

# Haroon Ahmed

Born 1936.

Autobiographical life story.

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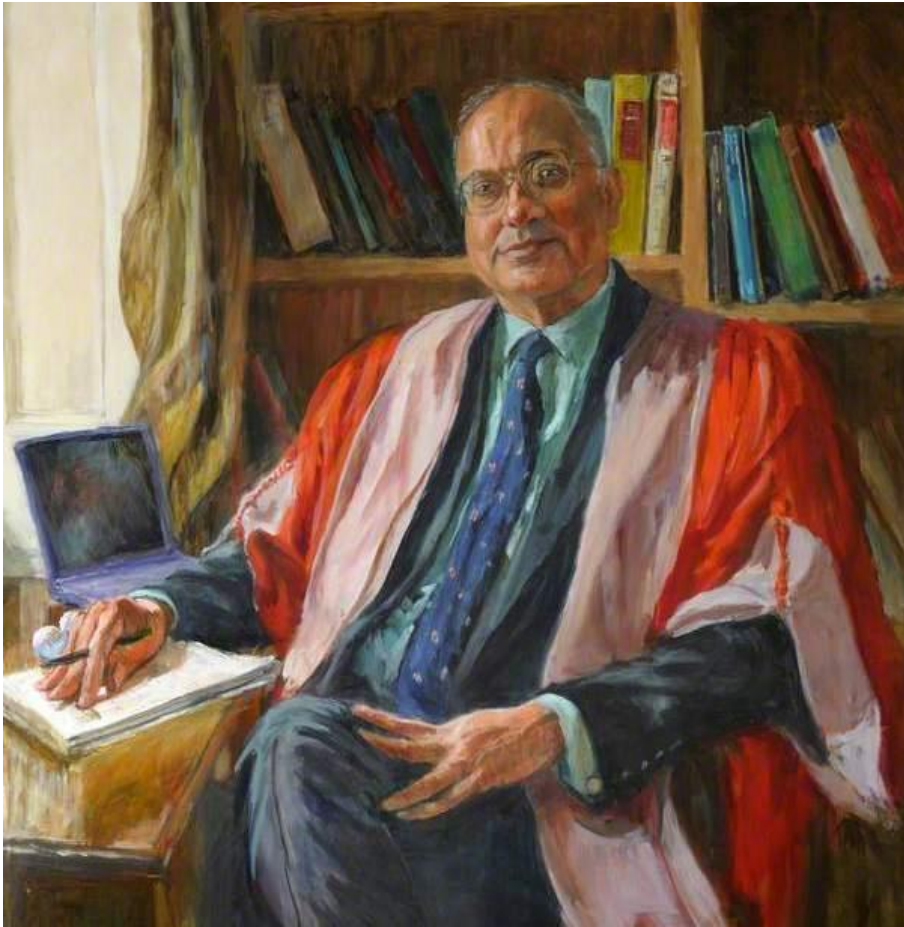
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*The text of this life story is transcribed, with thanks and acknowledgement, from the collection of Filmed Interviews with Leading Thinkers at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. The interview was carried out by Prof. Alan Macfarlane on 8th December 2009 and was transcribed by Sarah Harrison. It can be seen here: <https://www.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1106114>*

*Additional material was added in 2021 by Haroon Ahmed.*

# 1. Family Background



This portrait hangs in Corpus Christi College and shows Haroon Ahmed in ScD robes as Master of Corpus Christi College.

I was born in Calcutta, India in 1936; my father had been posted there and three of his children were born in this city. Father was a civil servant in the Indian Government Service; my mother had married at seventeen so had only just finished school. It is interesting to note that my father graduated in electrical engineering from the Technische Hochschule in Berlin in 1930 and in time my brother and I also graduated in electrical engineering from Imperial College, London. My father had gone to Germany between the wars, during the time of German hyper-inflation in the 1920s. He went with a group of Indian students who were not welcome in either India or England for having participated in the non-cooperation movements led by Mahatma Gandhi. Earlier he was at Aligarh University where he got into trouble because of his involvement in political agitation. He was a very mild and modest man despite having taken a degree of Diplom-Ingenieur in Germany which was very highly regarded across the world.



My father, Nizam Ahmed graduating from Technische Hochschule, Berlin

My paternal grandfather died before I was born; he was an administrator, involved in dispensing justice and running the railway goods transport system of Delhi under the guidance of the local Commissioner, usually a young Englishman. Grandfather, always addressed as Deputy Saheb, was hugely respected within the family and among his peers in India during the British Raj.

