

# **PRESERVING THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF BANGLADESHI FOOD**

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**LOTTERY FUNDED**



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# Preface

New Hope is a Birmingham-based grass roots community organisation that is mainly by the minority communities it serves. Rooted in the most deprived parts of Birmingham, we have a proven track record of reaching people that is most in need to solve problems and build community together. In only four years, our work with the most isolated and excluded has drawn the attention and respect of senior politicians and policymakers, schools and employers in Birmingham, and we have received support for our role in the community programmes from many of them.

The majority of the communities we serve were born outside the UK, which advantages them in preserving the traditions and customs of the Bangladeshi culture for reasons of language, cultural awareness, skills, self-confidence, networks or integrity. The originality of Bangladeshi food culture is dying in the UK because of the inclusion of fusion food to meet the taste of the British people. Our project aimed at restoring the original and authentic Bangladeshi cooking heritage and food. In short, people trust us because we are 'one of them' and live amongst them. We are a Birmingham organisation serving Birmingham people providing services for Birmingham.

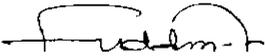
In response to the evident needs to preserve the cultural integrity by restoring the original heritage of Bangladeshi cooking and food, we have developed a range of community-based heritage projects and this current project is one of them. Supported by a large pool of skilled committed volunteers, who are also largely from minority backgrounds, who support our paid staff to minimise costs, we have proven that we can successfully address some of the most intractable and deep-rooted issues in our communities. One of our key aims is to use our resources, experience, and influence to remove barriers to Bangladeshi culinary heritage for both our young and elder people.

This book is the story of our project from the beginning to the end. It includes the Bangladeshi heritage of food culture and its popularity among the British communities in Birmingham and its surrounding areas. The project coordinator and our dedicated volunteers have

enormously contributed to the book. Some research on the history and heritage of Bangladeshi cultures has also been done. The hardest part was the transcription of the oral history interviews which was done by the volunteers. The only Bengali interview was transcribed by the project coordinator who is also a native Bengali speaker. The book also describes some of the recipes of authentic Bangladeshi food. The workshop proceedings have also been included.

The book will be a treasure of useful information of Bangladeshi food heritage. Researchers will also find valuable information on the culinary traditions of Bangladesh and its evolvement in the West. The early settlers from Bangladesh have expressed their opinions on the food habit and cooking experiences in both of the countries. Interesting stories revolving around their life have now come to the light.

I am indebted to all my staff and volunteers who have especially put their highest effort to help me complete this book. Among them are Maruf Ahmed, PhD (Japan), Coordinator for 'Preserving the Cultural History of Bangladeshi Food' project, Eniola Ajibola, Masters student of Human Resource Management and Business in Aston Business School, Birmingham and Fahim Ahmed, 3<sup>rd</sup> year student of Business, Management and Public Policy in Aston University, Birmingham.



Mohammed Foiz Uddin MBE, MInstF  
Chairman

# 1. Introduction

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Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. Cultural heritage includes tangible culture (such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art and artefacts). It also includes intangible culture traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts intangible culture (such as folklore, traditions, language, and knowledge), and natural heritage (including culturally significant landscapes, and biodiversity). Whatever shape they take, these things form part of a heritage, and this heritage requires active effort on our part in order to safeguard it.

Cultural heritage may be significant due to their present or possible economic value, but also because they create a certain emotion within us, or because they make us feel as though we belong to something - a country, a tradition, a way of life. The best way to preserve your cultural heritage, whatever it may be, is to share it with others.

## *The importance of preserving heritage, tradition and race*

Cultural heritage and natural history of a nation has a very high value and is unique. It is an identity that can be introduced to the world. Cultural heritage affirms our identity as people because it creates a comprehensive framework for the preservation of cultural heritage including cultural sites, old buildings, monuments, shrines, and landmarks that have cultural significance and historical value. Culture and its heritage reflect and shape values, beliefs, and aspirations, thereby defining a person. It is important to preserve our cultural heritage, because it keeps our integrity as people.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself, but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups as well as, mainstream social groups within a State and is as important for developing States as for developed ones.

### *Intangible Culture of the Cooking Heritage of Bangladesh*

Every community has a different culture of cooking. It depends on the environment, economy, culture and tradition of the specific area. For example, different spices are used in different areas during cooking. Due to this variation, the taste, colour, smell, and the chemical ingredients of the food are changed. The commercial industry has developed because of the different food culture. Many people are involved economically.



The different aspects of ethnic food

we see are: Italian, French, Chinese, Indian, Thai etc. Considering the varieties of cooking culture, it can be seen that the cooking of Bangladesh has largely been circulating on the very common issues of the traditional cooking method. In the cooking method, many Perso-Arabic cooking elements, along with materials and the reflection of the involvement of the Indian state of West Bengal is particularly noticeable. Crossing the territorial boundaries, this cooking style is spread throughout the world. Bangladeshi cuisine is also famous in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and other countries around the world.

Bangladeshi cuisine is the national cuisine of Bangladesh. It is dominated by Bengali cuisine and has been shaped by the diverse history and riverine geography of Bangladesh. Moreover, this country has a tropical monsoon climate.

### *Bangladeshi Heritage of Cooking*

Historically, Bangladesh has earned the reputation of being, a land full of nature's bounties as evident from the vast expanses of its lush crop fields, borderland hills thickly covered with virgin forests and innumerable rivers and their tributaries, making it the world's largest delta.

Ancient chroniclers have described it as "a land of emerald and silver", "a garden fit for kings", or as "a paradise among countries". This is the reason for which Bangladesh has always attracted settlers, traders, and conquerors who turned the land into a vast melting pot of diverse races and cultures. Anniversaries, Fairs and Festivals form a vital part in the social life of ordinary Bangladeshis. The biggest religious festival is Eid-ul-Fitr. Widely celebrated festivals of other communities include Durga Puja of the Hindus, Christmas of the Christians and Buddha Purnima of the Buddhists.

In Bangladesh, spring is welcomed with music and dance. Bangladeshi national identity is rooted in a Bengali culture that transcends international borders and includes the area of Bangladesh itself, West Bengal and India.

In Britain, this heritage of Bangladeshi cuisine and traditional culture of cooking has been altered generation after generation, unfortunately losing its authenticity among the Bangladeshi and other South Asian communities. This culture of cooking traditional Bangladeshi dishes needs to be explored, preserved and revived in the local Birmingham community for the sake of preserving the traditional methods of cooking.

The project "Preserving the Cultural History of Bangladeshi Food" project has focused on the preservation of this Bangladeshi cooking heritage amongst Bangladeshis in Birmingham to whom this heritage acts as their pillar of identity. This project has spanned for eighteen months from June 2017 and it has helped the wider community understand the heritage of the cuisine that they would enjoy when visiting a friend's house or an Indian/Bangladeshi restaurant and when engaging in cooking traditional authentic Bangladeshi dishes.

### **1.1. About Bangladesh**

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Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries being the 92<sup>nd</sup> largest country in the world. With approximately 166 million

inhabitants living in an area of 55,813 square miles, there are about 2,940 persons per square mile. Most of the population (98 percent) is Bengali, with 2 percent belonging to tribal or other non-Bengali groups. Approximately 83 percent of the population is Muslim, 16 percent is Hindu and, 1 percent is Buddhist, Christian or belong to any other religion. The population growth rate is put at an average rate of 2 percent annually. The capital and largest city of Bangladesh is Dhaka which is often called the Rickshaw Capital of the world with more than 600,000 cycle rickshaws on the road every day.

Until 1947, Bangladesh was known as the East Bengal province and had been part of Great Britain's India holding since the 1700s. In 1947, Britain, in conjunction with India's leading indigenous political organizations, partitioned the Indian colony into India and Pakistan. The borders of present-day Bangladesh were established during the British partition of Bengal and India in 1947, when the region became known as East Pakistan. Formerly East Pakistan, Bangladesh came into being recognised officially only in 1971, when the two parts of Pakistan split after a bitter war which drew in neighbouring India.

**"Bangladesh"** is a combination of the Bengali words, *Bangla* and *Desh*, meaning the country or land where the Bangla language is spoken. This primary language called Bengali by most non-natives is not just spoke by Bangladeshis, but also by people who are culturally Bengali. This includes about 300 million people from Bangladesh, West Bengal, Bihar, as well as Bengali speakers in other Indian states. Since the independence in 1971, the national identity has evolved. Islamic religious identity has become an increasingly essential element in the national dialogue, evident by the many Islamic holy days which are nationally celebrated.

