

*The heart felt emotions could be frozen in
'A Moment of Time' and locked away in a book,
to be opened and discovered by fresh eyes
in a few minutes or a thousand years later.*

A MOMENT IN TIME

**Dedicated to everyone who has participated in the
creation of this Book.**

**To
Reba, Shumi and Shorty
Thanks for the support you have given me and the
Project.
Romana Begum**

Introduction

True Stories is about Asian people who migrated from Bangladesh in 60's and made Hyde their home.

A Moment In Time

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Bengali Literature

As the popular saying goes, "**The pen is mightier than the sword**" and where else could this be proved to be more true than Bengal.

Over a period of centuries, Bengal has given birth to numerous writers and poets who have with their powerful strength of words heralded a new world.

They were the beginners of modern Bengal and much of their contributions are acclaimed today, to be one of the best in the history of literature.

The brave writers and poets had shocked the modern world with their revolutionary thinking and still are the major influences in the shaping of present-day Bengal and India.

The history of Bangladeshi and Bengali literature goes back hundreds of years. While it is impossible (and undesirable) to separate the literary trends of the two Bengals during the pre-independence period, post independent Bangladesh has given birth to its own distinct set of literatures and literature.

Some Great Personalities in the History of Bengali Literature

- Rabindranath Tagore
- Kazi Nazrul Islam
- Kavi Jayadeva
- Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94)
- Isvar Chandra Gupta
- Madhusudan Datta (1824-73)
- Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938)
- Sukumar Roy (1887-1923)
- Jivanananda Das (1899-1954)
- Bibhutibhushan Banerjee (1899-1950)
- Manik Banerjee (1908-1956)
- Sankha Ghosh

Nazrul's Flowery Tribute to Life and Beauty...

For conferring on me the honour as the chair of this Eid conference, I offer my gratitude to the Bengal Muslim Literary Society (Bongio Musalman Shahitto Shomiti). Let me first offer to you my Eid greetings. Eid is the celebration of joy and sacrifice . . .

Today, this is a poetry conference. Poets and writers have gathered here. Poets, writers, musicians are messengers who bring to people the message from the realm of joy and beauty. That's why they are pride of human civilisation. The human thirst for joy and beauty is eternal. Just as a person feels hunger for food, so he does feel thirst for beauty.

The poets are there to quench the thirst of the non-poets. The demand for the beauty dimension of life coexists with the ordinary needs of people's life. One day I observed a person returning from the market while holding a hen in one hand and some Tuberose (Rojonigondha) flowers in the other. I complimented him saying, "I have never seen such a combination of Fair and Fowl (foul) together!"

The duty of delivering the cup of beauty-ambrosia is on the shoulders of poets and writers. Lot of hardship and suffering the writers face in this path, but they must not be afraid. People don't have enough bread just to feed themselves. Through growing trees and paddy (rice), people turn acres and acres into plantation, but how many undertake cultivation of roses? It is even more unfortunate that the thirst for beauty is so scanty among the educated ones of this land. It's no wonder that the poet-writers of this land have to struggle so much in their life. But let's not despair. The blows of pain must be welcomed with the visit of joy.

The life and works of the poets and writers are like Lotus (Shotodol). Each of its petals has bloomed due to the strike of such pain and suffering.

I vividly remember my great feeling and realisation of this one day in my life. My son passed away. My heart was broken by the deep sadness at this loss. Right then Hasna-Hena (a flower) bloomed in my house. I smelled the fragrance of that Hasna-Hena to my heart's delight. That's the way to enjoy life – which is living a full life. I have cherished the experience of this very kind of life. My poetry and music have emanated from my life experience. I sang with the rhythm of life – these are the expressions of that rhythm. Whether my poetry and music are great or mediocre, I don't know. But I want to state emphatically – I have lived my life fully. I have never dreaded pain or suffering. I have dived into the ocean waves of life.

I was the first in my class. The headmaster had great hope that I would bring more honour to the school, but the world war of Europe came along. One day I saw people going to war. I also joined a platoon. I went to Chattogram, saw the sea, and I thoroughly enjoyed my life by diving into it. One day a policeman aimed his pistol at my forehead, while standing right in front of me, and said, "I can kill you." I exclaimed: "Friend! Indeed, I have been searching for death all along." . . .

[Excerpts from an address "Shwadhin-Chittotar Jagoron", given in 1940 in Calcutta Eid gathering of Bongio Musalman Shahitto Shomiti. Nazrul Rochonaboli, Vol. 4, 1996, p. 115.]

Where the Mind is Without Fear

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country
awake

from Rabindranath Tagore's Geetanjali

Poetry Company Private Limited

We create poetry here
All sorts of poetry
Political poetry, social poetry
Spiritual poetry, corporeal poetry
Urban poetry, rustic poetry
Romantic poetry, physical poetry
Poetry of dreams, poetry of realities
Forties poetry, fifties poetry
Sixties poetry, seventies poetry
We are even planning to release eighties poetry soon
Hands, legs, heads, shoulders

Hair, nails, fingers, toes
of poetry
We have them all with us
Domestic and foreign metaphors and similes
Words, rhymes, and metres
We have them in stock by the millions
Of course hundreds of poetry companies have
Started up like mushrooms. But
You definitely know
Our company has already made a name for itself
And can one earn fame by shirking?
Right?
Yes, the poetry that you ordered is almost ready
It turned out very nicely
Just the finishing touch left
Please sit, have some tea
We ran out of a few parts for the poetry
I will send Latif right now to the
Neighbouring factory to get them

[Translated by Zunaid Kazi]

My Story

Assalaamualaykum reader, my name is Rabia Begum.