On my mother's side I knew my grandfather well as a boy; he was a civil engineer working for the Public Works Department in Delhi and a very successful businessman

who made a fortune building parts of New Delhi, constructed under the architect Lutyens as the symbolic capital of India and the City became the administrative headquarters in place of Calcutta. I believe that he was also

involved in building airfields on the Eastern border of India when the Japanese invasion was feared but they were not used and eventually abandoned. Many years later the broken concrete slabs from the runways were discovered by travellers and the story was revealed. With his personal fortune and the dowry inherited from his first wife who died early in childbirth, Grandfather built himself a fine house in New Delhi where I lived with my family from time to time. This pattern of life

continued until the Partition of India in 1947.



Grandfather's home, Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi, India.

My maternal grandmother who died when my mother was only twelve was a remarkable woman because she became a portrait photographer and drove her own car, which was an amazing achievement for an Indian woman in the 1920s when hardly any

women drove cars in Europe. I am sorry that I did not meet her as a child, but she certainly influenced my

mother a great deal; I have suddenly remembered my mother telling me that that the car Grandmother drove was a Chevrolet, an American car. My Grandfather lost his house and his fortune when he fled from India to Bangladesh shortly after Partition.

I remember a very loving and caring home in my early years in Lahore and Delhi. I was the third child and rather pampered because I was a boy, my parents first two children were girls. Six years later my younger brother was born, and I my earliest memories are of being jealous of him because he had an ayah, but I was now going to school, and I greatly resented that he was staying at home.

British qualifications were more valued in India, when my father returned from Germany, he became a civil servant at a relatively low level because of his German degree but eventually became a high-ranking civil servant. My maternal

grandfather had supported my father's education in Berlin and he noted my father's qualities and when he came back from Germany a marriage with his daughter was arranged. Father was fifteen years older than my mother, a significant factor that defined my relationship with my parents - my mother was young and lively while my father was somewhat removed but very caring.

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## 2. Childhood

All through life father was quiet and gentle towards all his four children while my mother was excitable and forceful and she made us do our homework, taught us to speak English at an early age, and gave us a love of books. She read a great deal herself, although, later in life, mainly light romantic fiction. In childhood she had been to good schools in Shimla and Delhi and had had an English governess which ensured our excellent grounding in the English language. My mother was a strong influence on me, but stronger still was my sister; the elder of my two sisters was three years older than me and was immensely clever. I had to run to keep up with her. Competing with this clever person was an advantage for me because I raced ahead of my peers in school. I read my sister's books by classical English writers, Dickens, the Brontes, Jane Austen and adventure books by R L Stevenson, Daniel Defoe, and many others.



Haroon aged five in Delhi-  
the only picture that  
survived Partition.

My sister would bring into the house a lot of books that I would never have had access to; she didn't bully me but wasn't protective either; she thought I was spoilt and sometimes hid her books from me. We are now old but retain the happiest of friendships. My mother was always in control of my life until I was married and would know intimate details of what I was up to. She did this with all her children and nobody would be left unaware of her views on what we were doing whereas Father was relatively detached.

My parents were both Muslims, but neither was strongly religious. They did not pray regularly except on Eid days, when we all conformed, much like nominal English Christians at Christmas. I think my father insisted we obeyed the rules on alcohol and pork, but nobody went to pray regularly at the Mosque. At an early age I was beginning to read the newspaper; sometimes waking early to get hold of The Statesmen newspaper, my Father's preferred paper, before he took it off with him. I became aware of the Bengal famine, but it did not make a big impact on me as we were no longer in Bengal, but back in Delhi by then. Decades later I met Ian Stephens, the famous editor of 'The Statesman' for many years. By chance he was also a Kingsman and we met while dining in Hall. Fortunately, I had heard of his book 'Horned Moon' and he liked to talk to me about Pakistan and India. He lived in Cambridge and came to tea with us a few times when my children were young; he was a very courteous and kind man and we missed him when he died.

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### 3. Partition



Refugees from both sides fled and the trains were overcrowded and sometimes attacked by communal rioters. The inmates were gruesomely massacred. We were lucky enough to get on to a mercy flight from Willingdon Airport in Delhi.

At the time of Partition, we lived in Delhi and my father was given the task of determining the division of the assets between India and Pakistan. Unfortunately, this responsibility made him a target for the people who were trying to destroy the process of dividing India and the formation of Pakistan. Armed rioters attacked him while he was driving his car which was followed from his office and rammed, fortunately close to a police station; he escaped and telephoned from the police station and was rescued by my maternal uncle Enver. Immediately afterwards, and in the nick of time my uncle drove at great speed to our family home in Windsor Place, where we were bundled into his Hillman estate car with nothing other than the clothes we were wearing, abandoning all our most precious possessions - that memory with images of my mother's distress is very clear - and we arrived at the refugee camp set up in my grandfather's estate in Keeling Road. Immediately after we had vacated our home it was looted and all our possessions were lost forever.