Bangladesh is still primarily a rural culture, and the village is an important spatial and cultural concept even for residents of the major cities. Most people identify with a natal or ancestral village in the countryside. Houses in the villages are commonly rectangular and are dried mud, bamboo, or red brick structures with thatch roofs. Many are built on top of earthen or wooden platforms to keep them above the flood line. The village household is a patrilineal extended compound, linked to a pond used for daily household needs, a nearby river that provides fish, trees that provide fruit (mango and jackfruit especially) and rice fields.

Food, rice and fish are the foundation of the diet; a day without a meal that includes rice is nearly inconceivable. Fish, meats, poultry, and vegetables are cooked in spicy curry sauces that incorporate cumin, coriander, cloves, cinnamon, garlic and other spices. Since a larger percentage of the population is Muslim, is it not uncommon for there to be less consumption of pork. Increasingly common is the preparation of *ruti*, a whole wheat circular flatbread, in the morning, which is eaten with curries from the night before. Three meals are consumed daily. Water is the most common beverage. Before the meal, the right hand is washed with water above the eating bowl. With the clean knuckles of the right hand the interior of the bowl is rubbed, the water is discarded, and the bowl is filled with food. After the meal, one washes the right hand again, holding it over the emptied bowl.

At weddings and on important holidays, plays a key role, are encouraged to their capacity.

At weddings, a food is biryani, a rice lamb or beef and a spices, particularly

If biryani is not eaten, a complete multicourse meal is served: foods are brought out sequentially and added to one's rice bowl after the previous course is finished. A complete dinner may include chicken, fish, vegetable, goat or beef curries and dal. The final bit of rice is finished with yogurt (*doi*). On other important occasions, such as the Eid celebrations, a goat or cow is slaughtered on the premises and curries are prepared from the fresh meat. Some of the meat is given to relatives and to the poor.

With a per capita gross national product (GNP) of \$350 and an overall GNP of \$44 billion, Bangladesh has been considered one of the poorest countries in the world. The only significant natural resource is natural gas. Most of the Bangladesh population are involved in the production or processing of agricultural goods such as rice, jute, pulses, wheat and



food guests eat to

common dish with blend of saffron.

some vegetables. Practically all agricultural output is consumed within the country.

In recent years, industrial growth has occurred primarily in the garment and textile industries. Jute processing and jute product fabrication remain major industries. Primary export markets are for jute (used in carpet backing, burlap, and rope), fish, garments, and textiles. Imports totalled \$7.1 billion in 1996 and largely consisted of capital goods, grains, petroleum, and chemicals.

The People's Republic of Bangladesh is a unitary parliamentary republic with a president, a prime minister and a unicameral parliament. Three hundred members of parliament are elected to the 330-seat legislature in local elections held every five years. Thirty seats are reserved for women members of parliament. The prime minister, who is appointed by the president, must have the support of most of the members of parliament. The president is elected by the parliament every five years.

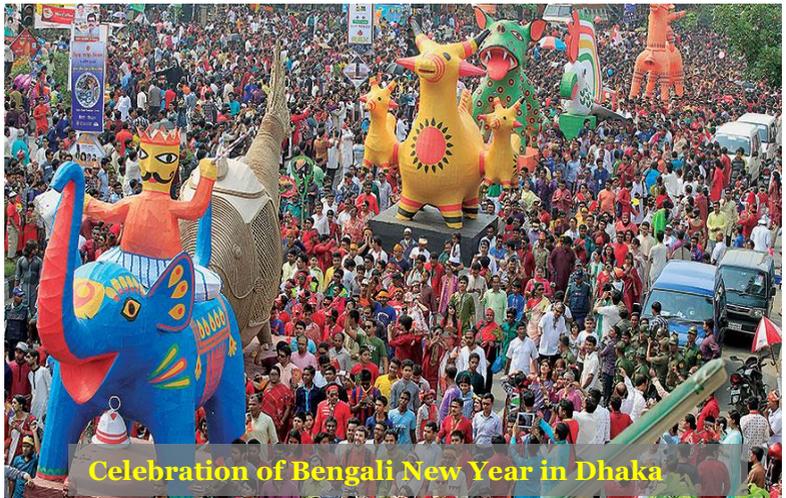
## **1.2. Bangladeshi People**

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Nearly 98 percent of the Bangladeshi population are Bengalis, most of whom are native to Bengal. The Bengali people have hybrid multiracial origins, including Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman and Austroasiatic ancestry. Bangladesh has a fairly young population with 34 percent aged 15 and younger and just 5 percent aged 65 and older.

The Bangladeshi diaspora is concentrated in the Middle East, North America and the United Kingdom. Several hundred thousand Non-Resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) have dual citizenship in Commonwealth countries like the UK and Canada.

In the early 21st century, much of the Bengali population remained rural, in both Bangladesh and West Bengal. In the rural context, men are typically responsible for most of the work outside the home, while women manage domestic matters. Labour is less clearly divided in urban areas, however there are many middle- and upper-class women who pursue careers in professions such as medicine and education.



### **1.3. Bangladeshi Settlers in the UK**

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After the founding of Bangladesh in 1971, a large immigration to Britain took place in the 1970s. Bangladeshis were encouraged to move to Britain during that decade because of changes in immigration laws, natural disasters such as the Bhola cyclone, the Bangladesh Liberation War against Pakistan, the desire to escape poverty and the perception of a better living. This immigration led to the formation of a British Bangladeshi Community. Many Bangladeshi men emigrated to the UK for employment during the 1950s and the 1960s and they are regarded as the first-generation Bangladeshi settlers, who upon arrival, settled in industrial cities and towns such as Birmingham, Luton, Bedford, Manchester, Leeds etc., just to mention a few.

The Immigration Act of 1971 imposed strict restrictions on the flow of immigration from Bangladesh to the UK. The act allowed only family members, i.e. wives and children under the age of sixteen to join their husbands and fathers, who were already settled in the UK. As a result, mostly family members emigrated following the passing of the emigrating legislation.

Throughout the 17th to early 20th centuries, the British East India Company employed over thousands of South Asian lascars and workers, who were mostly Sylheti Muslim and Punjabi Sikh, to work on British

ships. One of the earliest Bengali immigrants to Britain was Sake Dean Mahomet, a captain of the British East India Company who founded London's first Indian restaurant, the Hindoostane Coffee House in 1810.

Bangladeshi men who emigrated to Britain initially found work in the steel and textile mills across England, but when these industries collapsed, they turned to small businesses such as tailoring and catering. Many found work in the growing number of “Indian” restaurants and takeaways in the UK, most of which are owned- by Bangladeshis.



## **2. Bangladeshi Food Culture**

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The culinary culture of the Bangladeshi people arises from the influences of the indigenes, the neighbouring Bengali community and northern India. Rice and fish are traditional favourites with vegetables and lentils also forming a part of their staple diet. Fish as a staple diet is largely influenced by the river Brahmaputra, which meets the Bay of Bengal in Bangladesh.

Some food items are popular across the entire of Bangladesh, while some are regional favourites. For example, the use of freshwater fish is huge in Rajshahi and Rangpur areas. The town of Comilla is famous for its food culture, most notably the Tehari or Biryani, a rice-based dish. Saltwater fish are commonly found in Barisal and Khulna regions, which are also famous for their heavy use of the spice Piper chaba.

Bangladeshi cuisine also has a rich tradition of sweets. Mishti doi, or baked yogurt that is sweetened with charred sugar, is eaten between main course and desserts. The most common sweets and desserts are roshogolla, sandesh, rosh malai, phirni and malapua. These are typically made during festivals and other special occasions, like weddings. Pitha is also a special Bangladeshi sweet made from rice flour and sugar.

### **2.1 History of Bangladeshi Food Culture**

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Bengali food has inherited a large number of influences, arising from historical and strong trade links with many parts of the world. Bengal fell under the sway of various Turkic rulers from the early thirteenth century onwards and was then governed by the British for two centuries (1757-1947). The Jews brought bakeries to Bengal, the Marwaris contributed their sweet-making skills, also the exiled families of Wajid Ali Shah and Tipu Sultan brought different flavours of Mughlai cuisine. British patronage and the Babu Renaissance fuelled the development of these different culinary strands into a distinct heritage.

From the culinary point of view, some major historical trends influenced Bengali food. In addition, traditional Bengali cuisine is a comprehensive cultural model comprising of farming, ritual practices, seasonal variations, age-old skills, culinary techniques, as well as ancestral community customs and manners. It is made possible by collective participation in the entire traditional food chain: from planting and harvesting, to cooking and eating. The basis of the system is founded on rice, wheat and vegetables; unique farming methods such as seed + fertiliser + irrigation + pesticides technology (Green revolution); cooking processes such as boiling, stir frying, shallow frying, slow cooking of vegetables, in addition to meat, as well as singular utensils including grinding stones and stone mortars.

