

BANGLA FOOD JOURNEYS



Aftab Rahman



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This book is dedicated to the Bangladeshi pioneers of my father's generation for their courage.

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Forward by Carl Chinn

About the book

This book has been written using primary and secondary research methodologies. The research is qualitative and is samples from the interviews that have been done. The interview questions were semi structured which allowed the conversations to flow, meaning some interviews are longer than others. The structure has three main sections. The first section has two chapters called 'Four Centuries of Heritage' and 'Shopping' and this has been written using secondary research. Books by Yousif Miah, *Bangladeshi Settlers in Birmingham* and *Roots and Tales of Bangladeshi Settlers* have been invaluable as source materials. In particular the book on *Bangladeshi Settlers in Birmingham* has given me a reference point for the oral history interviews. The *Bangla Stories* (www.banglastories.org) funded by the Runnymede Trust has been a treasure trove of useful information and proved invaluable in preparing the chapter of Four Centuries of Heritage.

The second section of the book, covers shared stories of when Bangladeshi migrants came to the UK has been written using the principles of oral history and a semi structured interview style. This meant that we were able to collect a cross section of different experiences not just focussed on food. Most of the interviews were done in Sylheti and then translated and written in English. Care was taken to ensure that the integrity of the interview was maintained whilst translating into nearest English equivalents for Bangladeshi concepts. All the interviews have been recorded using a HD camcorder and snippets can be found in the Legacy website.

The third and final section has been prepared by interviewing people and collecting both their stories favourite recipes. In the some instances cooking was done in advance and the recipes collected retrospectively. In other instances this was done, in the presence of the interviewer allowing for a better understanding of the ingredients used and enabling me to take photographs.



FOUR CENTURIES OF HERITAGE

This short synopsis of Bangladeshi heritage looks at the country's location within the Indian Subcontinent and its position within the Mughal Empire, and the effect of the arrival of the East India Company. It considers how these events led to the employment of Bangladeshis in the shipping industry as lascars and the flow of migration to Britain. It briefly reviews the roles played by the lascars in both World Wars, along with the inequality in pay that they suffered. It looks at the early settlement of seamen in the port cities and the establishment of seamen's boarding houses. It explores early twentieth century migration of the first community in the East of London working mainly in the garments and catering industry and the post War period which saw the arrival of Bangladeshis, along with other commonwealth nationals to service Britain's need for cheap unskilled labour. It examines how communities developed in towns affected by these migrations, the re-unification of families in the mid seventies / early eighties and how the composition of their communities changed. Finally it looks at the on demographic statistics and what they say about, socio economic position, educational achievement and future trends.

Bangladesh is in the east of the Indian sub-continent. Its main neighbour is India but it is bordered to the southeast by Burma (Myanmar) and by the Bay of Bengal to the south. It is a low lying fertile land with a delta plain at the confluence of the Ganges (Padma), Brammaputra (Jamuna), and Meghna rivers and their many tributaries. These rivers defined the food Bangladeshis eat. Plentiful water enabled the cultivation of rice and provided the fish and the staple diet remains 'rice and fish'. The country is one of the most densely populated countries in the world with an estimated of 160 million people.

The Bengal region was described as the richest province of the Mughal Empire, which ruled over most of India between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bengal was famous for its textiles, fine silks, calicos and muslins. This attracted the East India Company to develop trade and it set up its first factory in Bengal in 1615. The company was involved in the slave trade and set up plantations and factories in India. They had a monopoly on trade in spices, cotton, silk, indigo dye, tea, saltpetre and opium. The Company became the largest trading company in the World and evolved into an important

political and military body. In the period leading up to the 'Battle of Plassey' (1857) East India company effectively ruled India until the 'Great Indian Rebellion' of 1857-8, when the British Raj was established in its place.

There is a common notion that Bangladeshis were the last of the South Asians to arrive in Britain. However, there is evidence that they were present from the sixteenth century when they first arrived as Indian servants, nannies and nursemaids known as ayahs. The East India Company also employed Bengali seaman – know as lascars. They were mostly recruited from the Sylhet region to work on the imperial trade routes between, India, Burma, China, the Malay Archipelago and East Africa. There are records from the middle of the eighteenth century of unemployed, poverty stricken, lascars stranded in London by a series of laws called the Navigation Acts. These laws meant that sailors arriving from India to London could not be re-employed on return journeys. Public concern grew about the lascars plight towards the end of the eighteenth century, leading to the establishment of hostels and seamen's homes close to the docks.

Back in their native homeland, men travelled from Sylhet to Calcutta to gain employment in the ships. Whilst waiting for the ships to arrive they needed places to stay and enterprising business men opened what was called 'Bariwallahs – boarding houses'. These Bariwallah owners provided basic food and shelter to prospective seamen. They also acted as recruitment agents for the ships working with the Sarong or the charge-hand on the ships. The Lascars worked in the engine room or as deck hands and endured harsh working conditions. The lascars were paid £1.00 - £1.50 a month compared to the British born seamen who were paid £5.10 in 1914. In 1919 the wages of the British seamen rose to £14.00 whilst the wages for the Lascars static.

Indian soldiers and sailors fought in both World Wars. In World War I (1914-1918) India supplied over 1,300,000 uniformed soldiers and many Bengalis were working in merchant ships, often in foul depths of the engine room. In World War II (1939-45) there were 2,500,000 servicemen from India, with 50,700 seamen serving in the British Navy, 26% of the labour force. Indian records show that 6,600 seamen were killed, another 1,000 wounded and 1,200 taken prisoner during World War II. There was still disproportionate inequality in pay compared with British seamen who earned seven times as much as the Lascars. There was widespread discontent among the lascars ead-

ing to strikes, running away and the establishment of seamen's unions. By the end of the war, the lascars wage had increased to £9.00, but, this was still less than half what the British seamen were paid (£20.00 - £24.00).

During the early twentieth century several ex-seamen set up boarding houses near the ports in cities across the UK, and there were several in London. They accommodated the lascars who often jumped ship, the boarding houses acting as a network of support to help people find work. From the 1920's there was a small settlement of ex-lascars in East London. This grew slowly in 1930's and there was the first signs of a Bangladeshi community, (Chowdhury 1995) estimated that there were between 150-200 men living there, mostly from the Sylhet region. The 'Indian Seamen's Welfare League' was established by the leadership of Ayub Ali and Shah Abdul Majid Qyreshi in Aldgate in 1943. These early settlers found employment in the garment industry in East London and in the restaurants of the big London hotels, whilst others travelled to the Midlands, to work in manufacturing or to the north in the for employment in textile mills. This period saw the establishment of Bengali 'coffee shops' that were catering to new arrivals, which later became the first 'Indian' restaurants.

By the late 1940's, Adams (1987) and Chowdhury (1995) estimated that there were 300 Sylheti people, again mostly living in East London. These laid the foundation for future migration. Estimates taken from the 1951 Census, show that there were by then 2000 Bangladeshi residents. By 1962, Adams (1987) estimates, there were 5,000 Bangladeshis in the UK, drawn by the demand for cheap unskilled labour. Over 50 per cent settled in the East of London, working in the garments industry, whilst others moved to Birmingham, Oldham and Bradford to work in the textile mills or in heavy industry.

In 1962 the British government passed the first Commonwealth Immigration Act, aimed at limiting the numbers of migrants into Britain from Commonwealth countries. The Voucher system was established with three specific categories, for people who had a job offer, or had special skills or qualifications (such as doctors and nurses) or who had served in British forces in World War II. 'Chain migration' became common at this time – existing migrants working to bring over friends and relatives. This led to a specific regional migration from the Sylhet district in Bangladesh. Again the migrants were mostly male,

whilst their families remained in Bangladesh. These men sent regular remittances home to sustain their families, build houses and purchase land. Most saw their stay in Britain as temporary. The pattern was, that they would work for a few years and then return to Bangladesh to spend time with their families. The 'Myth of Return' lasted longer in the Bangladeshi community than other South Asian communities, resulting in later family re-unification and permanent settlement.

Families began to join their fathers in numbers only during the early 70's and 80's and this radically changed the composition of the Bangladeshi communities. Estimates taken from 1971 Census suggest that there were 22,000 by and the 1981 figures shows that there were 65,000. This can be explained by the threat of changes in new immigration legislation, which meant that travel between Britain and the Indian subcontinent would become more difficult. There was concern that migrant workers might be prevented from bringing their families in the future, particularly children over 18 years of age if they did not do so now. In addition, the struggle against West Pakistan in the 1960's for independence and following the liberation and civil war in 1971 the insecurity and anxiety experienced in the period and the ensuing decade of economic / instability that followed in the country added to the desire to resettle whole families to the UK. It is also true that, the aging male migrants led to a shift in domestic requirements. In settling in the UK, over 50 per cent stayed in London and most of the rest went to Birmingham, Oldham and Bradford.

The 1991 Census figures show 163,000 Bangladeshi residents in the UK and in 2001 this had risen to 283,000. The Bangladeshi population was, however, extremely young, with a median age of 18, compared to 37 for the White population and almost 40 per cent were under the age of 16. Geographical location, remains the same as in previous decades with just over 50 per cent living in Greater London and the remainder in Birmingham (20,836), and Oldham and Greater Manchester (9,817), but in addition there were 4,967 in Luton and Bradford.

Turning to the socio-economic conditions of the Bangladeshi community, they continued to experience a range of problems (Garbin 2005: 1). They are in general terms, '...poor, badly housed and poorly educated, suffer a high level of male unemployment and have a very low female participation in the labour market' (Peach 2005: 23). Compared to other ethnic minority groups, Bangladeshis have the highest

rate of income poverty. Zorlu's (2001) study showed that the average net weekly pay of Bangladeshis was then £154.28, compared to £206.60 for whites. Bangladeshi men have the highest unemployment rate at 20%, (ONS 2005) four times higher than the white population. Female unemployment at 24% is six times greater than among white women. In greater London 65% of the men work in Hotels and Catering, and national the picture is similar. It is estimated that there are 12,000 'Indian' restaurants and takeaways in Britain, 90% of them, owned and run by Bangladeshis. This sector employs over 85,000 people and is worth an estimated £3.2 billion. It should come as no surprise that 'Chicken Tikka Masala' is the nation's favourite dish and curry houses are referred to as 'local' in the same way as pubs are.

In regards to education, 40% of men have no qualifications and neither do 49% of women (ONS 2004). However, these figures need to be split between older and younger Bangladeshi people. As it is the older people that have few formal qualifications, (Piggott 2004). In greater London 50% of 16-24 year olds, were students, compared with 45% on average and there is a national picture is similar. Bangladeshi students have been continuing to show improvements in further education according to the Learning and Skills Council with funded learners rising from 71% in 2004/2005 to 74% in 2006-2007.

The Bangladeshi community is one of the fastest growing communities with a young population. The trend continues into 2011, where it is estimated that there are 360,000, this will be verified in the new census. The community plays a major role in shaping multi cultural Britain. Young Bangladeshis are integrating into mainstream society, much more than previous generations. The 1970's witnessed fascist marches in Brick Lane, London, but also saw the community starting to organise themselves politically. This resulted in the election of Bangladeshi Councillors, Mayors and more recently their first Bangladeshi Member of Parliament. The capital has always set the trend for Bangladeshis to follow, and it is only a matter of time before this happens in the other parts of Britain where there is a substantial Bangladeshi community.





SHOPPING

The flow of spices to the UK has been steady from the 17th century. It started with the East India Company's trade in spices and other goods. The British started to introduce spices to their food during this period; early cook books have recipes that use ginger, cloves, cardamom etc for example. Some historians argue that the word 'curry' is itself an English word derived from 'curing' and this came from early accounts of merchant seamen who had Bengali Lascars cooking for them in the ships. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "curry" comes from the Tamil "kari", meaning the same as the Bengali word "shura" – that is spiced gravy. At this time availability was limited, but during the post war period, with the growing number of men arriving from the Indian sub continent, both the demand and supply of spices grew.

Yousuf Choudhury (The roots and tales of the Bangladeshi settlers) recounts his personal experience of purchasing curry powder in the mid fifties from chemists. It was later available in newly opened grocery shops in areas that had Asian settlements. Roger Gwynn, who lived with Bangladeshi people in Small Heath in the sixties joined a 'bishu' (this was seaman slang for joining a mess). He recalls visiting A.A. Continental Stores in Smallheath where he purchased spices. The spices were mixed by the shop owner in a brown bag and given a shake. Generally the available spices were coriander, cumin, paprika, chilli, turmeric and small amounts of garam masala. Nozib Ullah in his interview said that there was a shop on Soho Road where he used to purchase his spices.

The purchase of meat was trickier as the majority of the men were Muslims and they required it to be halal. Jewish butchers provided kosher meat and this was acceptable for Muslims to eat as the animals were slaughtered and the blood drained. Mrs Momuna Bibi in her interview, recalls that mutton was eaten less in those days and the main diet was chicken. The chicken would be purchased from the back of a van or sometimes from farms and then slaughtered at home in a traditional Islamic way. Nozib Ullah purchased chickens from a farm in Handsworth. Several chickens were bought at a time and kept in the cellar until they were required. Mr Rashid described the birds that he bought "The chicken we used to get for 2 shillings were very big and extremely tasty. All of them were full of eggs".

The Bangladeshi people are renowned for their love of fish. In the absence of Bangladeshi fish they used to frequently visit the Bull Ring Markets on Saturdays and purchase futa, sardines, sprats, mackerel, herrings and salmon heads. Some of the men would go straight there in morning after finishing their night shifts. The choice of fish was determined by the cost and they were prepared in a traditional Bangladeshi way. Momuna Bibi recalls how she cooked her fish "The oil tins were not available as they are today. We used to cook with margarine in those days. For the fish, I used to cook with Mustard oil". As described by Momuna Bibi, most of the cooking was done with margarine and according to Roger Gwynn vegetable ghee was available in 2lb tins; the Salma brand from Holland, was available in all 'Asian' grocery shops.

Rice was delivered by the local grocers and the brand that was used was Tolly Boy – American Long Grain Rice. Although this brand remains popular today, rice is being imported from Pakistan and India that is also popular. Momuna Bibi remembers how the price of a bag of rice went from £4.00 to £5.00 and there was a lot of talk. In the absence of Bangladeshi vegetables, seasonal British produce was used including Cauliflower, Potatoes, Cabbages and Tomatoes.

In the late sixties and early seventies Asian grocery shops opened up to supply food. Momuna Bibi describes how shopping was done. "In those days we did not go to the shops, we used to get rations sent to us. The grocer used to come and take our order on Wednesday and deliver them on Friday. We used to get everything, including rice whatever we needed and it was delivered on Friday before 12pm." In the 1960s only a handful of people could drive and owned cars.



One of the first Bangladeshi pioneers in the grocery shops was Shuruz Ali in Park Road in South Aston. His shop was opened in the early 1960's. Muktar Ali opened and ran a successful grocery shop in the 1960's in Balsall Heath. There were several other pioneers in the grocery industry. Gyas Uddin opened his shop 'Oriental Enterprise' in 1979 in Burbury Street, Lozells and he imported Bangladeshi fish and vegetables. He still has a grocery shop on Lozells Road with the same name. The import of Bangladeshi food items started in the mid seventies, prior to that people returning from Bangladesh would bring back what they could in their luggage. Momuna Bibi recalls her experience of Shatkora (a Bangladeshi lime) and dried fish. "We did not get this in the UK, we used to get it when it was sent from Bangladesh with peoples luggage. Some people used to get Shatkora and hutki (Dried Fish), this used to be shared amongst people and they used to eat happily – very happy. This food was available rarely, so this made it special and every one was happy". Other popular items bought back from Bangladesh included, 'nali phata' (leaves from a young Jute tree – that taste bitter), dried 'borui' (similar to olives) 'urir bichi' (dried beans), 'shikor' (dried mud tablets) and ash for cleaning teeth. In the mid nineties the private import in personal luggage of vegetables and hutki was banned. However, returning travellers from Bangladesh would bring Hutki back, if they could get through Customs without being detected. Those that managed to avoid customs came home and shared their brave stories of how they managed to bring back the Hutki and, in keeping with tradition, they shared it with their family and friends.

In the sixties a wholesale chicken company which undertook slaughter and packaging was opened by Syed Abdur Rahman. According to Roger Gwynn, this was the first of its kind. Mr Rahman was known as "Murgi Rahman" and he was a prominent figure in the Bangladeshi community. He is still alive today and in 2004 he was interviewed by Michael Palin for the BBC documentary film and book called "Himalay" and he is featured in both. In the early seventies Taj and Co Slaughter House, opened in Handsworth following in the foot steps of Mr Rahman. In addition to the slaughter of chicken, they slaughtered sheep and goats. Customers were able to pick the live chicken and have it slaughtered in front of them and prepared. They were one of the first slaughter houses to be opened in the West Midlands. They also offered a Qurbani service. Some of the larger grocery shops of that era had a slaughter section at the back of their yard. As the industry developed with grocers being supplied halal chicken and mut-

ton directly from slaughter houses, they have done away with their slaughter section. Taj and Co continue trade today providing a similar service, however, their prominence as a market leader has diminished and customers are no longer able to directly witness the slaughter, although, there is a video link to the slaughter room.

The once sought, after Bangladeshi fish can now be obtained in all major grocery shops. In 2011 a shop on Lozells Road called 'Maas Bazaar' (fish market) opened, supplying only fish. The cultivation and import of Bangladeshi fish has become a major industry. All types of fish can be found ranging from the smallest rani maas (queen fish) to large Bhaag Maas (tiger fish). Fish that can be found in the UK cannot always be found in the Bazaars in Bangladesh.

Over the last three decades, the once humble grocery shop has become a multi million pound industry. Whilst they provide a service in the main to households, they also supply food to the many Bangladeshi restaurants. These grocery shops have expanded and become supermarkets, rivalling the likes of Asda, Tesco and Sainsbury's. These grocery shops have had a major impact on the mainstream supermarkets, as they open seven days a week, with some even opening 24 hours a day. The mainstream shops have followed suit and now open on Sundays as well. Amongst the most successful in Birmingham is Pak Butchers and Grocers opened in 1978 on the Lozells Road. They have several branches in Birmingham, West Midlands and a branch in Manchester. In 2008 they opened their most ambitious branch in Washwood Heath, rivalling mainstream super markets. In the main the most successful grocery shops are run by Pakistani and Indian people. Bangladeshi people play a peripheral role in this industry, whilst the most successful Bangladeshi supermarket is Sonali Spice on the Coventry Road in Smallheath and FB Supermarket on Lozells Road, Lozells.





Mr Abdul Hoque

Abdul Hoque arrived in the UK in 1957 and he is the only person that was interviewed from that era. He recounts how he met Aftab Ali from the Calcutta Union, who helped him to come to the UK. He has a great story, where he first settled in Bradford and recounts how he missed beetle nut. He was one of a handful of people that could drive and he owned his own car.

What is your name?

Abdul Hoque

How old are you?

I added 7 / 8 years to my real age when I arrived at the age of 17, I showed that I was 25 years of age. If I did not do that, then they would not have allowed me to come in 1957 in January.

Was it cold at the time?

Of course it was. This was a cold country. I left my village in December and arrived in January.

How did you come?

I came by, what you call 'medical'. We did this by saying that we had wealth and we were coming to the UK for medical reasons. At the time, Iskandar Mirza was the Governor General of East Pakistan and he ordered, that those with wealth should go to the UK, if they wished. I came by plane.

How long did it take you to come to the UK?

I came from Sylhet to Dhaka, in those days the planes were not very suitable. I got on the night train from Sylhet and arrived in Dhaka in the morning. I met my cousin and he told me he was going to take me to meet 'Kattle Khai – Aftab Ali, from the Calcutta Union, he was number one for Bangladeshi people in Sylhet'. Prior to the partition of India, sea men came to the UK from Calcutta, however during and after the Second World War, many people were sent to the villages and were out of work. Calcutta had the Jetty (harbour) that people used to board the ships. After partition in 1947 Calcutta went to India. The other Jetty was in Chitagong. Aftab Ali, said that he would help the seamen in any way he can to send them to the UK. So we went to him and along with other people from my village, to see if there were any possibilities to travel to the UK.