Many refugee camps were set up across Delhi and our camp was in the house where my grandfather normally lived with his family. It was a large estate and refugee tents covered the gardens. Armed men patrolled the perimeter carrying guns while the women and children were huddled into very uncomfortable living spaces. We may have been in this refugee camp for weeks; my memory is not clear because time for children is punctuated by incidents rather than the calendar. Thinking now it was certainly long enough for us to feel very threatened, and the memory that remains is that as an eleven-year-old I was taught to fire a gun in case the man guarding our area was killed. I also remember very clearly that we had to squat on the floor with a plate full of daal (lentils) as our staple food.

When this refugee camp was under threat of being overrun, we were able to board a mercy flight from Delhi and Karachi. Our journey to the airport in a car was a terrifying experience with my mother lying on top of us along the back seat to hide her children; the rioters were attacking cars carrying families and ignoring cars with just the driver. Along the dangerous streets it appeared to roaming killers that there was only my father driving, we escaped through the checkpoints to the airport from where we were able to fly in a Dakota to Karachi. I remember there were not enough seats, so the children sat in the middle galley way enduring a very bumpy flight. Communal violence in India in 1947, would be branded today as an ethnic cleansing event and the ringleaders might have been caught and punished in an international court.

When we arrived in Pakistan, we were given refuge in the house owned by a friend of my grandfather. Again, my childish memory is that I owned only one pair of trousers, and I had to sit in my underwear when the trousers were washed but were not dry enough for me to wear! More seriously, I remember extreme financial deprivation until my father returned to the post he had held in India in the government Department of Supply and Development. We were fortunate in that we had all escaped while many families arrived mourning the loss of a family member either killed or kidnapped during the riots.

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## 4. Karachi and School

In Delhi I had been at St Columba's school where I had had a perfectly good education, but because my mother had taught us English, we were at a great advantage over many other children who could not speak English as well as us although we spoke mainly Urdu at home. We were certainly scolded in Urdu by my mother, but we children spoke in English to each other; my sisters were so much cleverer than me and they were able to help me and to make sure that I was getting the grammar right.

I went to St Patrick's school in Karachi, a blissful period in my childhood. I was there from the age of eleven until fifteen when I did the Senior Cambridge examination. I did exceptionally well and obtained a first class result. My school was a Catholic missionary foundation with priests from all over the world as teachers, but the principal always came from Ireland until a Pakistani, Father Raymond was appointed in my time at the school. It was regarded as the second-best school at that time in Karachi.

Grammar School was the best and my parents would have liked me to go there, but it was expensive and exclusive and my father had come out destitute to Karachi. Fortunately, he was a civil servant and when the transfer of assets took place in India, one of the agreements was that civil servants from both sides should be retained in equivalent posts.

In the early days we had only the clothes we were wearing when we left Delhi. Fortunately, with Father's job came a house, and within a month he was getting a salary; in retrospect, we didn't suffer much compared with many others who ended up in refugee camps in Karachi. Most historians are now aware that the urgency that Lord Mountbatten brought to Partition was unwise and uncaring. Furthermore in 1947 English police officers had returned to England or confined to barracks and far removed from all the gruesome incidents that were taking place across Delhi.



Sulky teenager in Karachi except when playing cricket.

The police and army, without good leadership tried but failed to stop rioters, Mr Gandhi tried but failed. It was a time of great sorrow but somehow, we had escaped and reached Pakistan.

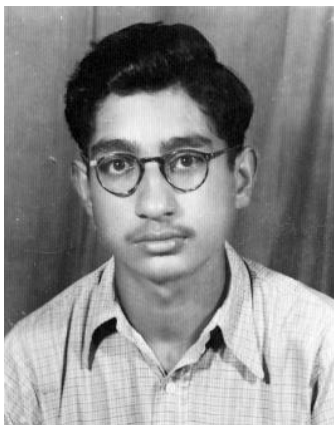
Safely settled in Karachi I played cricket, the love of my life, every moment of the day. It was difficult for my mother who would constantly have to chase after me and bring me back to much neglected schoolwork. As a cricketer I didn't make it to the highest levels but some of my peers went on to become Pakistani test cricketers; Mihir Bose's book is excellent in teasing out the love of cricket in India and Pakistan. Cricket is popular partly because it can be played without physical contact - neither Indians nor Pakistanis like games with physical contact; soccer and rugby are not played very much in the Indian sub-continent. I have always wondered why I was so hopeless at both these games when I was in England. While I was at school, I only played cricket which was an overwhelming obsession and played all the year. I was



captain of the local cricket team and had the advantage of being able to read and do sums, so could keep abreast of the rules; I don't play now but cricket is still an obsession, and I watch it and follow it very closely.

