Hill, Moon Bazar,  
pp.32-33]

have to venture far out of town to become a striking novelty. A western woman in the Old Town, or outside Dacca, attracted an audience at once. If she stopped at a shop, they crowded in behind her, discussing her clothes, her complexion, her selection, her money, her character, and who knows what else. Waiting for a train or boat, the foreigner became the center of a dense ring and its unanimous gaze, as direct, unblinking, tamarind pulp, yellow cucumber, purple eggplant, dark-red curly spinach, green limes, golden-brown pineapple. Another aisle was furnished in subdued tones, with small beige potatoes, amber-skinned onions, silver-gray garlic, golden knobs of turmeric and ginger, tiny hard betel nuts. In the next building, round baskets were heaped with dal (lentils), pink and yellow and green, and with rice, brown and white. Coarse sugar was sold from large dirty jute bags. In the dim dusty stalls to the rear, one found the crude wooden platters which looked as if they had been carved with a spoon, the small clay or tin lamps, the bamboo fishing baskets, and the graceful dark clay water jugs. When I bought these items and took them home, my servants raised their eyebrows, and slowly my artefacts drifted into corners, under cobwebs and out of sight.

In the poultry market, the chickens clucked miserably in their cages, where they were pinched and poked by all the cooks before they were carried off by their feet to be slaughtered in someone’s compound. The fish and prawns likewise were borne off flopping and wiggling, and it was exciting in the kitchen when the cook came home with his lively produce. Only the meat was dead-on-arrival. Strolling through the meat market, with still, the beef and mutton were delicious when a skilful cook had selected and prepared them. (Pork was not sold in the market because of the Muslim prohibition against it, but was brought stealthily by the Christian pork wallah to the house, still warm, with black-bristled skin on it.)

Around the periphery of the bazaar, vendors sat under faded black umbrellas, offering bananas, pink-fleshed jambura fruit, hairy coconuts, and the sticky brown sugar called gur. “Kemsahib! You try! Here—here!” extending a slice of papaya on a filthy knife. There was always a pan stand, selling the bright green leaf, smeared with white lime and wrapped around a few betel nuts and spices, which Bengalis chew and love. It has a pleasantly anaesthetic effect on the mouth lining, stains the teeth, and is spat out, leaving red splashes all over the country. Small stalls displayed cheap lunghis and saris and gamsas in colorful stacks; cigarettes; black braided cotton for ladies’ hair; playing cards. At night the oil lamps made round patches of light, and charcoal stoves were set up on the sidewalk to cook and sell the flat discs of bread called chapattis, or paratta.



Street bazar in Dacca.  
[Photo taken by  
D. Rutherford, 1992]

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Menu

- ✓ Greek soup or jelly chicken + lemon
- devil. eggs
- cold beef
- cold chicken salad
- pot. with vin.
- rice + cheese sauce
- Jello + pamelov + bans.
- ✓ coffee

Friday

- beef
- chickens
- order bread
- order cake
- margarine dressing

Sat.

- ✓ lemons

Sundays

Schwitters, Rahman, Dager(?)

hous. d'oeuvre

- ✓ cheese sticks
- peanuts
- radishes (⊕)
- chick. liver pate
- toasts.
- Pak. sticks

Sat. making

- ✓ cook chickens
- beef
- pot.
- make ice
- make soup
- cheese sticks
- boil eggs

Sun. maki.

- toasts
- devil. eggs
- cut pamelov
- string beans
- rice + cheese sauce
- ✓ chicken mix



COOK’S ROUTINES cont.

BOB MAYERS’ DESCRIPTION OF BARUA, THEIR COOK  
[Bob Mayers’ letter to MFD, Spring 1963]

Dear M.F.

Japan Barua of course at first sounds like one of the group of famous Buddhist cooks who maintain us so very well here. However, Japan Barua, in fact, is a floor cleaner and manure carrier in our garden. Though this doesn't preclude the possibility that his cooking abilities surpass that of our other Barua, he assures me that he cannot cook at all. Though the latter assurance still doesn't preclude the possibility of his being better than Abani Barua, our cook, I would not want you to suffer at his hand. He is available, though, for odd jobs, permanently starting tomorrow, or today, as our other ~~Barua~~ Barua, also not a cook, returns tomorrow. In short, though I am surrounded now with limitless Baruas I have but one authentic Barua chef.

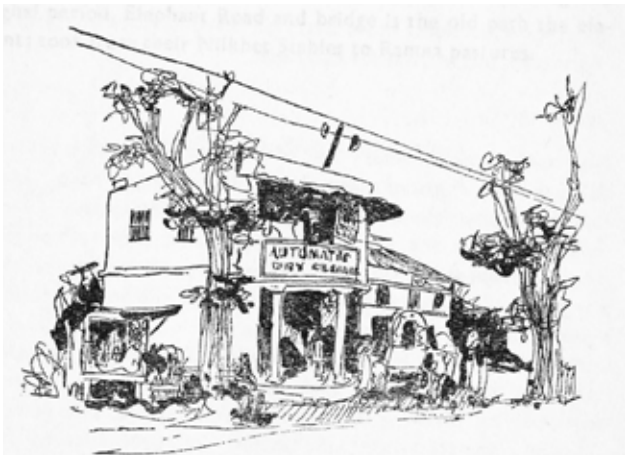
On the other hand, you, your husband, and Mrs. Dunham are all invited to dine here tonight. Please let me know your response at once as I must let the remaining Barua know whether to get food or not. Also, my cook is right now telling your bearer (not a Barua, I presume) about another Barua friend of his in Dhamondi who needs work. Your bearer upon returning to your house will be able to go and fetch this last remaining Barua. There may be one difficulty, however, as May 15 is the year's most important Barua holiday on ~~the~~ which none of them cook. Just a minute; I've just checked and found out that my permanent Barua will not be able to cook dinner for me tonight due to this holiday. ~~Nothing is to be done about it. I have no choice but to retract my former invitation which I transfer to tomorrow night. Is that possible. ? Let me know sometime this afternoon. Meanwhile, I think our permanent Barua has promised to get you a cook at temple today and the cook will show up at your house tomorrow morning. Pardon the changes of thought and direction above but it is so difficult to keep up with these fast moving Baruas..~~ So I retract my former invitation which I transfer to tomorrow night. Is that possible. ? Let me know sometime this afternoon. Meanwhile, I think our permanent Barua has promised to get you a cook at temple today and the cook will show up at your house tomorrow morning. Pardon the changes of thought and direction above but it is so difficult to keep up with these fast moving Baruas..

