

Kusoom Vadgama

'I have been here for 27 years, 4 days, and 1 1/2 hours,' Kusoom Vadgama told me. This was since she had first put her key in the door to her optician's practice in Temple Fortune. She is modest about her achievement, but it is one of several, because she has also been a journalist, an actress, and has chaired a centenary celebration in the House of Commons.

Miss Vadgama arrived in England in 1953 from Kenya, and studied optics. After training in drama at the New York Academy of Arts, she returned to England in 1961. She realised that there was not much demand for female Asian actresses at the time, and set up as an ophthalmic optician in Golders Green. She chose this area simply because she liked it, having discovered it by chance when she was a student living in digs.

Business was slow to start, because of lack of demand for female Asian opticians. To use her time profitably, Miss Vadgama wrote articles for newspapers. She was becoming interested in the part played by Indians in English history, as opposed to the influence of the English in India in the time of the Raj. Miss Vadgama had a dream of starting a newspaper for Indians in Britain, but was beaten to it when *India Weekly* was launched. She wrote for the paper for the next twenty years, reviewing shows and interviewing.

Meanwhile, Miss Vadgama's optician's practice became successful. She is now called an optometrist, following an international ruling. Like other optometrists, Miss Vadgama's work lies in examining eyes and giving prescriptions for lenses. She distinguishes between normal and abnormal conditions of the eyes for the age of the person. For precise diagnosis, she refers people on to their doctor or to the hospital.

She is concerned that some people cannot afford to have their eyes examined. Certain categories are exempt from paying - for example, those under 16, and full-time students between 16 and 19. She regards prevention of problems as being

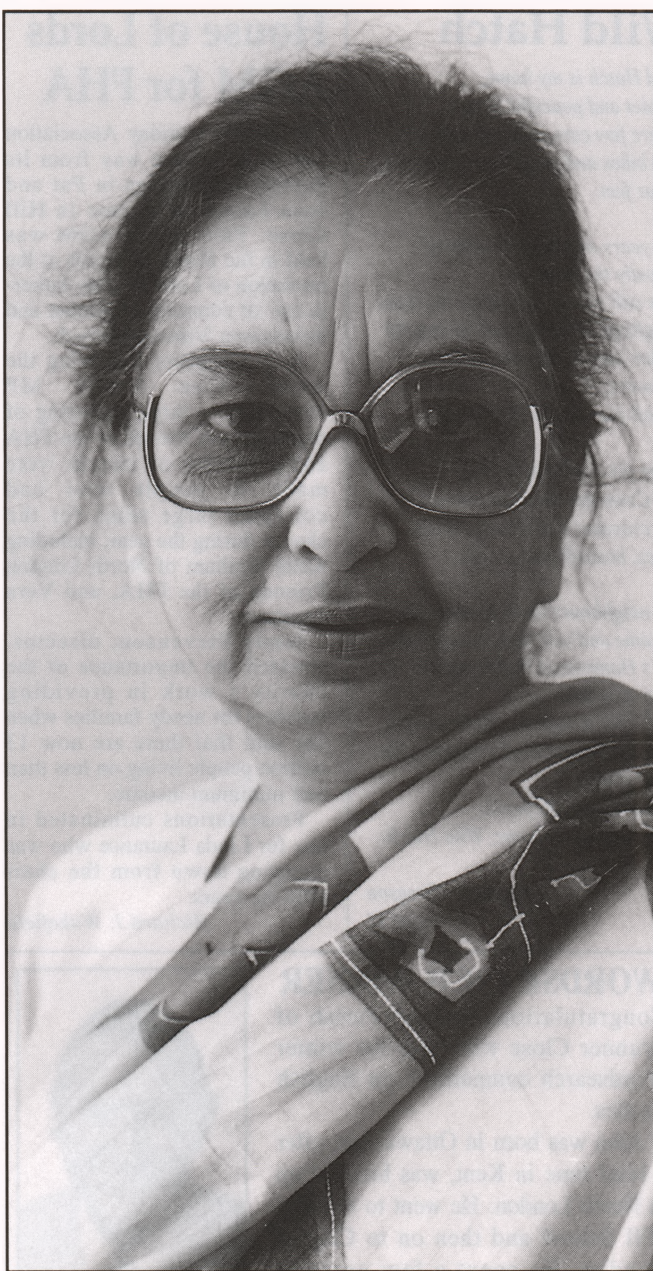
better and cheaper than having to put them right later, but recognises that this is difficult in the current system.

There have been changes in the health of our eyes over the thirty-three years that Miss Vadgama has been peering into them. She confirms that eating carrots is good for the eyes, as they contain vitamin A, and carrots have always been available. However, for the last 15-20 years we have made greater demands on our eyes than ever before. More people live alone, and so read or watch television more. We use Visual Display Units increasingly for work and leisure, which strain the eyes. Central heating has a drying effect; and the gap in the ozone layer allows more harmful ultra-violet rays to reach us.

Curiously, the precise cause of short-sightedness is unknown. It is not related entirely to heredity, the environment or nutrition, and it cannot be predicted. Chinese and Jewish people have a tendency to myopia.

In the way that she works, Miss Vadgama shows a lively sense of humour. When describing a socially difficult situation, she declared that she had to tell a white lie: 'Or, in my case, a brown one.' A messenger arrived who had forgotten an important collection of spectacles. Miss Vadgama handled it by wagging her finger at her saying, 'You see, I always knew that you were human!' She jokes with children who are reluctant to have glasses to correct short sight that it is a sign of intelligence, and that she has been trying to become short-sighted for years.