I met Aftab Ali in Dhaka and he said that he, could help, but you will need a medical certificate, with a verification from your local police station. We made an application from, a temporary residence in

Dhaka. However, the Police had to go to our village to verify who we were. The police verified who we were and I was asked to go to an office with our land deeds. Aftab Ali, looked at the papers and ratified them and sent them onto Dhaka. I received a letter to say that my passport had been issued in Dhaka and that I should come and collect it – the office was in Mutajil.

There were problems with the finance, with our country being poor, the ticket fair was 1,600.14 taka, in addition we would need some spending money as well. By some means, I managed to arrange the finance and went to Dhaka.

How did you raise the funds?

I borrowed money from relatives, using our family land as a guarantee of repayment, it is called 'bondoch'. This means, they take ownership of the land until you make the repayments. So, the first priority when you arrived in the UK would be to pay the money back. Aftab Ali, advised that we should go to Karachi as this is where our passports have now been sent to. He said that he would join us in Karachi. After a few days, he said that we could travel to the UK with Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). Once we got on the plane, they shouted out names and handed out the passports. After take off, our first landing place was Afghanistan, then to Cairo, then to Russia (maybe) and finally we arrived in Heathrow the following day.

When we landed it was dark, there was one other man with me who said that my brother has a house nearby. I asked to look at the address, as I knew how to read and write. The address was in Brick Lane. When I arrived there, I found some one from my village, his name is Noor Uddin, he is no longer alive, he died in an accident. He asked if I wanted to stay in London, or would I like to go to Birmingham? He said that he would be able to find me work in restaurants. He told me to think about it whilst he went off to work and told me that I could stay in his bed. I decided to go to Birmingham. I caught a train to New Street and showed the address to a Taxi driver. The address was Rosebury Street in Springhill, B18. This was my cousin's house. The door was answered by his English wife, as my cousin

was at work. She told me to wait outside, along with the taxi driver, whilst she went and got a photo, which I had sent earlier. She compared me to the photo and when she was satisfied, she invited me in and we saw the taxi driver off. I found that there was a coal fire, that she added coals to and stoked the fire. So I stayed there for a couple of days.

My cousin explained that there was not much work in Birmingham at the moment, but we have an uncle who lives in Bradford, Yorkshire and there may be more work available there. So I wrote a letter for my uncle and my cousin's wife posted the letter. After receiving the letter he came the next day from Bradford. He came to New Street. He arrived at the house and said 'this is no place to stay, lets go to Bradford'. He stayed one night and the next day we went to Bradford.

When we arrived in Bradford, he told me that this was a cold country, however; you will have to go and search for jobs. He told me to go and find a job in the morning, which I did. I went to several places and they told me to come in the evening or the next day. So, I went and found people of different nationalities. I was able to speak some English as I had read up to class eight in Bangladesh, so I was a little familiar with the language. I went and joined the 'Labour office' to claim benefit. The next day I went looking for work, which I found. However, this was night shift in the mills. I found all the night shift staff were from the greater Sylhet area and there were one or two English people there. I started to work. However, I found the work to be difficult, as this was physical work and I was a student in Bangladesh and I was young. After a while, I said that I wanted to do different type of work.

What type of work was this?

They call it the wool mills, where they used to wash the wool. There were bobbins with wool on with 16 machines and each person looked after three machines. I did not find the work suitable, I asked to be to be transferred to another job. The foreman, said OK, I will find you a different type of work, so he took me to a different depart-

ment. The foreman had a disability, with his leg, but he was a good man. He showed me how to do a different type of job, and said that I will do the setting, this will be your job. You will also get overtime. I did the work, and the pay was the same, but the overtime, meant that I had more money.

How much did you earn?

If an average person worked five nights, you would get paid £12.00. I was paid £17.00, this was because, I worked the night shift and they asked me to work in the day when the ladies used to work, which led to an increase in pay. It was hard work. The exchange rate for taka was 13, for each pound if you went to the Post Office and if you went to what we call 'black' the rate was 16. However, you had to be careful and sure that you could trust the person that you were sending money with. Some people did lose money, but I did not lose money at any time.

Eating and living was the domain of men as there was no mention of Bangladeshi women and there was no order to bring women. Ayub Khan gave the order to bring women over. There used to be three or four of us that ate in the same 'mess' or the Sylheti term is 'bishu'.

Is Bishu a made up word?

It was the sea men from Calcutta that developed the word, which is where I heard it from.

What type of food did eat?

We did get halal meat from the Pakistani butchers, along with rice and spices. There was one thing that we did not find and that was 'faan' for those that chewed 'guah' (beetle nut). I chewed 'guah' once or twice, with 'long' (cloves). There was a lack of green chillies, but occasionally we would get it from different parts of the world and people would tell the shop keepers to keep some aside.

Did you learn English here or in Bangladesh?

I know Bangla as well as I read up to grade eight in Bangladesh. I was always the first boy in my class, never second. My dad was good



at studying and I got a scholarship to read, so I learned to speak English whilst I was in Bangladesh. I had a Christian wife here, I was a supervisor for BMW – team leader. It was called Austin Morris, Rover at the time. Now I don't have a job, but I am looking for a job, even today I went searching for a job. My age does not allow me to get a job. I can drive a bus. I recently went for a test drive on a bus, at first I struggled but after a while I was fine. I used to have a heavy goods vehicle license. I still have two years remaining on my driving license. If you reach 75 years of age, you need a medical certificate and your vision has to be right. I am still unable to find a job. I need a job, immediately. I went for a job and passed the test and hid my age. The day before I was due to start work, they asked for my passport. When they looked at it, say said that I could not work as their policy allows only people to work up to the age of 65 years of age.

How long did you spend in Bradford?

I was there for two years.

Where did you come to in Birmingham?

I came to Aston in 1959.

Were there many Bangladeshis then?

There was, quite a number of Bangladeshis then in Aston.

How did you live back then? – did you share a house?

Yes we stayed in rented accommodation – two people to a room, some people had a room to themselves.

Was the rent 50p a week?

It was 50p or a £1.00 in some places. I was also a householder myself on two or three occasions. I had bought my own house. For a small room I charged a £1.00 and for larger rooms it was £2.00.

What area was your house in?

I had a house in Winson Green and then I got married to a Christian lady. Thereafter, I did not have any people living with us. I bought a house in Great Barr, where all the people were white; there were no

blacks. After that I bought a house near British Leyland in Longbridge, behind the train station. It was a new house. I stayed there for a long time, until my marriage collapsed and she got the house as I had young children. I stayed in different places and went to Bangladesh on occasions.

What was your food like during your marriage?

My wife was a vegetarian, and I used to eat what she cooked. She never drank alcohol, and my children did not drink either. When I fancied eating something, I used to cook myself meat or chicken curry once or twice a week.

Were shops available?

There were a few. The area that I stayed in, there was none. If I wanted food, I came to Aston.

Did you come by bus?

No, I had my own car. When I used to drive my car, there were only two other people with cars in the area. You needed to take a test and not every body was able to do this.

Were you a foreman for BMW?

No, I was a team leader. When I worked there it was British Leyland, which later changed to Austin Morris then Rover. During my time, there were many name changes, even 'British Road Holding' at the end they were called Rover. The one in Solihull was called 'Land Rover – Range Rover'.

Did you have a good job?

I worked in factories that paid well, I had good jobs. But I lived away from the community, I lived in Great Barr. My wife's family lived in Bournville, so I bought a house in Northfield. At the time, I did not work for Longbridge, I used to work for Lucas in Newtown. I went to Longbridge for a job, but they did not give jobs to black people, it was only when the company was nationalised black people got a chance.





Momuna Bibi

Momuna arrived in 1967 to join her husband and lived in Springhill. She was one the very few Bangladeshi women in Birmingham. She recalls how things were, when she first arrived.

How old are you?

65 years.

When did you arrive in the UK?

1967 – I think, I don't fully remember these days.

Did you first arrive to Birmingham?

No – I came to Springhill. I lived in my relatives house.

How many people lived with you?

There were many people living there. There was at least 13 people – there was 3,4,5 people per room and they slept in single beds.

Was it a big house?

Yes it was, it was four bedrooms.

How did you cook and eat?

In the main we ate chicken a lot. There wasn't any mutton like you have these days. We used to buy live chickens and then slaughter them in our homes and then skin them, cut them and then cook them. They used to cook individually as they had their own shared kitchen. They were all working in factories and were busy.

Did they cook once a week?

They used to cook on Saturdays and some times this lasted the whole week, otherwise they would cook mid week, in the evenings if they needed to.

Where did you get the chicken from?

They used to bring them in cars from where they were purchased, or sometimes they were purchased from farms. They used to keep them in cellars and bring them out to slaughter them. Once the chicken was slaughtered they were kept in the mop bucket and once dead, they would be bought out and skinned. It was hard, in those days. The men used to work long shifts in the factories, so they had little time. They used to come home after 5pm and they used to play cards. In those days, there were not many mosques as there is today, so people prayed less and did not fast. They used to pass time by playing cards. The cost of the chicken in those days were only 50p, however, you could get a lot more for your money back then. Your wages were a lot less as well. Those days they used to get paid £12.00 to £13.00, this was proportionate. A bag of Tolly Boy rice was £4.00 and when this went up to £5.00, every body was talking about it.

Were there many wives, with the men?

It was mostly men. In those days not many people bought their wives or family over. There were very few. There were one or two women in each town. Where I lived there was one other woman that lived near us. She used to come and visit and was very kind to me.

How did you learn to cook?

At first I was shown how to cook by my husband and then I learned how to cook.

Were there gas cookers?

Yes there were gas cookers, my husband showed me how to use it, along with it how to switch lights on.



Did you find fish?

We did not get any Bangladeshi fish, we used to get fish from the UK. We used to get them on Saturdays from the Markets in Town. The men did not work on Saturdays and Sundays. So they used to go to Town on Saturday and buy the fish. There was futa, sardines, sprats, mackerel, herrings, salmon head and salmon. I have been on occasions. The markets are similar to Bangladesh, with different stall holders. On one line there was fish being sold and the other line had vegetables being sold.

How did you cook the fish?

Well how do you cook fish – the oil tins were not available as they are today. We used to cook with margarine in those days. For the fish, I used to cook with Mustard oil, which we used to put on the skin and it tasted good. We got used to eating food cooked with margarine. When I first arrived the food was not very nice, but you get used to it.

What was the margarine like?

It was in small white tubs, they kind kids use today to make cakes.

Did you cook the fish with vegetables?

We used to get vegetables, they were English, not Bangladeshi. We used to use Tomato, Radish, Potato, cauliflowers and cabbage various types – whatever was available in this country.

Did you miss the Bangladeshi vegetables?

Yes, we missed the vegetables a lot, but what could we do. Later on Bangladeshi shops started to open and then we started to get vegetables little by little.

How did you get food in those days?

In those days we did not go to the shops, we used to get rations sent to us. The grocer used to go and take our order on Wednesday and deliver them on Friday. We used to get everything, including rice



whatever we needed and it was delivered on Friday before 12pm. We used to get milk delivered to us on a daily basis. We simply ordered it with the milk man. Those days we did not have freezers. We used to keep them in buckets of water and the milk did not go off. The milk was used on a daily basis, not like today where we keep them in fridges for three days.

When the food was cooked and left for a week, did it go off?

No it was fine, we had cupboards which were cold and kept the food cool. When the men finished work they would have a wash and heat what they needed in a frying pan and then eat it.

Can you tell me about Shatkora?

We did not get this in the UK, we used to get it when it was sent from Bangladesh with peoples luggage. Some people used to get Shatkora and Dried Fish, this used to be shared amongst people and they used to eat happily – very happy. This food was available rarely, so this made it special and every one was happy.

Those days must have been very difficult for you?

It was very difficult, we did not have baths in the house, and we did not have fires like we do now. We had coal fires that we prepared every morning and it burned throughout the day. It was cleaned in the morning and fire started again. The coal was kept in the cellar and delivered every four weeks. We did not have toilets in the house, it was in the garden. When it snowed, it used to snow a lot those days all the way up to our knees. So, some one had to clean the path for every body else and then it was used by people one at a time.

How did you have baths?

We used to go the Public Baths as we did not have baths in the house. We used to go twice a week.

How do you find it these days?

It is very good now, everything is available now. Everything we have in Bangladesh is available now, and we can purchase whatever our heart desires. We get items that are not available in Bangladesh, especially

the big fishes. There is not a fish, that is not available – all types of fish you can get. In old days, even if your heart desired it – things were not available as there were no Bangladeshi shops.

Do you still eat a lot of chicken?

No, my diet is mostly fish these days, I occasionally have a piece of chicken.

Do you have anything further to add?

The people, who arrived in the early days, suffered a lot hardship. These days, things are very good. We have gas fires and central heating; those that have arrived now, are comfortable. Families did not join their men folk and they did not bring them.

How did you cope on your own?

There was nothing that we could do. I stayed for nearly two years and then went back to Bangladesh, which I enjoyed very much. I stayed there for two years and then returned. I did not like it when I first arrived, the food was not very appetising. But we had to eat and after a while we got used to it. I did not like it, I used stay in my room being the only female in the house when the men arrived from the factories. Those days I used to sit crying upstairs. I did not like it. Those days there were not many women around, just one other woman, who used to visit now and again.

What did you eat for breakfast?

We used to eat bread and egg that we used to fry and toast in the grill as we did not have toasters.

What were the conditions of the houses?

Most of the houses had lino, a few had carpets. We did not have fridges and central heating back then. When we returned from Bangladesh, we bought a council tenancy from a couple who were going to Hajj. For £300.00, this included all the furniture. We would go to the council offices and change the name, it was very simple in those days, they simply wanted their rent paid. It is more difficult to do that these days. The rent for people living in shared accommodation was only ten shillings (50p now).



Mr Nozib Ullah

Nozib Ullah is in his eighties and arrived in the UK in 1958 and lived in Birmingham. He represents a classic example of how he and his fellow countrymen lived in shared accommodation along with how the cooking was done. He was one of the first to bring his family over in 1969.

What is your name?

Nozib Ullah.

Where are you from in Bangladesh?

I am from Babon Gow in Gaula Bazaar.

When did you arrive in the UK?

I came in 1958, in February.

How old were you when you came to the UK?

I came with my original 'passport age', I was 29 years of age.

Where did you arrive in the UK first?

I came to Birmingham first.

Did you come by plane?

Well I didn't walk here, of course I came by plane.

You could have come by a ship?

Those that worked in the ships, came with the ships. I came after making my passport.

Where in Birmingham did you live?

I lived in Handsworth first, in Bolton Road. That house no longer exists, it has been demolished.

How many of you lived in one house?

It was a small two bedroom house, there was four or five of us. But other people lived in larger houses with up to 15 / 20 people. Some people lived by sharing with 4 to 5 people per room. The houses belonged to Bangladeshi people, that is why they could get so many people to a room. The rate was 50p if you stayed in a double bed or 75p if you stayed in a single bed.

What type of work did you do and where?

I worked in a factory making pipes in West Bromwich.

How did you cook and eat?

I cooked myself. I used to purchase live chickens and bring them home and slaughter them.

Did you get chicken that was dead from the shop?

In those days, they were killed, but they were not halal. So we got them alive then home and slaughtered them ourselves.

Where did you purchase them from?

There was a farm in Handsworth.

Where did you get your spice from?

There was a shop in Soho Road.

Was it difficult for you in those days?

It was not difficult in those days, very much as we are today, in fact it was better for us in those days. It was safer then, we were able to sleep with our front doors open. There was no fear of thieves. We left money lying around, and it was safe, but now, if you leave a second hand item outside, it will be taken straight away.

Did you eat fish?

We used to get English fish, such as Betki, Futa and Herrings from the Bull Ring and there was a shop in Soho Road that stocked fish occasionally.

Did you cook on your own, or were you part of a bishu? (Shared mess/kitchen)

Some people had bishu, and there were some on their own. The bishu was a way of saving money. If you ate on your own, you ate as you liked.

Were you part of a bishu?

I was part of a bishu for a while, but I did not like it. I preferred eating on my own and cooked the way I liked.

Did people cook once a week?

The food would go off if it was left for a week. We would cook it and leave it in the cupboard and then warm some up in a frying pan when we needed it.

Did you have fridges in those days?

No there was no such thing in those days.

Was it very cold in those days?

It was very cold, we did not find days like these in February, it was dark, we could not operate without lights even in the day.

Was this because of the coal fires?

Yes, there was coal fires.

Did you miss the Bangladeshi food?

We got used to the food here after a while.

What was your breakfast like?

We ate bread, egg and beans, the same beans we have now.

Can you get everything you want from the shops now?

You can get everything you need now. Back then people did not know how to read, so we were not able to read the labels and find what was halal and haram. People only ate what they knew, as halal. These days the children are smart and they tell us what is halal.

Did you grow any vegetables in the garden?

We had no time as we were busy working from 6am to 6pm. Those were 12 hour shifts, there was no time for the garden.

How many days did you work?

I worked five days and there was over time on Saturdays, so that made it six days.

How much did you earn?

You will laugh at this, back then we earned £7.00 for twelve hour shifts. Those that earned between £10.00 and £14.00, they were the big wigs. The £7.00 that we earned back then, is nothing compared to the £200.00 people earn today. We got more for our money back then. After all our expenses we managed to save £3.00 per week.

Did you send the money to Bangladesh?

Yes, the exchange rates in those days were 40 takas for a pound.

How much was an acre of land?

An acre was worth between 150 to 200 taka's. Now this is worth between £15,000 to £25,000

How often did you go to Bangladesh?

The first time I returned, it was after seven years.

When did your family come to the UK?

They came a year before the war in Pakistan, I think it was in 1969.

Where did your family first live?

We first came to Lozells, I had my house in Church Street, it was number 1 at the top of the road.

Were there many other families back then?

There were very few families in those days, may be eight or ten. We were laughed at, because our families were here in this un-Islamic country. Now I laugh at them, and remind them of what they said to me. I tell them that you laughed at me and now, you have gone to High Court to get your family here, just to tease them.

How old are you now?

I am 84 now, I was born in 1927 in May.

What did you do over the weekends?

We spent the time cooking resting, and we went for the occasional walk in Lozells, Town, Soho Road and sometimes to Handsworth Park.





MRS RASHID

Mrs Rashid joined her husband in 1969 at the age of 17. She grew up in Dhaka, and did not find the UK to be a culture shock. But, she did find cooking a challenge and phoned her mum for tips. She placed a great emphasis on education for her three children and they have all graduated with degrees and masters.

What is your name and where are you from in Bangladesh?

My name is Mrs Rashid, and I am from Pumayla. I was born in Comilla, but I grew up in Dhaka. I studied in Mymensingh.

When did you arrive in the UK?

I arrived in the UK in July 1969.

How old were you at the time?

I was 17 years old.

As a newlywed?

Yes as a newlywed.

And how long were you married for before you came?

6 months.

And what were your first impressions of the UK?

It was really nice when I arrived in Heathrow airport and when I arrived in Birmingham. Because we had a friend here, Mr. Khandakar and his family, I didn't feel very lonely or strange.

Did you come with your husband or did you arrive later?

Yes, I came with Mr Rashid

So where did you come and live at first?

At first, I came to Small Heath....Banks Road....21 I Banks Road.

And what was it like for you, was it a bit of a culture shock for you? I didn't feel very strange, because where I was educated for 12 years in Baarthosorri Homes, the standards were much higher than this country. My sister-in-law was English, Rita. But when I came out of the house, I did feel a little bit strange, there were very few black people at that time, 1969, and not that many cars on the road, not too many people on the road, no children. It was very, very nice you know, Small Heath. I think there were maybe only 200-300 Bangladeshi people there at the time. It was really nice, not as crowded as nowadays

Can you tell us a little bit as your role as a wife?

Yes, it was a little bit strange for me when I started shopping, cooking by myself, and you know, I used to go to the hospital sometimes on my own. I enjoyed it, but it was a bit strange, with all of my family

back in Bangladesh, and me doing everything on my own here. My father used to send me letters, at that time there were no phones or mobiles. He used to send me them once a week, and in every letter he used to say, 'Remember where you were educated, and you should not be spending all of your time in the house. Cook, if you have baby, look after the baby, in your spare time, go to the library, do your studies, so you'll grow up more. Then if your baby start school, start a job, go to college, or go to school, Learn more English, that's it, that your life.'