LAUNDRY ROUTINES

DHOBI KAJ (LAUNDRY)

At first Wohab did the laundry squatting next to the kitchen on the verandah. He would beat the soapy items on the floor before hanging everything up to dry on the verandah. Dan taught Wohab the 10-step process of ironing a shirt, which he had learned from his brief WW2 army days. Wohab used an electric iron on an ironing board we had inherited from the Matzakis.

It wasn't long before we resorted to the local laundry professionals, dhobis, to do the wash of our better clothing. We would send Wohab with the selected laundry to the nearest *dighi* ("tank") where the *dhobis* would wash it along side the ducks, bathers and other water life. Laundry items were then dried on ropes strung between bamboo posts or on grassy plots and a professional ironer would do the ironing using a Victorian-age iron heated by charcoal.



DCD sketch, 'Living in Dacca'

**LAUNDRY AND DRY CLEANING**

In the case of laundry, it is advisable to supervise and to impose your ways in the beginning if you are particular about the results, especially with synthetic and delicate fabrics. Likewise pressing should be carefully watched at first. The following laundry aids are available :

1. Starch="rice water"
2. Soap=cake or ball form (local bazar)
3. Bleach="acid" (local bazar)
4. Rope="roh-shee" (local bazar)
5. Distilled water for steam irons (at local garages)
6. Powdered soap=lux (major bazars and import stores)
7. Clothes pins (New Market)

For dry cleaning it is a good idea to give any special instructions about cleaning and pressing in writing and to ask whether it is advisable to remove any buttons. (See **Shopping** for dry-cleaning shops).

Note : For vocabulary in Bengali pertaining to this section see the **Glossary**.

From our guide book, 'Living in Dacca,' p.118

Mostly laundry is done in these parts, as you know, by going down to a public tank (a large rectangular pool in which ground water lies stagnant and which are getting very low and pea green because it is still the dry season). Everybody bathes in the slimy looking water and quantity of laundry is beaten against little wooden platforms in the water and then stretched on the grass to dry. After I had a pillow case and sheet ruined at a public laundry I had to hand everything over to the cook.

[MFD letter to Elizabeth 04/18/1961]



GARDENING ROUTINES

“MALI KAJ” (GARDENING)

Thanks to Dan’s combined passion for gardening and design, our outdoor spaces at Hafiz Villa were beautiful to look at and enjoy all year round. Dan was delighted to have a garden of his own. He had many ideas about how to landscape it. On returning home from work every day, often his first concern would be to instruct Mali where and what to plant.

Dan loved to go to local nurseries near New Market or to Farm Gate (a government agricultural organization experimenting with growing non-local vegetables such as asparagus). During our first year, he would invite our neighbor and fellow flower-lover, Mable Shannon, to shop for decorative plants. Mabel knew which ones grew best in Dacca and at what particular season.

Dan was quite detailed in his instructions to Mali as to what to plant and where to plant it. Dan clearly had an overall “composition” of colors and plantings in mind when he framed the garden with rows of different colored flowering plants. He had Mali place the marigolds, portulaca, petunias and other small flowering plants in front of the tall calendula. Along the west side of the garden, which was shadier, Dan kept a cluster of trees (in spite of “our gang’s” fear of snakes) which included a banana tree and a papaya tree. Most of our garden was covered in “doob” grass, a fine short grass, which we never felt any need to mow. It was a local grass that grew all over the city along side of roadways providing a tasty meal for the goats and cows.



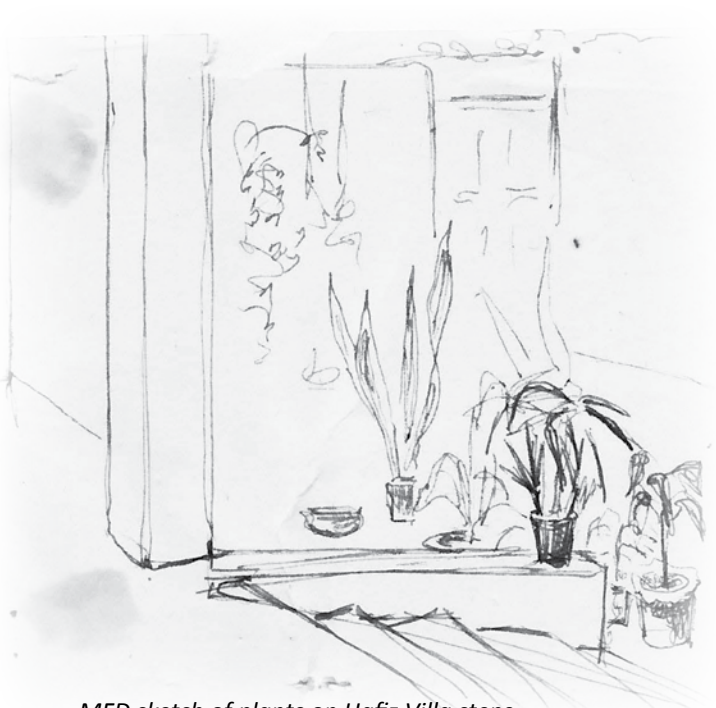
“You wanted to be surrounded by something that wasn’t just dust and dead leaves. You could only hope to get a winter garden really. We had all the annuals, things like phlox and nasturtiums, all those grew most wonderfully ... Of course, the great thing was pots. We had pots and pots and pots all along the edges of our verandahs. And very often when you left and went somewhere else the person who took over from you took over all your pots.”

[Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj*, p.84]



POTTED PLANTS

Other than a guava and a frangipani tree, all the plants in the courtyard and in our living room were potted. Dan liked the local custom of using pots for plants because it made it easier for him to move them around for different arrangements in different seasons. In the pots Dan grew a wide variety of flowering and tropical plants including: ixora, gardenias, white periwinkles, day lilies, hibiscus, jasmine, Rajani-ganda (bush of small white flowers that have a sweet scent in the evening and that ladies wear in their hair on special occasions), “elephant ears” and bi-colored caladium and croton, among others. On the verandahs, Dan grew colorful bougainvillea vines that hung down from the roof.



MFD sketch of plants on Hafiz Villa steps

SEASONAL FRUITS:

- Lychees in April and May
- Mangoes from June through August
- Tangerines at Christmas time
- Coconuts
- Water melons
- Jack Fruit
- Bananas (khola)
- Pomegranate
- Pamelo

SEASONAL FRUITS & FLOWERS:

BLOSSOMING TREES OF RAMNA:

- Krishnachura (red blossoms in May)
- Redsilk Cotton Tree
- Kanakchura (yellow-gold blossoms)
- Frangipani (white or pale pink blossoms)
- Rain Tree “The pride of Dacca”
- Peepul Tree

My description of the greenery and wildlife at Harfiz Villa [MFD letter to Elizabeth Walker, 04/18/1961]

vacant field next door. We have two mango trees, two coconut, some palms, a guava tree, flowering bushes, and four beautiful rose bushes two in front, two in the back patio. Cows graze, or rather mow, our front lawn. We have two toads that hop around the patio while we have supper and with whom we are very friendly. We would like to have a baby goat but they won't stay small and a mongoose but it would have to be on a leash. We look away when the cook takes the chicken he has bought in the morning and which has been happily playing in the yard all day to be eaten. There is a large dog population but we are not as friendly with them because they bark and howl all night.





GARDENING ROUTINES cont.



DAN’S STRUGGLES WITH MALI

Dan struggled with Mali, who did not share Dan’s aesthetic appreciation of flowering plants and insisted on growing plants that were edible instead. Where Dan aspired to place nasturtiums, phlox, impatiens and marigolds, Mali would often plant beetroot, cabbage, or egg plant. Dan made a point of bringing back from the USA seeds for the flowers he wanted to try out in our garden. Mali used pots for the plants – too many for our liking, but that was how Bengali’s liked to keep their plants, because they can be moved about and cared for easily.

Left to his own devices, Mali-bhai would have cut down the small clump of trees (including a rare papaya tree) that stood in front of our house and ornamented our garden so nicely. But to Mali the trees made our garden a “jungle” that might attract snakes. Although Mali had a point, somehow Dan convinced him that in the end, enjoying the beauty of the trees was more important than avoiding the risk of attracting snakes. The tree incident was to be only one of several that taught us about the village life of “our gang.”

and only straight rows. Dan drew the sinuous outline of the flower beds <sup>he wanted</sup> stretching around the outside of the front garden. The mali cut a deep trench following the line like drawing the borders of a country without the country, and was quite unhappy when we made him fill it all in again and dig out the strangely shaped world-be flower beds between the curves of the line and the fences. Dan has filled these beds with tropical greenery – huge “elephant ears”, enormous leafy plants or thick stalks, delicate ferns, and a ground covering of purple leaves. We think the mali thinks it is an extension of the jungles said to still exist in some parts of the country. We have allowed him some small beds a sa fagon and they may not be bad. We have a patio in the back which will be a contrast in the winter because the mud floor becomes hard and smooth in the dry weather and looks quite formal with the white-washed walls around it.

We acquired 2 tiny kittens about three months ago.

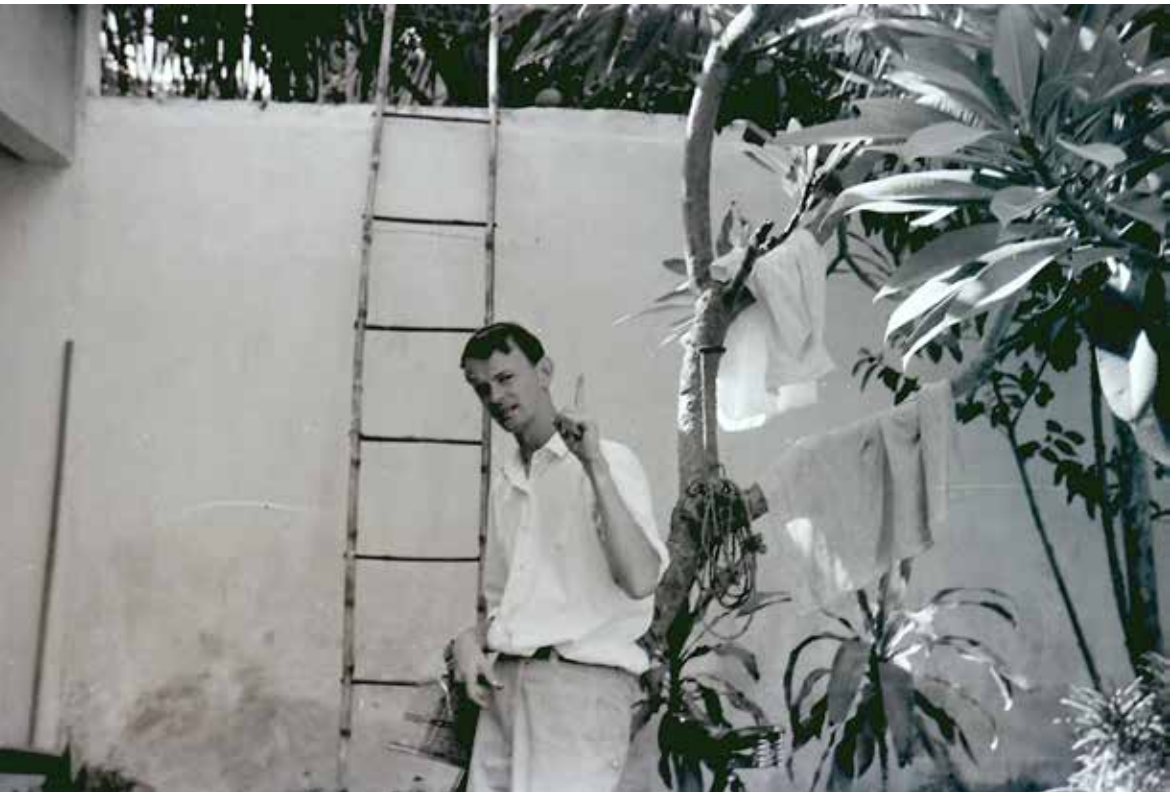
Describing Dan’s gardening  
[MFD letter to CGR  
09/01/1960]