Miss Vadgama is still exploring the contribution of Indian people to England. She refers to the two and a half million Indian soldiers who volunteered in the Second World



Jackie Norman

War, and also to their many sporting achievements and financial donations. She cites the 900 words in the Oxford dictionary that originated from India: such as bungalow, jodhpurs, shampoo and pyjamas.

Miss Vadgama has published a book, *India in Britain*, and she chaired a centenary celebration in the House of Commons, attended by Paddy Ashdown and Sir David Steele. It was to commemorate the first Asian MP in the English Parliament: Dadabhai

Naoroji in 1892.

On a local level, Miss Vadgama has been trying to persuade London Transport and Express Coaches to permit short-term parking, for dropping off and meeting, in Golders Green Station. 'They should be more caring,' she says.

Miss Vadgama herself is very caring, and has made many contributions on local and national levels.

Jackie Norman



Passover Festival

As the members of Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue prepared to celebrate the Passover festival at the end of March it was time to reflect on past happenings and look forward to future events.

Among Rabbi Jackson's more enjoyable experiences recently was the honour of being presented to Her Majesty the Queen at the North London Hospice. He had the unusual opportunity of reciting the special blessing which is said only in the presence of the monarch.

The Synagogue's own magazine has been highly praised by a leading national journalist, Mr Gerald Smith, at a symposium of similar publications. Mr Smith commented on his particular interest in the magazine's article on the Synagogue's contribution to the 75th anniversary of the Suburb, last year.

Two recent youthful appointments to the Synagogue have both made an immediate and favourable impact. Simon Klyne has been appointed youth officer with the specific object of instilling a feeling of pride in the Synagogue by its younger congregants and making sure that all the many available facilities are fully used. He has galvanised the many

young members of the congregation with a whole stream of regular and special activities which have been very well attended.

Special trips have been arranged to France and Poland, and regular groups attend such diverse activities as first aid, street awareness and theatrical makeup. In the summer there will be regular tennis groups and other sporting activities.

Simon is also very aware of keeping the young adults active in the wider Suburb community and of contributing to the area in any way possible.

The other recent appointment has been that of the Rev. A. Freilich as cantor of the congregation. Rev. Avraham Freilich has impressed everyone with the beautiful way he has conducted the services. He is the great-nephew of the Synagogue's former cantor who served the community so wonderfully for many years. It is hoped and believed that Rev. Freilich will play an important role in helping the HGS Synagogue to maintain its vibrancy among all its members for many years to come.

Richard Glyn

Henrietta Barnett School overseas links

This year many of the girls are again taking part in activities beyond the confines of the school. A second joint party from HBS and Christ's College visited Paris at the end of March to take part in the European Work Experience programme. The French students much enjoyed their fortnight here and it is hoped that finance can be found for this in the future. Another group of year 10 girls went to France at the end of March as part of an exchange.

Over half term, some scientists joined a Barnet visit to Cern and the science museum in Paris, and

those studying a classical subject went to Greece.

Future expeditions being planned include a combined trip with Christ's College for geographers to Iceland and trips to France and Germany for year 8. All girls learn both French and German, and about 70 per cent took both languages for GCSE. There are trust funds to help with these overseas trips for which girls may apply in cases of financial hardship.

The diversity of the school was celebrated at the International Evening on 10 March.

Jane de Swiet

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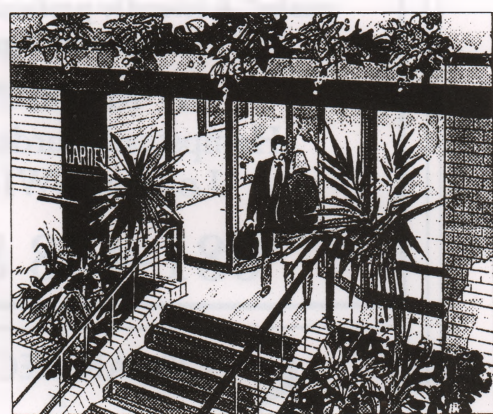
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Proms at St Jude's

Proms at St Jude's this year has been extended to a nine-day festival in aid of the North London Hospice and St Jude's Organ Appeal. From 1 July there will be a total of twelve concerts, including organ recitals; the Melodian steel orchestra, who have an amazingly wide repertoire including classical, modern calypso, pop and jazz; Mark Anderson, an outstanding American pianist who studies with Suburb resident Benjamin Kaplan; an evening of opera by the HGS Operatic Society; the Gwalia Male Voice Choir; lieder and piano solos from Anne O'Reilly and David Morse; the Nonesuch Orchestra; the Choir of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, and a jazz concert on the final night.

Donald Sinden and friends will be providing a theatrical evening in tribute to Gwen Watford.

Flower Festival and Christening robes

For three days there will be a flower festival in the church, and for the whole period an exhibition of period christening robes. Frances Musker is arranging this and would be pleased to hear from residents, on 349 9678, who have period christening robes to lend for the exhibition.

Refreshments

Wine, tea and coffee will be available in the Proms marquee, with strawberries and cream on some days.

Tickets from David McKinley, 16 Southway, 455 6693.

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