I have been given the opportunity to express my views and opinions about the world that evolves around me at this moment in time.

First, a little bit of history.

I was born in Bangladesh where I grew up and spent my childhood in a quaint old village known as Mokhrom Pur.

Being the daughter of the local teacher I spent my mornings in an Arabic school whilst I attended a Bangla school in the afternoon, as well as being taught by my father during the evenings.

I was the eldest out of four sisters and a brother; therefore I was married at the age of fifteen. After fifteen years of my marriage I came to England with my husband and children and we settled in Hyde. Hyde was different; it was smaller than I had imagined. I felt alienated in this New World of mine, a world where I had to bring up my children in.

I cried a lot, I had left the one place that I loved and grew up in, the one place where people knew the real me. I didn't feel welcome here; I was classed as an outsider. Even though I had to accept Hyde as my home I knew deep down that my heart was still in Bangladesh. There were so many barriers I had to face, the language, cloths, food and general lifestyle, it was all so different and confusing but you learn to cope, I suppose you have to.

Time has a funny way of passing us by, we don't realise how much has changed but as I look at my children it's clear to see how different life is in this country.

Hyde has changed, the people have also changed but it's still small. There are a lot more Bengalis than I first came here, it's nice, it

feels like home. I feared the upbringing of my children, especially in a foreign country, which they had to call their own, however my children are aware of their religious and cultural beliefs and know where their roots lie. I feel; I have accomplished one of the biggest hurdles in life.

I have spent over half of my life in this country, the one wish I have left is to grow old in the place I grew up in, to spend the last few years of my life in the place I spent my childhood in, to grow old with the people I grew up with, to go home to the loved ones I had left behind, to go back and just be me.

Written by
Reba Begum



My Story

Faruque Ahmeds life story

Faruque Ahmed was born in Bangladesh in 1940; he came to England in 1965 to visit a relative an uncle, he had a good journey from Bangladesh to England. His uncle lived in Hyde at his own property with his family; his uncle had a good earning job. Mr Faruque Ahmed can remember the independent day with West Pakistan and East Pakistan. There was a big War between the two Countries; a lot of innocent people died at the war. But he was quite lucky, because he came to England a month before the independence day and his family was safe no one got injured.

He went back to Bangladesh in 1970 and got married to Syeda Suraya Parvin. His wife comes from village called, Aurong pur, Balagong, Sylhet.

When he first came to England he found it very different e.g. the atmosphere, difficult to communicate with people. It was hard for to live with Muslim life style, no Mosques or halal food shops. He went to Khujgipur High School in Bangladesh, but he did not go on to do any further education as he came to England. He started work as he came here.

He learned English here and lived with his uncle in Hyde. Then he bought his own house. He lives in Hyde with his wife, children and mum. His uncle lived with him, who passed away in 1979.

His first job was in a cotton mill as a group leader. He also worked in rubber factory and at T wall Ltd as a packer and incharge.

Then soon he owned a restaurant in Denton.

At present he has retired for Health reason, but he was involved with Bangladeshi Welfare Association in Hyde and served as secretary for 12 years. He is the trusty of Hyde Jamia Mosque.

By
Nadhira Parvin

My memories of the past (Mr. Kazi Abul faige.)

I was born in March 1954 Sylhet, Bangladesh, in a very big village in Fenjugonj. I came to this country at the age of 14 years old on 28th February 1970 for education and work. I came to London with my Uncle and Aunt from Bangladesh. The journey in the plane was very tiring and long for me and it was very inexperienced.

I came to Manchester from London at 1986. I chose to live in Hyde because the area seemed very calm, and attractive .I didn't migrate from India to Bangladesh, I remember a little about the partition, when East Pakistan became Bangladesh. I went back to Bangladesh and I got married in 1984 and my wife became my second immigrant, she migrated after 6 months of my marriage.

My wife moved to England in 1985, and my first daughter was born. In London I didn't find anything much strange because I had my family and relatives living down here and they all took care of me.

I got on with my relatives very well. I went to school in Bangladesh

near my home village I studied at secondary school until my last year. In England I went to a educational institute, which was a night school in London, the session lasted for 2 and half-hours.

I communicated very well around others and I didn't have many difficulties speaking in English.

When I first came to England I lived in London at my relative's house. My father and Mother also had the permission to come to England they both came in 1987. My first work was tailoring in a very reputable factory in London. Later on at 1986 I was the owner of my restaurant in Stalybridge. Called the ' Akash Tandoori Restaurant'.

Now I work as a waiter and I wear mixed clothes. I like Bangladeshi food mostly I also admire cooking.

When I came to Hyde the community developed slowly as it took longer for more Muslims to migrate from Bangladesh. But now everything's changed children growing up, mosques have expanded; and schools have developed.

My social life has grown because I often visit my friends and family that live close to me and far away.

Written by Ferdousi Bahar Kazi.

A SELF-MADE MAN

Life history of Ahad Miah

When I was born in 1952, Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan. My first fourteen years were spent growing up in the small village of Shikondor Pur in East Pakistan, and going to school close to home with my brother and sisters.

As the eldest son, I became head of the household in the absence of my father, who had already migrated to England and settled in Bradford to make a home for us to join him.

I remember the mixed emotions of excitement and uncertainty when my mother told me that we were to settle in England, but that she and my brother and sisters would not be leaving until a later date. I felt afraid to be alone, yet proud to be considered responsible enough to make this marathon journey alone into the unknown. It was hard to leave my family and the security of my mother tongue and customs.

It was my first ever time I flew by air which I found extremely exciting.