Furthermore, collectives of female cooks and other practitioners are devoted to cooking traditional cuisine which is found in the villages across Bangladesh and Indian state of West Bengal. Their knowledge and techniques express community identity, reinforce social bonds, as well as building stronger local, regional and national identities. Those efforts in the region also underline the importance of traditional cuisine as a means of sustainable development.

Ancient Bengali diets included rice, fish, honey, dairy and vegetables. The region was an administrative and commercial bastion in South Asia during early Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms and consequently the later Muslim sultanates. Mughlai cuisine developed in Bengal following the establishment of the Mughal province of Bengal in 1576, as part of the Mughal Empire. The city of Dhaka played an important role in influencing Bengali food that encompasses Mughal elements.

The British Empire ruled the region for nearly two hundred years between the 18th and 20th centuries, during the time whereby, Bengal Renaissance shaped the emergence of modern Bengali cuisine. During the British Raj (Britain's rule over India) period, Calcutta influenced many Bengali Dishes. In the southeast, Arakan cuisine from Burma influenced



dishes in Chittagong, particularly dried fish.

The Partition of Bengal in 1947 resulted in the separation of the Hindu-majority West Bengal from the Muslim-majority East Bengal, thus causing many shifts in demographics and culinary styles. Today, as opposed to the largely vegetarian cuisine in West Bengal, there is a greater emphasis on meat in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi cuisine incorporates a large number of cosmopolitan influences, a legacy of the region's historic trade links with the Arab world, Persia, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Burma. The Portuguese in Dhaka developed cheese, whilst the British introduced tea.

The worldwide rise of curry well beyond the Indian sub-continent to a virtual state of global domination was thanks in no small part to the exploits of the British East India Company and the British Raj rule in India. The British rapidly developed a love affair with their newly discovered spicy food and took the dishes back home. It was around the same time that a number of Indian sailors landed in the ports of Cardiff and London. These seamen, mainly from the region that would later be known as Bangladesh, initially opened cafes to cater for fellow Asians. However, they soon skilfully adapted themselves to be in accordance with British tastes, selling curry and rice alongside traditional fish and chips. The after-pub trade was capitalised on by staying open into the late hours, and it was here whereby the ritual of the post-pub curry was born.

The earliest British record of a curry recipe is to be found in a book by Hannah Glasse. Entitled "The Art of Cookery" which was published in 1747. This book provides a recipe for 'curry' that includes coriander seeds and pepper. The fourth edition of the book introduced ginger and turmeric as ingredients. Notably, the sensitivity of the British palette to spicy food meant that there was no mention whatsoever of chilli, despite having already been introduced to India by traders from the Americas around the late 15th century. The year 1780 saw the introduction of the very first commercial curry powder, allowing for curries to be prepared more easily than ever before. A soldier turned surgeon chef, Mr Sake Dean Mahomed, a man from the then-greater Bengal was the first to start

a restaurant serving curry on March 15, 1810 on Portman Square, London called the Hindoostane Coffee House.

Accordingly, in Britain, and subsequently around the world, the term 'curry' is generally recognized as any sauced Indian dish. Some all-time British favourites that have been regarded as the stuff of legend consists of Chicken Tikka Massala, Chicken Jalfrezi and Vindaloo. The origins of the Chicken Tikka Massala along with the Chicken Jalfrezi can be traced to British-Indian interaction during the colonial period, albeit the Vindaloo has a uniquely interesting story behind it. Before the arrival of the British, other European powers competed for power and influenced India. The most influential among them by far were the Portuguese, whose trading empire brought many commodities to the sub-continent from the New World and paved the way for other European traders. Thanks to their trade, chillies, potatoes, tomatoes and vinegar, are all now part of the staple diet. They were introduced to the sub-continent. The Portuguese

It was in this way that the gentleman's game came to be associated not with fish and chips, nor with the Sunday roast, nor even with the Friday night kebab, but rather with one of the spiciest of curries, the vindaloo.

## **2.2. Main Features of Bangladeshi Food**

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Bangladeshi cuisine is known for the diversity of its cuisines from different geographical regions of Bangladesh. Each area has its own method of preparing food by using an assortment of local herbs and spices, as well as vegetables and fruit. In Bangladeshi cuisine, some foods are popular across the entire region, whereby some are popular in specific areas.

### *Western region*

The western areas mainly include the Khulna and Jessore areas. Furthermore, it is very close to the West Bengal of India (the region with the second largest concentration of Bengalis in the world). The cuisines of these areas are known as authentic Bengali recipes. Mug dal with hilsha fish head, dalna, chachchari, luchi-payesh, hilsha with mustard, etc. are very popular in both the east and west parts of Bengal.



### *Northern region*

The northern part of Bangladesh has strong influences from Eastern Indian states, such as Assam and Manipur. The main characteristic of the food here is that it is mainly sweet and has a lot of uses of banana throats, raw papaya fruit, raw mango, urad lentils and grilled or smoked vegetables.



### *Central region*

The capital Dhaka and its territory region make up the central region, where fresh water fish are much more popular. Due to different ruling periods, the cuisine of this region is versatile. The Old Dhaka area is famous for the Nawab Awadhi cuisine. In Old Dhaka, kebabs, naans, bakharkhani, kachchi and pakki biriyani, haleem, mutton bhuni kichuri, and speciality mutton tehari are examples of dishes that became popular in other parts of the country.



### *Eastern region*

The staples of Sylheti people are mainly rice and fish. Their choice and method of cooking is distinctly different to non-Sylhetis. Traditional foods include sour dishes, such as tenga (or tok) cooked with vegetables, including amra, defal, olives (belfoi), dewwaa, amshi, mango choti (aam choti), kul (boroi), hatkhora (or shatkora), ada zamir (ada lembu) and any other sour lemon-like tasty vegetable. The 360 disciples mentioned earlier brought their distinct cultures and cooking styles. These included many types of meat dishes, including chicken.



### *Southern region*

The Southern region of Bangladesh includes the tribal areas that have their own style of cooking methods and ideas. Other than that, the most southern part of this region is mainly influenced by the Arakan cuisine of Burma. Dried fish (shutki), bamboo shoots, sea fish and many more are the specialties. They use lots of spicy flavours and coconuts in their food preparations.



## Main ingredients

Riverine Areas: Bengal's main staple food of sweet water fish comes from this riverine region. The rivers of Bangladesh are filled with thousands of types of fish. Ilish, Rui, Katol, Koi, Papda, Boal, Citol, Magur, Sing, Mola, Dhlea, etc. are favourites to all. Bangladesh's "Paddar Ilish" (Padma Ilish) is famous all over the world.

The staples of Bangladeshi cuisine include rice, which is a common component of most everyday meals and to a lesser extent, "ruti" (an unleavened whole wheat bread). "Atta" (a unique type of whole ground wheat flour) is used for making Luchi, Porota, Pitha, etc.

Lentils/Pulses (legumes) includes at least five dozen varieties; the most important of which are Bengal gram (chhola), pigeon peas, red gram, black gram (biuli) and green gram (mung bean). Pulses are used almost exclusively in the form of 'dal', except 'chhola', which is often cooked whole for breakfast and is processed into flour (beshon).



As a tropical country, a wide variety of green vegetables and fruits are available in Bangladesh. A host of gourds, roots and tubers, leafy greens, succulent stalks, citrons and limes, green and purple eggplants, red onions, plantains, broad beans, okra, banana tree stems and flowers, lotus roots, green jackfruit, red pumpkins, and mushrooms are to be found in the vegetable markets or kacha /sabji bazaar. Local and hybrid chicken, beef and mutton dishes are favourites across Bangladesh, as well as bird dishes, such as group duck and pigeons.



Rajshahi & Northern Regions: Rajshahi mangoes are considered as the best in the country. Sweet dishes are also popular. The Northern parts of the country is also renowned for growing pineapple, guava, watermelon, white or sweet melon, green bell apple, wood apple (kotbel), tropic grape, jujube (kul/boroi), pear, litchi, carambola (kamranga), etc.

Sylhet: A citrus fruit called shatkora is sometimes used in meat dishes. Freshwater fishes are more readily available than saltwater ones.



Chittagong and Southern Regions: Ziafat or Mezban feasts are popular throughout the area, where characteristic "heavy" dishes—dishes rich in animal fat and dairy—are featured. Saltwater fish and seafood are quite prevalent in these areas. Shutki (dried fish) is more available in this region than in other parts of the country. Bangladesh's Southern region is also popular worldwide for its fisheries industries with over 100 types of fishes exported every day from this region.