I had no interest in music, didn't listen to it or have any training in it; my mother and sisters dabbled with the harmonium, but I didn't. Much later in life, having married a wife who is very musical, living in a musical environment, I turned towards music to find out more about it and I now enjoy it, but it has never been a passion. I listen to classical music, and whatever my wife is playing. She plays the violin in a number of informal groups, and she goes to concerts as a regular subscriber; I went once or twice but found I was not enjoying myself.

In Karachi I went to a school where the quality of teaching was occasionally poor and I also suffered from the fact that I was tall for my age and possibly looked sulky as a teenager. In a size-ranked classroom they put the taller boys at the back, perhaps sensibly, but if like me, a tall boy also has poor eyesight it means that he doesn't see very much on the blackboard. I was very short-sighted and it was an impossible situation for me, so I just sat and listened and made notes. It took my parents a little while to discover my disability and I was fourteen when they realized I could hardly see anything at a distance. Amazingly my batting at cricket was exceptional despite the poor eyesight but collapsed when I had glasses because I could not judge the length of the ball!



Serious and civilised taking Senior Cambridge examinations in Karachi.

One of the advantages of my short sightedness was that I learned to listen and make notes which forced me to pay close attention. I understood what was being taught and didn't have to revise for examinations, so more time for playing cricket! I remember the maths teacher was a particularly poor teacher because I could do maths instinctively and had no difficulty understanding concepts and I knew that his explanations were not always correct.

The English teacher was always below the standard of my sister and my mother. They were both good English speakers so English was coming easily to me and I was reading way beyond the rest of the class. I read Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, my favourite book at the time was 'Treasure Island', so I was reading classical English literature. Many years later, when I was among scientists in Cambridge, I realized how much better educated I was in English literature. In Karachi read anything we could find in the shops and my sister took me to the British Council and to the American Information Services, where we borrowed books. She had to take me because she needed an escort; I remember the British Council librarian noticing that we were back again within a week asked us if we had read all the books we had borrowed - we had. She was very impressed and helped us to find the best books.

When I was in the refugee camp, I asked my father why we were refugees and why our former friends were trying to kill us? He answered that there were riots between

people of the Hindu religion and people of the Muslim religion, so the conflict was religious. I decided then as a thinking child that religion was not good for one and I abandoned religious beliefs. My mother was aware of my attitude and scolded me sometimes, but my father had been completely honest with me and accepted that I would not have any religious belief. That has remained the case, although I have attended many religious services.

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## 5. London and Chiswick Polytechnic

I began a pre-engineering degree at a college in Pakistan but just at that time my father was transferred to England. He was having difficulty with his career, and agreed to be transferred from Pakistan to an equivalent position at the Pakistan Embassy in London. His job was to direct the inspection of industrial equipment for the industrialization of Pakistan, before purchasing it.

When he came to the Pakistan High Commission in 1954 as a diplomatic officer, he brought his family with him. We settled into a house in West London, and I went to Chiswick Polytechnic to do my 'A' levels. From the Polytechnic I tried to get into Cambridge but found I needed Latin to study engineering; at 18 I could not wait a year to do an O-Level in Latin, so I went to Imperial College instead, a close second choice. The polytechnic was a good experience because everybody, from administrators to teachers, were so kind to me; in 1954 I was something of a novelty, a student from Pakistan! One of the things I can assert about the British education system was how fair it was.

I was tested by the maths teacher, Miss Tompkins, who decided that I could do problems which were way above the ability of the rest of my class and explained that the polytechnic was for students who were not of the best ability and were trying for the second time to get 'A' levels. She lent me her maths books and also her solutions book and left me to do the work.

Occasionally she would ask me if I understood everything, but she was wonderful, and pushed me way ahead of the others in the class. The physics teacher, Mr Kilburn, thought I could understand A-Level physics easily, so he made me his assistant. I had to lay out the classroom for the experiments and help him to do demonstrations; I was extraordinarily lucky with my teachers, and they made a big impact on me. We had come to London in the summer of 1954 and in October 1955 I went to Imperial College to do a BSc degree in electrical engineering.



Regent Palace Hotel in 1954. We stayed there for two weeks.