The flight began in Sylet and we touched down in Dacca. From Dacca I flew to Karachi. The flight from Karachi to London was via Beirut and Damascus.

We touched down in Heathrow airport and my fears began to well up again.

I spoke very little English, it was hard to communicate with others, and even my Urdu wasn't fluent, which was no help as I came by Pakistani International Airlines.

A terrible loneliness engulfed me as I left Heathrow to make my own way to Bradford; there was no one to receive me. I had only an address of my father and no knowledge of public transport.

I eventually managed to make a taxi driver understand my needs by showing him the address on a piece of paper and climbing resolutely into his Taxi.

It was with a sense of joy and relief that I finally arrived at my father's home.

I spent the next two years struggling to cope with schoolwork and learning English at the same time.

It was lonely and hard work, the customs and language (especially the local dialect) were strange to me, but I was determined to make a success of my life and a home for my mother and family in England. I learnt the restaurant trade and worked my way through restaurants in Swinton, Ashton-u-Lyne and Hazel Grove.

In 1971, there was news that East Pakistan was fighting for its independence from the rest of Pakistan.

I was worried about the situation, and how my family at home and my fellow countrymen in England would be affected by the inevitable changes taking place.

It seemed to me good that East Pakistan should be independent as otherwise our native language of Bangla would be under threat and Urdu would become the main tongue.

I decided to help our cause by joining several other immigrants to publish our aims and collect donations to the war effort in East Pakistan. We held meetings to drum up support from the East Pakistan community in Manchester.

I felt this was my contribution towards helping my people to gain their independence.

It was a happy day in early January 1971 when the news broke that East Pakistan was now independent, and now called Bangladesh. During all this time I was still working in the restaurant trade. I felt that I needed a break. I missed my family and wanted to see for myself that my family were safe and well after the traumas of the partition. So in 1972 I returned to Bangladesh.

It was whilst I was in Bangladesh that I got married. We stayed until the end of 1973, during which period my first son was born. Shortly after this I returned to England.

It was hard work but eventually I was in the position to buy my own restaurant in Bolton. Initially things went well, but as time went on it became obvious that my new business was not expanding as I had hoped, so I decided to sell, and move to Bury, to be nearer to my cousin and his family.

By 1982 my family had grown. My eldest son had a brother and a sister. It was time to move on.

We made our way to the market town of Hyde in Tameside, where I bought my second business, in a small town just outside Hyde-Hollingworth.

By 1985 I had another great opportunity to expand my restaurant trade by opening another place famously called The Dacca in Market street, Hyde. Also my youngest daughter was born in 1985. Life was not just all work. I took an active part in the Bangladeshi Welfare Association, which provided help and advise to the local community. I became founded member of Shah Jalal Housing Association and the mosque.

In addition to this I was involved in representing my peoples needs to the local Council, Education and Police, and Social Services department.

I was also the chairman of the Shapla project, and in 1987 I became a parent governor in Hyde High School.

In late 1987 I decided to sell the Hollingworth restaurant to give me more time, and to give myself a break from the hard work involved in business.

However, by 1991, I bought yet another restaurant in Hyde- The Taste Of India.

As my family grew up and became more independent, their schooling and general education became my prime concern.

In the late 1990's I made several trips to Bangladesh where I secured land and business interests.

It seems like a lifetime ago since, as a frightened lonely fourteen-year-old boy I made my first visit to England.

I had promised my family that we would have a better life here, and I feel that my promise has been kept.

Written Tahera Sultana (Shubi)

TIME FOR TRUE REFLECTIONS

My name is Abdul Rashid. I was born in Bangladesh in 1943. I came to England to earn money and to build a better future for myself and my family in Bangladesh. I came to this country by ferry it was a very long, hard and exhausting journey to this country, which took months.

I decided to come to Hyde as I was offered an appropriate job that was suitable for me at the time.

I didn't migrate from India to Pakistan as but I still do have a vivid image of when the partition took place in 1947 and when the British left with the two countries, India and Pakistan.

I first came to this country alone and I then returned to Bangladesh after a few years to see my mother and I also got married. At first every little thing seemed strange to me such as the language and their way of living, which was totally different to the way people lived in Bangladesh. The whole culture was different and it felt really weird and uncomfortable.

I did go to school in Bangladesh but when I came to England I decided to work and not carry on with further education at the education institutions in England.

After a few months of being in England I became more familiar with the language and the way of living and I started to communicate

better with work colleagues and with other people. I became more and more fluent with the language as the days went by. I lived in Hyde near my work place and I then returned to Bangladesh to bring my wife and my children to this country. They arrived in 1981 on Christmas day.

My first ever job was in a cotton mill factory called Ashworths, which I really enjoyed.

I don't really do much, I spend most of my time with my grandchildren, and they keep me occupied.

I speak various languages such as English, Urdu, Bangla and Punjabi. I still like to be traditional therefore I dress in tradition menswear and eat the traditional food.

The Bangladeshi community has expanded very rapidly, at first there were mainly just men but now their families have come over and this country feels more homely.

Being a Bangladeshi gives me great pride so does being a Muslim. I pray five times a day in the local mosque and occasionally at home.

I have so many memories of my life and the events that took place during my life, which I often reflect on.

Written by Saira Begum

Life on My Own.

Life History Of Syeda Rahena Begum.

I was born in 1955 when Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan. I was educated in Bangladesh up until the age of 11. The reason for me not completing my education was because I was the eldest daughter and had to help my mother with housework. During the partition of Pakistan and the rest of Pakistan I was at the age of 15 and vaguely remember what happened. It was the most frightening experience, I watched my neighbour's house burn and people shouting at each other and screaming for their lives. It's a past I never want to return to. My family and I fled until it was all over. Two years after the Independence of Bangladesh I married my late husband Mashuk Miah.