Dan with a calf in the front garden

THE COW CHOR (THIEF)

One day, Dan found Mali beating his head on the front lawn in despair because a cow had entered the garden and eaten many of the plants he had tended so carefully. He found the culprit cow finishing her meal in the empty lot next door. The cow was small and skinny, as most were, and in need of nourishment. Nevertheless, Mali told Dan to take the cow to the thana police station where it would be put in “prison” and the owner fined for the trespassing. We were amused to learn that even chickens could be imprisoned.



Dan in the back patio



AN ASIDE ABOUT DACCA BIRDS

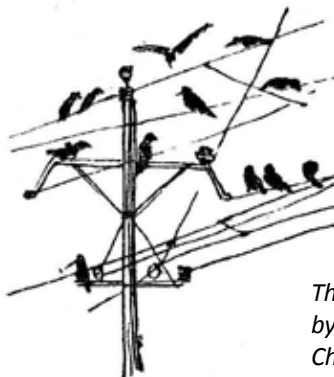
DACCA BIRDS

Some of our most frequent, perennial feathered visitors to our home were the crows. They were noisy, big, black and fearsome. Their “kawk” “kawk” was ubiquitous and especially bothersome when we ate breakfast in our back courtyard. Cook would laugh at the sight of Wohab flapping angrily at them with *gumshahs*, vainly trying to keep them away from our breakfast *japatis*. But we were determined to enjoy our outdoor meals as if we were on the verandah of a grand colonial hotel, even if it meant putting up with Sir Crow and the rest of his uninvited entourage.

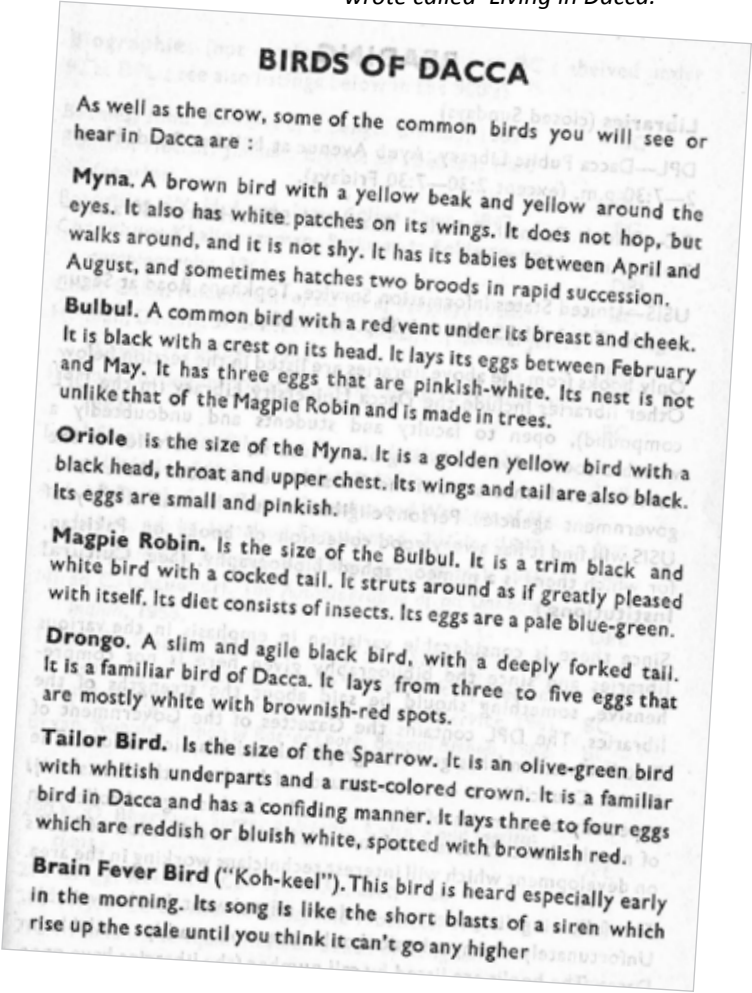
Pigeons were also annoying, un-wanted guests at our *al fresco* meals, although less demanding than the crows. Dan and I took to referring to certain people as “pigeons” because they came by our house so often without invitation and without purpose other than to poke about and see what we were doing. (The worst of these “pigeons” was a librarian, who often came by unannounced and occupied our time with meaningless chatter). Meanwhile, Dan and I learned to call pigeons “squab,” if we were serving them at a gala dinner, in hopes that would make them more appetizing.

Finches, parrots, and mynah birds were all sold in the market as caged pets. Parrots and mynah birds were especially popular in Bengali households as sources of entertainment because they could imitate human speech so well.

In Spring, we enjoyed waking up to the soft calls of the *Kotha bou* (Bride’s Talk) bird which sounded like the whispering of lovers. But sadly the “Koh-keel” (Brain Fever Bird) would often ruin this moment with its aggravating, “Woop, Woop” call which would repeat again and again each time at a higher pitch.



This chapter on birds was written by Pat Hill’s 12 year old son, Christopher, for the guide book we wrote called ‘Living in Dacca.’



The swallows were my favorite Dacca birds because of their graceful flights and their forked tails.