And can you tell us about the first curry that you cooked?

Oh, yes, it was very, very hard for me, when I started to cook for the first time. For the first 4-5 months, I used to burn the saucepan, and my husband used to come home and say 'oh, you burn it again today! I have to buy another one!' I think in the first 6 months he bought about 10 saucepans for me! Firstly, I was having to use gas cookers, secondly I couldn't control it, and thirdly, I didn't know how to cook! Because at the hostels where I used to stay when I was at school, they never taught us individual cooking things. It was really hard for me. It took me at least one or two years to learn properly

Who taught you when you were here, how to cook?

Nobody. I had to learn by myself. Sometimes, if I found it too hard, I used to phone my mother in Bangladesh! And she used to tell me what to put first, and if you cook the fish, never cook raw fish, fry it first. I used to ask her because she was the best cook, my mother.

There's a little story about when your husband first asked you to get the milk, could you tell us a little bit about that?

Oh, yes, that was really funny! He asked me to go and get some milk and I opened the fridge – no milk. I looked in all the rooms, and still couldn't find any milk. He then started asking, did you bring the milk? I asked you about half an hour ago! I asked where it was, and so he went to open the front door and I saw there was two bottles of milk, just by the doorstep. I was surprised, and he said, 'That's the way we get the milk, from the milkman. They deliver it in the morning.' it was a really big surprise for me!

Were you looking for a cow?

Yes, I was looking for a cow! Nowadays it's the same thing in Bang-

ladesh, supermarkets, milk delivery etc. but in 1969 if I said I was looking for the cow, you'd have to believe that, because in that time, if I stood on the road, I'd see maybe 1 or 2 cars drive past.

And where did you used to go shopping?

I used to go shopping on Coventry Road in Small Heath. There was only one Bangladeshi shop, and one or two Pakistani shops, that's it.

And what was the food like, what did you used to buy?

Oh, that's the saddest story. There was nothing. For 2 years I used to cook cauliflower, cabbage, carrots, and sometimes prawns from the bull ring markets, that's all. There were no Asian shops, they were very rare.

And what about chicken?

We used to get chicken. Chicken shops were there, one halal one was there. I think it's about 50-60 years old now. Big chicken we used to buy, and they would cut it. No problem with the meat, but fish and vegetables, were very, very rare.

And did you used to go to the bull ring markets on Saturdays?

Yes, I used to go the Bull Ring markets to go shopping there, and sometimes we would buy pieces of materials, 5/6 yards, from the market and then make saris from them, because there were no sari shops at all and I didn't bring any with me from Bangladesh. At that time it was cheap. There were no sari shops for other five or six years, not until about '72.

And what type of fish did you used to buy?

I used to buy prawn, bream, herrings and sprats.

And how did you used to cook it?

It was not really tasty. When I cooked it, slowly, slowly it was tasty because they were fresh, not frozen. So it was really tasty.

Could you tell us some of your recipes? How did you used to make them?

Fish, what you can do with any fish, just cut it, wash it, then put 3 or 4 grams of curry powder in it –turmeric, chili, and nowadays you can get the special fish powder from Bangladesh or India. If you put that

one in, it is tastier. Just marinate the fish for 10-20 minutes and then fry it. Then leave it in a plate, fry the onions separately, add some green chili, coriander and then add the fish to it, it's really tasty.

So you didn't get any fresh Bangladeshi vegetable or anything like that?

Oh, not at that time.

Did you miss the food?

Not that much, because the English thing, when you added it with the curry powder and green chili, we turned it into Bengali food. So it wasn't that bad. We'd cook the rice, fry the cauliflower, fry the prawn, and fry the fish, so it was nearly similar.

And what's it like now? Did you face any racism when you arrived?

No, no, I never felt racism. When I see things on the television regarding conflict between the Asians and White or whatever it is, I'd always say, 'I've worked at Heartlands Hospital for 27 years, and for 20 years I rode the bus. I used to use the 28 bus; I never had a car at that time because I could not drive. I did work in Southall as well. I never ever received racism, even when I used to stand at the bus stop, the English people use to say, 'Darling, go in the front'. They used to put me in the front instead of them. But nowadays when I see all of these things, sometime I can hardly believe it, that it's happening. I do keep ask-





ing myself the question, is it me, or them? Do they make something wrong on the bus stop, or whatever it is in the shop. But me personally, I never experienced racism towards me.

At the time were there many Bangladeshi families?

No, not many. I mean in Small Heath, I used to know only a few families, Mrs Haque, Shefali Haque, Mrs Pasha and Mrs Alam, that's all.

Did you see them often?

Yeah, I used to see Mrs Pasha most of the time, and then in 1971, we used to live together, because she was a student at that time I think. Mr and Mrs Pasha used to live in Leicester and they moved to Birmingham. They couldn't buy a house at that time, so they used to live at my house. 211 Banks Road. For Tauhid's 1st Birthday, Mrs Pasha was in my house. And Mrs Khan, she lives in London now, she cooked all the food for Tauhid's birthday.

So did you have children here?

Yes, I got 3 children Nillufa, Roopah and Mamun.

What was it like when you first had children?

When I had Nillufa, she was a premature baby, very small. They were all born in Moseley Hospital, and they kept Nillufa for nearly 3 months. We used to go by bus to visit her. Mashallah she was alright. After 6 months she was a big baby.

Did you feel strange bringing up your children in a foreign land?

Not really, I enjoyed it. I didn't have too many problems. In 1972 I moved to Sladefield Road. After Sladefield Road, I moved to Thornton Road. Every time I moved I went closer to the school, so it's easier for me, because at that time I didn't drive. When I moved to Thornton Road, they had all started school and then they went to Washwood Heath School. That school was A level, O level, and they all finished their A levels there. After they finished, I moved to Hodge Hill, and then after they went to college, I moved to my current house in Solihull.

Did you have aspirations for your children? What did you want them to be?

Yes, I felt grateful to this country, I used to take them to school, and the teachers, even when they did A levels or O levels, there was so

much opportunity here. The teachers were so good. I would go to the school, sometimes with a box of chocolates for the Head Teacher, just to ask them how they are. The Head Teacher would say, 'do you know, you are the only one mother, who just comes out of the blue to ask how they are. Are they in break time; are they inside the school, or do they go outside? This is really, really great Mrs Rashid, that you are doing this and you must have had a good education back home. Sometimes, you even ask for the holidays, no-one else does this. They phone us or they come in but you do it the official way.' I found my parents made me this way, my education, so it was not hard. Inshallah (God willing) they did all that they could.

They've all done well haven't they?

They've done very well. Nillufa did her BA honors in Worcester and Roopah got her Masters from Leeds in English. Mamun completed his Masters in Luton and you know, I didn't even feel any pressure, even at that time. We both worked full time, looked after everyone back home. Mashallah my 3 children they are so good, I never needed to push them about their education. There was no need to tell them, it's automatically inside them. I think this is their route, you know my father was an army officer and he was in the army in this country in World War two and he escaped from here to Germany, then India, then Pakistan. We had a very strong discipline in our family. My youngest brother in America, he has completed his BA honors as well. My father believed in education, not the building, not the house. So many people used to say 'you have 6 sons but not 6 buildings?' He replied 'no I don't need 6 buildings I need 6 certificates in their pockets' and we got it. It's easy for me to follow these things for my kids. It was really, really easy for me. They did their education very easily.

So your father was he in the British Army?

Yes.

And he left?

Yes he left yes.

Why did he leave?

Because during the Second World War he was a prisoner in Germany then he escaped from there to India.

From the prison?

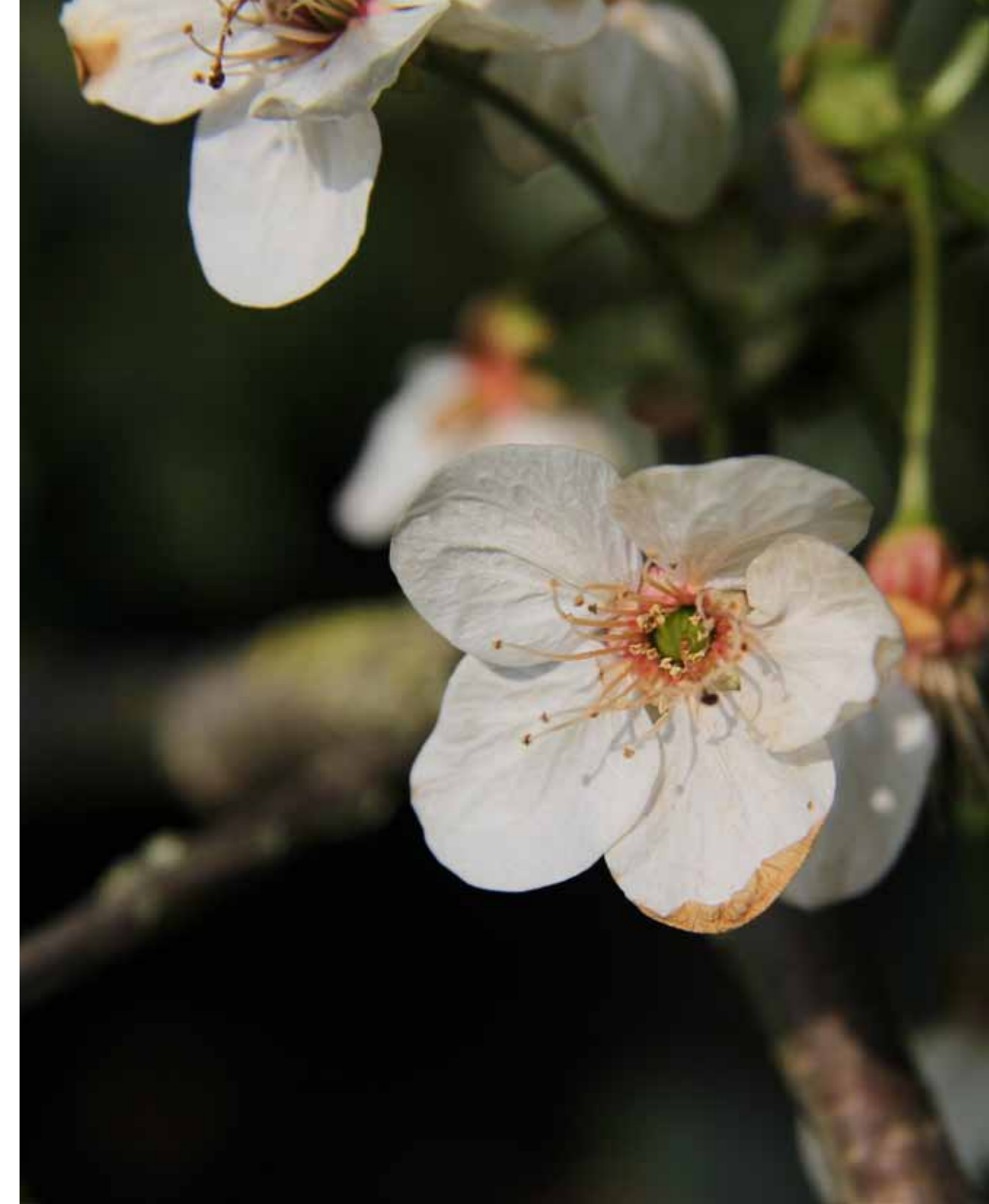
Yes, yes, because it was war time. Our family was very, very strong,

because my brother he is a major in the army, my sister's son, he is in the army, he is a captain. I have about six or seven family members in the army, all majors or captains.

Oh ok strong family, military family!

Yes military family! They don't say come here, they say COME HERE!. It's the order you know, we used to get the orders from the family, not the soft, soft talks from my father. So in this country, I follow his steps for the education for my children. When Mamun completed his MA honors I said to my husband, 'I can't believe my 3 children passed.' When he got his graduation photo I just said thank god and my elder brother sent me a letter from Bangladesh saying we are proud and you should feel proud that they stayed in your community. They were born in England and all of them passed degrees, we feel proud for them. It was really easy for them and I would advise anyone, doing education to complete it. It is such a golden opportunity in this country, to give to our children. You can do it easily; there is no harm in doing it. People talk about a fee, that's only the subject if you want to do something, you can easily do it. No-one is stopping you. Money does not matter. Don't go on holiday, don't buy expensive clothes. I didn't buy a car for 10 years. I bought it when Mamun was 7 or 8. I bought the house first. My children have never been in a council house or rented house. They are not bad but I bought the house first because I know it is important for children to live in their own house with good neighbors. My old neighbor from Sladefield Road, who is now 40 years old, he still has my house key, we are that close. When I go Bangladesh, he comes to the house, waters my plants, and looks after my house. Even the house I live in now, both of my neighbors are so good. I don't feel as if I live with English people, I feel as if I live with my own people. This is all up to you and how you present yourself everywhere.

That's good, thank you very much.





Mohammed Abdul Rashid Booya

Mohammed came to the UK in 1963 to study in the textile industry and initially lived in Bradford. He moved to Birmingham where he played a big role in the Bangladeshi community by supporting them with translating letters and other general duties. On occasions he worked three shifts to pay the mortgage and on weekend he managed to watch three Indian movies in a day.

Can you please tell me your name?

Mohammed Abdul Rashid Booya

Where you from in Bangladesh?

Kumila

When did you come to the UK?

13th September 1963

And how did you come, what was your purpose?

Actually I came as a student; my purpose was to have higher education on my qualifications on my diploma which was textile technology. That was the main purpose I came to England.

Did you get a student visa or a study visa?

I did have a student visa.

When you first arrived in the UK how did you find it, what was it like?

It was extremely cold, even in September. I arrived at Heathrow and then I went to Victoria to catch the train to Bradford. I changed trains at Sheffield to get to Bradford.

Did you have any problems speaking English?

Luckily I was quite capable to communicate in English because I used to speak English in my technical industry with my other colleagues and I wanted to pick up the language as quickly as possible, therefore I didn't have any communication problems with people.

You came by coach was it, or train?

By train to Bradford. Approximately, about 7 o'clock in the evening on the 14th September.

Did you have anywhere to go?

Luckily I did collect an address from Bangladesh from my friend. It was number 7 Moneycombe Lane. Then it was snowing in Bradford and I did find a very good taxi driver. He helped me a lot, he just used to pick up my one small suitcase which was about 16 inches or so. He grabbed it and put it in the car and took me to Moneycombe lane. There I met some strange people whom I had never met before but my friend was out at the time. They just welcomed me and showed me the room.

Bengali people?

Yes, Bengali people. In one house there were about 13 or 14 of us. One bed here, one bed there! Luckily they did have one single bed for me and they just said change over and have some food. I remember exactly what I ate. It was patna rice, with berry mangsho and I really enjoyed it. Then they showed me the toilet and bathroom which was downstairs, no bath or anything.

Was it outside?

It was luckily in the cellar. So I just ate and went straight to bed.

And when did you start college?

That's a sad story actually. I made some enquiries within the first two weeks and I found out that if I went to college straight away the minimum fees could be one pound admission but unfortunately if I started to continue my studies my family would be in big trouble because I have loaned so much money and within a certain period of times if I couldn't pay the loans off I would lose my land. So I just visited the college a few times and decided it wasn't for me. I wanted to find a job and help my family survive.

And what job did you get?

As I couldn't continue my studies in textiles technology I would try to find another job in the same sector so I found a job in a textiles factory which was in Harrowgate and I found lots of Indian women there. I couldn't see any Bengalis there at all. So I started to feel strange and very lonely and I used to rent a single room in Harrowgate. I never had any rice, just boiled egg and bread and butter every day.

Could you cook?

No! So I thought about where I would get rice and curry powder and all the things I needed so I just lived on boiled egg and bread and butter.

This was in 1963?

Yes 1963. I couldn't adjust to the atmosphere of that textiles factory.

How much did you get paid?

Four pounds I got. Working there I didn't like it because there were Indian and Gujarati people and I was not able to speak any other

language apart from English and Bengali. So I thought I would try something else. Everyone was talking about restaurants and hotels. So one day I came out from my room and looked for work in a hotel. On the second day I went to Hotel Pillar and had a little interview with the madam Mrs Tongue. She liked me and she said your English is a little broken but I think you will pick it up within a month because your communication skills are good. She complained once, she said one thing I don't like you will have to go through clinical cleaning. I thought, blimey what is she trying to say. My teeth were so red because I used to always eat paan. She said she would arrange it so when I started I had dentist appointments; I went about four times to clean them. I just got the job and they used to pay me five pounds. But as you know in restaurants and hotels you get tips here and there. My other advantage was that I used to sleep upstairs, work downstairs and all the toilets and bathrooms were inside. Altogether I found out that this job was very suitable for me, I used to earn 9 or 10 pounds a week. Within 6 months I had paid off all of my loans. While I got the job in the hotel, I used to eat rice pudding and bread butter and cake sometimes because I still could not cook. One day I asked the chef if I could try and cook some rice and chicken and he said you can try if you want. So I did try cooking with one of the English chickens and I put so much salt in I couldn't eat it. So then I forgot about cooking again.

So you missed Bangla food?

Yes I did, I did. After 3 months I tried to get out of the hotel. I climbed the hill and found the Taj Mahal restaurant in Harrowgate. I was walking to the entrance and the Bengali workers rushed to the door and just welcomed me and invited me in. They took me upstairs to the kitchen and gave me rice with prawn curry and lentils. Oh my God. I ate so much food and they invited me to come every day if possible or at least 2 to 3 times a week. That was my first job in Harrowgate in a hotel so I started to get used to the surrounding people and my hotel staff.

Did you make any friends?

Yes I made a few friends. Next door was Mrs Abbots. They used to come to the hotel to prepare the menu and I came to know them and I used to play with their daughter sometimes.

Did you come to Birmingham soon after that?

After about a year. My father was quite restless that I was in a strange

place without any of our people around. He used to know someone next to our village that came here in 1957 or 58. So he contacted their family and wrote to him to try and help me to go to Bradford. His name was Mr Haider Ali. So he came a couple of times to ask me to go with him to Birmingham. The second time he came, which was about 9 or 10 months into my job at the hotel, I thought yes, I might enjoy Birmingham more with our people there. I discussed it with the hotel manager and said, look I feel very strange here, there aren't any Bengali people around in his whole city and my uncle has found a job for me in a factory and I think I am better off in Birmingham. He said its ok, its up to me. After I gave a couple of weeks notice I came to Birmingham in October 1964.

Did you not want to continue your education?

Unfortunately I didn't because my brothers were 13, 15 and 17 and I also had another 3 young sisters and if I went to study my family would be struggling and starve and my father would lose all of his land.

How old were you when you came?

20 years old.

How old are you now?

67.

Tell me what it was like when you came to Birmingham.

When I reached Birmingham, it was the same thing, about 13 or 14 people in the same house. 219 Somerville Road, Small Heath. There were a few people waiting for me because amongst everyone I was the youngest and they knew I had some educational background and everyone used to call me Master and respect me differently.

You used to write letters for them?

Write letters and take them to the doctors and tax office and that sort of thing. I used to love to help people. So within a few months I started to enjoy my life and my curry. The chickens we used to get for 2 shillings were very big and extremely tasty. All of them were full of eggs. Unfortunately we didn't have toilets inside, we never always had hot running water and we had no bath inside. Our main food was chicken curry, lamb curry and sometimes fish curry from the bullring markets, the Bream fish and Herring and Mackerel. The vegetables we used to eat were mainly cauliflower, cabbage carrots and potatoes.



I enjoyed most in Birmingham watching Indian films. I never used to miss any. I used to watch 3 movies a week at least!

Who was your favourite actress?

At that time Basanti Mala.

And your favourite actor?

Dilip Kumar.

And your favourite film at that time?

I used to love Dilip Kumar's "Ram aur sham". I have seen many of his films but I can't remember all of them. Another one was "Devdas". And also the Pakistani film "Sabiya Sontorsh".

And where did you used to watch these films?

Imperial Cinema and Luxor Cinema, Triangle cinema. They were all in Balsall Heath and Moseley. I started to enjoy my life, working in the factory, watching my films, sending money for my family. I used to cycle from one cinema to the other on my bicycle. Sometimes I used to watch 3 films a day, one at one o'clock which would finish at half past three and then another one at half past six.