My husband migrated to England in 1980 and lived with his father in Northampton. Later my husband moved to Hyde and worked in a factory, to make a better life for my two children and me, as we were struggling financially. I came to England in 1981 with my two children, with the help of a family friend who accompanied me during my long and exhausting journey, which was a new experience for me.

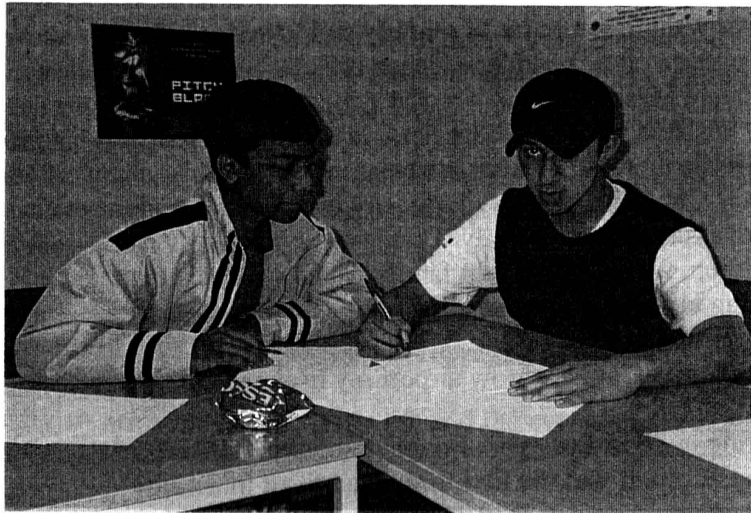
At my arrival at Heathrow airport my husband came to receive his family.

During my first few years I found everything different to Bangladesh, it was the first time I had lived in a multi-cultural environment. By 1986 we had given my elder son and daughter a younger brother and sister.

Life started to become very hard when a tragedy struck, and my husband died shortly after our youngest son turned one.

I had a great of number problems to face, as I was now alone and had no idea of how I was going to cope with all my children. I spoke no English and didn't know many people, who could offer me help and support though I had help from some of my neighbours. Life looked dull but with the help of my neighbours I overcame the difficulties and I managed to stand on my own two feet.

Written by Ruhella Begum.



Home is where the Heart is

My name is Haji Shukur Miah, I was born on the 25th October 1932 in Sylhet during the British reign. I came to England looking for work and I arrived on the 6th of January 1962.

I travelled by plane; the journey seemed never ending. There were several others from my country but no-one from my village. Although I was amongst my own people I still felt out of place and slightly isolated.

I arrived in London, where I stayed for six months. I was then brought to Oldham where I lived for ten years.

Language is looked upon as a barrier, and in most cases it can be but the older generation were much more polite and friendly. Although I couldn't speak English properly I managed to cope. In 1991 I took a one-year course in college, which helped me a lot.

Life in Oldham was very different, especially for me. I worked in a factory as a rubber cutter and joiner. The reason I found it strange was because I worked night shifts, therefore I had no social life.

There weren't any halal grocery shops in Oldham so we used to get rations from Halifax, twice a week. There wasn't even a mosque; we used to use a house in Glodwyck on Waterloo Street. I lived in a rented house with several other people. I paid up to twelve shillings for rent.

Before I returned back home to bring my family over, I bought a house. It was 225 Pedestrial Road, in Oldham. I paid a deposit of £50 and then paid £2 weekly, which doesn't seem much, but for that time was a lot of money.

I was transferred to Hyde by the company I was working for, I still worked as a rubber joiner/cutter but was promoted to machine operating supervisor. I preferred Hyde as there were more Asian people and also because the atmosphere was more homely and comfortable.

In terms of praying arrangements, it was very poor as it was just a house on John Shepley Street but we were then given a building on Jackson Street, which became the Mosque. The building still remains but has been worked on and improved as up to a thousand people can now pray at once, whereas there was room for only about a hundred before.

The community as a whole has improved a lot, the number of Asian families has increased and so have the facilities available to them. Before there was only one Asian food store, we now have three and there is also an Asian clothes shop. We also have a Bangladeshi Welfare Office where people of all ages are welcome. There is also a local snooker club, which is run by my son. In terms of food, clothing etc I am very traditional; before we had to cook for ourselves but now I have my wife and daughter-in-laws to cook for me.

I have retired and live with all my family; I love spending time with my family, especially my grandchildren. I thought that bringing up children in a foreign country would be difficult; I thought that the roots would be forgotten and that all the culture would be lost, but I have maintained both, or hope that I have and I am pleased with the way my children have turned out.

The memories of Bangladesh are always close to my heart. I would love to go back home and settle down as my brother, sisters and other relatives are still there but my main priorities, my children - are still here. However I will go back as I miss it very much; home is where the heart is and mine remains in Bangladesh.

Written by Reba Begum



MEMORABLE MOMENTS

My name is Md Luthfur Ali, I Was born on the 8Th of December 1956 in Pakistan.

The reason I came to England was because my parents were in this country. My parents wanted me to join them in England because I was the only son and my mum was missing me, so I had to come.

The journey, by plane, was an experience of a lifetime because it was the first time I had travelled anywhere. The feeling I had at that time was a bit weird because I had never seen the place, at the same time I was looking forward to seeing different things and exploring the nature in England.

I came to Hyde because my parents were living here. I came and lived at 132 Nelson Street in Hyde and then moved out because my father went back to Bangladesh with my mother. I then moved in Church Street in Hyde with some of my relatives who were living in this country at that time.