MFD musings in praise of the Dacca birds, 1967

I am a foreigner, a stranger even after six years, in Bengal. I still can take nothing for granted and, like those animals in Northern climates which feverishly collect and store away a winter's supply of food before that season over takes them, I have feverishly tried to store as many sights, sounds, and experiences which I have had ~~in/Bengal~~ here, knowing that some day we would be leaving; wanting, almost instinctively, to be prepared for the long years away/ from this strange and enchanting country. Photos, sketches by my husband, slides, newspaper clippings, and memtoes of all sorts fill several shelves of our library. I have tried to take back something ~~of the sounds~~ through ~~study~~ learning ~~something of~~ the language, literature, and music, but these ~~are~~ which are dearest to me have been the hardest to capture. Even a tape recorder does not do justice.

I would have liked to record a Bengali dawn in May, especially the sounds of the birds. At least a dozen varieties of melody enter this symphony which begins with the first lonely song of the fever bird. Bird after bird joins in, each with its own melody and own rhythms, until the crows intensify the build up with their persistent pedal points. Then the melodies seem to disperse gradually, leaving in the end as ~~the surroundings enter/die~~ ~~the~~ ~~become conscious of daylight~~ ~~only the~~ ~~breathy~~ ~~songs~~ punctuated by the deathless caw of the crows. I have heard this concert ~~at/dawn~~ in ~~the~~ villages and in Dacca where it is still possible to forget city life during these early hours when nature makes her first sounds. I know that no where else will it be the same and I wonder if any where else it will be as beautiful. Sadly I wonder if I will even remember the sounds themselves and if I will not be left stranded with only the knowledge of this beauty and no means of experiencing it again. How fortunate are the great musicians and composers whose aural memories are strong enough to retain the sounds they wish to call on later. How fortunate I am as long as I can listen to a raga in Bhairav or even ~~from/the~~ music meant for later hours which recaptures the ~~odd~~ feeling, if not the actual sounds, of this enchanting hour.

“... a Bengali dawn in May .... At least a dozen varieties of melody enter this symphony which begins with the first lonely song of the fever bird ...”

“How fortunate I am as long as I can listen to a raga ... which recaptures the felling, if not the actual sounds, of this enchanting hour.”

“The hot weather had its own characteristic accompaniments. There were the koel and brain-fever birds whose calls went right up the scale ... you waited for those last few notes and they would always come a few half-beats off. Another monotonous and very trying sound’ was t hat of the tin-pot bird, ‘ a hammer sound all the time like a small cotton-gin factory.’ A night sound which disturbed those trying to sleep outside on their lawns was the sound of jackals howling ‘like babies being torn limb from limb.”

[Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj*, p.135]

DCD sketch in 1962 letter to me

★ To go on living is our motto.  
8/1962  
WATING!  
DAN.





ROUTINE VENDORS & HAWKERS

After breakfast vendors often came down our little lane plying their wares. Generally goods were carried in a large open basket on a vendor’s head as he chanted his identifying call.

The earliest vendor in the day would be the *dudh wallah*, the milkman, with his deep cans of milk hanging from either end of a bamboo pole on his shoulders. The open aluminum cans were topped with a large leaf so that the milk did not slop over. We always suspected the milk of being watered down, but appreciated getting it fresh every morning.

Throughout the day there would be a stream of vendors such as: the bangle seller with his basket full of colorful bracelets, the vegetable *wallah* with his burden of eggplants, onions, potatoes, carrots, etc., and the *lungi wallah* with his array of cellophane-wrapped, starched plaid *lungis*.

More rare was the book vendor. He collected books from one household and sold them to another, mostly English language books. We enjoyed the little notes we often would find inside these books from the previous readers advising on the readability of the book.

Occasionally rug *wallahs* from Afghanistan would stop by in pairs, unfurl their carpets for us to ogle over, for they were indeed genuine, splendid and irresistible. The few ones that we eventually bought were hard won with extensive bargaining by Dan.

Pork, which gave a religious problem for the majority Muslim population, was only available from Hindus and Buddhist *mangsha wallas* (meat vendors). The pork *wallah* would come surreptitiously to the back door of the kitchen bearing hunks of freshly cut pig in burlap sacking and the cook would buy chosen cuts from him.

There was a *wallah* of local fiddles whose call was ubiquitously heard as he roamed the city. From the busy streets of Motijheel to the quiet residential neighborhoods, he could be heard playing repeatedly the same tune from an old popular movie as he went from place to place.

The occasional snake charmer carrying his covered basket, often accompanied by his assistant, would announce his presence by blowing his nasal sounding horn. It was a rural version of a shenai and sounded remotely like a clarinet. If admitted to entertain, he would squat before us, open his basket and blow his nasal tune on the instrument while the cobra gracefully lifted its head above the basket rim and slithered out as if part of a scene from Kipling’s *Kim*.



DCD sketch , ‘Living in Dacca’

My description of Dacca vendors from my essay about life in Dacca, 1967

I would have liked to record the daily sounds of people about our house and in the street outside, especially the cries of the ~~various~~ various hawkers as they come by at intervals, some of them accompanied by rhythmic bells, ~~or~~ the rapid ~~fire~~ fire of a child's noise maker, or the monkey man's ~~double~~ double rattle. "Shari kah-por" is the cry of the sari vendor. The last syllable, "por", is a long drawn out nasal sound. "Ei kahkoz" is the cry of the paper trader with a lilt in his voice as it goes up on the "i" sound of the first word, is suspended for a minim, then <sup>is</sup> fired out ~~the~~ in rapid succession <sup>on</sup> the ~~next~~ ~~two~~ last two syllables. "Kola, Kola", the banana man. The second "kola" is cried at a higher pitch than the first and there is a swing upward on the final "a" pointing to infinity. Then there is one of the most cheerful sounds in all the ~~world~~ world, that of the ~~one~~ ~~stringed~~ ~~violin~~ ~~vendor~~ one stringed violin vendor. There are a couple of tunes that he plays which can be recognized all over Dacca, and, indeed, you may meet him anywhere in Dacca, playing his one-stringed ~~violin~~ made of a tiny clay bowl with a piece of skin over it for a sound box ~~through~~ <sup>to</sup> which ~~the~~ a long thin strip of bamboo is attached for stretching a single piece of ordinary wire. ~~On this simple instrument and with~~ Another strip of bamboo is made into a bow with horse hair. With this simple instrument held against his chest with one hand, bowed with ~~another~~ the other hand, a bag bristling with ~~similar~~ other violins at his side, the vendor strolls for miles through the streets of Dacca, playing continuously his gay little melodies, followed always by a small band of children and admirers. The two tunes he plays most often are programmed apart with improvisations and other tunes not played so frequently. We have heard ~~him~~ him at least once every two ~~weeks~~ or three weeks in all our six years here. He, and ~~the~~ all these vendors, are as natural and enchanting as the birds at dawn. It is hard to tell how much of their charm is associated with the surrounding sights and sounds and without the total context I am not sure the would bring such poignant delight. The tape recorder has not been perfected to that extent yet where I could rely on it to bring back these pleasures. ~~It is a pleasure to hear the sound of the violin and the monkey man's double rattle.~~