Wow, a real film fanatic...

Yes, a real fanatic. I used to decorate my room with all the film stars. Whoever visited my room, such as the bank manager and my other friends; Mustavisor Rahman and Mujibur Rahman and Habibur Rahman Chowdry. They sometimes used to come to my room to talk and drink tea and watch all the film stars. I used to work first, at a place where one Irishman was abusing me. I said I don't like it if the foreman doesn't take proper action about this. The foreman just started to neglect it and I used to get out of the factory a couple of times. I then got a job at Circ Radiator, Warwick Road and that was 1966. I used to work at a furnace and I was my own boss. They used to give me a list of things to do and if I finished the work in 5 hours, the next 3 hours would be my own. I thought if I can get more money in the night shift, I'll only have to work 4 nights. So I requested the foreman to transfer me from day shift to night shift and luckily I got the night shift and I worked there for 4 years, 4 nights a week, 12 hour shifts and I really enjoyed it. Thursday night I finished, Friday, Saturday and Sunday were all free. Monday evening I used to start at 6 o'clock.

Did you used to watch films on your days off?

Yes I did.

When did you learn to cook and how did you learn to cook?

When I came to Birmingham they didn't allow me to cook at first because they used to respect me and love me. But after 6 or 7 months I said no, show me how to cook.

Were you part of a "Bishu"?

Yes, yes I was I remember now. So 4 of us were in a bishu; Mr Nurul Hoque, Mumin Ali, Haider Ali and myself. Haider Ali used to buy the big chicken on Saturday evening, sometimes 2 of them and you know the coal fire, we all used to have the coal fire. We used to burn the chickens on the fire and he showed me how to cook chicken curry, lamb curry and aloo bhaji. I think about 3 times he showed me and within a month I became the best cook out of everyone. When we used to have guests come from outside, they used to say "Master-shaab, please cook for us. We will arrange everything you just cook it and mix in the masala!" I used to do it and I learnt to love my own curry. I do still cook.

And did you buy fish from the market?

Yes, most of the time Haider Ali used to go buy the fish and vegetables from the market. At that time, our vegetables weren't available. Mostly we used to have English vegetables; radish, cauliflower, cabbage and potatoes. There was another vegetable similar to ours, spinach.

Did you grow anything in the garden?

Coriander and mula, the landlord used to grow in his garden.

So you went to get married in Bangladesh?

I worked for 4 years in Circ radiators and I really enjoyed it because I was my own boss and earned a lot of money at the time because when I used to compare my wages with the others in my room. There was another guy, Mumin Ali who used to get 20 pounds and I used to get 19 pounds for 4 nights. The value of the money was unbelievable. I made a lot of money. In 1968 I left the job in September. I then came back to Pakistan. I didn't really want to get married because I wanted to do more for my family and then get married. But my father would not let me go back without getting married so that's what it was. In 16th December 1968 I got married, on Bangladesh Independence day.

And then your wife joined you in....

I stayed in Bangladesh for 6 or 7 months and in that time I had arranged her passport and taken a visa. She just came with me in July 1969.

And your life changed, was it difficult?

Well that's natural, you have to get married and share the things good and bad and I started sharing. I came to 211 Banks Road and that house was owned by a very good friend of mine, Mr A.H. Condukar. He was a very good friend of mine. Unfortunately I lost him in 73, he passed away. After about a year or so I bought the house from him. My first house I owned was in 1970. I only paid 700 pound and my mortgage was 8 pounds. I couldn't pay it, it was so difficult.

Did you get another job?

Luckily, I found a job in Birmingham City Transport where there was plenty of opportunity to work overtime. I used to work so much overtime you wouldn't believe it. If you check the records I used to work 3 shifts. I started at 5 o'clock finish at half 10 and then start again at half 11 and finish at 6. Then I started the night shift at 7 and come home at about 12 o'clock. That's the job that made me survive for 33 years. Bus Conductor.

Did you enjoy the job?

I enjoyed it because it was independent and I made so much money. I changed houses 5 times and Inshallah all the times the houses were better.





Gyas Uddin Islam

Gyas arrived in the UK in 1964 as a child aged eight. At the time of his arrival, there may have been only a handful of Bangladeshi children in the UK. His father was a merchant seaman. His story depicts what it was like growing up in the UK during that period. He is a renowned business man, who has had grocery shops over the last thirty years and he is still in business.

What is your name?

Gyas Uddin Islam.

How old are you?

57 years old.

When did you arrive in the UK?

8th August 1964

How old where you at the time?

I was eight years old, however, my dad reduced my age by three years so that I could study more and join infant school. When I started school, I didn't know how to speak English. My teacher was called Mr Dodd. There was also a Pakistani teacher who spoke to me in Urdu, but I didn't understand him.

What was it like when you first arrived?

When I first landed, it was not what I had imagined London to be. It looked like a dirty country, the buildings looked dirty from outside, but inside it was very clean a bit like people who look like one 'type' from outside and inside they are 'different'.

Did you come with your mum?

I came with my mum and dad.

Were there many other Bangladeshi families at the time?

I came and found, Haji Naim Ullah from Gush Gow and his family and from Hobiphur, there was Atik Ullah and our family so there were only three families in the area that included parents and children.

Where did you come and stay?

I first stayed in Albert Road in Aston, then Telford Street in Aston.

Did you stay in your own home?

At first we stayed with Atik Ullah in his house and after that we went to live in Bolton Road in Small Heath. We had our own house.

What was school like for you?

I did not know the language nor did I have a friend and I was unable to say anything to anybody. I spoke in Bangla and they spoke in English. There wasn't a day that I did not have an argument with them.

They used to swear at me calling me black. When I told the teachers, I did not get any justice as you do these days. Even the teachers used to call me 'blackie'. The PE teachers were the worst. After a period I learned how to speak English and understood them. There were times when I used to challenge them about when they went to Asia and India and how they did not learn manners, treating me like that. My life was like living in a War. When I went out, whether they were English, Irish or Jamaican they used to say 'let's go paki bashing' as soon as they saw you, either you fought and got beaten or run away. That is what it was like back then.

Can you tell me more about your school life and any incidents?

The first day that I was there, I did not understand anything and it was cold in the playground. A boy said something, but I did not understand and then suddenly he head butted me on my nose. After he hit me I tried to chase him in the snow, but I fell down and scratched my leg. I have a temper, so when I saw him I hit him in the face and broke his glasses. They called my dad from the factory and he was made to pay half a crown for his glasses.

What was your secondary school like?

I went to Summer Lane Secondary School, where I used to do a lot of sport and I used to play for a football team. Narinder Singh was a forward and I was the centre half, and if we did not go they would lose. Because we were black they did not like allowing us to play. We had discussions about this, as the teachers felt ashamed taking us to games as we were black. However, we were good players, so we forced ourselves into the team. Later on our names were forwarded to the Aston Villa under 16 team. In 1967, we played and our school won the American Trophy.

Where you a good player?

Yes I was, but I felt cold and when I went to College I stopped playing as I wanted to concentrate on my studies more.

Did you have problems whilst you were at secondary school?

Yes, all the time as we were a minority and we were viewed as different. After a while the teachers improved and the law changed and there were incremental changes due to the 'Race Relations Act' – things started to change.

Which College did you attend?

I went to Warley College of Technology on Wolverhampton Road in Warley.

What did you study?

I studied a course in Mechanical Technician in City and Guilds, ITB, UEI and there were others. I did five courses in a year. At the time my English was very poor, but in Mathematics and Science, I was very good and always got top marks. However, in English I got zero as I was weak in that. When they used to speak to me, they spoke very slowly. They used to put me in internal news letters for my good work, I used to work for Caulcast Bar metal company in Quinton, that I had an apprenticeship with. I made a 'demonstration lathe' with four other colleagues, this may well be showing in Aston University.

What did you make?

It was a Central Lathe that you could demonstrate in a class room, how you could make a single / double thread screw, and how to cut a groove. The big machines, you were not able to bring to the class rooms. This machine demonstrated changing gears for different ratio's etc.

How many years were you at college for?

I was there for three years.

Did you get a job after that?

Yes, I worked with IMI from 1978 as a 'Maintenance Fitter'. But it was very difficult to get the job. There were times when I used to sit and ask 'Allah' – you created me in one country and for education I came to another country and this was not good. This hurt me very emotionally. Even though, I had education, there was no job for me, because I was black. Allah has helped a lot, as we have moved forward now. My dad prized education over every thing else and said this cannot be taken away from you. With your prayers, I have encouraged my children to study, I did not look at wealth.

Can you explain how you got the job at IMI?

I went outside IMI and they had displayed vacancies for 'Maintenance Fitters', I then went to the recruitment office. When the recruitment officer arrived, he said 'what are you doing here? In a rude manner. I told him, there is nothing wrong with being polite and I have come because a job has been advertised. He said, so what, why are you

here? I replied, I came for the job. He said 'You a maintenance fitter? I replied, Do you feel so bad about me? I can see the certificates that you have displayed there with 'class three'. I told him I have a got a 'first in first'. He then said, 'so you want to do the job? I replied' I want to do the job'. He asked, 'What experience do you have? I told him to look at my certificates. After looking at the papers, he asked if they were my papers? I told him that this was mine, not my dads. I asked him, if he did not believe that a black man can have qualifications? He said, No it is alright, but can you do the job? I told him that I wanted the job and if he did not give it to me, I said that I will look into the law to see if there is anything that I can do and I will not give up, even though I am qualified as a technician. I came for the job as 'maintenance fitter'. He then made a call to his 'technicians department' and a man arrived. He then took me and showed me drawings, I said 'You are showing me something, in other words you don't believe that I did engineering. Why are you showing me 'front elevation, side elevation? Don't you think I know this?

After some further discussion they took me downstairs. They said that they could offer me a job on the basis of a six weeks trial period. I told them to give me the job and if I am unable to do this in a week, they could kick me out. They said, that you will lose your present job, I said that is fine, there is no problem with that. My Allah is the one that decides what I will earn. Back then, people used to earn no more than £150.00 per week, but I told them that I needed a minimum of £300.00 per week after tax. They said, you will get that, the hourly rate was between £7.50 and £15.00 per hour. I said, That is OK, if you are going to pay me £15.00 per hour then I am willing to do the job. I started the job and in six months, I earned what people would earn in 18 months. As a result they promoted me and made me a 'Charge Hand' however, my colleagues and the factory and the Union went on strike. For two weeks, I went to work on my own.

The board of directors called a meeting and invited me and told me that they had lost 20 million pounds in two weeks.

When was this?

This was in 1978 / 79. They told me that they would give me a job as a Foreman on the production line. I told them, that my qualification was an 'Engineer' and my Dad had aspirations for me and made me an Engineer. I told them 'I don't want to work on the production line, even as a Foreman'. They asked, what they could do as a result





of this? I told them if you sack me, you will have to pay me a lot of money as this would be unlawful. I told them to bring all my equipment out as I did not want to go back to the office, and told them that I made a promise that I will not work for another white person again. Thanks to my prayers, from that day since I have not worked for a white person. I set up a grocery shop on Burbury Street in 1979, where I got vegetables from Bangladesh. At the time there was a small shop owned by 'Iqbal Bhai – Eco Brothers, in Oldham' I used to supply goods to them, and now they are multi millionaires. I supplied to every where.

Did you have an import licence?

Yes, to obtain fish but for grocery from Bangladesh you don't require an import license. I was very much in the dark about these things, I used to think that import is such a big thing. I went to a Bangladeshi brother and told him that I have a free hold shop, without any mortgage and he could have half of the profits as he was importing grocery from Bangladesh if he joined me. After three months when he refused to give me grocery, I thought I will see what I can do. At the time 'Meridian Enterprise – International' a Bangladeshi company, said they would send me products from Bangladesh. I didn't know if I needed an import license I went to Heathrow to the passenger terminal and asked them, where to go for things arriving from Bangladesh? They told me that I needed to go the Cargo Department. Looking back at it now, they must have thought I was a fool. I went to the Cargo Department, I found 'Tibet FS Fry' and I spoke to him and told him 'I am importing items from Bangladesh, do I need any license?' He said that I will not need anything, simply the name of my shop, 'Oriental Enterprise' which I registered in 1981, which I still have today. They told me to leave the name of the company and they will obtain a CNF number for me, this is a customer identification number for when items arrive. Even today you don't need any import license. I believe that there are people who wish to keep us in the dark as they are selfish, I have found this a trait in our Bangladeshi community. They refused to help others and there was jealousy in the community, as they don't want others to progress.

A majority of people are restaurant employees, later on when people came as boy vouchers, (this was a scheme to allow children into the UK and usually join their fathers). I asked their parents to send them to school, however, they told me off, saying that I have become English. They sent 14 / 15 year old boys to work in restaurants. I don't blame

the restaurant industry as this has helped us and it is a source of income for our community. What I am aggrieved about is the fact, had they gone to school and learned a little bit of education this would have been better for them. If they had a learned a little English and got jobs in the mainstream system that would have been good. Allah says, that you should embrace the country that you live in, as this is your country. Nobody is the master of their own destiny in terms of how much you earn it is reseed, (this is a common word used to say people are pre-destined to earn the amount of money set out by Allah) this is up to Allah.

In 1985, many people arrived as visitors to the UK from Bangladesh. Even though the older generation have children with a Masters Degree, they still come to me for advice, even if it was about a bill. In 1985 many young people arrived from Bangladesh, having sold their land and property to arrive here. They used to come to me with forms. I used to give them some ideas in filling in the forms.

What was the food like in 1964?

The food was similar to what we have today, back then we had live chicken. Shuruz Miah Querishi he had a shop. He is my relative. The shop was in Park Road, that road no longer exists, they have turned it into the Spaghetti Junction. From his shop we got the chicken, some people slaughtered the chicken there, whilst others brought the chicken home and slaughtered it, making it halal. The usual shops did not have any halal food. Slowly things started to improve. In those days we did not have any place for prayer, there was a place in Frederick Road in a house, we used to pray Namaz, this has now become the Masjid E-Noor near the round-a-bout. For Eid prayers, there was a Mosque on Walford Road and there was the Digbeth Civic Hall that we used to hire. There were no other places for prayers. Now in Lozells, there must be at least 50 – Allah is so giving. We have to be grateful to Allah, in Lozells, the first Hafeez was Kibria, Saidul and Saleh my son, they were the first three people to be Hafeez in this area. They were born in the UK and have become a 'Hafeez', we must be grateful to Allah.

Can you tell me a little about the campaign work that you did for the liberation of Bangladesh and how you met Sheik Mujib?

The night that they should have given power to Sheik Mujib.



How old were you at the time?

I was 20 years old, however, my passport age was 17. That night on Muntz Street, with friends, we sat and listened to the Radio and heard that the Sheik did not get the power. We heard that the Sheik was arrested, on that same night we went to Pasha Shahib's house. We sought out people who were educated, I knew Mr and Mrs Pasha. At that time Mr Pasha had studied for the Bar on two occasions but, he did not pass. It was 12.30 when we called for him, Mr Pasha came out to see us and we asked for his help, as the Sheik Mujib has been arrested and we will need to call a meeting in Small Heath Park. During the night we worked and produced leaflets. At the time I had a motor bike that I used to drive. There was a Pakistani Picture Hall that many of the Bangladeshis used to go to. MAK Hoque sat at the back of my bike and said don't be afraid I am behind you. He went to the hall in front of every body, including the Pakistanis – and they would

not let him in, he slapped the door open and gave out the leaflets, telling all the Bangladeshi people to attend the meeting. This is how we distributed the leaflets amongst all the halls. We went to Bangladeshi houses and spoke to all the people we knew and told them that we must attend the meeting and work together. The next day in Small Heath park, Mrs Pasha tore her gold chain from her neck – it did not belong to her, but it was to encourage people. The people there, gave their wages, whatever they could afford. There after, people gave their wages on a weekly basis. After the meeting we formed the Bangladesh Action Committee consisted of, Pasha Shab, Afrose Miah Shab, M.A.K Hoque, Tony Hoque, Joru Master was educated amongst us. Roger Gwynn the son of England's ex defence Minister's son was the secretary for a youth committee, and Jamal Bhai was the President there was nine of us in total. We raised £700.00 through our efforts for the cause.

We heard that Sheik would be released on the 8th February 1972. He came to the Caledonian Hotel in London. We left at 5am in the morning and got there at 7am, it was cold and there was snow but we got there. We were allowed to see him at 11am. We went with Roger Gwynn to have the meeting. On behalf of the committee I asked Sheik Shab, 'Sir what will you do when you go back to Bangladesh?' He said 'when I go back to Bangladesh, I will retire as the father of the nation, I will hand over security to Colonel Usmani as the Defence Minister and Head of the Army and the young people will run the country'. After the discussion, I got a signature and date under the Bangladeshi national anthem of Sheik Shab. This letter I still have today, the nine of us took photo copies of the letter. After his return to Bangladesh, four to five weeks later, I used to read Financial Times and the Guardian and found that his son was made head of the Army and Colonel Usmani had no title. After that I stopped taking an interest in Bangladeshi Politics. There were times when I used to sit alone, and I used to always pray for the Sheik. But after a while, I realised this was a mistake as he said one thing and did another thing. If he had retired as the father of the nation, he would have been respected in the same manner as a pheer / fakeer (holy man).

Thereafter, I was asked to get involved in the Bangladeshi Welfare, but I did not get involved and become President. They also asked me to get involved in Mosque committees. I told them that I don't need this, I have my family now and they are my priority and I invested my time with them being a family man.



Gyas Uddin Islam in the 70's



Islam and friends



Muhammad Idrish

Muhammad arrived in 1976 on a British Council Common Wealth Scholarship in 1976 and lived in Bristol before moving to Birmingham. He has an inspirational story in regards to fighting for his right to stay in the UK by campaigning. Since then he has led numerous campaigns to support other people in a similar position as his to remain in the UK.

Can you please tell me your name?

My name is Mohammed Idrish. I am the coordinator at the Asian Resource Center. I am from Bangladesh from the district of Foridpur. I have been here for the last 35 years.

Can you tell us how you came to the UK?

I came to this country to study. I was a student and was given a scholarship by the British Council known as the Common Wealth scholarship. They brought me, and I went to Bristol University to study Physics. I was supposed to go back to Bangladesh at the end of my studies. I did not, and remained here, and that is a long story how I remained here.

Tell us before the story why you did not go back?

Well I did not go back because being young at age and heart, I fell in love with an English woman and I did not want to leave her on her own. I could not take her back to Bangladesh so I thought I would remain here. I did get married to her. I did get married to her to stay in this country as husband for a British wife. I was given according to immigration law in those days 12 months leave to remain here in this country. During those 12 months my marriage broke down and therefore I applied for indefinite leave to remain here. The home office refused to give me leave to remain on the ground that I no longer live with a British wife.

Can I just ask for background, how old were you when you arrived here?

I was 26.

And what year was it?

That was in 1976. I arrived in the country the day Southampton won the F.A cup by beating Manchester United in 1976 F.A cup final on the day I arrived they beat Manchester United. So I have remained faithful

to Southampton ever since I had been a follower of Southampton football team. But they not doing as good, nowadays but I remain their supporter.

So your marriage didn't work out, the home office did they try to remove you?

Well following on from the refusal of leave to remain which I've fought through the usual immigration appeal process. I went to the adjudicator and higher tribunal I got onto the court of appeal and went to the House of Lords and all the way through my appeal was dismissed. I was not allowed to stay in this place. When the House of Lords dismissed my appeal on the same day the home office issued me a deportation notice. I appealed against it. Once again I went to the adjudicators who dismissed my appeal. I went to the higher court and they allowed my application and I was allowed to stay and this is only one part of the story. During my appeal hearing, I realized that I could not get justice, from the people who deliver justice because the law was stacked against me. Immigration law in this country is there to control black people's entry and settlement in this country. I, being a black person did not think that I can win on the basis of the law. So we launched a public campaign. We had demonstrations. We had pickets of the courts. We had a demonstration again. All together there had been 10/12 demonstrations in support of my campaign. The campaign was supported by a very large number of public people from trade union movement, my own trade union, NALGO which played a really important role in the campaign. 187 members of House of Lords made a presentation to the home secretary. About 200 MPs made a presentation to the home secretary and I was told thirty-five thousand ordinary members of the public also wrote individual letters to the home secretary and the campaign collected some like a hundred thousand signatures on the petition, asking the home secretary to alter his decision. Anyway, at the end the court allowed my appeal and the home secretary had no choice but to let me stay in this country.