I didn't migrate from India to Bangladesh as I was living in Bangladesh already.

I don't remember anything about the partition because this happened well before I was born. I have heard about this from my father, about how people struggled through this event.

I went back to see my parents after a couple of years, I didn't know I was going to come back to England as a married man. I got married in Bangladesh and then returned to my job in this country.

I did struggle the first time I came to England because the life style was totally different to the place I came from.

I went to school in Bangladesh, when I came to this country I decided not to study but work instead.

Eventually I communicated with people as I learnt to speak and understand the language.

My first ever job was in textiles, which I enjoyed working in and now I am working in the catering department, where I feel more comfortable, and enjoy my colleagues company.

I speak various language such as English, Bangla and Urdu.

I have traditional food at home such as rice, curry and ruti and I can cook Indian food as I used to work in an Indian restaurant.

The community has developed slowly but there are a lot of Asian people who have migrated from Bangladesh to this country. As a Muslim most of my social time is taken up by praying five times a day and spending time with my wife and three children. The most memorable moment in my life was when my one and only daughter was born, which I always reflect back on.

Written by Nasima Ali

I was born in Sylhet, Bangladesh in 1958. At that time Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan. I came to this country as a visitor. Travelling by plane to this country was no struggle because I'd had experience of travelling before. I chose to live in Hyde, as staying close to my relatives was comfortable for me. I remember during the British rule, Bangladesh was a part of the British Indian provinces of Bengal and Assam. In August 1947, it gained independence with India and became a part of Pakistan and was known as East Pakistan. It remained in Pakistan for about 24 years, from 14th August 1947 March 25th 1971.

I got married in this country and now have two sons in primary school. Something that I found strange in this country was the culture. It was very different from Bangladesh, I found it very hard to fit in with the society at first and felt very uncomfortable. My English was very poor and I struggled a bit. I went to college to study 'A' levels at the age of 17/18 in Bangladesh, but didn't learn much English. I didn't go to college in this country but I went in to a job straight away. I worked in a restaurant as a waiter and I am still working as one now. I didn't worry about money much because I was on my own, and there was no one to worry about at in Bangladesh apart from someone distant relatives and friends.

The Bangladeshi community has now developed over the past years, more people are coming to Hyde from Bangladesh and other towns. There is only one mosque in Hyde (Hyde Jamia mosque). It was built before I came to this country and the community has developed it and it will be developed even more, hopefully. My social life is my family and friends and they are very important to me.

I have memories of my parents who passed away when I was three years of age. I felt very lonely. Now that I have my own family they mean a lot to me.

My culture is very important to me because I am a Bangali Muslim living in this country for more than 10 years, but it does not mean that I forget my roots.

If you don't know where you come from, you won't know where you are going.

By Hamida Yasmin



Looking into my past

Assalamualikum readers.

My name is Al Haj Munsif Ali. I was born in 1951 in Bangladesh. I came to the United Kingdom for a better living with my dad. I had never been abroad; therefore it was my first time flying on a plane. The flight was very frightening at first but then it became very enjoyable.

In England we first settled in Oldham but moved to Hyde as there were other relatives living here.

My marriage was held in Bangladesh, where the rest of my family were. The wedding was arranged and very simple. When I was living in Hyde I missed my home in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh I went to school.

As I came to England I also went to an education institute to study. I had difficulty communicating but slowly learnt to communicate fast. Apart from speaking in Bangla, I also knew how to speak English and Urdu. After I finished my studies, I went to work at a Textile Mill. I helped with the cooking and still had Bangladeshi food here in England. But my clothing had changed to suit the weather here.

The community has developed in a very good way and it became standard. A mosque was built which housed about 400 Muslim men. In my area I would help the other community members.

I was involved in local politics and visiting other places. I have memories of the olden days, in school and working at the Textile Mill. I also remember when I was a bus conductor.

Now I am self-employed and enjoy my life with my family.

Written by Monuwar Ali



Birth of a Nation "Bangladesh"

The State of Pakistan came into existence in 1947 in two parts (East and West) and was separated by nearly twelve hundred miles of Indian territory. Islam was the only link which united people of the two regions of Pakistan whose inhabitants spoke different languages and belonged to different cultures. The main reasons for the break up of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh was the lack of recognition of the Bengali culture and language, lack of Bengali participation in the central decision making process in Pakistan, and the colonial style of economic exploitation of East Pakistan by West Pakistan.

From 1947 to 1971 there were five Provinces in Pakistan: East Bengal (East Pakistan), Punjab, Sind, North West Frontier and Baluchistan. Languages of these respective regions were Bengali (55.48%), Punjabi (29.02), Sindhi (5.51), Poshtu (3.7), and Baluchi (1.09). Urdu was the national language.

21 February 1952. East Pakistan was rocked by demonstrations against the basic committee report which did not grant official status to the Bengali language. Nineteen students and many others were killed in police firings. After the martyrdom of the students the whole nation was outraged. The language agitation movement gripped the masses. It was acknowledged that the Bengali language was the foundation for Bengali identity. The day is known as "Martyrs Day".

"A sense of deprivation and frustration began to develop among the Bengalis, hence Bangladeshi nationalism was born. A new sense of awareness regarding East Bengal's (East Pakistan) separate political economic and cultural identity had begun to manifest itself at the time of the language controversy between 1948 and 1952."

1954: The united front led by H S Suhrawardy of the Awami League and A K Fazlul Haq of the Krishak Sramik Party won the provincial election. Later the united front was dismissed. Governor's rule was proclaimed and Iskandar Mirza was sent to Dhaka as a Governor of East Pakistan. On 4 August millions of people were affected by unprecedented floods.