## ROUTINE VENDORS &amp; HAWKERS cont.

PAT HILL'S DESCRIPTION OF CARPET WALLAHS  
[P. Hill, *Parlor Bazar*, pp.2-4]

A motor rickshaw trembles and clatters into our driveway and the rug wallah steps out, a tall Kashmiri in baggy pyjama with a curved nose and shiny black mustache.

"Memsahib, you look at rugs today?" He cocks his head and adds persuasively, "I have very nice rugs today, you want to see."

If for some reason we cannot view his wares at the moment--perhaps we have guests, or amoebic dysentery--he asks, "When shall I come back?"

Sooner or later he is in our living room with his oriental rugs and his partner. All have incredibly emerged from the tiny interior of the rickshaw. These wallahs frequently work in pairs. Each has his own role in the scene, but its exact nature is known only to the team. It is likely to be a family affair, and one purpose of the togetherness is doubtless to see that neither cheats the others. Dust flies like dry fog as they unroll the rugs, one after another, shaking each to produce seductive waves of sheen on the surface, glancing at us sharply to see the effect.

"You look from this side, sahib, you see, you like too much color." The tone of the rug lightens and darkens as we change our angle of vision. Each rug is tossed carelessly aside as another is spread for examination, until the floor is covered with them. They lie in banks, stacks, overlapping at all angles. The names ring: Kashan, Kirman, Shiras; Isphahan, Turkoman, Afghan. Patterns are profuse. A garnet-bright medallion on cream; intricate tendrils and arabesques on pale blue; stylized mosques on a brick-colored prayer rug; geometric flowers; wine reds and delicate pinks; sapphire blue and bronze greens.

Surrounded, we breathe deeply and try to keep calm. Oriental rugs may be an acquired taste. I seem to remember a time when I, like many occidentals, preferred the more subdued colors, but it must have been a long way back. These rugs easily become an addiction.

We pace around, peering and scowling thoughtfully. If we gaze too long at one of them, one wallah begins to lift and shake it again, emphasizing its glories.

"Well--what do you think?" we ask each other. "I rather like that---" "But it's awfully busy, isn't it?" "Let's look at this one again..." Sahib drops to his hands and knees and studies the knots on the back. The wallahs smoke and wait, occasionally interrupting to encourage us, often talking to each other in their own dialect, Kashmiri or Punjabi. We mutter about warps and wefts and guls, sounding more knowledgeable than we are, which deceives no one. Our bearer brings tea. Time is no object, only money.

This session concludes when we decide to keep two or three of the rugs for a few days and see how it feels to live with them. This is a very important feature of the purchase. I am bewildered by the presence of quantities of anything, and suffer agonies of indecision at a super-market or smorgasbord. We must have a rug or a copper lamp resting quietly in the house for a while by itself to know how warmly we feel about it.

The wallahs roll up all the other rugs and the whole party is tucked into the rickshaw again. The price haggling will come a few days later when they return for our decision. This can be good theater if you have the right cast.

Wallahs come in seasonal spasms, unpredictably. One summer in Dacca, in what is now Bangladesh, we had a heavy rug season. The city seemed to be flooded with merchants from Sind, Azad Kashmir, and Punjab, who had come from West Pakistan to sell in the eastern province. Every Sunday we gathered in our living room with our close friends and neighbors, Paul and Shercoo Rusby, and a wallah. Shercoo, a Parsi from Bombay, an art collector and a first-rate

MINOR STRIFE  
WITHIN "OUR  
GANG"

[MFD letter to CGR  
11/15/1964]

Dan sits as judge  
for the first quarrel  
between the servants

We had our first servants quarrel the other day after 4 years of ostensible peace although it turns out that there have been other quarrels which they had settled among themselves. This one was over an allegedly stolen razor blade - Mohan accusing the cook - and because the cook said he wished to leave our employ we had to decide the case which in the heat of the quarrel had become further compounded. We called in Dan's secretary who is a law student passing his final exams now, a Buddhist, very calm, and turned out to be excellent. Dan sat as judge & he acted as interpreter at the same time indicating how to proceed. We heard each separately for an hour about, decided that it was still their personal quarrel & that we could not take sides in it, but that a third party - Wahab - was to blame for not having kept the quarrel away from us. After we had explained that to Wahab and persuaded Mohan to apologize for making accusations for which he had no proof, we brought in the cook, Mohan, & Wahab together for the formal epilogue, and all seems to have been concluded. We felt very colonial and scandal at the same time. I envy the landlord, or lady, who can set out justice on the spot which is really what I had expected but then my Bengali is not that good and my understanding of the situation not as keen as Dan's. It was an experience.





Mother D surrounded by Mohan, Cook, Wohab and Mali in thier formal whites, 1965.

“All household servants wore uniforms, usually white with bands on their turbans and cummerbunds in the colours of their sahib’s service. Inside the house they went barefoot ...”

[Allen, *Plain Tales from the Raj*, p.87]



### 3.3 STAYING PUT AT HAFIZ VILLA





“Then, having lost the balance  
of his friends,  
‘Went Fantee’ -- joined the  
people of the land ....”