How many years did it take?

Well as I said I came into this country in 1976 where they refused my application in 1981 when the campaign started and finally in 1986 the home secretary allowed me to stay. Something like five and a half years of campaigning to stay here.

It must have been a very stressful time?

No it was not a stressful time at all, because as I realize I was a young person I came from Bangladesh. I was part of the Bangladesh Freedom Movement from all my formative years in school, college and University. I had gone and seen people fight against injustice. The peoples fight for equality. I already had a university degree and I had a very good degree and that's why they brought me into this country for education. If I went back to Bangladesh I would have got a good job. There's no doubt about it. So I was not to worry whether I could stay here or not. So what I wanted to do is to test who can stay and who cannot stay in this country because while I was fighting, I knew there was a large number of the Bengali community living in this country. Pakistani communities were living in this country. Indian communities were living in this country. African and Caribbean communities living in this country and everybody like me were insecure of living in this country. Nobody actually knew who has got the settlement here, who can feel safe and secure in this country and who cannot. There is an attack on our community through the law and there was an attack on our community on the street. Somebody has to test it. My fight was to test, whether, I, or my community had got the right to stay here or whether we could establish our rights. Either by law or fights in the streets. I have seen in Bangladesh fighting on the streets with guns and achieve their independence. I was in no doubt that if you fight, you win. So I actually never in my campaign was tired or stressed. So it's a fight which has to be done. There maybe a weak point in personal life but that didn't affect me. One of the other reasons I thought I had the duty to fight because I was care free as I described to you. I was not worried about going back and I was young and with a lot less family responsibility. So I thought I had an opportunity. It is my duty on behalf of the community to fight. If I can win so can many other people win and also get inspiration to fight. That's what we achieved, what we've set out to achieve and I'm glad we achieved that and as a result I think our campaign has contributed to this sense of security our community can now have in this country.

Can I ask you a little bit about your work; does the campaign give you inspiration as a way of giving something back?

Well it is because this centre was formed before I started working here and the people who worked in this centre people who were involved in managing this centre had taken part in 'Mohammed Idrish defense campaign' before I started working here. So I had an oppor-

tunity to meet people who worked here and know about why this centre was formed and it actually matched very well on the type of ideologies we had behind our campaign. So, I thought it will be a national progression to progress the campaign into a paid job. So when the opportunity came in this centre I had no hesitation applying for the job. I had competition but luckily I overcame the competition and I got the job and I thought the centre has a philosophy for the betterment of our community in this country. I got the job, I have moved from one thing to another and continued from the one individual fight that I had to have the privilege to fight for the whole community. All the time, I have worked here, there have been many campaigns that this centre as was involved in. We have been involved in, divided families campaign, also justice for black people in this country. There have been many injustices on victims of attacks. If you are a black person and you are a victim of a racial attack, you can end up in prison or dead and so that was the type of justice. So there are many black people have been in prison over the years being victims of the injustice. We have fought for individual victims to be released from prison. We have been involved in the Satpal Defence campaign, Clinton Mearby defence campaign, Cardiff three defence campaign, Broadwater force campaign and many others up and down the country. Either playing a leading role when it was in Birmingham or a supporting role when it was outside Birmingham – and we continue to do that.





Mr Anjob Ali

Anjob Ali gives a vivid description of when he arrived to the UK. His attention to detail of his journey, paints a great picture of what it was like for him travelling from Sylhet and then finally onto Birmingham.

Where are you from in Bangladesh?

I am from Hashna Bad in Satock Thana.

When did you arrive in the UK?

I came in 1963 in December.

How old were you when you arrived? And how old are you now?

I was around thirty when I arrived, I was born in 1933, and now I am 77 years old.

How did you arrive?

At the time, it was Pakistan and I came with Pakistan International Airlines. I flew from Sylhet to Dhaka, then to Karachi, then to Cairo, then to Rome, then to Paris and finally to London.

Did you come with a voucher? Was it sent to you?

I came with a voucher and it came from the 'Ministry of Labour', they issued a form.

What was it like when you landed in Heathrow?

Well, I did not even see a plane, merely heard them. Back then, the Sylhet Usmani Airport was a small house. We got on a plane from there, and it was a small plane with about 30 seats or so. We came to Dhaka where we mounted a larger plane for Karachi, which then went onto Cairo. They told us to wear warm clothes, I thought, Cairo is a warm country, why do we need warm clothes – but when we landed, we realised it was cold. In those days, each time we landed in a country they would give us a drink – it was Fanta. When we landed in Heathrow, they checked us through immigration. We then went to the bank in the Airport and changed all the Pakistani money that I had. There were three of us in our group, all with different addresses, I approached a Pakistani man and asked him which address was closest.

He said that the closest was Aldgate in East London and you should go there. I asked him, how we should go? (I am able to speak Urdu as I studied it). He advised that we should go by bus to Victoria and then you can take a Taxi.

We came to Victoria and a Pakistani or Bangladeshi person helped us get a taxi to Aldgate. When we arrived at our destination, we knocked the door and a Bangladeshi person opened the door. He took us in and gave us food. The person we had come to see, was at work so we waited for him. When he arrived, he did not seem too happy and he said, people spend a lot of money to come here and when they leave I have to give them money. So we sat there with a paraffin heater, we were very sleepy. He asked if we had any money? We said that he has some and I showed him what we had. They kept one of us there and we will move onto the next address that we had. I had an address for Aston in Birmingham and the other person had an address for Bedford. (I was disoriented as I came from a hot country and it was so cold and I did not understand every thing) One of the people at the house took us by underground to Euston and put us onto the Bedford train and told us that the last destination was Bedford.

When we got on the train, it was a local one that stopped quite frequently and I had a small suitcase with me. There was an English man next to me, and I showed him my address. He took out of his pocket a Cigarette packet and he wrote B, E, D and asked if I understood – I nodded. He showed me through the window the names of places when it stopped, I thought I was supposed to get off, so I got up to go. He stopped me and showed me the names of places on the boards, and he did this for two or three times. I looked at the name board that was lit up, and realised that there was writing on it and I realised what he was showing me in regards to the names. I always travelled on trains in Bangladesh, from Sylhet to Dhaka, so this is nothing new for me; I just had not made the connection. It was clear to me now, as I realised that I should get off when Bedford was shown on the name board. The English man had left and I looked out for BED and when I saw it, we got up to get out. I opened the door to get out and saw that there was a big drop; I thought that this is not right as when we got on there was no drop. So, I thought it must be the other way and it was so we got off, but we left the door open.

We gave the ticket to the guard and said 'new man, car, taxi' using my hands to gesture. He pointed us to a place and said 'stand here' I did not fully understand. So we went and stood there. It was very foggy and we could not see much.

What time was it?

It was near 1am, and we had a long journey and were very tired. So, we both stood there and had a cigarette. I saw cars come and go with people getting on and off, but they were barely visible due to the fog. We looked at the guard and he gestured with his hand to stay there. Finally he called us over and I showed him the address that I had and he arranged a taxi for us. We got in and he took us to the address, I asked my colleague to knock on the door, he did very gently and I told him to knock the door harder. I thought, if they don't open the door we will go back to the station, I thought they must have places to stay and will make arrangements for us. We saw a light being switched on, so I got out of the car as well. The man opened the door and said that he was expecting a few of us, three or four people. I said, 'there are only two of us' He asked if we have enough money for the taxi, otherwise he will pay. I said, 'No, I have enough and will pay for the taxi'. The man that opened the door was from Joganathpur and the person we had come to see was from Borcafon and his name was Shomsor Ali. My friend had come to see Shomsor Ali, and my address was for Birmingham in Aston. The man took us into a room and lit a fire with a Paraffin heater and sat us down and asked if we had eaten rice. We said that we had eaten already in London, so he gave us bread and tea. He then showed us to beds, I was shown into a room with men who worked in the brick factories and they were doing a night shift.

When they returned from their night shift, they woke us up and gave us breakfast. He asked how many of us had come; we said that one of our friends has stayed in London, he said that all of us should have come to Bedford. We were, happy to have been able to leave one of our friends in London as we did not know what was going on. I said, that my friend would stay and I would travel onto Birmingham. He said, that there was no rush, you can stay here and there is work here, you have come here legally so you can claim funds from the Labour office, which will be enough to feed you and you will be no burden to me. He advised, that I write a letter to the address that I have in Birmingham before I leave. So, I wrote the letter to my uncle, explaining that I am now in Bedford. I got an immediate response, where he said

that my health is not great, so I am unable to come to collect you. He advised that I should come in any weekend and he will help you when you come to Birmingham.

So on Saturday or Sunday, I got a coach to Birmingham on a very foggy day. The first stop was Northampton where you had to change for another coach. It wasn't like it is today where, the coach was next to each other, it was further away. I had been in the UK for 6/7 days now and have become more used to the language. I asked some one where the coach was and he said 'down there', I thought that it could be quite a distance. As I walked I noticed a black person, I thought he could be Bangladeshi or Pakistani. I decided to speak to him in Bangladeshi, I first gave him my salaam and said that I wanted to go to Birmingham, he said "come with me", however, he did not say that he was going to Birmingham. I followed him and he took me to a tea shop, where he offered me tea, but I was fasting and asked him instead to buy me a packet of biscuit for later, which I paid for. It was very cold and I put my hands out to warm them by a heater and put my feet out as well, but he told me that this is not allowed – so, I just heated by hands.

The coach left and arrived in Digbeth, we got off and walked around past the Bull Ring and then past the Income Tax office in Union Street and got on the 39 bus. The man that I was with got off on Victoria Road and my stop was next on Park Road, I wish the man would have told me this as this would have put me at ease, especially as I am new to the country. I showed the bus conductor the address and he told me to get off at the next stop. I got off and looked for numbers on the doors, however, it was dark so I could not see the numbers. I saw a shop nearby, it belonged to 'Shuruj Miah' I later found out, so I entered the shop and told him where I was going. He called some one from the back of the shop and asked him to take me to the address. He took me through a back passage that led to the house, where I met my uncle.





Patricia Ali

Patricia has a unique story where she moved into a Bangladeshi multi occupancy house and rented a room in 1966. She later married the man who owned the house. She witnessed the arrival of Bangladeshi women and children to join their families and realised how isolated the women were. She decided to become a nurse, so that she could support them. She continues to help the community and is very well regarded by them.

Can you tell us your name?

My name is Patricia Ali.

How old are you Pat?

I am 65.

And you live in Mayfield road?

Mayfield road yes. I have lived here since 1981.

And where were you from originally?

Originally I was born in West Bromwich, just down the road. My parents were there, my sisters and everybody was born down there.

Are you English or Irish?

English! No its ok we had a Mehsaab (mosque teacher) before and he used to tell the kids “Your moms Irish”. So my daughter used to ask me “are you Irish mom?” and I used to ask why and she would say “Because Mehsaab told us you’re Irish!”

So in the early years, what was it like when you started seeing Bangladeshi people?

Well, in the beginning it was all single men, never saw any Bengali ladies or Indian ladies they were all just working men. Weekends you’d probably see them if they weren’t working and they just kept themselves to themselves.

And what were you doing at the time...?

At the time, I was married to an English man and he was a big gambler, so I left him and came down to Birmingham where my sister lived. Then I looked for a room and I found a room in her husband’s house in Aston. He was the landlord.

Oh right what year was this?

That was 1966 or 67 probably. There were no other women there just me and my son. I used to go to work and he found me a babysitter for my son, which was his auntie. I used to go work, come home and go to my sisters. That was my life at the time. I didn’t have much to do with anybody except at the weekend I used to see them all. Otherwise, I would go to work, have some dinner and go to bed. No problems, just very quiet. And that’s how I started to know Bengali, because I never knew Bengali at all. I knew Indian people because my sister was married to an Indian man at the time. So I didn’t feel any

problems with them, I wasn’t frightened of living with all these people, I don’t know why. They weren’t like frightening people; they were gentle, made me feel at home. So that’s how we lived, I used to go with my sisters. Then because I never used to eat curry, I never knew what it was. He used to make some curry, so he used to give me curry. We just used to have dinner together. I’d just be there; I don’t know what role I was in the beginning, just a lodger really. And we just made friends and....

And what type of work did you do Pat?

I worked in a factory and in the canteen at the time. Just general duties, then there was sort of half past 7 until half past five on Saturday mornings. But in the end it just became too much because I was leaving my son all day and then working Saturday mornings. So he (current husband) said why don’t you stop work and stay at home. Then I stopped working and stayed at home for a few years. So I lived in his house with all these men who were related to him and his friends. Slowly they all started leaving. We left the property and came to Lozells.

This house?

No Burbury Street. There was an English lady there as well, with a Bengali husband. What happened then all the ladies started coming then 1970, 71.

When did you move into Lozells?

1971 we moved into Lozells. In 72, a friend of ours, his wife came. In 72 my husband’s sister came. So that was 2 ladies I knew. I never knew any other ladies. And then they kept coming and I learnt Bengali off the lady living with me and she was supposed to learn English from me but she didn’t. Then the children were born.

When you started eating Asian food, Bangladeshi food, how did you find it?

It was lovely, very nice. We had neighbours who would like to come for dinner. They would ask us if we could make them a curry. That’s how my neighbours learnt how to cook a few things. The lady next door learnt how to cook daal, she liked that!

Can you cook?

Yeah, I can cook.

What’s your favourite curry?

I like chicken actually. I like chicken curry but I eat anything like fish, meat more than anything and vegetables.

Have you been to Bangladesh, Tell us about what it was like going?

We went to Bangladesh yeah.

When did you go?

Went in 1991, New Year’s Day we landed in Bangladesh. My husband had already gone before to make sure that the house was ok and I went with all my daughters plus my step son and step daughter. The thing that surprised me and my daughters was when we got to Bangladesh the plane landed and we went down the stairs and anyway we thought we had been transported to London. So we were going down the stairs and at the bottom of the stairs were the army, with guns. My daughter said “mum the army’s come” and I thought they must have always been here because they haven’t come for us. We were surprised how small they were and thin. The heat when we got off the plane was really warm and I felt the heat and it got really nice. Then we went to Sylhet where my husband was waiting with some of the relatives and everybody was saying to me “I’m your grandson”, I’m your this and I’m your that and I didn’t know who anybody was, because his brothers have kids in Bangladesh so they were all there. So we got on this van, going along which took ages to get to where we were going. When we reached there it was nice and you could hear all the insects. It was so peaceful it was really nice. Then we went into the house with lights, dark lamps and everybody was there greeting us. We had some dinner. Everybody wants to talk to you, ask you questions. My daughters were tired they wanted to sleep. We were all settled down now, had nice furniture and a bed each for everybody and the children. They were quite happy.

Where In Bangladesh did you stay?

Binar Bazaar in Thana (District) and it’s inside a village. So we were in the village in this nice house my husband made which was lovely. It was very old fashioned now. Then the next morning you wake up early and they’ve got this blackbird inside your roof at 5 o’ clock in the morning. People were already up to talk to us and I saw his brother. His brother had already had a stroke and came over and his brothers wife, all the kids. Their wives came over, the village people and everybody.

What did you see?

It was quite a lovely place. It was really beautiful with goats, chickens things like that which you never see. The animals and the baby animals and the children were really delighted. They really didn’t want to go they just wanted to go for a week.

How long did you go for?

We stayed there for two months. We would have stayed longer but my dad was ill at the time. So I came back. I said to them you can stay with your dad but they said no we want to come back. So I brought all the girls back with me and the boys stayed and we had a great time. I felt really comfortable. Obviously it was quite warm for us in December, people were cold and we had really red faces from the heat. We had a great time we went to town went to Sylhet and had a lovely time. I didn’t go anywhere really I stayed in the village. I couldn’t understand why people had left their homes to live as they did live in the early years it was very hard so the men lived together in one house and they have these beautiful houses and beautiful family. This lady taught me how to speak Bengali and her house was absolutely fantastic. I said to her when I came back “how can you leave a wonderful house and come to live here?” and she said “well you have to think about the money”

Pat, tell us a bit about the role you played in the community?

Well there were no children available to help and I had to do lots of translating, taking people to anywhere they needed to go. I had to write letters nearly every day. Even today I have still got to go to somebody’s house I forgot today to read a letter that’s come. She has children old enough to read a letter but she wants me to it. Lots of things I felt sorry for the ladies when the ladies came from Bangladesh because they couldn’t speak English and then I felt that I could do something for these ladies coming to this country who were really frightened coming with their babies and going to hospitals. So I decided again that my knowledge was good enough so I thought to have an interpreter’s job in the hospital. So I went to the hospital, I said to the matron “I’d like a job as an interpreter” and she said “how many languages could you speak?” and I said I could speak one, Bengali but that’s the one you’re having problems with. She said ok so we’ll start you off as an auxiliary nurse and then you’ll go away when you’re needed, and I said yes that would be lovely. That’s how I started in the hospital. So the ladies would be there sitting in the middle frightened



to death and I'd go in and say "Ballah nei gorh, Khitah osier" (Hello, how are you? what's the problem?) and they said you could speak Bengali and I replied yes I can. They would tell me their problems and then I'd try and help and translate and I used to go to the main hospital, lady got a heart problem and I used to go and interpret to her and she always remembered me and very strangely over the years she was related to my son's wife and she said I seen your mother in law and she's such a nice lady. She didn't know at the time I was in the hospital. So I worked there for a long time doing interpreting and I used to come home and if I didn't know what something meant I'd say to my husband "what does that mean?" and he'd tell me then I would forget then he would tell me, "I can't be bothered to tell you again" so then I used to ask the other ladies and they would tell me. Then I'd try and think that's right. Then after some time my husband decided to go back to Bangladesh to build this house we were going to. So I had to leave work then which I was quite disappointed. My husband's first wife joined us. I called her my Affah (Older sister), she came in 1982 since she's been here and she has lovely kids and I always call them my kids. The four sons and one daughter, they love me and I love them too.

Do you find it challenging?

No because they knew me from day one. When I met my husband he was married already and had got two sons and they knew about me obviously and I used to have this lovely friend who used to write letters for us and for him and I used to offer to put something on for the eldest son or the next son down and he used to write to me. He used to write to me in baby Bangla writing that he wanted a ball or wanted a bike. His dad wouldn't send any money for that kind of things so I used to send things over. Before they came I gave them some money for a bike and that bike was still there when we went in 1990. My husband was going to and from Bangladesh so another three children came along so by the time they got here, the youngest was four, they all knew me. I never felt any animosity from them, I mean her daughter came back with me and left her mum in Bangladesh because she wanted to be with me. Now they're all grown up but they all come and visit. It's a close family where the mums would come here and leave the children or they would stay and cook the meals here. My own son is a similar age to them and he comes down all the time and they'll get on.

Do you feel very much part of the Bangladeshi community?

Yeah I did.

Still do?

I never had anyone say something to me or any bad words to me. I think my children had a bit of a problem when they went to school because I was white but their dad wasn't white. Children when they're brought up they think they know it all when they go to school, somebody once said you're not white and you're not black so you're a half caste. It was never upsetting to them that they never came to me and cried about it.





Discovering Curry

Roger Gwynn eloquently describes how he first discovered curry and then later lived with Bangladeshis. Roger has written this chapter himself, however, he has not done himself justice. After his graduation from University he volunteered and worked in Bangladesh for several years and he can speak fluent Bangla. On his return to the UK he worked in the Bangladeshi community. He led a Bangla school in Smallheath and has forged some amazing relationships with the community. The people that he taught, are very grateful for the role that he played, he is called 'uncle roger' with endearment.

It was in my student days during 1960/63 that I first fell in love with the food of Bangladesh. That was half a century ago, in a rather severe and bleak university town in Cambridge. In those days everyone - and especially students - had to count their pennies carefully. Fast food hadn't been invented, the streets were still clean (there were no carrier bags, polystyrene burger trays or cola cans to litter the pavements), and eating out was a luxury. There were relatively few "Indian" restaurants, and curry had yet to achieve its status as Britain's favourite restaurant food.