1958: Martial Law was imposed in Pakistan. Political parties were banned. Majibur Rahman, Maulana Bhashani and others were arrested.

1960: Mujibur Rahman was arrested in Dhaka and sentenced to two years simple imprisonment. During the month of October a twenty four hour cyclone (10 October) hit the coastal belt of East Pakistan. More than 3,000 people were killed. On 31 October another cyclone killed about 20,000 people.

1961: East Pakistan was hit by a cyclone which took more than 2,000 human lives. Police fired on student demonstrations against Ayub Khan's Martial Law. Hundreds of students were arrested and H S Suhrawardy demanded that democracy be restored.

1962: President Ayub Khan imposed an authoritarian constitution and instituted a system of so-called "basic democracy".

It was virtually a dictatorship under a democratic garb. Martial Law was lifted. The people of East Pakistan opposed the "basic democracy" system.

Meanwhile the Bengalis had lost their two great leaders, A K Fazi ul Haq and H S Suhrawardy. Despite many limitations these leaders had struggled to establish a democratic system in Pakistan so that the people of both regions of East and West Pakistan could develop and prosper on the basis of mutual understanding and harmony. But their efforts did not work. After their death a new generation of political leaders had emerged among the Bengalis and they were from the ordinary middle class and had closer links with the common people. The most prominent among them was Shiekh Mujibur Rahman (1920-1975).

1966: Mujibur Rahman announced his six points for regional autonomy. Mujibur Rahman and his party (Awami League) workers were arrested. There were anti-Ayub demonstrations all over East Pakistan.

1967: Opposition leaders of East Pakistan formed a united front to achieve regional autonomy for East Pakistan.

1968: Mujibur Rahman was arrested and implicated in the Agartala Conspiracy case, charged with trying to establish an independent East Pakistan, with Indian help. The antiAyub movement gathered momentum and led to his fall.

1969: President Yahya Khan imposed martial law and dissolved the National and Provincial Assemblies. Maulana Bhashani demanded national government.

1970: Elections were held in December 1970. The Awami League and the Pakistan People's Party of Z A Bhutto emerge as major parties in East and West Pakistan respectively. Neither leader was interested in sitting down for 120 days in the National Assembly in order to draft a constitution.

1971: Events moved very quickly. Z A Bhutto decided to boycott convening the National Assembly on 3 March. Yahya Khan dissolved his cabinet and sacked the East Pakistan Governor, Vice-Admiral S M Ahsan. Mujibur Rahman called for a general strike in Dhaka. Popular resentment erupted in violence in Dhaka and other places. Troops moved into action and a curfew was imposed. The Awami League launched a non-violence, non-cooperation movement.

1971: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his famous public speech, declared "This time our struggle is a struggle for independence" and called upon his countrymen to "make every home a fort" in order to resist the Pakistan armed forces. Unfortunately the Pakistani ruling clique was secretly planning to bring about a military solution to a political problem. Mujib's demands were not accepted and Yahya Khan launched "Operation Searchlight" against the Awami League. Mujib was arrested and taken to West Pakistan.

The Liberation War

The people of Bengal (East Pakistan) were determined to be united in their resistance to this savage onslaught. Major Ziaur Rahman, the second in command of 8th East Bengal Regiment in Sholashahar Chittagong, took the crucial decision on 26 March 1971 "we revolV. He started organising forces to put up a fight in conjunction with other Bengali Army officers. The declaration of independence in the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was announced from Kalurghat Radio Station. People from all walks of life joined the "Mukti Bahini" (Bengali freedom fighters).

By November 1971 over one hundred thousand guerrillas had forced the Pakistani army to retreat into the relative safety of fortified enclaves. The conflict became locked in stalemate and it took a mighty offensive by Indian armed forces during the eleven day war of December 1971 to dislodge the Pakistani forces from their strongholds. Bangladesh resistance cost between one and three million lives, and the country suffered property damage estimated at one billion US dollars. This war culminated in the creation of independent and sovereign Bangladesh (16 October 1971).

1971: Mujib returned from West Pakistan where he had remained imprisoned throughout the war. He formed a twenty three member Awami League cabinet with himself as Prime Minister. All Indian troops were withdrawn from the country by 12 March 1972.

1973-1974: The Awami League Government held a general election on 7 March 1973 which it won overwhelmingly. The holding of elections and the extension of formal government control over the economy however did not prevent a sharp drift towards economic and political crisis. The cost of living had risen by 400-500 percent, law and order deteriorated, and Mujib Resorted to one-party presidential rule but this only increased the vulnerability of the regime.

1975: Coups. In the early hours of the morning of 15 August 1975 Mujib and most of his family were killed by a group of former guerrillas, now majors in the Bangladesh army, in a surprise attack which was reminiscent of the tactics used against Pakistani officers. They installed Khandokar Mustaq Ahmed as President. During this time there were several coups and counter coups led by pro- and antiAwami League India axis of the army officers.

1975-1981: After the several coups the young General Zia, aged 40, came into power. He proved to be a leader with insight, imagination and initiative. He brought various Political groups under a Nationalist Front and later formed a political party called Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). It won the election of February 1979. But left wing and anti-repatriate factions in the army remained disaffected.

1981 : A group of freedom fighting officers assassinated Zia in Chittagong on 31 May 1981 in a surprise attack similar to the one in which Mujib had been killed.