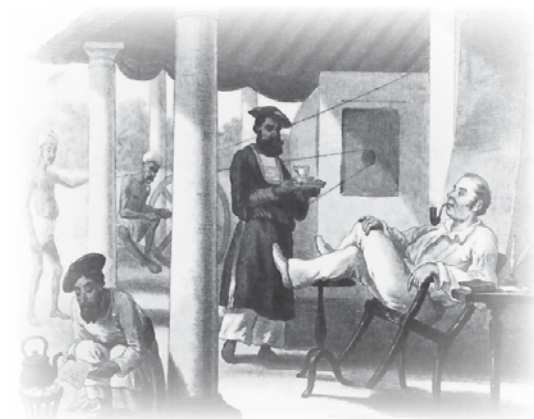
[*Rudyard Kipling’s Verse*, p.78]



### REJECTING THE USA CONTRACT LIFESTYLE

Within one year of moving into Hafiz Villa, Dan got a new job with USAID to join an architecture program at the East Pakistan University of Engineering and Technology (EPUET). As part of this new job he was expected to move to Dhanmandi where four American professors from Texas A & M were being housed. Dan had no idea that this new job would challenge our beloved “Bohemian” lifestyle. However, because USAID was funding the effort, it was assumed that Dan and I would take on the standard living style of all the other USAID families. The opportunity to move to a furnished Dhanmandi house, to have a car and driver, and the US commissary privileges might seem tempting to others, but for us these were all the things we were proud to avoid and live without.

Dan and I were tormented by the thought of leaving Hafiz Villa. Had this change of domicile been stipulated when Dan was asked to join the team, he might well have had second thoughts about taking the job. He expressed a firm reluctance to make the shift, arguing that we were well established in our house where it was and that it was equally close to the university as was Dhanmandi. He mentioned the virtues of our “Bengali life style” (as opposed to the “foreign lifestyle” of Dhanmandi) and how it might promote better ties with the local students and faculty. He managed to win his case to stay, but not in time to stop the delivery of the furniture, which was automatically assigned to USAID families. Due to some clerical error, we woke up one morning to find an oversized almirah, large sofa and two armchairs dumped in our garden. We successfully managed to have it all sent back to the US Commissary warehouse where it came from, since it was obviously never going to be able to squeeze into our little house.

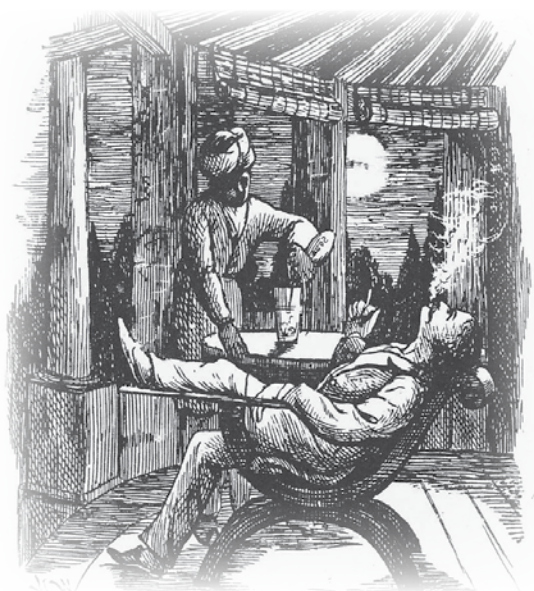


### GOING “FANTEE”

Makbul, Dan’s boss, laughingly accused us of “going native” when we first chose Hafiz Villa. And indeed, we did go a bit “native” in how we chose to live in it. We loved our kutcha houseware (our hand-made glassware and clay pots), our white-washed walls and cement floors. We loved our natural ventilation and open unscreened windows. We loved our solar heated water. We loved our semi-public life that could be glimpsed through Dan’s garden wall.

Bengali friends who came to visit us reacted in different ways to our living arrangements. Some were disappointed that we lived in an ‘old’ house, in an ‘old’ neighborhood, with bamboo furnishings from the local market and without an AC or a refrigerator in the living room, as was customary in any ‘new’ Dhanmandi house. On seeing our rough pottery ash trays and bowls, more than one Bengali visitor suggested we go to New Market to get some “real” (porcelain) chinaware.

But we also had many friends and visitors who were appreciative of our simple aesthetics and more local Bengali style of furnishing our house. Like us, they felt “at home” being able to hear the birds without the drone of an air-conditioner and feel the natural breezes and see outside without the hindrance of screens.



U.S.A.I.D. furniture which we  
returned to the warehouse

*The almirah on the front lawn*  
[MFD letter]

“One morning we woke up to find the front lawn covered in large furniture. There was an almirah that would have been difficult to get through the front door it was so big. There was a sofa and large armchairs which if placed in our living room would have left little space for circulation. There was a large dining table and chairs to match, coffee table, and cabinets. Dan contacted the USAID provisions department and persuaded the “in-charge” to remove the furniture as soon as possible as the monsoon season had begun.”



GOING “FANTEE” cont.



Hafiz Villa update  
[DCD letter to MFD, 08/12/1961]

Wonsir had typhoid but is cured now  
(he was not cured the last time I  
told you he was cured)

Cook is quiet.

Birals are loud and big I shall try  
to get rid of them before you get back

Noutoon make one katch bore

Wall is up.

Floods are down

Vegetables are vegetable (egg plant) ↓

Dawings are dull

Shulers are over worked and heading ↓  
for a nervous break down.

all else same

Seeds - Drop a note to some company ↓  
in the <sup>N.Y.</sup> Times gardening section and  
have a catalogue sent here or forget  
the whole thing.

Use whatever ticket you want?



RESISTING THE PRIVILEGED LIFE

Commissary privilege was also included in Dan’s new contract. The access to powdered milk, Nescafe, Heinz ketchup and hundreds of other American “goodies” could prove a temptation to enrich our life style. American cigarettes at American prices was certainly a temptation for Dan. But for a long time we resisted out of pride. Dan had laughed with disdain at the sight of the trays laden with commissary liqueurs wheeled into Dhanmandi living rooms at social gatherings and swore we would never do that. We took pride in our local consumption: tolerating the “gray” sugar that Cook brought from the bazar and making do without good butter, and other staples that the Dhanmandi Americans had. Paradoxically, the Commissary happened to be much closer to us than to the American community it served in Dhanmandi. Whereas I could bike there in ten minutes, a Dhanmandi wife had to schedule a car and driver to take her across town to get there.