My sisters and I had read a lot about England; we also shared a passion for cricket; we remember landing with BOAC at a hut that was then the terminal for overseas flights; then we got a bus to the centre of London, and I remember my sisters remarking that those were the dolls' houses we were passing, as they were like the dolls' houses that were made in England for the overseas market.

On our arrival we stayed at the Regent Palace Hotel in the centre of London for a couple of weeks while the High Commission staff found us accommodation.

On one occasion I remember my sister and I going downstairs to find a newspaper as we were used to doing at home. To us most of the papers looked rather parochial but we found 'News of the World', misunderstood the title and marched up with it; my mother grabbed it, read a little and tore it to pieces and told us not to go down

by ourselves again. The first impressions of England were not very positive; we used to go down to the restaurant and all the English food seemed terrible, so my sisters and I frequently asked for fried eggs!

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## 6. Imperial College



Imperial College BSc Hons, in Electrical Engineering.

Imperial College was full of inspiring people. I came into contact with Dr Boothroyd later Professor Boothroyd, and he taught me transistors, which was a subject just coming up following the invention of the devices in the USA. Six years later I was expected to teach undergraduates in Cambridge the out-dated topic of thermionic valves! Then there was John Lamb, later to be Head of Electrical Engineering at Glasgow University, who taught me the physics of semiconductors. The third lecturer was Mr King who supervised my final year project on transistors and had a big influence on me as he had been at Clare College and was later to direct me to do a PhD degree Cambridge.

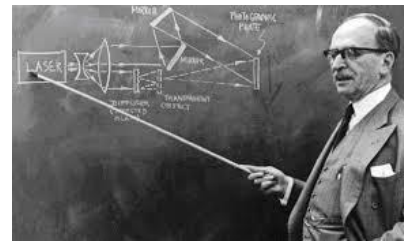
There was also Dennis Gabor later to receive his Nobel Prize for holography, who wanted me to stay on and do a PhD with him. I was terrified of him and declined.

I did well at Imperial because of my mathematics ability. Always afterwards I kept telling students that the basis of engineering is mathematics; if you can do maths engineering is a straightforward subject. I got the top marks for maths in my final year, and that was very helpful later in life. I worked very hard, particularly in my final year when my parents went



Professor A R Boothroyd who taught transistors at Imperial College.

back after a couple of years in England and left me in charge of my younger brother. He was at Latymer Upper School as he was six years younger, and we had a difficult time. Britain now has laws against racial discrimination, but didn't in those days, and we had a lot of racial trouble. I was twenty and he was fourteen, but looked older, and we had doors slammed in our faces when trying to find new digs.

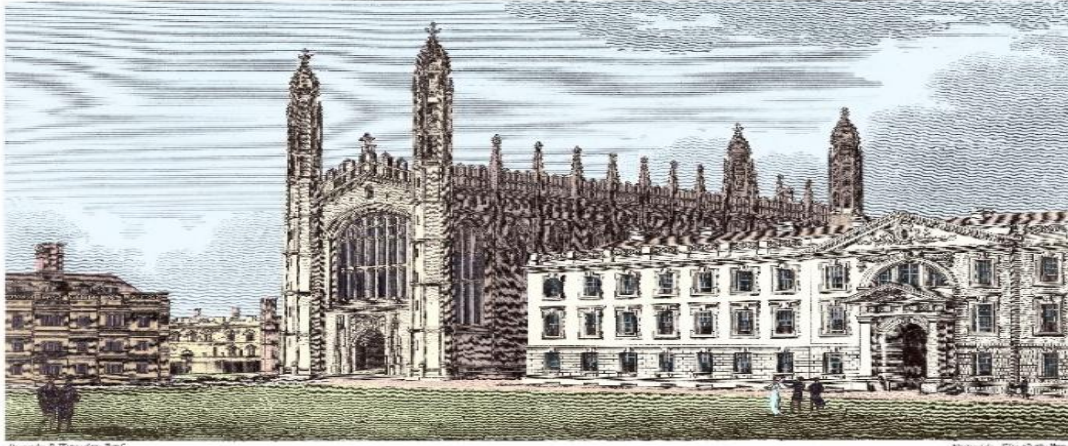


Professor Denis Gabor, Nobel Laureate.

My parents had left us in good accommodation, but we lost it due to an argument with the landlords, because of all the difficulties, I didn't do much outside of studying while I was at Imperial College except a little sport, but I didn't have enough time to play in a college team. We were close to

Shepherd's Bush and there was a lot of racial tension there. I remember my brother and I nearly getting beaten up by teddy boys; it was actually our own fault as we had laughed at their clothes. The park-keepers saved us. I regard myself as British now because I took up British nationality in 1967 and have not had a formal link with Pakistan since then.