1982: On 24 March 1982 Lieutenant General H M Ershad seized power. He has remained in power since 1982 primarily by keeping the armed forces happy. Strong resistance developed from the two paramount opposition parties, Awami League led by Mujib's daughter Sheikh Hassina and the BNP organised under Zia's widow Khaleda Zia, against the military authority or regime and competing with each other in mobilising popular opposition against army rule. Bangladeshi politics was again at the crossroads. On 4 December 1990 the 60 year old former general (Ershad) agreed to step aside for a caretaker government and a journey to establish democracy began. After that Khaleda Zia of the BNP and Sheikh Hassina of the Awami League came to power through fair election.

1986: General Ershad lifts martial law. Holds parliamentary election.

1990: A great popular movement overthrows General Ershad.

1991: BNP wins General Election. Begum Khaleda Zia becomes the Prime Minister.

1992: Parliament amends constitution entrusting all executive power to the Prime Minister. Abdur Rahman Biswas becomes titular leader.

1994: Opposition boycott of parliament since March to press the demand for a mutual caretaker government to conduct general election. Opposition MPs resign in December.

1996: Begum Khalida Zia resigns in March. In June The Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina wins the election.

Bangladesh have a long history spanning thousands of years. A land replete with history we finally achieved independence in the year 1971 after a protracted 9 month long Independence war.

Climate

Bangladesh has a tropical monsoon-type climate, with a hot and rainy summer and a pronounced dry season in the cooler months. January is the coolest month of the year, with temperatures averaging near 26 deg C (78 d F), and April the warmest month, with temperatures ranging between 33 deg and 36 deg C (91 deg F and 96 deg F). The climate is one of the wettest in the world; most places receive more than 1,525 mm (60 in) of rain a year, and areas near the hills receive 5,080 mm (200 in). Most rain falls during the monsoon (June-September) and little during the dry season (November-February).

People:

A vast majority (98 percent) of the people of Bangladesh are Bengalis and they speak the **Bengali** language. Minorities include Biharis numbering 250,000 and other tribes numbering about a million, with the Chakma being most numerous in number. About 83 percent of Bangladeshis will profess Islam as their religion. The next major religion is Hinduism (16 percent). Other major religions include Buddhism and Christianity.

A member of the Indo-European family of languages, Bangla (sometimes called Bengali) is the official language of Bangladesh. Bangladeshis closely identify themselves with their national language. Bangla has a rich cultural heritage in literature, music, and

poetry, and at least two Bengali poets are well known in the West: Rabindranath Tagore, a Hindu and a Nobel laureate; and Kazi Nazrul Islam, a Muslim known as the "voice of Bengali nationalism and independence." Bangla has been enriched by several regional dialects. The dialects of Sylhet, Chittagong, and Noakhali have been strongly marked by Arab-Persian influences. English, whose cultural influence seemed to have crested by the late 1980s, remained nonetheless an important language in Bangladesh.

Biharis, a group that included Urdu-speaking non-Bengali Muslim refugees from Bihar and other parts of northern India, numbered about 1 million in 1971 but had decreased to around 600,000 by the late 1980s. They once dominated the upper levels of Bengali society. Many also held jobs on the railroads and in heavy industry. As such they stood to lose from Bangladesh independence and sided with Pakistan during the 1971 war. Hundreds of thousands of Biharis were repatriated to Pakistan after the war.

Bangladesh's tribal population consists of about 1 million people, just under 1 percent of the total population. They live primarily in the Chittagong Hills and in the regions of Mymensingh, Sylhet, and Rajshahi. The majority of the tribal population (778,425) live in rural settings, where many practice shifting cultivation. Most tribal people are of Sino-Tibetan descent and has distinctive Mongoloid features. They differ in their social organization, marriage customs, birth and death rites, food, and other social customs from the people of the rest of the country. They speak Tibeto-Burman languages. In the mid-1980s, the percentage distribution of tribal population by religion was Hindu 24, Buddhist 44, Christian 13, and others 19. The four largest tribes are the Chakmas, Marmas (or Maghs),

Tipperas (or Tipras), and Mros (or Moorangs). The tribes tend to intermingle and could be distinguished from one another more by differences in their dialect, dress, and customs than by tribal cohesion. Only the Chakmas and Marmas display formal tribal organization, although all groups contain distinct clans. By far the largest tribe, the Chakmas are of mixed origin but reflect more Bengali influence than any other tribe. Unlike the other tribes, the Chakmas and Marmas generally live in the highland valleys. Most Chakmas are Buddhists, but some practiced Hinduism or animism.

Religion

About 80 percent of Bangladeshis are Muslims, making Bangladesh one of the largest Muslim countries in the world. The Muslim community in Bangladesh tends to be accommodating to other faiths and beliefs and Bangladesh is known for its lack of communal strife. Hinduism is professed by about 12 percent of the population while there are significant numbers of Buddhists in Bangladesh. Bangladesh also has a very small Christian community.

Islam in Bangladesh

The region of what is now Bangladesh saw wholesale conversions to Islam that began in the thirteenth century and continued on for hundreds of years. Muslim missionaries and mystics who wandered about the villages and towns were responsible for much of the conversions.

Most Bangladeshi Muslims are Sunnis, but there is a small Shia community.