Eventually we did surrender somewhat, and allowed ourselves to indulge in commissary shopping for parties and gifts. In spite of the commissary prohibition on gifting commissary goods, we liked to give foreign liquors and cigarettes to our Bengali friends who, as we knew, had little access otherwise to such cherished goods. But once word got out among our local community that we had some commissary goods, we had to endure routine requests for commissary stuff. I remember one of our Bengali friends in particular who made a point of visiting us regularly once she found that we had access to the commissary. Upon arriving, she would always make an excuse to “just have a look,” at our storeroom and then help herself to any commissary item that caught her eye.

My description of the  
“white sugar” crowd  
[MFD letter]

“We were given commissary privileges. The commissary happened to be near us on Elephant Road. It was a car ride away for families in Dhanmandi and housewives used to shop there once a week. We had noticed that Dhanmandi foreigners had white sugar compared to our dusty colored bazar sugar. We called them the white sugar crowd. They had butter and Kraft cheese and much else that we had forgotten about. We refused to shop there until Dan was grateful for the powdered milk and gradually we added a few other times.”

PAT HILL’S DESCRIPTION OF THE BOHEMIAN LIFESTYLE  
[P. Hill, Parlor Bazar, pp.140-141]

A certain wariness existed between the Official and Unofficial American communities, partly because of a few privileges enjoyed by the Official. Their housing and furniture were provided by the U. S. government. They could buy, at the Commissary, liquor and cigarettes and imported foodstuffs and paper towels, and could have scarce items imported duty-free by APO mail. Few of the Unofficial people actually resented these facilities, exemptions which most Official Americans did not.

Official foreigners had their own crosses to bear. Some wondered if the husband's salary was meant to hire twenty-four-hour availability of the entire family. The wife of a department head might call a junior official's wife to tell her to serve on a committee, or to give a luncheon for thirty people--guest list supplied--and personal plans often had to be pushed aside accordingly. Pressure was exerted upon wives who backed away from group projects and meetings. Those whose husbands were on temporary assignments might take it less seriously, but the



RESISTING THE PRIVILEGED LIFE cont.

Fleeing the American colony for Hafiz Villa  
[MFD letter to Hugh-Jones 1961 p.2]

Sometimes we have been discouraged by it all, but we still are enjoying it really. We have an excellent cook and his son does the cleaning, not unsupervised of course. The cook is really the only skilled labor we have found and he is devoted. Our garden even without the wall is pleasant and we eat most of our meals on the back veranda or in the patio under the stars at night; I took a very pleasant ten day trip to India with a school friend of mine and her mother and shortly after accompanied Dan on a business trip to Rangoon. We have a restricted social life from fleeing the American colony who all belong to big initials, ICA, UNESCO, US Consulate, etc, all "experts", all older, all with families, and living off US commissary goods, and living on the other side of town. I am probably too willing to believe the rumors that the wives are bored and unhappy, and that they all spend their time at bridge parties and cocktails. If it weren't for the age difference we might be taken in and with the British colony. The city is very pretty in many parts, something like a large farm with bamboo colonies interspersed or house-and-gardens, and then there is the picturesque old city. The University is quite adequate and there are good libraries. The movie supply is poor which is an added strain to the lack of entertainment here. Dan hasn't had time to do any more solar experimenting but he got into a



THE MAYERS SET UP HOUSE  
[Bob Mayers letter to MFD, Spring 1963]

HIRING STAFF AT 9 NEW BAILEY ROAD  
... We were told by expatriates who had lived in Dacca for years that we could not survive here without a house staff of at least four servants, each earning between \$15-\$20 per month. We'd need a cook who also did the food shopping. The markets had no refrigeration so food had to be bought very early in the morning and you'd have to carry home live chickens and fish. We'd need a bearer to run the staff and serve us meals. We'd need a sweeper because a bearer and a cook were above doing the cleaning. We'd also need a mali to tend the garden and a chokidor to guard the premises. And, from time to time we also might want to have on our staff a masseuse

Soon, job applicants showed up in droves. Many of the cooks who came were late middle aged men who had worked for English families during the British rule. They all carried tattered cardboard folders filled with folded yellow crumbling reference letters. The letters were often tragic and hilarious: "Sirs, Mr. Ahmed served as cook in our residence from April to May 1945 and during this period sufficiently exhibited his culinary skills to convince us to re-commence interviewing other men of his profession." Another letter read: "To Whom it May Concern: Mr. Farid Ali briefly attempted to cook for our family but we soon developed concerns for our health. I would advise you to carefully observe the 'cleanliness' of his hands". It amazed us that these poor illiterate men had been carrying around these damning letters for twenty years without having any idea what was in them.

Right on the edge of the road, separate from the house was a small shack which Mr. Mirza explained to me was the servants' quarters. It was truly bleak, without electricity or shutters on the windows. I paid the contractor who was building our balcony to add window bars, shutters and electric lights. When the job was finished our landlord scolded me. "This is the problem with foreigners.", he said, "You come here and coddle the servants and give them all sorts of things and when you leave it makes life much more difficult for us pukkah Pakistanis."

APARTMENT OVER LOOKING A TANK  
Florence and I soon found a house to rent on New Bailey road. We had been looking for a house that fronted on a "tank". Because all the land is low when the monsoons arrive everything floods. Before they build houses they excavate large rectangular pits in the ground, often larger than an acre in size. The dirt is piled up around the tank and houses are built on these small rises. The tank soon fills with rainwater and is surrounded by lush tropical vegetation. Around these tropical "lakes" are built some of the nicest houses in town and our house was right there on a nice big tank. The only problem was none of the windows looked at the tank and there was no porch or balcony to sit and enjoy the view. I negotiated with Mr. Mirza, our new landlord who agreed to build a new porch and roofed balcony I would design to overlook our tank. Once this was done, Florence and I happily left the Hotel Shabagh and moved into our home. We lived on the second floor, above a Pakistani family.