None of today's Kashmiri or Gujarati style eating houses were around. "Tandoori" stood for something new and daring, "Balti" and "Karai", "Paneer" and "Chaat" hadn't entered our vocabulary. Almost all the "Indian" restaurants were run by pioneers from Sylhet, and their menu, in essence, was meat curry and rice. Compared with today, the bill of fare was limited in range and the culinary quality often low. Nevertheless the tantalizing aroma of hot curry sauce suffused with ginger, turmeric, cumin and fenugreek was enough to stop me in my tracks outside the local Indian restaurant, and soon I was another curry addict.

A year or two later I found myself living in East Bengal, discovering "real" Bangladeshi cooking; an endless variety of dishes separately prepared from fresh ingredients using individual recipes, in contrast



Abdul Gafur

to the usual range of "Indian restaurant" curries, which were in fact made (as I found out later) by adding different items to a standard basic chicken stock.

It wasn't until I returned to Britain and moved into a lodging house in Birmingham that I learned how to cook a simple curry. The lodging house was owned by an ex-seaman from Sylhet, who was now a machinist in a factory. Several other factory workers lived in his house - migrants from Sylhet who had been enticed to Britain (this was in the 1960s) by means of work vouchers issued by a government desperate to fill the demand for industrial labour. These men had come to Britain purely as breadwinners, leaving their families at home in Sylhet. One consequence of this was that they had to look after themselves, doing their own cooking, washing and cleaning. Some cooked individually, some clubbed together to form a "bishu". This was seamen's slang for a joint messing arrangement. I was invited to be a member of the landlord's bishu, which at that point included one other person apart from the landlord himself.

The rule was that the mess-mates, the bishu members, would share the toil of shopping and cooking in an equitable way, and split the bill fairly. As I was unable to cook I had to do much of the shopping, and of course keep a careful account of expenditure. But I often hung around in the kitchen and watched my mess-mates and other fellow

lodgers do their cooking. There was little subtlety in their methods: the aim was to produce something moderately palatable which would quell the pangs of hunger after a hard day's work. Before long I learned how to copy their efforts.

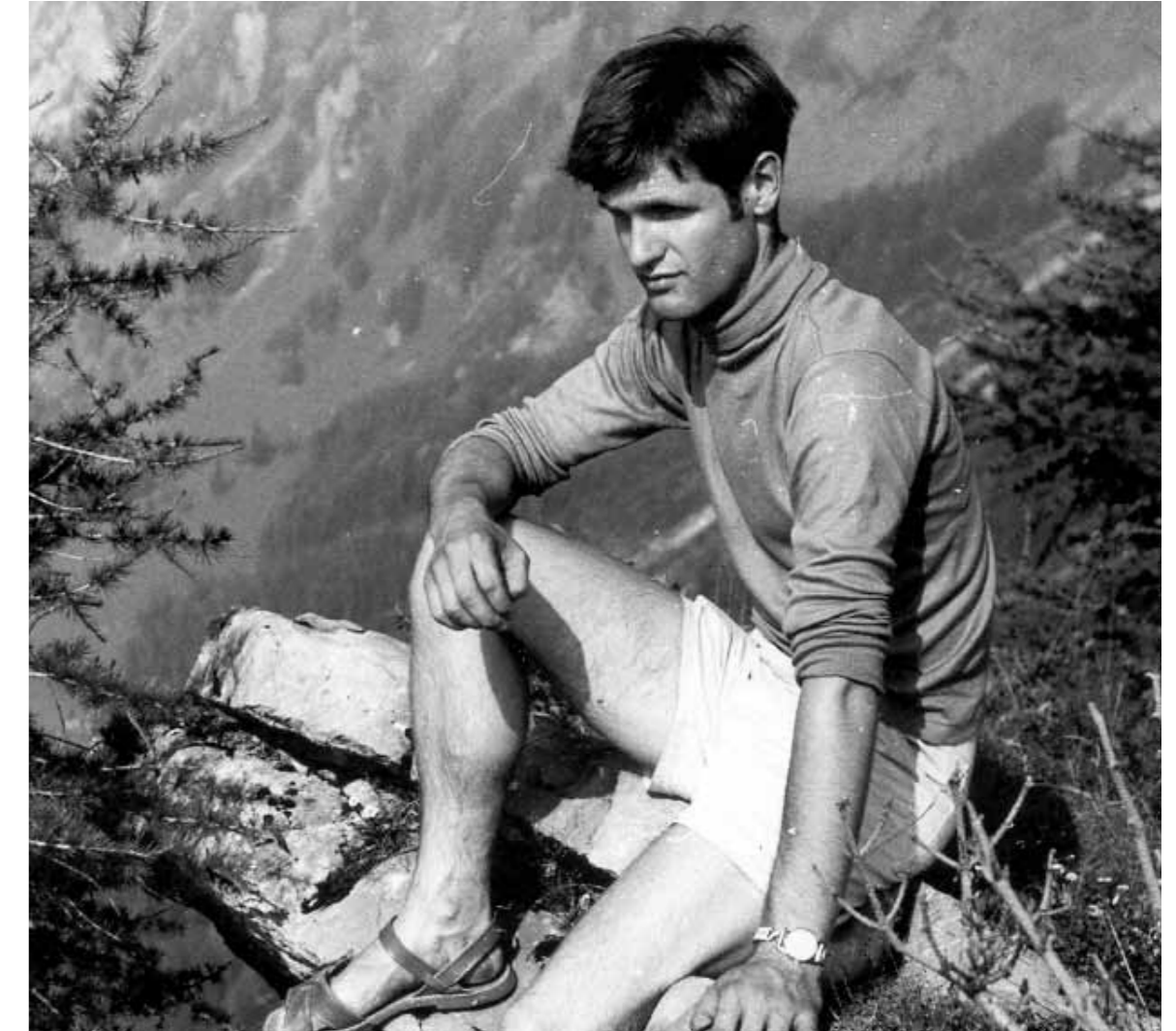
Apart from boiled rice there were only three or four basic dishes. There was lamb, mince or chicken curry with or without a vegetable. There was fish curry, there was chatni, and there was dal. Most of the time people would stick to lamb or chicken; some always had a dal as well. Fish or fish chatni were more of a special treat.

We bought our ingredients at a local shop called "A.A. Continental Stores". A.A. stood either for Afro-Asian or for Abdul Awwal, the younger of the two brothers who owned the shop. Abdul Awwal was the butcher, forever hacking legs of lamb with a cleaver, paring fat off lean meat with a sharp knife or dismembering chickens. Abdul Hai shovelled spice powders out of huge tins, weighed vegetables and kept the till. It was a small shop and had a limited range of local and Asian vegetables, and irregular supplies of dried and deep frozen Bangladeshi fish. The inventory of South Asian products available in those days, even in the famed bazaar of Coventry Road, was a great deal shorter than it is nowadays. Items like shatkora were rare and much sought after.

Abdul Hai was always happy to make up an impromptu mix of spices, spooning a bit of this and a bit of that rather haphazardly into a brown paper bag and giving it a shake. We weren't fussy, and didn't want the bother of buying lots of separate spices. The taste of our curries would remain constant for a week or so while we were using one bagful, then change subtly as we moved onto the next. The mixture always contained coriander, cumin, paprika, chilli and turmeric, plus a bit of garam masala if desired.

This is how a typical chicken curry would be made. The washed chicken pieces would be thrown into a large saucepan with a good amount of chopped onion, a few bay leaves and sticks of cassia bark, and some lumps of vegetable ghee from a tin. The pan would be set on the gas stove and heated briskly until the chicken started to sizzle and brown. Meanwhile some chunks of root ginger and cloves of garlic would be pounded together, using a chunky iron pestle and mortar which the landlord had made himself on his lathe at the factory. The mash of ginger and garlic would be added to the seared contents of the pan and

given a stir. By now the onion was breaking down and mingling with the juices of the chicken and the melted ghee, to form a rich gravy. As soon as the ginger and garlic had amalgamated and everything was spluttering together merrily, a great spoonful of mixed spice powder would be added and stirred vigorously into the sauce. It was given a few seconds to heat up and torrify, and then the water would be added, enough to fully cover the chicken pieces. The same large cooking spoon would be used to lever a roughly gauged portion of salt out



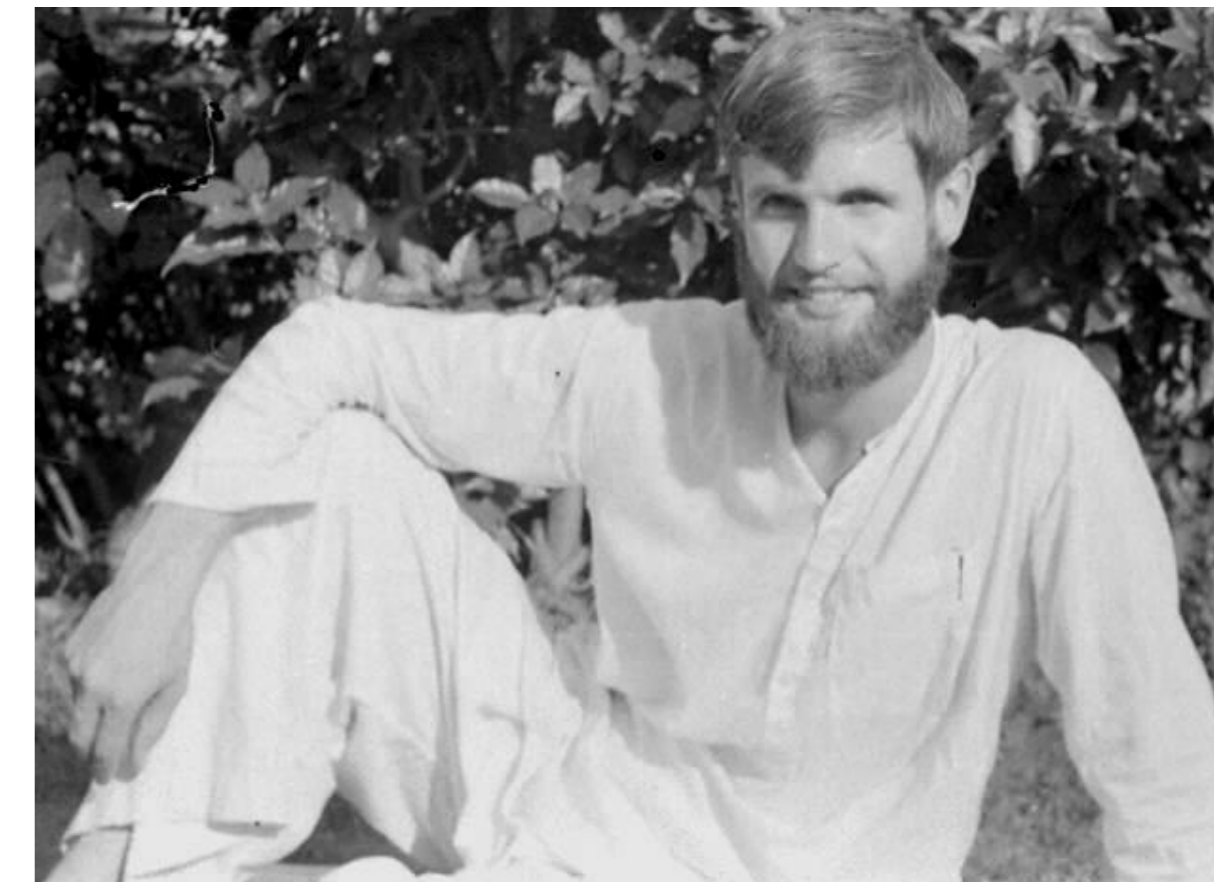


of a jar and slip it into the boiling stew. Potato or some other vegetable might also be thrown in at this stage. Then it was simply a matter of waiting until the meat was done. The gas was usually kept at a fairly high setting to hasten the cooking process, so it was wise to stay in the kitchen and give the fast-boiling pot a good stir from time to time. Sometimes a pan would run dry and the contents stick to the bottom - the resulting curry might just have a more intense flavour than usual, or else taste of charcoal, depending on how badly it had burned.

For a fish curry a more traditional approach would sometimes be used. Chopped onions would first be fried in oil until melted. Then the spice would be added - a little turmeric, perhaps, a bay leaf and a bit of cumin, but not (God forbid) the spice mixture used for meat - and the fish pieces would be fried just long enough to seal the flesh. Finally water would go in, and possibly tomatoes, spinach or beans. The cooking time for fish is short, and getting it just right was obviously more of a challenge than with meat.

Mackerel was sometimes used to make a chatni. The fish would first of all be fried whole. Then it would be broken up to extract the good flesh, discarding the bones. The fish would then be mashed together with freshly chopped onion and coriander leaf and seasoned with salt. A simple but appetising relish; but it was too time consuming to be prepared often. The mackerel were generally bought early in the morning from the Bull Ring market, on someone's day off, or on their way home from a night shift.

To prepare dal, the amateur chefs would first boil whichever pulse they had selected (usually pigeon pea or "moshur dal"), together with some chopped onion, in plenty of water - maybe with some cassia sticks and cumin powder for flavouring, but without salt - until it turned to a mush. Then they would heat up several spoonfuls of ghee in a separate pan, and in it fry a good quantity of chopped garlic, together with some fennel seeds and cumin seeds. When the garlic was well browned they would combine this "bagar" with the boiled pulses, and finally salt the dish.





Carol Lyndon

Carol Lyndon was born, raised and educated in Birmingham and is a retired head teacher. She first started teaching in 1970 at Lozells primary school. Carol recollects at the time, the young people were mainly white but she started to see changes when they were working on the demolition of the old properties.

She recalls the first wave of child migration. In the early 1970s, it was mainly boys from the Bangladesh and Pakistan community accompanied by their fathers. It was a very difficult time for them, due to the culture shock they were facing in these hard times. They were huddled with cardigans and scarves coming from a warm country into the appalling British weather. They had no English language and strange white people surrounding them at every move they made. They were scared that they would not fit into society. Carol said that for some of the children coming from villages in rural locations to come into a modern city, they did not know how to walk down corridors, as they were not used to being in a big building. It was all very foreign to them. A lot of them did not even know what toilets were. Carol understood that it was the culture shock experienced by these young Bangladeshi boys which caused them go to the toilet on the floor and stand on the toilet seats breaking them because they did not grow up with such luxuries as indoor toilets.

She recalls you could see that these children were scared and she initially taught them language using pictures skills and drawings but they were very quick to learn. They learned the language very quickly. She recalls them being extremely well behaved and showing respect to their teachers. They seemed far better behaved than some of the “home-grown” families. Carol said that there was a really good harmony in Lozells Primary School because at the time there a number of different ethnic minorities were migrating to Britain including Africans, Asians and Vietnamese people. At the parent meetings, it was the dads would most of the talking because of the language barrier.

When the children’s mums started to join the families they were

frequently very isolated, left at home. If they did come to collect the children they would huddle together. But they did have high expectations for their children. A dad had asked a question about his daughter “Will she be a doctor?” Carol had no idea whether she would be a doctor or not because at the time she was just learning her numbers, learning to pronounce words correctly and learning her colours. The one thing Carol noticed was that help was always around the corner. The support they put into their children’s education was phenomenal. Carol recently met the child that her dad wanted her to be a doctor and she found that she did indeed go to university and become a doctor.

Carol experienced her first curry on the Lozells Rd. She recollected that it was a Bengali restaurant. Carol had a Biriani. Her next curry was a Madras which she emphasized “nearly killed myself”. Carol then noticed more and more restaurants were opening up. She and her colleagues would visit Lady Pool Road. It was a huge magnet for Carol and her work colleagues because it was very cheap and very good food. Carol still occasionally visits it. Carol now cooks her own curries because of the impact that ethnic cuisine has had on her life.

She says she sees that Birmingham as a melting pot of cultures where you are able to try every food imaginable. When Carol retired, she recalled visiting India which came about as a result of her experiences in the 1970s, with all the lovely families and the people who appreciated education and wanted better for their children. The people who valued education and did not take it for granted which people nowadays tend to. They supported each other and their families and that is what made Carol choose to travel to see for herself.





Paul Fulford

Paul recounts how he first discovered curry from a Vesta curry packet and had his first curry at the age of 14 in the 60s. Since then he has become a connoisseur and has seen the curry industry develop in to what it is today. He believes the future is bright as curry houses are evolving into fine dining establishments.

Tell us a little about you and what you do?

I'm a restaurant critic at the Birmingham Mail. I've been a restaurant critic for 15 years, which I am passionate about.

You also work for the Birmingham Mail, can you tell us a little bit about this?

Well the day job is as feature editor. I control and manage the team of writers. The passion I do have in addition to that is restaurant critic. I eat out and review at least once a week and eat out for pleasure often on other occasions.

Tell us a little bit about when you first discovered curry?

This is kind of embarrassing but I had a mother who couldn't cook. I mean she struggled to cook English food and anything more exotic was completely out of the question. The first curry I ever had was from Vesta. It was dreadful. I remember little packets of dry ingredients that you mix together with water but, I thought it was lovely at the time. And then when I was about 14 which was back in the late 60s, I went with friends one evening to a curry house, called the Curry Garden in Erdington which is still there and had my first curry which was a real eye opener. It was fairly traditional. In my memory it had flock wall paper whether it was true or not I don't know and it was quite a mild curry with white rice. It was lovely. It became a passion.

From your view how do you think the curry has developed?

I think it's interesting. I think they've reinvented themselves with remarkable success over the years I mean we have the best balti houses, where we all sought out more authentic experiences at such a great price. My fear about that was it was driven largely by price and I think there was a bit of a price war going on and I think the quality suffered because of that but then we had the emergence of more up market

curry houses which offered authentic food. In better surroundings using better ingredients and techniques that were traditional and which were really skilled and well honed so you had the emergence of places like Lasan which champions food from across the Indian sub-continent, all of the guys who cook there and own the business are Bangladeshi.

Is the curry industry more inclusive of families?

I think they are, I mean I have two sons, one who's sixteen and one who's twenty-three and both have been going to curry houses since they were pre school kids. I could remember taking them along to these places and the charming waiters asking whether they're OK with spicy food. They'd usually have as their meal chicken tikka or something similar. The restaurant would wash off the spices and they got used to eating out and got used to spicy food and the wonderful thing is that I never felt under any pressure whatsoever in these places and it wasn't embarrassing to take children because the places were so accommodating and I think it's taught white British people to eat out together as a family in a way which was impossible before the emergence of curry houses. I think mainstream restaurants are often unwelcoming to families.

Did you ever make distinctions between the various community groups or did you think in the early days it was just Indian restaurants?

That came late to me as you say because to me they were all Indian restaurants. I think it's only the last ten to twelve years that I've realized the subtle differences between the different sorts of food. So that Bangladeshi food is different from Pakistani food and Pakistani food is different from Sikh Punjabi food and southern Indian cuisine different from them all and Kashmiri cuisine is different still and I think it enriches the city enormously to have those choices.

How do you think it's impacted on the cities economy?

I don't know but, I can't overestimate the impact it's had on it. I'd love to know how many people were employed in Indian curry house restaurants in Birmingham but it must run into the thousands and the spending on ingredients and the reviving of the areas. I mean it's hard to imagine what would happen to areas like Lady Pool Road were it knocked down or Stratford Road or Soho Road. These places are all vibrant to a large extent because the number of restaurants that exist there and sweet centres. Let's not forget the sweet centres where you get tremendous value for money and an authentic experience.

What do you think is the future of this trade, do you see it morphing?

I think when you have an excellent restaurant in a city which I believe Lasan to be it raises the quality of the others, I think you know in Birmingham we have for instance Simpsons, mainstream French classical cooking. Michelin starred and the ripple effect is that for the restaurants that strive to have a similar sort of market, they have to up their game if they want to compete and I see the evidence already in Birmingham and that is happening with curry houses. There are many tremendous quality curry houses in Birmingham now that strive for a fine dining experience, albeit one without the daunting aspect of traditional Michelin starred restaurants.

So the future's bright?

I think the future is tremendously bright. I think Birmingham would be impoverished if it wasn't for its curry houses. I mean it's my default setting that I mentioned that I go out for a meal once a week to and review a restaurant and probably once more for pleasure and the default setting for those pleasure meals is the curry house. It's the one that's most relaxed, the most satisfying and I mean sitting down with a pint of lager and a cracking curry with a roti or a naan. It's just ideal. It's a fantastic Friday night.