Hinduism in Bangladesh

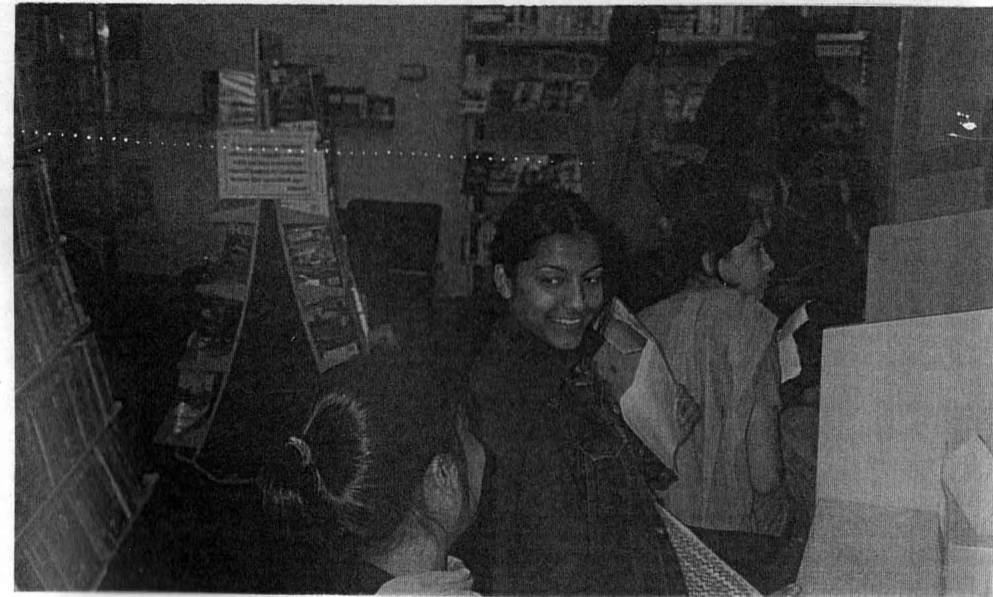
Hindus in Bangladesh in the 1990s were almost evenly distributed in all regions, with concentrations in Khulna, Jessore, Dinajpur, Faridpur, and Barisal.

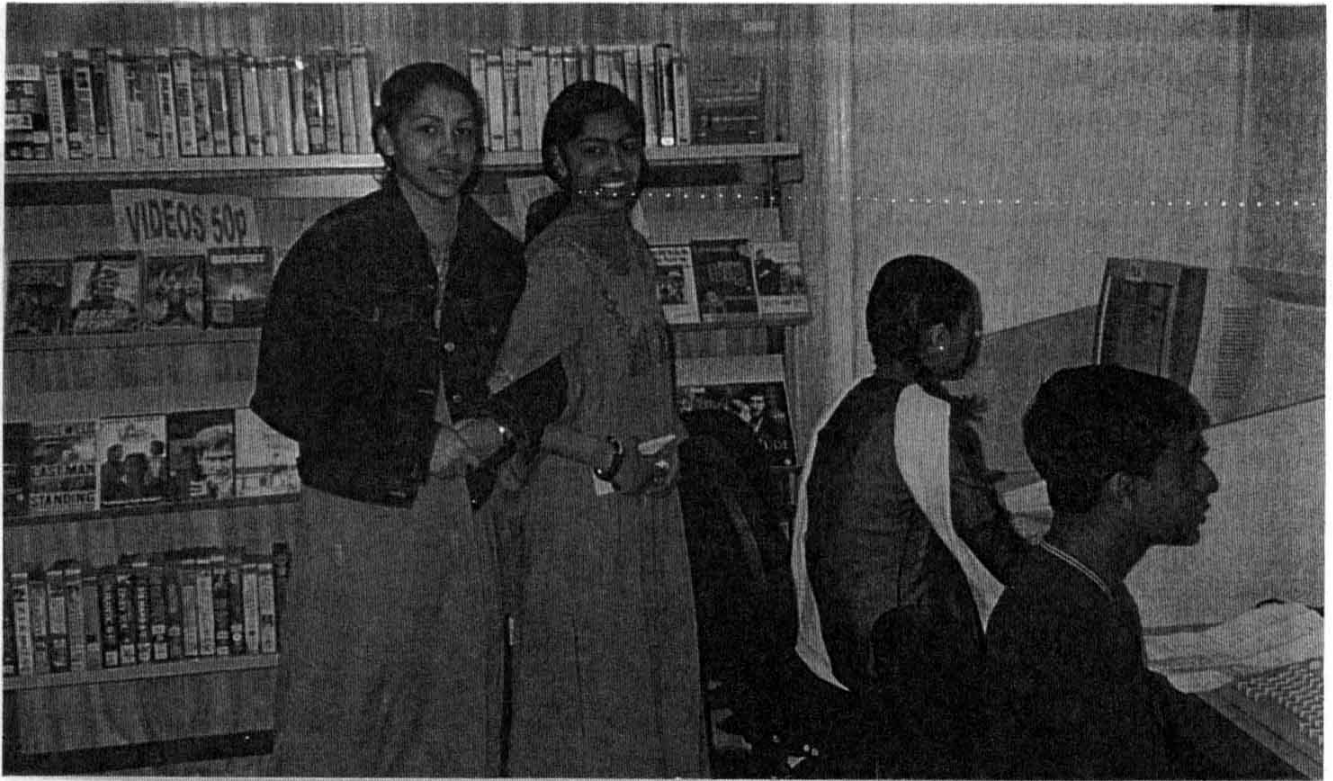
Buddhism in Bangladesh

In the Chittagong Hills, Buddhist tribes formed the majority of the population, and their religion appeared to be a mixture of tribal cults and Buddhist doctrines. According to the 1981 census, there were approximately 600,000 Buddhists in Bangladesh, representing less than 1 percent of the population.

Christianity

In the 1990s, Christianity had about 600,000 adherents, mainly Roman Catholic, and their numbers were growing rapidly.







A MOMENT IN TIME

*A collection of true stories by the
young people of
Hyde*