Barisal and Khulna: Piper chaba is a flowering vine in the family Piperaceae. It is called "Chui Jhal" in Bangladesh. Chui Jhal is originally the twig of a Piper chaba. It is a very expensive spice in Bangladesh, it has great medicinal value and tastes somewhat like horseradish.



People in Khulna, Bagerhat and Shatkhira cut down the stem, roots, peel the skin and cut it into small pieces. Then they cook them with meat and fishes, especially with mutton. They love the spicy pungent flavor of spice all year round. A wide range of sweet water fishes are available in this region, which are highly famous all over the country.

## **Bangladeshi meals**

Each dish is to be eaten separately with a small amount of rice or ruti, so that individual flavours can be enjoyed. The typical Bangladeshi fare

includes certain sequences of food. Two sequences are commonly followed, one for ceremonial dinners, such as a wedding and the other for day-to-day sequence. Both sequences have regional variations, and sometimes there are significant differences in a particular course in Bangladesh.

Ceremonial occasions, such as weddings, use to have elaborate serving rituals, but professional catering and buffet-style dining can be seen now. The traditions have not disappeared; large family occasions and the more lavish ceremonial feasts will still have the same traditional rituals.



Bangladeshi is a country of rivers, so it is no surprise that fish is a staple food. There is a common saying that “Fish and Rice make a Bengali”. The fish being described here is not any kind of fish rather, it is a river fish, be it from fresh or salt water. This comprises of a variety of fishes such as smoked, boiled or fried Hilsa (which is the national fish of Bangladesh), Trout, Eel, Butter fish, Ruhi, Katla, Mackerel, Reetha, Pungas Catfish and Walking Fish. Some others include Lobster, Red Snapper, Rupchanda, Tuna, Bhetki and Loitty, which are equally very popular.

### **2.3. Employment of Bangladeshi People in Catering and Hospitality Sector**

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The majority of Bangladeshis within Britain hail from the city of Sylhet, which is renowned for its food. According to the Bangladesh High Commission, throughout England, around 90 percent of all curry houses are owned by British Bangladeshis. Brick Lane alone has 57 Bangladeshi-owned curry houses. When the Bangladeshis arrived in Britain in the 1950s, the curry house was the first stepping stone to building a future in Britain. Since then, curry has become one of the most loved cuisines in Britain which is contributing significantly to the catering industry and generating around £4.5 billion for the economy.

In 1946, there were 20 restaurants or small cafes owned by Bengalis; in 1960 there were 300; and by 1980, more than 3,000. Presently, there are over 12,000 curry outlets in Britain employing more than 100,000

people, mostly of Bangladeshi origin. Also, 18 tonnes of Chicken Tikka Masala are consumed every week and on average a British adult will spend £1260 a year on curry. The curry houses now stand as a symbol of pride, history and heritage for the British-Bangladeshis.

In order to represent the catering industry, run by the ethnic Bangladeshis, the Bangladesh Caterers Association (BCA) was created in 1960. This association is responsible for approximately 12,000 British-Bangladeshi restaurants and Takeaways across the UK. It also ensures that the views of the Bangladeshi Curry Industry are represented in a co-ordinated and coherent way to the government and policy makers in the UK and internationally.

## **2.4. Comparison of Bangladeshi Food with other Cultures**

Although there are major differences between the Bangladeshi cuisine and those of other cultures, there appears to be some similarities between the Bangladeshi and Indian cuisines. For example, bread and rice are commonly served as starters in both cultures but with slight differences. Whereas the Indians would typically serve basmati rice, Bangladeshis tend to serve standard white rice. Additionally, Bangladeshi breads typically are made of white wheat flour, not whole wheat flour like Punjabi or Northern Indian breads. Bangladesh is a majority Muslim country, unlike Hindu-dominated India, therefore beef features more prominently on its menus than those of Indians.

For desserts, Bangladeshis use milk as the base for many of them, as it is with Indian desserts. But instead of cooking the milk down, Bangladeshis separate it into its curds and whey, then soak the whey in sugar. An example is the Mishti doi which is a sugared yogurt dessert.



### **3. Bangladeshi Food Heritage**

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Bangladesh like every country has its own tradition of foods. Bangladeshi food heritage takes its origin from the regional variations of its history influenced by the Mughlai cuisine, and its river-line geography. The origin of aromatic dishes such as biriyani and korma that requires the use of a large array of spices along with an extensive amount of ghee has been credited to the influence of the Mughlai cuisine left behind by the Persian Rulers.

#### **3.1 Cooking Heritage Workshops**

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The project “Preserving the cultural history of Bangladeshi food” organised 15 workshops in three different areas of the inner-city of Birmingham. The areas are Aston, Small Heath and Sparkbrook. Each of the areas have several community centres/leisure centres where the members of the different minority ethnic people gather and enjoy the services. In our project, we mainly targeted the men and women of Bangladeshi origin. However, we also invited people from other South Asian nations, Africa and Britain.

The central focus of the workshops was to create a friendly environment to explore, revive and preserve the original Bangladeshi cuisine which was beginning to lose its authenticity in Britain. Clients from previous projects, particularly middle age women have said that the original taste of Bangladeshi cuisine was fading out from the food eaten in the local community due to the lack of knowledge, skills and experience in preserving the traditional recipes. Bangladeshi cuisines have been fused with British culinary taste and styles which is not only detrimental to the preservation of the traditional cuisines, but also to the younger generations who are gradually becoming unaware of these traditional cuisines. It was expected that from the workshops, awareness would be created to revert Bangladeshi cuisines back to its original form and therefore protect the history and heritage of Bangladesh.

The clients for the workshops were recruited through the distribution of flyers to various religious centres like mosques, churches, temples, community centres, door to door contact, telephone contact with the previous project clients, word of mouth and through coffee mornings at the community centres. These people were informed of the project and workshop activities. Furthermore, the people who were interested were given the dates relating to the workshop activities.

On the day of the workshop, clients were given two forms- a media consent form, ethnicity monitoring form and a feedback form to fill out at the end of the workshop. Then the volunteers and sessional worker set up the workshop.

The workshop activities included a talk on the history and traditions of Bangladeshi cuisine, the influences of various cultures on the Bangladeshi food and the change in taste and style of traditional cuisine in the UK. There were also discussions about the future prospect of Bangladeshi cuisines in Britain. Beneficiaries were given fun activity sheets to fill out and were given opportunities to tell about their stories of learning and practising cooking traditional dishes. We also received their views, regarding the current Bangladeshi food available in Indian restaurants in Britain.

The clients were offered tea and coffee and snacks in the break. They exchanged their views with the staff and volunteers during the 10-minute break.

After the break, the beneficiaries took part in the cooking demonstrations during the second phase of the workshops. All the health and safety measures had been taken beforehand. The staff and volunteers arranged the cooking ingredients along with the other necessary accessories for the demonstration. What ensued is that the clients were given a recipe of the particular dish of the day. They took part in the cooking demonstrations with great enthusiasm. Several traditional dishes of vegetables, fish and meats were prepared and tasted.

Volunteers assisted the project coordinator in the workshops. They distributed and collected the feedback forms and media consent forms.

Shortly thereafter, they assisted the beneficiaries in cooking, as well as taking photographs and filming on the workshop for the documentary.

### **3.2 Day out and Food Festival**

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New Hope Birmingham organised a day out with the food festival in Henle-on-Thames with the community people in August 2018. The participants included the people from the inner-city areas of Birmingham. It was a shared celebration with other projects and engaged both the young and elder community people. The day included visiting the place, games, food and river cruise in the river Thames. New Hope supported and shared the preparation of Bangladeshi food and drinks with the other participants, as well as part of the transport. People enjoyed the food and games. Typical Bangladeshi foods were served which included authentic Bangladeshi mutton biryani, egg curry, chicken noodles, vegetable curry, beef patties, mixed salad and soft drinks. Young people played football with the elder people. At the end of the day, everyone enjoyed the boat cruise in the river. It was extremely a fun-filled day.



### 3.3 Oral History Interviews

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Few of the interviews have been transcribed below for the readers:

#### **SUPARNA ROY NANDY**

Can you tell me about your background?

*In Bangladesh we lived in a joint family with my parents, my siblings in the same house and in my husband side they also lived in a joint family but not in Dhaka, it is in another district Khulna City with all their siblings, my husband's brother, my brother-in-laws, my sister-in-laws. In Dhaka where I lived before we came in the UK, we lived in a medium flat with my two children, my husband; our kitchen is separate, but we lived in the same house.*



Can you tell me how many siblings you have, your parents' profession?

*My father is a well-known politician in my country, now-a-day he is the opposition leader and my mother she's a house wife and my brother is a business man and my sister-in-law is an advocate and my sister is also a political leader, Executive leader of Bangladesh Nationalist Party and her husband is a government service holder.*

Can you tell me about your education in Bangladesh?