Apsana Khatun

Apsana is very much the modern women in her late 20's, she graduated from Wolverhampton University with a degree in Business and Marketing ten years ago. However, she did not pursue a career in her chosen field of study. Instead she followed her heart and commenced voluntary work at the Bangladeshi Youth Forum (BYF). This later led to a paid position and she is currently the development co-ordinator for BYF. She is very passionate about her job, as it has given her the opportunity to develop herself and at the same time help the community, women in particular. She can see herself being involved in the community for many more years to come.

She grew up in Aston in a large traditional family. She left home after her marriage and now lives in Perry Barr with her small family. She has been married for four years and has a lovely boy who is two years old. She enjoys family life and the challenges and the joys that it brings. She has plans to have more children in the near future.

As a teenager she did not enjoy cooking and her mum did not pressure her to learn. She took more of an interest in her early twenties, as she viewed it as an important life skill. She was taught by her mum. Her mother is a great cook and her favourite dish is 'korma - Bangladeshi style of course' and this is followed by her Biryani. Her mum puts a lot of passion and effort into cooking and you can taste that in the end result. Apsana describes her style of cooking, as somewhere in the middle as she does not have the time that her mum has.

Apsana's favourite dish to cook is biryani and this is followed by cous cous with vegetables. She has decided to cook cous cous with vegetables, her very own invention with a Bangladeshi twist, by adding spices and ghee (clarified butter). She first cooked this dish in her early twenties. It has since become her son's favourite dish. It is a quick and easy dish to prepare.

COUS COUS WITH SPICY VEGETABLES

½ cauliflower
 A medium tin of pre-cooked chick peas
 200 gram cous cous
 1 table spoon of vegetable oil
 1 medium onion
 1 tea spoon of ghee
 1 tea spoon of coriander powder
 ½ tea spoon of turmeric powder
 ¼ tea spoon of chilli powder
 5/6 green chillies
 Small bunch of coriander

Peel and cut the onion finely and set aside. The cauliflower needs to be cut into small florets and the chick peas need to be removed from the tin and washed and drained. Place the cous cous in a small bowl and add luke warm water and leave for 3 / 4 minutes, this will expand it. Heat a medium pan and add the oil when it is hot. Followed by the onion and salt, allow it to sweat for a few minutes and then add all the spices and cook for a few minutes. Once this is done, add the chick peas and cauliflower stir in and place a lid over the pan and cook at a low heat for 10 minutes. Add the cous cous and stir in thoroughly allowing all the flavours to blend in and cover for a further 10 minutes. Add the green chillies whole and add chopped coriander and ghee, stir in and leave to stand for a few minutes, before serving.





**Abdul Muhith
Chowdhury**

Abdul was an absolute pleasure and an inspiration to meet. He comes from Bangladesh via New York. He lives in Kingstanding with his wife and three children. He has a daughter aged seven and two sons aged four and two.

It was his life time ambition to go to America. Whilst studying Economics at Dhaka University at the age of 20, some of his colleagues were heading to America. He made some enquiries about this through the 'Foreign Language Centre' and they gave him a list of universities that he could apply for. He applied for 15 and was accepted by all of them. He decided to accept the offer from Wisconsin University to study Computer Science as that was the cheapest option. However, this was only the beginning of the process, as he did not think that the American Embassy would give him the visa. Furthermore, his family are a modest middle class family. His dad worked as an accountant in a tea garden, without the means to even pay for the air fare.

At this stage, he did not inform his family or friends that he had applied. He was called for his interview with the American Embassy. After an initial interview in the morning, he was asked to return in the late afternoon for a decision. He was filled with anxiety and excitement, so he did not wander far from the Embassy and remained nearby. When he came back for the decision, they gave him his passport with a visa. He was overjoyed and could not contain himself. On the same day he caught a train and returned to his home town in Sylhet, where he informed his family. They were all surprised, happy and in shock. He still did not have the funds for the air fare, but his father assured him that he would raise the money, and he should proceed with making the travel arrangements.

He arrived in America in 1990 and commenced his course in Computer Science. His family gave him some initial cash, which soon ran out. He managed to get a part time job at the University canteen for 20 hours per week. However, he was still struggling to make ends meet. One of his relatives living in New York found out that he was in America and she tracked him down and invited him to New York. He moved to New York and enrolled at a University and obtained a job in a department store. His studies started at 8.15am and finished at 4.15pm and then he started his shift at the restaurant at 5pm and returned home in the early hours of the morning. He talks about how he managed to do his studies whilst on the train journeys that



lasted 20 minutes to and from college. On occasions he would miss his stop as he fell asleep through sheer exhaustion. He discusses, how this was a very difficult time in his life, as he only managed to get three hours sleep a day. Luckily he had the weekends off, that allowed him time to rest.

He graduated and obtained a job in the computer industry, however, this was short lived as the company closed down. His friends advised him to apply for a job working in a bar, which he did and obtained a job as an assistant manager. He was trained in making cocktails and as a sommelier. In due course he became the manager and made a lot of money from customer 'tips'.

He met his 'Brummie' wife whilst she was visiting relatives in New York. They later got married and spent the first three years living in New York. His wife persuaded him to come to Birmingham and in 2005, they came and started their family. He explains that New York, is great whilst you are single, but, Birmingham is more suited to family life. Since moving to Birmingham, he has worked in some of the leading bars and restaurants as a Manager. He is currently the Manager at Bay Leaf cafe / bar / restaurant in the Custard Factory in Digbeth.

Abdul has a great passion for gardening and he shared with me all the vegetables that he had cultivated in his garden. He had even man-



aged to grow Phati Low (Bangladeshi Marrow), not to mention all the usual English vegetables. He told me that his passion for gardening came from his mother. She is a herbalist who took great pride in her garden. He used to get involved with his mother in the garden from the age of six. He recalls how they never had traditional medicine. When he or any other member of the family were ill, his mother would gather various herbs, and pound the juice from them and feed it to them. Throughout his travels, where ever he lived he sought out a patch of garden to grow vegetables. He has acquired a taste for raw vegetables, like string beans, carrots and cauliflower.

Abdul does not usually cook, but when he does, he tries his best and wants people to really enjoy the food. His favourite dish is 'garlic and ginger lamb'. He learned to cook this dish after a dinner party in Chicago where they served him 'garlic and ginger beef'. He asked how they cooked it and they gave him the recipe. He has adapted this dish with lamb and it is the only dish that he can really cook well.

LAMB GARLIC / GINGER

Ingredients:

- ½ Kg lamb leg on the bone
- Thumb of ginger and more for the garnish
- 3 clove of garlic
- 1 large onion
- 1 tea spoon of paprika
- 1 tea spoon of chilli flake
- 1 tea spoon of coriander
- ¼ tea spoon of turmeric
- ¼ tea spoon of cumin (jeera)
- 1 tea spoon of salt – add to taste
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 cardamoms
- 2 table spoons of vegetable oil
- 1 table spoons of white vinegar
- A small handful of coriander for garnish

Grate the onions, garlic and ginger. Heat a medium pan and add the oil, once heated, add the onions, garlic, ginger and cook for five minutes on a low heat. Add all the spices to the pan stirring and cooking for five minutes, then add ½ cup of water and simmer for five minutes. Add the meat and vinegar (this softens the meat and speeds up the cooking process) stir in and cook at a low heat for ½ an hour. No water is added as the meat releases water. When the dish is ready to be served, it is garnished with finely chopped ginger and coriander. This dish can be eaten with rice or chapattis.





Fahmida Begum

Fahmida is a lovely young lady with beautiful smile. She is in her early twenties and the only Bangladeshi female that I know who is in the Royal Air Force. She represents the third generation of Bangladeshis in the UK. She was born in the UK and has an older sister and younger brother. She grew up in Lozells, and her family still live there.

She went to Holte School and had a keen interest in History and Arts. At the age of 15 she went on an Army training camp for a week, and was hooked and wanted to join the army straight from school. However, her dad thought that she had been brain washed and would not allow her to joining. There was little that she could do, as she needed her parents' consent. Her Dad wanted her to go to University and become a nurse, while, she was convinced she wanted to pursue a career in the forces. After leaving school she did a BTEC in health and social care, so she could work in the medical profession when she joined the Army.

When she got her grades, she didn't apply for university. Instead she went to the Army recruitment office. The recruitment team were not in that day and she got talking to the Royal Air Force (RAF) recruitment team instead. They were so nice to her that, she applied and got in to the RAF. She did her forty week basic military training as a soldier in Buckinghamshire, before proceeding with her chosen speciality. She graduated from her training and went on to train for a further six months, to become a Medical Officer. After graduation, she was been posted in Honington – a training base for young gunners and she will be there for the next three years. Within that period she will spend four months in Afghanistan or the Falklands as a Medic – she casually asserts that is part of the job for which she's been training. She explains that it is not as dangerous as people think, as you are not a

front line soldier. I asked her if she was looking forward to it and; she explained 'it will be an experience'. She adds, if she gets posted, she could be in Cyprus for three years, but is hoping that doesn't happen.

I asked, if there was any pressure from the community because of joining the armed forces? She explains her parents have been the biggest concern as they were not happy, it wasn't because she is joining the forces, but because they want her to be close to home and have a 'normal' job. They were also concerned about her safety. There has been a lot of pressure from her uncle's who feel what she is doing is wrong. However, being a medic and not having to kill people makes it easier for her to ignore that pressure. She does get the occasional joke at her expense, which, she just brushes off.

When she first applied for the forces, she had some doubts as she saw 1,000 people in training who were all white apart from her. She grew up in Lozells and went to Holte School, where the majority of people are Asian or Black and she was comfortable in that environment. When she joined the Air Force, it was a culture shock and she was well outside of her comfort zone. She was invited to the armed forces 'Muslim Association' conference where she met other fellow Muslims and since then, has felt more comfortable, as knowing there are more Muslims out there, and that she's not the only one. The Muslim Association organises regular events and she was in London with them, where she met the Prime Minister – she adds, she is not really fascinated by that.



When asked about the food in the RAF, her mood becomes more sombre. She explains, breakfast is normal, while lunch has a selection of vegetables cooked in various ways. Evening meals often consist of meat dishes, and it is halal, but, she doesn't like the way they cook it. It is too bland and they don't use any spices. She misses Bangladeshi food when she is on base, even when they do make curry, it is not the same and she avoids it. Curry something she saves for when she comes home. She finally adds that, she would like to see more Muslim and Bangladeshi people join the forces.

Fahmida has chosen to cook Chicken Korma as that is her favourite dish. Her mother does not cook this dish every day. It is reserved for special occasions like Eid and birthdays, so they look forward to it. Her mum learned how to cook that dish from her grandmother. In her recent visit to Bangladesh, her grandmother cooked the dish and it was 'nicer than her Mum's'. She can cook some basic dishes, but she hasn't quite mastered fish curry yet. She admits that she learns to cook from her Dad as he is the better cook, being a chef for over 20 years. This is the first time that she has cooked the chicken korma.

CHICKEN KORMA

1 Kg chicken leg and thigh
4 table spoons of ghee
4 table spoons of garlic and ginger
5 onions
2 tea spoon salt
4 bay leaves
6 cardamoms
500 ml water

The chicken needs to be cut into thighs and legs and scored (the butcher will do that on request), this needs to be washed and drained. The garlic and ginger need to be grated together. The onions also need to be grated (or whizzed in a blender). A large saucepan needs to be heated and the ghee added, followed by the bay leaves, cardamoms and cooked for a few minutes in a medium heat. Add the garlic and ginger and stir in and allow it to brown followed by the onions and salt. Cook this for about 10 minutes, until the consistency is soft and brown. Then add the chicken and stir in and cook for 10 minutes, allowing the spices to be absorbed. Add 500ml water and cook at a high heat for ten minutes and then simmer for a further 10 minutes. This rich dish is usually eaten with pilau rice.





Ataur Rahman

Ataur is a charismatic character with a passion for life and always full of energy. He is in his late forties and is married with three children and lives in Lozells. His daughter is 17, and his two sons are aged 11 and 12. He is very proud of his daughter as she has recently passed her GCSE with several 'A' stars and is presently at college. His wife works in the education sector and is well known and popular amongst her peers and the community.

Ataur spent his formative years in Bangladesh and studied in Sylhet MC College for a degree. He was involved in several charities in Bangladesh and was the treasurer for a notable student development organisation, which he still supports today. In his early twenties he was invited to Germany by a cousin, for a visit. He stayed there for three years. He lived in Munich and worked in Hospital catering and then in various restaurants. He decided to come to the UK as he has many family relatives here. He arrived in the UK in 1993 and spent the first few weeks visiting family – in particular in Birmingham. He visited relatives in Inverness who offered him a job as a waiter. However, preferred working in the kitchen. He worked in Inverness for several months, but, he ultimately missed the community in Birmingham.



He returned to Birmingham and, with the support of relatives, he had an arranged marriage. He found work in local restaurants as a cook and slowly worked his way up to become a chef. He has since worked in some of the leading restaurants in the city. In 1998, he joined forces with three other friends and purchased the Mint, where he is the Head Chef.

Whilst he was in Bangladesh, he never cooked as this was the domain of the women. When he was studying away from home, he ate in the college canteens and restaurants. His favourite dish is Khoi bhuna (this is a popular small river fish).

Ataur learned to cook when he was in Germany. He has chosen to cook Sardine Chutney. He first came across this when he was in Germany. He explains this is a healthy option and easy to cook. It can be eaten with rice, chapatti and bread. A tin or two of sardines can usually be found in a Bangladeshi kitchen cupboard as a last resort. Ataur has used his own blend of homemade curry powder which consists of a varying degree of coriander, cumin, turmeric and chilli powder. Making your own curry powder is a common practice and in some homes they will roast and grind whole spices to make the mix. Some women are very reluctant to share the blend that they use, so that they can have a unique taste.

SARDINE CHUTNEY

Sardine tinned 125gm
1 table spoon of vegetable oil
1 ½ tea spoon mixed curry powder
½ tea spoon of turmeric
¼ tea spoon of salt
½ a medium onion
1 clove of garlic
½ tomato
2 green chillies

Garlic and onion needs to be chopped finely and set aside. The two chillies need to be cut length ways. A small frying pan needs to be heated and the oil added, followed by the garlic, onion and salt. This needs to be cooked for 5 minutes. The mixed powder, coriander, chillies needs to added and cooked for a few minutes, followed by the sardines and cooked for a further 5 minutes. The dish is ready to serve and can be eaten with rice, chapatti or bread.





Minara Ali

Minara is in her forties and a young and loving grandmother. She has three grandchildren, two girls aged three and two from her eldest son's wife and a boy nearly two from her younger son's wife. She has four children, three boys and a girl and lives in Handsworth. Her two eldest sons are married and live nearby. She shares her home with her daughter, youngest son and husband. She also looks after her grandchildren on occasions. She works in the community, volunteers for various charities and is very well known and regarded by the community.

She arrived in the UK in 1976 in March with her parents and six brothers and sisters and parents, on what was a very cold night. Her father had arranged a house to rent in London. However, they were unable to find the property and instead went to a relative's house and stayed the night. The plan was to stay in London, as there were more employment opportunities; but, unable to find a property to rent, they headed to Birmingham. They stayed in another relative's house in Aston, until her father managed to arrange to rent a room in a house in Smethwick. The one room had three double beds where the whole family stayed in very cramped conditions for six weeks.

Her father found a council property that a Bangladeshi family was living in, who was due to go back to Bangladesh. They agreed to hand over the property with all the furniture including a live in lodger for £600.00. At the time a similar house could have been purchased for £1,200.00. This was a three bed room house with rented one room with a lodger. His name was Morris. She found that very amusing

as this means chilli in Bangla. Morris was a pensioner who fought in World War two and he used to tell them stories and act out scenes of when he was in the war. At the time, she did not really understand what he said, but was taken by his enthusiasm and acting. He used to eat boiled cabbage and potatoes and her mum was worried, as she thought, such bland food couldn't fill him up. On occasions, her mum used to give him rice and curry, which he gladly ate.

Two months later, her dad gave Morris, about £60.00 to pay the rent to the council, but they never saw him again. The room was then let to a Bangladeshi family who stayed for six months and moved out when they bought their own house. In 1978 the council offered them a house that had been refurbished, and the family decided to take the property as it was opposite a primary school, with a junior school nearby.

Minara had an arranged marriage at the age of 16, in the summer holidays. Her husband lived in Aston at the time. She did not get the opportunity to learn to cook whilst she was at her mum's house, as it was always done whilst she was at school. However, at the weekends she helped in the kitchen. When she was at her in laws, she used her intuition to cook food and found that they all enjoyed it. She later learned about the various vegetables that can be added to meat, chicken and fish.

It was only when she moved into her own home that she started to experiment with cooking English vegetables in traditional curries and

bhazees. She is widely regarded by her family and wider networks as a great cook. She has adapted her cooking, using a minimum amount of chilli in her curries so that her grandchildren can join in.

Five years ago, she and her husband took an allotment in Handsworth, within easy walking distance of their house. Minara grows traditional vegetables and has started to experiment with other crops. She grows Chinese marrows, Jerusalem artichokes, sorrel and various Bangladeshi vegetables. She enjoys the allotment as it allows her to grow organic food, eat healthily and meet new people. It is a great stress buster.

It would appear that I chose the perfect time to interview Minara. As I arrived the hallway was full of boxes of Chinese marrows that she was giving away. She was looking after her grandson whilst using a 'Dah' (a traditional Bangladeshi cutting instrument) to prepare the lau aga (green tips) of the Chinese marrow plant to cook a traditional Bangladeshi favourite, 'Shutki' (dried fish). Her grandson also came and helped tear the leaves up. The recipe of Phata Bime and uri bisi (swamp eel and beans), is traditionally made using Bangladeshi beans, but it has been adapted using British runner beans. I have decided to add two curries by Minara, especially as her grandson had a hand in the preparation. The second dish, lau aga shutki is a Bangladeshi favourite. In Bangladesh during the dry season when the availability of fresh fish is scarce, dried fish is used with seasonal vegetables to make this stew which is eaten with rice. This remains a favourite amongst Bangladeshis in the UK.

PHATA BIME AND URI

600 gram of phata bime
200 gram of runner bean (seeds)
2 small onions
2 cloves of garlic
2 table spoons of oil
1 tea spoon of turmeric
1 ½ tea spoons of chilli powder
½ tea spoon of coriander powder
½ tea spoon of cumin powder
¾ tea spoon of salt
Small handful of coriander

A medium pan needs to be heated and the oil added. The garlic is grated and onions are finely chopped and added after the oil is heated along with the salt at a medium heat. Allow all of this to brown and the onion to melt and then add the remaining spices and wait until this is cooked, getting rid of the raw smell. The beans ideally need to be soaked in water the night before and the husks need to be removed. The beans need to be added and cooked for ten minutes approximately until it starts to soften. The phata bime, needs to be prepared in advance by cleaning, washing and cutting into small pieces and removing the head. The fish needs to be added and stirred in gently for 5 minutes allowing the fish to release its water. At this point add cold water, covering the fish and beans and cook at a high heat for 5 minutes and then simmer for a further 10 minutes. For the garnish add finely chopped coriander.





LAU AGA SHUTKI

A bunch of low aga (100 / 150 gram - approximate)
 4 sticks of Bombay duck
 4 small dried phooti (a very small Bangladeshi fish)
 1 small onion
 2 cloves of garlic
 ¼ tea spoon salt
 ½ table spoon of oil
 1 tea spoon of chilli powder
 1 tea spoon of turmeric

The lau aga needs to be prepared in advance by removing the greenest tips. The onion and garlic needs to be grated. Heat a medium pan and add the oil followed by the onions, garlic and salt, reduce the heat and allow it to melt and brown. Add all the spices, stir in and cook for 5 minutes. Add the Bombay duck, phooti and the lau aga and gently stir in. Add hot water covering all the ingredients and cook at a high heat for five minutes and then simmer for a further 5 minutes.