## 7. Cambridge and King's College



King's College where I went after winning an Open Studentship to do a PhD Degree. The First-Class degree from Imperial College was highly regarded and I succeeded against a lot of competition.

Following the completion of my degree at Imperial College I was offered a number of opportunities of doing a Ph.D. degree at Imperial College, but I declined all offers for the reason that I did not understand what benefit I would gain from doing this higher degree and my father suggested that I should do a graduate apprenticeship, which would be more beneficial for me on my return to Pakistan. I went to Birmingham as a graduate apprentice working for GEC and this was the horrendous year of my life in England. I was not given accommodation with the British apprentices, but given lodgings with a landlady, where I was very lonely and spent most of my evenings and much of the night reading.

I discovered that I was being paid less than the other apprentices and I went to see the employment manager to ask for an explanation, and he answered that apprentices from abroad with a foreign degree of inferior quality were paid less and was nonplussed when I explained to him that I had a first-class degree from Imperial College and was the best qualified of all my peers. He immediately increase my salary to the higher rate and sent me on a special assignment to the GEC Research Laboratories at Wembley in London, a life-changing experience. I enjoyed the intellectual environment of research and resolved to move into research as soon as I could. During this time, I met Don Beck who had been at Downing College at Cambridge, and he told me stories of the wonderful time he had had at Cambridge University, and I also met his beautiful wife, Nedi who was extremely kind to me and fed me dinners at her home on several occasions.

I immediately went to Imperial College to meet Mr King and asked for his advice about getting into Cambridge and he showed me a copy of the Cambridge University Reporter which advertised PhD scholarships. I applied to three colleges and was fortunate enough to obtain a scholarship at my first choice, King's College. I terminated my two-year apprenticeship with GEC at the end of the first year and went off to Cambridge and was accommodated in King's College for my first year. I had a wonderful time working hard on my Ph.D. degree, playing cricket and table

tennis for the King's College teams and social tennis on the conveniently available playing fields. I also captained the Engineering Department's Cricket XI, which played evening cricket against other University Departments.



Anne Goodrich, a Vicar's daughter who married me in 1969.

My PhD project was on cathodes and scanning electron microscopy and I completed my degree successfully with plans to go and work in California, but my performance must have merited reward because I was invited to apply for a Research Fellowship, and obtained the Turner and Newall Fellowship, offered by the University and just one year later, to my immense gratification I was appointed to a University Demonstratorship, now designated an Assistant Lectureship against very stiff competition. The Head of Department, Sir

John Baker liked my prominence in the Laboratory as Captain of Cricket and three years later, in 1967 I was promoted to a full lectureship, a tenured post and my career in Cambridge University was established but a College Fellowship eluded me with two or three colleges turning me down on the basis of 'cultural differences' an euphemism for racism - the Race Relations Act was yet to come.

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## 8. Cambridge University Academic Career

In 1967 I met Anne Goodrich and after much hesitation on her part she agreed to marry me in 1969. In that year I was entitled to a sabbatical year, and I was able to go to the Thomas J Watson Research Centre of IBM in the USA, thanks to an invitation from my lifelong friend Alec Broers, now Lord Broers. This was a life changing experience for me, and I returned to Cambridge with expertise in a new area of research and worked in association with Sir Charles Oatley and stopped working with my initial supervisor Bill Beck.

My research activity grew rapidly, and I had to seek extra space in the Cambridge Science Park and this novel laboratory supported by GEC and British Telecom was inaugurated by the Chancellor, Prince Philip. In another sabbatical year at MOS Technology in America I worked on microelectronics, the design and fabrication of silicon chips which opened a new vista of exciting research. Consequently, my research activity continued to expand and was supported by Hitachi when GEC and BT decided to opt out of semiconductor research. At this stage I was confident of being promoted to a chair on the basis of leading the largest research group with funding from SERC and international recognition.

On being overlooked for a Chair at the Engineering Department I moved to the Cavendish Laboratory and founded the Microelectronics Research Centre, in a new building sponsored by Hitachi and formally opened by The Chancellor, Prince



The Chancellor, Prince Philip, signing the visitors book on the occasion of the opening of the Microelectronics Research Centre at the Cavendish Laboratory.