*In Bangladesh, I studied Home Economics, home management and housing. I completed my BSc in 2003 and Masters in 2005. After that I joined in the bank and in 2016, I joined in the MBA courses and I completed in 2009. I came in the UK and I completed MBA in 2016.*

Can you tell me about your first cooking experience?

*My first cooking experience, it is horrible thing maybe because that time I was 6, 7. I made some dough, rotis and parathas with my grandma. It was a horrible situation. After that I prepared some noodles, with my mum, puddings, simple recipes, our traditional recipe is too hard that time. That was my first experience. After that I learnt lots of things when I become grown up, or after my marriage, I prepared lots of traditional food. I learnt from my aunts, from my grandmothers both of my grandmothers, my sister in-laws mother in-law, my mother.*

**While growing up, what was your favourite dish to cook, the one you enjoyed the most cooking?**

*Most cooking..., lots of cakes in our traditional cakes, we call pitha, there are different kinds of shapes, some sweet dishes; it is our cultural, some are religion, some are regional areas and we make some vegetable dishes for our religious purpose, some mixed vegetables, vegetable fries like different shapes, there's different colours. You can say it is a variety kind of vegetables. Fish items, fish preparation is totally different. Some we prepare with different ingredients, different process. Their process also is different, sometimes we use steams, sometimes we fry, sometimes we made some dry fish and we can preserve it for 14 months, we can use it.*

**How big is fish in Bangladesh like how important is fish in Bangladesh?**

*Because in Bangladesh we depend on different kinds of river, with our geography, we are surrounded and divided in rivers. Some cities, some village are nearby some canals, some ponds that's why we depend on fish because it is a good source of protein and in our countries most of the people, they like fish and fish is easy to get, as you can get it from your near ponds. If you're villagers, you can get it from canals which ever one is beside your area. It is a big market and this big market is also exporting abroad. That's why we are depending on fish for our protein source, for our marketing, for our economics, lots of things depend on fish and fish also is a traditional food in our country. We live in our country with different minorities, different ethnicities, different religions, their different regional areas, their different recipes also depend on fish items. Fish is massively important in our country.*

**During special occasion, what kind of meals are prepared?**

*It depends on which ceremony you celebrate. In wedding ceremonies, we prepare different cultural things. Two days before we celebrate the Halal. We mainly call Halal the after-wedding reception, we also celebrate another reception and all things we did. If it is evening time or afternoon meals, the recipes most of the time is one rice item. This is friend rice or pilau rice or sometimes we celebrate with biryani and one dessert item, one appetiser, some appetiser like we call tikiya and fish items, one fish fry or fish curries, chicken curries or meat curries and one sweet dish like rice pudding, some drinks like biriani is made with card because it is good for health or digestive systems. After that, lots of things we celebrate with, some sweet dishes we call misti, different colours, different shape sweet dishes we prepare for the wedding ceremony and we also do this for birthday celebration is like get together parties and our cultural festivals we celebrate with food like our first Bengali month. Bengali year we start in April, middle of April that time we celebrate with our traditional food like Bengali food, rice, fish, some dried fish item, some dried food like sweet dishes, different cultural recipes we celebrate with different regional foods*

**What is the importance of cooking in your life?**

*It is significantly important because both my children like food, home food prepared by me and my husband also likes my food recipes and I also like to prepare food for my families and for my friends.*

**You mentioned that you moved here to the UK from Bangladesh, can you tell me about the last food, the last meal that you ate before you left Bangladesh.**

*Maybe someone invited us, my husband's friends, we went there in a food shop like we called it Biryani house, we ate some biryani maybe, I forget.*

**Can you tell me about moving to the UK, what your experience was like leaving Bangladesh and coming to the UK.**

*That's totally different things because our country's religion is different, but in here there's food preparations you can enjoy because lots of*

*Bangladeshi people is also living here. We can easily get Asian foods, which preparation we made their ingredients, we can easily get from food shops or supermarkets. They also bring some our country's Asian foods that's why internationally I moved here, but I have that not much a problem with the food or any culture*

### **Talking about the weather, the environment**

*Weather is totally different because we are from tropical country, there's warm weather every time we are sweating in horrible sweating, because temperature is 35, 32. Most of the time, winter season only for 2 month, 3 month it stayed. Winter also maybe is minimum temperature, some areas it is 4 degrees, but some areas is 16, 14 degrees Celsius, and in here is minus 4 degrees, sometimes is snowing and is different things.*

**When you were travelling to the UK, did you come with some ingredients to use in cooking or were you able to find the ingredients here as soon as you got to the UK?**

*No, I am not taking took any kind of ingredients because when I came here that time I came as a visitor. I lived with my relatives, my friends, my husband friends, their home I know there is everything we can get, every ingredient we get here. Some foods, our local foods, vegetables there is not available, but you can bring with you any kinds of food or vegetables.*

**I mean looking at the experience that you had cooking in Bangladesh, has that changed since you came to the UK because of maybe ingredients are not available like you said UK or what has changed about your cooking since you left Bangladesh and came to the UK?**

*Some food I make with the local ingredients, we can easily get these things and some not that much of difference. Some change ingredients, I just changed with another ingredient which is available in here, not that much of difference because in here locally, lots of Bangladeshi people living here and we can easily get ingredients in here that why I haven't any problems getting ingredients.*

So, would you say that you still make the same dishes you used to make in Bangladesh since you came to the UK or has it changed a bit?

*Some little bit change, not that much. But little bit I change here, some availability in here daily milk, daily products is available. Some pizza food you can easily preserve in your fridge but in our country, we can get. However, most of the time we like to prepare in our home and in here we can easily get food, food shops and we also get in the cities in our country. There are city people, they can easily get food from food shops, different restaurants, but in village areas there is not everybody's support. There is local food like small size food shops and sometimes they are not heightening, that's why most village people are dependent on cooking inside their home, but not in outside. But in here, everybody can enjoy outside food, inside, own preparation food but in our country, villagers do not enjoy these things.*

Have you also incorporated some of the British recipes into your cooking or do you just stick with the Bangladeshi recipes that you know?

*No, No, I think lot of things, fish and chips and fries' item, some sweet dishes, flapjacks. My husband, my son always like these things and mashed potatoes with peas or chickpeas or some fish fingers, my daughter likes fish fingers. I like onions, and some sweet dishes, rice pudding, pancake. I like lot of things from here.*

And would you that say your children enjoy both the British meals and Bangladeshi meals also?

*Yes, my son and daughter they like lots of things here, but my daughter doesn't like any fish. She only likes fish fingers and my son also he doesn't like any small fish, any kinds of fish because of fish bones inside and that's why they mostly like British recipes.*

So, have you experienced any changes in your food since you moved here to the UK or is still the same?

*Some breakfast item in our country we make Rotis. In morning breakfast sometimes, we make vegetables, some lentils. But, in here we depend mostly on cereals. We can easily get cereals and some bread items and pancakes. If you easily can get these things, then why you*

*make. Sometimes I make Rotis in here but not very often. But in our country, most of the time I prepare Rotis in my home.*

**Can you tell me about one recipe that you love to cook the most?**

*One recipe is Biryani item and some meat item*

**Can you like give a summary of how you prepare the meal?**

*Biryani is a very huge recipe, huge ingredients. First of all, we prepare it if it is chicken or meat. If it is meat then we marinate it with ginger, curry paste, turmeric, cumin and we marinate it for overnight with yoghurt. After that, we slowly cook it, after it is tender, then we fry it, small sizes potatoes, if it is big size potatoes, we make it half, then we fry it, then we cook the rice for half boil not full boil because of all the recipes. All the ingredients we just mix, not mix we layer it. First, we put some meat item and over this we layer with rice, then potatoes, then cover it, we cooked it in low heat for 20mins to 25mins then we cover it and serve it with fry onion, golden brown fry onions and sometimes with one drink item, we call boriyani and we make with yoghurt and some mint and black peppers. This item most of the time we want to change some food habit at times, we make biryani at home.*

**Can you tell me how good your daughter is and if she has started picking up on these recipes from you?**

*My daughter she is only 7 years, sometimes she make cakes with me because she likes to paint and she likes to put some ingredients colourful things, she also learned from school, that's why she likes to make cake with me and she likes to help make dough sometimes. I make rotis that time, she learnt how to make dough that time, she also help me put some one tea spoon, put some one tea spoons, she just play with me like making food is one kind she enjoy.*

**Based on all that we have said about food and cooking, is there any other thing else that you would like to tell us about food and cooking that we haven't talked about?**

*Food item in my country, in our school we studied food and nutrition and what it is. You have to learn it because for the girls you have to*