Kaisar Raham aka Hemal

Hemal is a vivacious character with an amazing zest for life, not to mention, a Metallica fan. He is in his early thirties and lives in Edgbaston in his friend's apartment. He came to the UK in 2002 aged 24 as a student and lived in London. Hemal represents one of the many thousands of Bangladeshi students that have arrived in the UK seeking a British education. He studied Computing & English at the London Business School for three years. He lived in shared accommodation with seven other Bangladeshi students in a flat. The rent, bills and shopping expenses were shared equally between them like a ship's mess. This is how the first generations of Bangladeshi lived in post war Britain. He and two others took responsibility for cooking the food. He later moved in with his cousin, sharing a room with a friend, and again he took the responsibility for cooking. Whilst in London, he secured a part time job in Super Drug with the help of one his friends. He stayed in London for three years, before moving to Birmingham.

It has been his long term ambition to study Law and was successful in application to Wolverhampton University for a place. He moved to Birmingham and lived in several shared accommodations in Alum Rock, Small Heath and Erdington before moving to Edgbaston. He managed to get his job transferred with Super Drug from London to Birmingham. He completed his degree has worked for CAB as a volunteer and continues to volunteer for a law firm in London. He is currently is a Manager for Super Drug.

All of Hemal's immediate family are in Bangladesh and he misses them terribly. He was only able to visit them after seven years in this country, due to the constraints of studying and lack of funds. He has very fond memories of Bangladesh and credits his father with teaching him to cook. His mother did not allow him to visit the kitchen,

as she considered this no place for a young man. However, when she went to stay with her parents for long periods, his father was left in charge and he encouraged him to learn to cook. He admits that he and his father were like 'buddies'. They used to prepare 'naughty' food and experiment. I enquired what 'naughty' food was; he said "It is rich food, like biryani, roast and meat that isn't usually eaten every day". At home he became the cook of choice and everyone enjoyed his food. The preparation of food is usually the domain of women and his younger sister could have cooked. However, as he candidly admits, he is a better cook than she is.

He came to the UK knowing how to cook only rich food. He soon realised that budget constraints and also health concerns meant that he would have to adapt his cooking style. His passion for cooking did not diminish and he soon learned how to cook, quick nutritious food like daal, (lentil), enda biran, (omelette) and aloo bortha (spicy potato mash). His move to Birmingham expanded his cooking repertoire as he was exposed to different styles of cooking by his European friends. He is now able to bake cakes and cookies. He also experiments with English food by adding a Bangladeshi twist. He has retained his role as the main cook in the house and often hosts dinner parties and Bangladeshi nasta (breakfast) for his wide network of international friends.

Hemal cooked Aloo Bortha for us. This is a common food for poor Bangladeshi people. He learned to cook this dish through observation. He says this is a very quick and easy dish to prepare and it fitted in with his busy lifestyle. This dish is usually prepared with coriander. As he had no coriander to hand, he used parsley as a substitute.

ALOO BORTHA

3 medium potatoes
 ½ medium onion
 A very small handful of curly parsley
 4 birds eye dried chilli
 1 tea spoon of salt
 1 table spoon of mustard oil
 ½ tea spoon of Ghee (optional)



The potatoes are boiled in their skin, to prevent them becoming soggy. Whilst the potatoes are boiling, cut the onions and parsley into small pieces. Heat a small pan and add a tablespoon of mustard oil and then the dried chillies allowing them to brown. Once the potato is soft, remove them from the hot water and place them in cold water for a few minutes, until cool enough to handle then remove the skin and mash. Add the chillies to the potato and crush them. Add the remaining ingredients to the potato and mash them all together. The dish is usually served with rice.





Lutfa Hussain

Lutfa is a lovely warm person with a great sense of humour. She represents the wave of women that joined their husbands and their extended families in the mid eighties and early nineties. She remains in the extended family with her husband, four children – two boys and two girls aged, 19, 18, 13 and 10 years of age. The house is also shared by her father in law and a sister in law. Other members of the family have married and left the family home, but, their house remains the central location for all family gatherings. She is clearly the backbone of the family.

She was a happy student in Bangladesh when she was informed of her impending marriage to a 'Londoni Daman' (British Groom). She was told by their family servant and at first, she was in disbelief. It was when her mum told her that she would be visited by a potential groom that she took it seriously. And within ten days she was married.

She explains how her family were fairly wealthy in Bangladesh, being land owners. The family had inherited their wealth from her Grand father. They had two servants in the house, to help with chores around the house. She had never cooked prior to her marriage. When she knew of her impending marriage she knew that she would have to learn, so she observed her mother when she was cooking.

Shortly after her marriage, she arrived into the UK accompanied by her uncle. She recalls first arriving in London and driving past the houses, with garden fences that she thought were incomplete houses. She was shocked by this as she anticipated the UK to be a rich country and thought the houses in Bangladesh were better.



She started to cook the first day that she arrived in the UK. Her late mother in law showed her how but she also relied on her instincts from and what she had seen her own mum do. She recalls her mother in law being very nice and showing her simple cooking techniques. Her first dish was enjoyed by the family, helping her to develop her confidence. As a result she experimented with more adventurous curries. She also took on the responsibility for making breakfast for the whole family, washing clothes, ironing and other domestic duties. This is a common feature in traditional Bangladeshi households, where daughter in laws take on these tasks. In return, the wider family help with childcare and raising the children. This also maintains a link with Bangladesh, its language and its traditions. The mother and grandparents teach the children their mother tongue, which helps the children become bi-lingual.

Lutfa misses her family and Bangladesh terribly. Since being in the UK, she has visited twice once with all the family and more recently she went on her own to visit her ailing father. She would like to visit more often with her family, but admits it is more important that they concentrate on doing well in their studies at the moment.

Lutfa chose to cook a traditional Bangladeshi fish dish with Boal. Boal is a predatory fresh water fish, it can grow up to two meters and weigh up to 45kg. The average size available in the shops selling them is around 40cm. They can also be purchased as prepared boal steaks. For this dish she used boal steaks, which she marinated and fried before cooking. This is a common practice when preparing larger fish, as this seals the fish and prevents it from breaking up easily when being cooked.

BOAL BHUNA

1 kg boal (prepared)
 1 ½ medium onion
 2 cloves of garlic
 1 tea spoon ground chilli
 1 tea spoon turmeric
 1 ½ tea spoon curry powder
 ½ tea spoon of ground coriander powder
 1 ¼ tea spoon of salt
 2 ½ table spoons of vegetable oil for cooking and marinade
 Vegetable oil for shallow frying the fish
 1 tea spoon of English mustard
 3 green chillies
 A small handful of fresh coriander

This dish is cooked in two stages and you will need a medium sized frying pan and large pot. In the first instance, the fish is marinated, shallow fried and cooked in sauce. Finely chop 1 ½ onions and simmer in enough water to cover the onions until it is soft. To prepare the marinade, you need a tea spoon of mustard, ½ tea spoon of turmeric, ¼ tea spoon of salt, ½ tea spoon curry powder and ½ tea table spoon of oil. The fish is then marinated and left for 10 minutes. A frying pan is heated with vegetable oil covering the whole surface generously. When the oil is hot, add the fish and cook each side for approximately five minutes and then set aside. Pre heat a large saucepan and add two table spoons of vegetable oil followed by the two finely chopped garlic cloves and lower the heat. When the garlic is browned add the onions and stir in. When this is done, add a tea spoon of chilli powder, ½ tea spoon of turmeric, 1 tea spoon of curry powder, 1 tea spoon of salt and add a cup of hot water and allow the spices to cook for 5 minutes. Place the fish in the pan and add 1 ½ cup of water (enough to cover the fish) and cook at full heat for 10 minutes and simmer for a further 5 minutes. For the garnish, cut the 3 chillies length ways and finely chop the coriander and add to the dish. This dish is eaten with rice.





**Pulish Bibi
(aka Salema)
& Nilufa Yasmin**

I have known Salema for over 25 years; she is a distant relative (auntie). I have often frequented her house over the years as I am good friends with her oldest son 'Harun'. She has been a true family matriarch for as long as I can remember. She has the ability to shout at will, and perhaps that is how she has maintained her position. She is a 74 year old widow and has four boys, and she lives with her eldest son, daughter in law and four granddaughters. This is a very traditional set up. Her three other sons are married with children and live nearby.

She arrived in the UK with her two eldest sons in 1982 to join her husband and lived in Aston. She lived in a shared accommodation with another family in a house that was in poor condition and dilapidated. Her twin sons were born in City Hospital, and after a home inspection the nurses refused to release her, due to the poor conditions of the house. She was kept in hospital for an extended period and was visited by Pat, an English nurse that spoke Sylheti (Pat has been interviewed as in earlier part of the book), and she pleaded with her to let her go home. Eventually they did on the condition that they would get better accommodation. They were on the housing waiting list and were offered two properties in Newtown and they refused them both as they were tucked away in groves. The third house that she was also offered, was in Newtown, but, this one was near a small field and had primary and secondary schools nearby. Newtown in the eighties and early nineties was an area with high instances of



racist attacks and her sons were not spared that experience.

In the mid nineties they bought a house in the heart of Aston, where she still lives. She has always been renowned for her green fingers. She has a superb garden and spends endless hours tending to it, growing amazing English and Bangladeshi vegetables. When I visited, she showed me her pride and joy, her phati lou (Bangladeshi marrow) plant, that had several small marrows growing. She complained that the weather was not good this year and last year was much better, when she managed to harvest a number of 'phati lou's'. She invited me back later on in the year, to see her harvest. She said that she came to the garden as often as she could and how good this is for her health.

In most traditional households, the mother does not cook, if she has a daughter in law in the house. The cooking duties fell to Nilufa her eldest daughter in law. Nilufa arrived in the UK in 1994 at the age of 18 after marriage to Harun. She comes from a modest family in Bangladesh and did not cook at her parents' home. This was the domain of the servants under mothers direction. However, when she arrived in the UK she was taught by her mother in law to cook. She found this to be a challenge as she was always burning her hands, but she learned slowly. After the birth of her eldest daughter 'Khadiza' she took over the cooking duties and her mother in law looked after the child. This is still the case today.

TENGRA WITH CAULIFLOWER

1 kg Tengra
1 cauliflower
6/8 green chillies
2 small onions – pre cooked
4 garlic cloves
1 tea spoon salt
½ tea spoon chilli powder
½ tea spoon turmeric
½ tea spoon coriander powder
½ tea spoon curry powder
1 table spoon of vegetable oil
A small handful of coriander

The fish needs to be prepared in advance by removing the intestines and given a salt wash to remove the smell. The cauliflower needs to be cut into medium sized florets. A medium pan needs to be heated and the oil added, then add the finely chopped garlic and brown before adding the pre-cooked onion. See note (some families pre-cook onions, to save time – this is done by cutting the onions finely and by cooking at a low heat with water until the onion is soft). Add all the spices and stir in for 2/3 minutes, followed by ½ cup of water and cook for a further 5 minutes. Add the cauliflower and stir in and cook for 5 minutes, then add the fish and cook for 5/7 minutes. The fish will release water from the cooking. At this point add 1,000ml cold water and chillies (whole) put on full heat for about 10 minutes. Once this has been done, garnish the dish with a handful of finely chopped coriander. As most dishes, this is eaten with rice.





**Shamsun Nehar
Chowdhury**

Shamsun is a lively character with a ready smile. She is in her early forties and lives in Lozells. She is married and has three daughters, aged 22, 18 and 13 years of age. She is employed by the Bangladeshi Youth Forum (BYF) for the last six years as a women's worker. Her work involves development work with ladies living in Lozells and Aston. Her networks in Aston are very strong as she grew up in that area. After her marriage she moved to Lozells.

She chose to work with people as she is very passionate about the community. Her father inspired her as she grew up watching him and she is following in his footsteps. When she talks about him her eyes light up. Her father was Sobur Chowdhury, one of the foremost community leaders from the Bangladeshi community. He arrived to the UK in the 1950's and his wife joined him in 1965. He was one of a very few people that could read and write at the time, he had a degree from Calcutta university. Most of his fellow Bangladeshis were illiterate and they came to him with letters and forms that he used to help them with. There used to be a queue of people waiting until 2 - 3am in the morning, as he did not refuse any one. This involved immigration work, which helped the men to bring their wives and families to the UK.



They lived in a small terraced house with two rooms upstairs and two downstairs. She recalls, her childhood and remembers all the noise coming from downstairs in the early hours of the morning. The coal fire used to be on, tea was made throughout the night and food was cooked. It was like a nonstop community centre. Their house was always full of people, up to 30 people at any time. Her dad was visited by community leaders and councillors and they would all sit on the floor with him.

It was particularly busy in the 60's, 70's and started to slow down in the eighties. In the nineties, it died down as children were able to help their parents. In the eighties and nineties advice centres were available in community languages from Asian Resource Centre (Handsworth) and St James Advice Centre (Aston) and people went there for advice.

Sadly her father has passed away now.

TANDOORI CHICKEN BIRYANI

2 medium sized chicken breast
1 table spoon of curry powder
1 lemon
5 table spoons of tikka paste
1 tea spoon of salt
3 cloves of garlic
A small thumb of ginger
400 gram basmati rice
1 large onion
1 cassia bark
3 cardamoms
1 tea spoon of turmeric
1 tea spoon of ground coriander
2 table spoon of ghee
125 gram tinned sweet corn

This classic dish has been slightly adapted and it is cooked in two separate stages and then brought together. The chicken needs to be diced into small pieces. To prepare the marinade the ginger and garlic needs to be grated and added to a bowl. This is followed by a table spoon of curry powder, five table spoons of tikka paste, one juice of a lemon and a tea spoon of salt. Add the chicken to the marinade and mix in thoroughly, this is left for a couple of hours in the fridge. The chicken needs to be placed on a baking tray and then cooked in a pre-heated oven for 10 / 15 minutes.

For the rice a medium pot is required. The onion needs to be cut finely. The pot needs to be heated and the ghee (clarified butter) needs to be added followed by the onions which need to soften at a medium heat for five minutes then add one cassia bark, three cardamoms, a tea spoon of turmeric, a tea spoon of coriander and cooked for a few minutes. The rice needs to be washed several times to remove the starch and then this can be added to the dish with approximately 600 grams of cold water. The sweet corn needs to be added with the rice. Cook this at a high heat for ten minutes, ensuring that it is stirred a few times. Reduce the heat and place a lid on the pot and cook for a further ten minutes at a low heat. Once this is done, then add the chicken and stir in. Before serving the dish needs to be garnished with finely chopped coriander.





Yasrina Begum

I was invited to Yasrina's house on a pleasant sunny afternoon. She lives in Great Barr with her husband and two daughters. I managed to get into the garden and look at the vegetables that they grown, by her husband, Sobur, who is a keen gardener. He explained, this year had been difficult to do as much gardening as he would have liked as they were having some work done to their house and the garden got neglected as a result. He had still managed to grow chillies, naga's and tomatoes in his green house and his tomatoes were used to garnish the dish Yasrina had made.

Yasrina described herself as a housewife and mother in the first instance. She also has two jobs, working as an administrator for the NHS in the mornings and some evenings and at weekends she works as a care worker supporting people with mental illness. Her plans for the future are to have a bigger house, or perhaps her own business, but, she remains concerned at the risk of job loss at the moment.

She has two lovely daughters, Sumaiyah who is four and Irum two years old. She is concerned for both of them and wants to keep them in a shell and protect them. Her plans for them in the future are to study hard, get a job and enjoy life. She would like to see Sumaiyah become a Ballerina or a Gymnast as she is always dancing, but her husband has more traditional ideas and wants her to be a doctor. Sobur, interjected at this point and said that she could be a social worker or an engineer as she is good at maths. With regard to Irum, Yasrina said that she has such a strong personality will be bound to make her own choices. They both agreed that there is no real pressure as long as they are happy.



Yasrina grew up in Handsworth in a large family with seven siblings. She has four brothers, and three sisters – two of the brothers and two of the sisters are older. Her two older sisters would do the cooking at home. After they got married and left home, her sister in law did the cooking. Yasrina did not have the need to cook at her parents' home, but, when she got married she had to learn as her husband is a 'curry man'. In the early days, she would practice cooking and on one occasion she forgot to add ginger or garlic to a chicken curry and found it to be very bland.

On one occasion, when she had invited Sobur's sister and her husband for dinner, she cooked a traditional fish curry with uri (beans). However, she did not know how to trim the uri properly and left the edges on. The dinner guests removed the edges, when Yasrina was not looking. Sobur's sister called her later that evening when she got home and gave her some friendly advice on how uri with fish should be cooked. This firmed up their relationship and her sister in law became her informal tutor. She would visit on occasions and teach her how to improve her cooking, in particular fish dishes.

She has become a more confident cook now and likes to try different things, however, she gets worried when people come for dinner. I wonder if she was worried about my visit. Yasrina cooked 'Hilsha dim with tenga' (see note*below) favourite dish as she enjoys sour things and does not have a sweet tooth. She learned to cook the dish from her sister.

*note – Elish is Bangladesh's national fish. It is seasonal sea fish caught in the Bay of Bengal, it is cousin of the herring family and it is an oily fish. Dim means eggs. Tenga means 'sour' often fruit that is not yet ripe is used to make dishes sour.

HILSHA DIM TENGA

- 150 grams hilsha dim
- 2 small Bangladeshi unripe mangoes
- 2 small onions
- 4 garlic cloves
- 2 tea spoons salt
- 1 tea spoon chilli powder
- 1 tea spoon turmeric
- 1 tea spoon coriander
- ½ tea spoon tomato purée paste
- 1 tea spoon dried fenugreek leaves
- 2 table spoons of vegetable oil
- 4/5 green chillies
- 3/4 green tomatoes
- Handful of fresh coriander leaves

A small pot is required to cook this dish. Finely chop the garlic and onions and set aside. Heat the pot and add two table spoons of oil, once the oil is hot add the garlic followed by the onion and stir in. Add two tea spoons of salt and tomato purée paste and stir in and allow it all to simmer down on a medium heat for approximately 10 minutes ensuring that it does not burn. Once the onion is soft add a tea spoon of chilli, turmeric and coriander and mix it in. Leave this to simmer for approximately 10 minutes allowing the flavours to blend in and use a potato masher to crush the onions. The two mangoes need to be peeled and cut in to small pieces and added to the dish and stir and leave to soften. The eggs need to be washed and crushed and then the water needs to be drained. Once the mangoes are soft add the eggs and fenugreek leaves to the pan and cook at a medium heat for 10 minutes. At the final stages add 4/5 green chillies, whole and add enough hot water to cover the eggs and simmer for a further five minutes. Once the dish is cooked, add the garnish of 3/4 quartered tomatoes and a handful of finely chopped coriander.

This dish is served with boiled rice. I was asked to join the family for dinner, which was a very pleasant experience. I have never eaten Hilsha dim like this before; this is a truly delightful dish with a sour kick.



Conclusion



Aftab Rahman

Aftab was born in Bangladesh and arrived in the UK with his family at the age of six. He first lived in the Lozells area of Birmingham. He attended a local school and left with no formal qualifications. He then worked in restaurants throughout the UK for a couple of years. Before enrolling on a part-time college course in Business Studies and simultaneously doing voluntary work in the community. This led to a full time course at Birmingham University where he completed a degree in Youth and Community Work. He has since completed a post graduate diploma in Management and a Masters in Management and Organisation Development from Birmingham City University.

Aftab has been a leading light in his community and has established several successful charities. He has supported many young people to take a leading role in their community, among them some truly exceptional leaders. He worked for Worcester City Council as a Youth Worker, and then as Director for the Bangladeshi Youth Forum before joining Government Office for the West Midlands as Head of Stronger Communities. He has since returned to his roots and is the Director for Legacy WM.

Throughout his life, he has retained a keen interest in community links and has a strong creative flare. He is a talented photo journalist, holding his first exhibition at The Drum in 2006 and producing a booklet titled 'Back Home – Photo Diary of Bangladesh'.

He is passionate about food, owns a restaurant and co-owns another. The 'Bangla Food Journeys' project gave Aftab an ideal opportunity for him to indulge his passions. He would like to take writing more seriously in the future.

He continues to live in Birmingham with his wife and two daughters.

Colour photos have been taken by Aftab Rahman.
Black & white photos taken by Roger Gywnn.

ISBN details