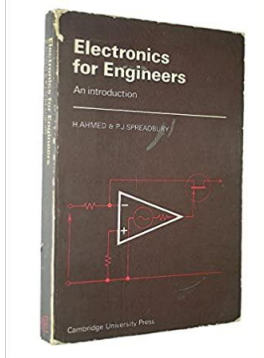
Philip. Eventually after almost a decade as a Reader I was elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering and subsequently promoted to Professor of Microelectronics-it had been a long wait! I am proud of being the first immigrant from Pakistan to become a Professor at Cambridge University; if I think back, a moment of sheer pleasure was when I was made a professor because it had been such a struggle to be promoted. I was fortunate in that I was awarded a grant by the SERC which included a secretary so that I had more time to work in the Laboratory while my secretary carried on with the administrative work. I am amused now to recall that she noticed that there was a letter

marked 'private and confidential'; I thought it was about my pension, so I left it for the whole day until just before going home I read that, out of the blue, I was to be made a Reader. I noticed that the Readership could be assigned to any University Department that would have me. I had been in Engineering for twenty years and overlooked for promotion, so thought I would like to go to the Cavendish Laboratory. Ian Nicol, whom I consider one of the great Secretary Generals of this University rang me and asked whether I was sure I wanted a change as nobody else had done so before. In the event the Heads of Department, Engineering and Physics had lunch together and agreed that I could move.



I believe that one of the most remarkable systems in the UK is the higher education grading system. It is totally without the bias which I encountered in other aspects of my life. The Head of Department, Sir John Baker gave me an early lesson when I was put on an examining board in the Engineering Department while I was very young and inexperienced, and worried by the responsibility. While we were classing the candidates, he noticed my uncertainty and said to me “Dr Ahmed, we are here to do justice” and this simple guidance was sufficient and remained with me all my working life. I taught electronics and worked closely with the late Peter Spreadbury, and we published a book on our lecture course which became a best seller and is still in print almost five decades after it first appeared.

Textbook published, 1973. Still in print more than 40 years later.



## 9. Corpus Christi College Fellow and Master



The New Court of Corpus Christi College, showing the Chapel and the Master's Lodge.



Photograph in the College archives taken in 1967.

I was elected to a Fellowship at Corpus Christ College in 1967: supervised undergraduates for almost twenty years and served as Warden of Leckhampton, the graduate section of the College, a very fulfilling experience! The College became an integral part of my academic life in Cambridge. After 30 years as a Fellow, much to my surprise and pleasure I came top of the poll of Fellows choosing the new Mastership candidate.



In the Spencer Room while serving as Master, 30years later.

I was very hesitant about accepting this great honour but was disarmed by the very 'Cambridge' remark by the Senior Fellow conducting the Election that he would not know what to do if I did not agree to serve because I had got a starred first, while all others, had got 'specials' which made me laugh but I understood his dilemma. Nevertheless, before accepting the Mastership formally, I met the clerics in the College and explained that I did not hold any religious belief although I strongly supported the right of others to hold to their faiths. The Senior Fellow said, "Well, Master-Elect, if you are prepared to do your duty, we will not hold that against you". I was rather moved and thought that if they had that sort of trust in me, I would go to Evensong and read The Lesson in

the Chapel from time to time. I should mention that long before I became Master, I had learned a great deal about the Anglican faith; My wife's father, an Anglican priest was at Christ's College as an undergraduate and her grandfather at Corpus Christi, and both became vicars, so I was very understanding of other people's religious beliefs. When I went to Evensong, I didn't know the hymns, but my wife



Procession to Great Sain to mark the 650<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mary's for a Thanksgiving Service on the 650<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

knew them without even looking at the hymn book. So, we went into Chapel, and I read the lesson when asked to because I saw it as my duty and some were constrained to say that I did my duty well. My personal rejection of religious belief was coloured by the effect of Partition of India when different extremist religious groups butchered the innocent and has remained with me ever since. I have brought my children up to believe that they have to be extremely tolerant, to have strong principles and abide by them at all times.

In the earlier stages of my Mastership I had to face the problems associated with the expansion of the Parker Library, a contentious issue on which the Fellowship

was divided, and according to my statutory duties I could only proceed along the lines of a democratic decision. After much deliberation it was decided to terminate the project. Fortunately, Doctor John Taylor, an Old Member of the College contacted me almost immediately afterwards with a view to helping the College and the outcome was the splendid Taylor Library for the use of students, and particularly the undergraduates. The Taylor Library was the major achievement of my six-year tenure. Doctor Taylor helped the college in many other ways also-