*learn it, not for boys and we learn some food values, what is nutritious here, what is the good for the mother, ill people, older people, lots of things we learn from our school, this studies, lots of things I learnt from this subject for my family for when my son and my daughter was born, I learn some child development courses from this subject that's why I ought to mention it because in here I don't know if they have nutrition classes or home economic subjects in GCSE because my son studies from year 9 or year 10, he didn't learn it. But in our country, girls must learn this subject and it is also helpful for their whole life because lots of things we know in practical ways. Our teachers told us, teachers, we learnt some experience with our classmates, our friends, they also share their recipes with us, their regional food they share with us. This is I don't know in here sometimes they celebrate food festivals, like sharing cakes but not like that, these things are different from our country.*

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## **NOOR MAHAL**

### **Tell me about your background**

*My name is Noor Mahal, I was born in Dhaka and educated in Dhaka. While doing my HSC I got married. Then moved to Poland and started my life there. When I was pregnant I came in Poland. The reason that I came to Poland is that I had an accident in Dhaka. After that my brothers brought me to Poland. I studied in Poland. Then I moved to Italy and settled there.*



*New country new people. I started everything anew.*

*My father and his family lived in West Pakistan. After partition, they returned to Nagorbari of Bangladesh. They settled in Nagorbari. My father was an Engineer in Feni district of Bangladesh. For that purpose we settle in there. We are 7 brothers and 2 sisters. Brothers are all elders and we sisters are youngsters. They used to do business and most of the*

*time they stayed outside home. They are now settled in Europe. We two sisters settled in Italy.*

*I got married against the will of my family. It was a love marriage. Got married in July 1993. I have two daughters one is 22 and another 14 years. My husband was a football player. When we got married, he used to play at that time. Now we are settled here. He is doing a job now and I am also working as a career.*

### **What are your earliest memories of food/cooking?**

*I was too interested in cooking. But my family never let me go in to kitchen as I was younger, also they loved me a lot. My father loved me a lot but used to say, “can I have meals cooked by my daughter before I die”?*

*One day my father was telling his sister to provide me with vegetables to cook as he desired to eat food cooked by me. Then I cooked and the compliment I got from my father was amazing. He said, I have never eaten such delicious food and it is the best of all foods in the world.*

*I did not have the experience of cooking before. I didn't know how to cook. My husband could cook, make flat breads. He asked me that he wanted to teach me how to cook. Then we came abroad. And here I am a regular cook of Bangladeshi food.*

### **Importance of these cooking experience in your life**

*As in a woman's life, the cooking experience is very important. To me it is also very important. I was very curious about cooking. I was very interested and even nowadays, I cook all the food of my home. I get most pleasure in cooking than any other thing in the world.*

### **What sort of food do you like to cook most?**

*I can cook various types of dishes from various countries. But there are some Bangladeshi recipes which I like to cook most. I like vegetable dishes which are really delicious. I like to cook vegetable korma which is tastier than chicken dishes.*

### **Tell me about your last meal before leaving Bangladesh.**

*Last time I came from Bangladesh in 2015. Last meal was in my aunt's house. I can still feel the taste. She cooked boiled rice from broken rice, several chutnies etc. She made the chutney with fresh garlic, green chillis and coriander leaves. At that time my husband, my younger daughter and my niece accompanied me. They all enjoyed the food.*

**Tell me about your moving to the UK and leaving Bangladesh.**

*Four of my brothers were settled in Italy. I was accompanied by my sister. So, all my relatives were in Italy. This made me emigrate to Italy.*

*The reason that I came to UK is that I get the same environment that in Bangladesh in terms of food, clothes, people etc. I am here for 2 and a half years but I never felt out of water. It feels like I am in Bangladesh. We celebrate all Bangladeshi occasions.*

*Regarding UK food, I find all the ingredients here, but the difference is the freshness. One cannot compare between foods in Bangladesh and those in the UK. Bangladesh has its own style. So, that is missing.*

*There is no match between foreign and Bangladeshi food.*

*It's true that I learned a lot of recipes. There are few recipes which are unique of its own taste and nature. So, Bangladeshi original recipes are obviously different than those produced here in the UK.*

**Tell me one recipe you would like to cook most.**

*Cabbage Roll with Rice and Chicken*

*Boil chicken, cut into small pieces, mix coriander leaves, onion, green chilli, black pepper, salt. Then add boiled rice. Leave aside. Cabbage is boiled. Then rolled in the rice mix. Make several rolls. Put them in a frying pan. You need tomato sauce. Then fry in oil for 1 hour at low flame.*

**Tell me any other thing you would like to add.**

*This project seems very important to me. We can showcase our heritage to the world through this project.*

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## **DR. SALEHA JEBA**

### **Tell me a bit about your background**

*Basically, I came from a big family, I have 5 siblings including me, we are 6 children from our parents. I came from Bangladesh basically. I used to spend time in Saudi Arabia. Over there I used to spend over educate because my father was a GP over there and then I return to Bangladesh. I completed my GCSE, A-levels and then I completed my MBBS and after marriage, I started to come here in this country. I started my job as a doctor now near about 7 years, I am enjoying my job.*



### **Can you tell me a bit about your earliest memories of food?**

*As far as I remember when I was very little, my mum used to cook, so during that time we used to stay in Saudi Arabia as I have already mentioned and over there my mum did cook you know Bangladeshi food. She used to use different spices and we really enjoyed a lot of Bangladeshi dishes over there.*

### **Can you tell me more specifically about the dishes?**

*As you already know, we do prepare different type of curries like for example, chicken curries or fish curries. Fish curries are more popular in our country, because in our country there are lots of rivers, but people do get fish very easily, so the fish curries are very popular in our country.*

### **Could you tell me about your last meal before leaving Bangladesh?**

*The last meal I can remember, my mum did make it. It was 'ilish polau'. Ilish is very popular fish in our country and she used to make ilish polau by using different type of spices and we really enjoyed a lot. Obviously, you know my sisters and brothers, my parents, and my other few relatives attended the dinner party before I leave the country.*

**Can you tell me a bit about your moving to the UK and leaving Bangladesh?**

*I think I have already mentioned, after my marriage I came here to settle in this country. Basically, I graduated in medicine, so I started again study to get the registration to practice as a doctor in this country and after completing all of my exams I started my job as a doctor.*

**What was your perception of food in the UK?**

*In UK we are very fortunate that we have lots of Indian restaurants. If we feel bored, if we do not like to cook we can easily go to the restaurants, we can easily have different types of curries and rice, but most of the time we do prepare the home-made food which our children enjoy a lot.*

**Tell me one recipe you like to cook the most**

*Basically, I like to cook different types of curries like you know mutton curry, chicken curry, fish curry but the children they do like meat and chicken, but my husband he likes fish curry, so I need to cook different type of curries. Most of the time I need to prepare chicken curries because my husband and my children, both of them they like how I prepare chicken curry. I do prepare in a simplest way most of the time, so if I begin from the start; in a saucepan or in a fry pan, I put the oil like 3 to 4 tablespoons then I add the onions, chopped onions and then ginger, garlic paste then those become a bit red or brownish. I add different type of spices, dry spices like chilli powder, turmeric powder and few other powders for example, 'garam masala' powder and then I put small amount of chopped tomatoes, sometimes tomatoes puree and then I add the chicken. I do fry at the beginning to let the water you know evaporate and when it becomes dry then I add bit, small amount of water. It takes near about half an hour to prepare the chicken curry. It is the easiest curry because I am busy, I need to work but for that*

*reason I prefer to cook chicken curry most of the time and obviously we do take boiled rice, sometimes we take chapatti with chicken curry*

**Is there anything else you would like to add?**

*Yes Obviously, I like to thank all the officers, volunteers and well-wishers of New Hope Birmingham for organising and running such a beautiful presentation which obviously brings our culture and heritage to a foreign country and I am really proud that I can represent my country, my food, my value, my culture to this project.*

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**DR. SULTANA KUDRATI KHODA**

**Can you tell me about your background?**

*I am the second daughter of my parents, I was born in 1976, in a rural area of Bangladesh and after that, I grew up in the semi-urban area because my parents used to work there, both were government service holder. My mother, two siblings, two sisters,*



*I spent ten years that means up to my school final exam I stayed. The area's name is "Shaturia", this is another district like "Kajipu", it is very close to Dhaka city the capital of Bangladesh. As I told you, it is asemi-urban area and so I had the opportunity to see the lifestyle of village people and the urban people as well*

**Can you tell me about your parents' profession?**

*They both worked in government organisation, my father was an engineer of Bangladesh telecommunication department and my mother was a family planning officer. Both of the jobs were public oriented, so we had a huge opportunity to meet different people from different community because you know the family planning department and the telecommunications, they always had people coming to my mum's office, as well as my dad's office, thus, we always had the chance to meet people. Furthermore, we also lived in the semi-urban area which often*

*resembled a small town, so we always got the flavour of town life and as it is adjacent to the other village, rural areas. Consequently, I also had the chance to see and visit the village very often*

### **Can you tell me more about your birthplace in Bangladesh?**

*It is in Shaturia Opujala which is a very small unit of Bangladesh and there is like 480. I think the Opujala and the district is 64 like if you think West Midlands is a district, so in Uk it is comparison to Bangladesh there are 64 too. I grew up in the Monaco district. This is very close to Dakar city and it is very nice area. I would say, people are very friendly and as my father was a government service holder, a lot of people used to visit our house as this was very close to the office and there is a very huge agricultural land government property, albeit my father used to give allotment to the other people and they would grow crops and there is other small pieces of land in front of our residence. Moreover, my father, me and my sister used to cultivate our own vegetable there. So, it is a good community, neighbours were very friendly, so I enjoyed the agricultural activities, fishing and some other like poultry activities, some carpenter. Like a lot of people made the village fair, village market, it was fitting, like there is a big gathering and there was another market every morning,) so I used to see all the things in my life.*

### **Can you tell me more about your education in Bangladesh?**

*I studied 10 years in a school in Shaturia, subsequently I got an admission in government technical college that is in Dakar city and I stayed in my dad's official residence, but my mother still was in Shaturia because she didn't transfer with my father. After passing higher secondary certificate exam, I got admission in Bangladeshi university for bachelor's degree in Agriculture. It was a 4 years course, but I studied in 6 years because of session jam. It was problem in Bangladesh sometimes that jam doesn't heal on time, so the student would have to wait, and it prolonged their student life. As I was in touch with the village people in my school life early life, it helped me a lot to complete my bachelor's course in Agriculture because I had a lot of practical exams based on agricultural activities, cultivation of rice, maize, sugarcane and making the nursery bed or something like that, so I enjoyed a lot. Although as a woman it was really unknown that*

*time to study bachelor's in agriculture, but I enjoyed, and I got good results in my final exam and after that I completed master's in plant pathology and I came in the UK to study another master's in Brighton university. I did that and completed my PhD.*

**Can you tell me about your married life and children?**

*I married my classmate He was my classmate from undergraduate course and we know each other from 1996 but we got married in 2007 and we have one daughter, she is 4+ she will be 5 in September, and she is attending nursery.*

**So, what are your earliest food or cooking memories?**

*It's very good, actually my mother was not an expert in cooking in her early life and that's why when we were younger, we used to cook and my mother always invited her neighbours, as well as other office colleagues to support her, even with festivals or anything because she was not confident that time to cook huge amount of food and different dishes, but she allowed us to learn from her colleagues or anybody. Not only for cooking, anything we wanted to learn, my mother always helped us, always provide the money to buy the accessories or whatever we want so that's why in my childhood, I had the chance to learn cooking from different people and my father also had an interest to cook so he also sometimes helped cooking and as we had the backyard garden, so we always feel very pleased to have these crops from our garden and cook. Also, as it was a very semi-urban area, we had the chance to eat healthy fresh fruits, vegetable, fish everything from the market, and that's all. I can remember, my sister also the same, we liked to do all the household work, we feel very interest for everything and that's why me and my elder sister we both learnt from childhood.*

**So, from your memories of cooking at a very young age, what was your best meal to make?**

*I prefer to cut fish especially the "ilsha" our national fish. It possesses a very specialised smell and you can eat it as fry, curry or whatever. I remember, in every Thursday there is a weekly open market, lots of people from neighbouring village used to come to and sell their products. Daily market is only for local people, they normally used to*

come, but for the Thursday market, it is huge. Every Thursday we used to buy the “ilsha” fish, the biggest one that time, it was very popular. I used to buy it because I didn’t have any brother, so I used to go with my dad. I like to do shopping, so I normally used to go daily, weekly, whatever, we liked to go with my dad, bought it and cut it and cook. The fry ilsha fish, I can remember

So, tell me about one dish that was associated with an occasion or a celebration that you remember?

As we are Muslims, we have basically two main festivals, religious festivals. One recently we celebrated, that is Eid el fitr after performing Ramadan for one month fasting. We celebrate that Eid el fitr and we have another two and a half months later of that celebration Eid el altar that is, we sacrifice animal on that occasion, so, we used to celebrate this one. So normally we used to celebrate Eid el fitr that is, after one-month Ramadan that is, in my mum and dad’s workplace in semi-urban area but the other one when they sacrifice the animal, that one we used to celebrate with our grandparents’ house in Gajipur, where my birthplace is. Actually the celebration for the children like we used to buy new clothes, a lot of food, and we always hide our dresses, not allow to see anybody the neighbour people and then my mum used to cook and we supported our mum to cook when we grew up and confident to cook and we always feel interest “mum don’t help us, we want to do ourselves”. So, we woke up very early in the morning and then we started cooking, my father will shower and wear the new cloth and then went for morning prayer, the Eid prayer and we are women and there was no scope to go for prayer. Sometimes in this country or in the urban area or Dakar city, some places, the mosque there are places for women prayer in there, but that time in the village and the semi urban area, normally women doesn’t go for Eid prayer, but they do pray in the home, so we visited neighbour’s house, anywhere. We used to get money, gift, from my parents, senior relatives or neighbour whatever. It was like we used to hold purse to collect and hold the money and at the end of the day we started to count how much money we got, me and my sister. It is really nice memory. The same thing happened in my village, the grandparents’ house because that time we used to call our family cousin, my father’s brothers, sisters, my grandfather, grandmother and after Eid prayer, they sacrifice the animal. It is huge blood and a lot of meat so, this is different festival and

*I like to from previous night, we used henna to draw different design on our hand and our uncles, aunties, we didn't need to cook because we are guest in their house so, one or two dishes we used to cook but they didn't allow us to cook because we are guest and you just visiting for few days so you don't need to cook. It is a different feeling and one thing I would say, as I celebrate two different Eid in two different area, the food habit and the food style, you know the Eid day little bit different, is like some people like different food and other relatives don't cook but the basic thing is like pilau rice, chicken roast kurma or beef puna you know these types of very common thing but for other dessert type is totally different so we enjoyed everything*

**So, tell me more about the difference in desserts in both cases?**

*The main thing for dessert, milk is very common, and we call "Shemai" after boiling the milk, we add sugar and then we can add the Shemai like noodles, is very fine structure if you compare the noodles, it is very thick but the shemai is very thin. So, we have to soak it in the milk, this is one thing. We also have "Shauta" that is plain rice we boil and add some colour, food colour, then we fry it on butter and we add sugar and some spice. This is dry, there is no milk, so this is Shauta. Some other sweet like you can boil rice in milk then add sugar that is, rice pudding. Some people use sugarcane sugar, you know the normal sugar that is also made from sugarcane juice but this is refined, it is white colour but we add another sugar sweet that is very brown colour that is not that much refined that is called "Gur" and from date juice in Bangladesh, people made different kind of sweet and that sweet also used for cooking rice pudding. So, it's a different dish people normally make in Bangladesh*

**What was the importance of cooking while growing up for you?**

*Cooking of course is very important, if you know different cooking then you can enjoy, you can entertain people and personally I love cooking, and I love to feed people even from my family life, that is in childhood, I told you that my mother didn't know that much cooking but now she's very much experienced, but that time she always helped us to learn and it helped me a lot in my hostel life in my university accommodation, you know sometimes the university canteen food is not that much tasty and we had to cook supporting food for changing the taste. As I knew*

*everything, and I enjoyed cooking, so I always cook different dishes even at home, in my hostel university hall. Now I am a mother so as I know everything, in this country there is no family or supporting family worker like those people help household work in this country but it is common in our country so we have to do everything, cooking, cleaning, this and that, everything in here and different taste, some people like something that others doesn't like so we have to think about this, not only this, nowadays I'm very much cautious about the nutrition value and the health issue whether it is healthy for me or not or who is eating. So, adding the spice and the oil, fat and anything, cholesterol amount, everything I try to maintain in a balance.*

**Can you tell me about your last meal before you left Bangladesh?**

*It was 21<sup>st</sup> of October in 2004, and I can remember I was that time unmarried and I was coming alone so it was really challenging, also I was very much excited, but I was not scared. Although, I didn't have that much idea about the life of UK, but I was thinking how my life can be, how I have to maintain my home life something and some of my relatives visited me as I was coming so they made some food, also my mum cooked because there is like a gathering of my farewell and my flight was in the early morning so it was like a dinner party at our home like rich food like Pilau, roast and fish, some sweet but as it was Ramadan time when I came, so after fasting the whole day it was very difficult to eat but still in the morning I had to fly so we just tried to eat the food.*