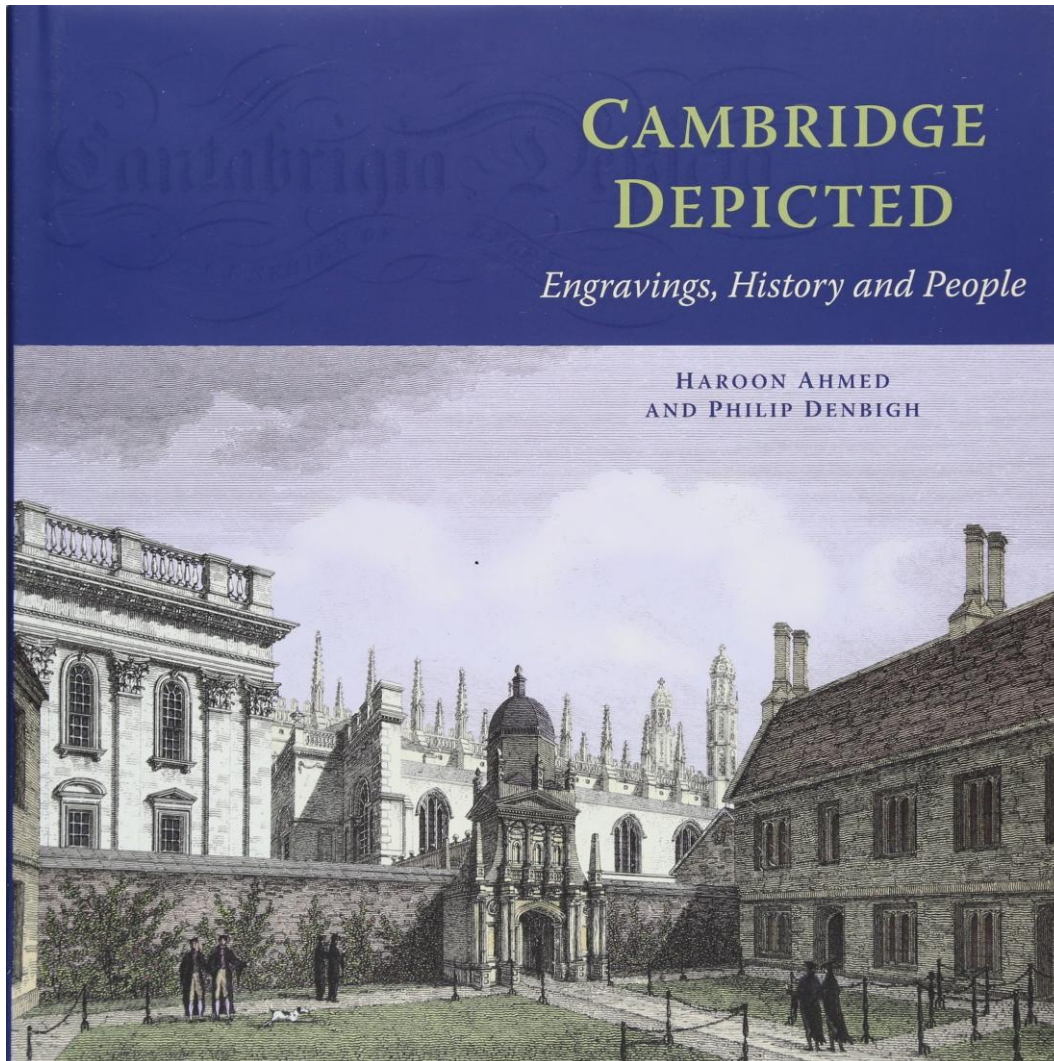
Escorted to Senate House to award degrees carrying a book under the robes

a splendid example of an old member, returning to acknowledge the role of the College in his career and success.

During the term of my Mastership there were many occasions which remain vividly in my memory, His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Chancellor of the University of Cambridge came to a lunch and admired the plumbago in the Garden Room and Prince Charles came on a less formal visit when he was particularly good at talking to the students. The College celebrated the 650th anniversary of its foundation and there was a splendid procession from the College to Great Saint Mary's, the University Church for a Thanksgiving Service. The annual presentation of degrees

in the Senate House is also a vivid memory because I was escorted all the way to my special seat; the undergraduates knelt before me, and I clasped their hands

before admitting them with a Latin oration. All too soon the Mastership came to an end, but it had been a memorable experience and a privilege that is accorded to a very few academics and again I am proud that having come as an immigrant to the UK I gained a College Mastership and to the best of my knowledge I am still the only immigrant from Pakistan to have held this position. In retirement I wrote illustrated histories ‘Cambridge Computing’, ‘Cambridge Depicted’ and ‘Cambridge Engineering’.



*Cambridge Depicted.*

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