**Now tell me about your move to the UK, the experience you had when you got here?**

*Definitely when I was alone, and I was just completed my masters and I was admitted in another master's course in the university of Brighton. I used to live in London, but I travelled from London to Brighton and it was an expensive journey and food, also different thing because we Bangladeshi people normally use to eat rice with spicy curry but I struggled a lot to find the available veg and other Bangladeshi spices, but gradually I learnt from different people, my neighbour, my friends, I asked them where I can find this spice and this and that and I can remember one thing parsley is not very common in Bangladesh so I was looking for Coriander leaf and I bought parsley, I thought it is*

coriander. When I went home, and I tried to have a smell, it does different, it does not like coriander leaf. I thought British coriander maybe like that because everything looks different, a lot of different food, fruits, in the supermarket then I asked one of my aunty that “why is this like that”, then she told me it is not coriander, it is parsley. So, this is my first shopping experience then fast food, junk food, I started working in a fast food shop that is, KFC so I learnt a lot different food name even the chicken names, different part of chicken called different names like thigh, wings, breast something like that but I enjoyed it because I always try to adapt wherever I live.

### So, do you still cook here, in the UK?

Yes, I have to cook, and I learnt to cook English dishes, Turkish dishes also, from different friends because I like cooking, but I like to learn cooking from different dishes, sweet dish or some other English dish. I like the stuffed pepper, stuffed aubergine, we normally bake aubergine and make the smashed, but in the shop, they cook differently, and it is called ‘Baba ganoush’. It is a Turkish or Middle Eastern, I can’t remember but I know that name ‘Baba ganoush’. It is a very funny name, whenever now I cook baked aubergine like we bake it in the oven, then we peel the skin and then we smash it, it is called ‘Baba ganoush’.

### Do you see the recipes that you used in Bangladesh here?

Initially when I first arrived in the UK, I bought some spices with me but still we needed some basic things. Even the cooking accessories, like normally in this country people use chopping boards and knives but it is very uncommon in Bangladesh, most of the people still sit down and they have different types of knives and they cut the vegetable and other meat, fish whatever, it is called “Boti”. So, for the spice, I said I didn’t find everything as soon as I arrived. I had some, but I learnt from different people and it is very difficult because the English name is different, so it is very difficult to find that area. Sometimes it is not on the whole spice, it is like a ground spice, so it is very difficult to know what type of spice it is. So, some other thing also like fish, we used to eat is not frozen but, in this country, most of the Bangladeshi fish are frozen. There is some open market, there is some local market in here they sell sea fish or some other fish but that time, where I used to live, it was not available for the normal fish. The meat also the same,

*everything chilled or frozen, so that is why the taste is different. Our vegetable I would say taste totally different, our cauliflower, our cabbage, onion, whatever, our onion is very spicy here I find a bit sweet taste, something like that. We have the garlic, is very small size, here is very big size something like that but nowadays as I have passed 14 years in this country, I try to manage and it is okay now, everything is okay, I don't mind.*

**So, can you tell me how you were able to cope when you first came not having those ingredients you were used to, how were you able to cope with cooking?**

*It was not in one day. Because sometimes I had to ask, sometimes I had to borrow from my relatives if it is not available. Specially the green chillies. Our green chillies are very very hot but in the supermarket I found the green chillies very very blunt. It was really difficult. We use green chillies in egg omelette. As the chillies are not hot, it was not really tasted like ours. I didn't mind because I knew I had to stay. That's the main thing. If anyone goes to anywhere in the world, if it is like if he or she thinks something different. It depends on the status of your stay and depends on the setup of your mind. If there is no other way, I start to accept. I stay here permanently. I occasionally go to Bangladesh, so when I go I like to use the Bangladesh ingredients. When I stay here, I use ingredients from here. I am a very much adaptable person.*

**In relation to the traditional dishes of the UK, are there any similarities of the dishes of Bangladesh?**

*In this country there is a lot of Indian restaurants. It's like Bangladeshi in terms of staff and food. I found what specific spices they use is called curry sauce and curry powders. It's not common in Bangladesh. This type of spices particularly they are used by the people of specific region. Most of the staff is from Sylhet. I found every Sylheti family I visited, restaurants that they use curry sauce, curry powder. And people use a lot of yoghurt. Some leafy vegetables, I found different. But onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric powder or chilli powder are common. Definitely I never used curry powder in Bangladesh and I never seen anyone using in Bangladesh also.*

**What are your daughter's reactions to these various dishes?**

*Well, I tried to give her normal food. When she was younger I used to give normal hotchpotch food. Now a days she does not like spicy food. But I tried to make her like but it is difficult. You can adjust at home, but when visiting your friends house, it is difficult. But she likes different foods.*

**What changes do you see over the years of your food and cooking habits?**

*Of course, starting from shopping we used to use fresh ingredients. Our spice is different. Coriander and turmeric are fresher than those available here. Because of the temperature and climate, one thing is the food here is more resistant to decomposition as the temperature is low. But in Bangladesh, foods rot easily if not preserved in the fridge. The same vegetable we eat here has different taste to those eaten in Bangladesh. Because of the soil and environment.*

**Tell me one recipe you would like to cook most.**

*I like korma. Chicken korma and roast are similar terms. So this is made of chicken, yoghurt, some spices. Normally for roast, people cut chicken into 4 pieces for roast cooking. If the guests are new, we make bigger pieces as it looks good. I prefer small pieces as I do not like to waste and I am an expert in Environmental science specially waste management. After washing the chicken and draining the water, I use garlic, onion and the ginger paste. Add salt and put plain yoghurt into it and leave for half an hour to marinate. Then I fry the chicken pieces. At the same time, I mix some other specialised spices. I use poppy seeds, mace and nutmeg. I crush it and make paste. After frying the chicken, I take out. Still use the oil to put the marinade with these spices. Fry for few minutes and then add the chicken. Then add the fried onion. Sometime use sugar in it. When the gravy is thick then I stop cooking. So it is a very delicious dish we offer to our guests.*

**Is there any other thing you would like to add?**

*I love cooking and I enjoy food. Now a days, we are now very health conscious and consider the nutrition value of food. So, now life is digital. You can get every information from the internet. You can learn cooking*

*from the internet. It eases life and save money. Just be aware of the nutrition value and health.*

## **SIKDER MD IBRAHIM**

### **What are your earliest memories of food**

*First, I came to this country in Oct 1997. It was 1994 I first graduated from the University. I rented a house and that time I started cooking. Previous that I never cooked. That time I memorised how to cook. I didn't have mobile phone that time to call my mother to learn about cooking. We lived in different districts. I used to live in Dhaka and my parents in Khulna. So, I started cooking from my memories of how my mother cooked during my childhood. I cooked chicken curry, vegetables, lentil soup etc. Recalled from my childhood how my mother cooked and then I collected the ingredients to cook.*



*I have good memories of secondary school. Boys never selected Home Economics. It is about cooking, sewing etc. All the time, elder sister supervised us as she had this subject. I chose the subject although girls choose this subject most. When we appeared in the exam, everybody said no you are not entitled to take the test. It is for the girls. I got the highest marks in sewing. That time I did not know how to cook, but I knew what ingredients to use in cooking. Basically, we cooked under the supervision of our teachers. But I also got the first position in that event. Still even I go to Bangladesh, my elder sister reminisces the event and laughs at the memories.*

### **What was your last meal before you left Bangladesh**

*It was 5<sup>th</sup> Oct 1997. I loved my mom's cooked food. Because we lived in the country side. Our relatives came to invite me, but I said I would eat only my mom's cooked food.*

*I came here on 6<sup>th</sup> Oct 1997 for higher studies. I studied in University of Newcastle, University of Cardiff, Birmingham City University, University of Birmingham and Oxford University. I did few Master's and professional courses. My wife also did Masters and she is working as a fashion designer.*

### **Importance of cooking experience in your life**

*I think specially in Asian community, man should not cook. I believed that man should not cook. When we came to this country with my wife, she is a fashion designer. She did not know how to cook. She learnt and now is a very good cook. We then realised cooking is not like a traditional and we need to survive. But it is an art. If someone starts cooking, he or she will love it. If they learn how to cook and do the research. It's not in the traditional way, I think one can change the ingredients and make varieties of dishes. I think everyone should know how to cook. When we came first to this country as a student, we didn't have enough money to buy food every day. In our country, we have a maid or our mother who can cook for us. But in this country, we have to cook our own food. So, everybody should learn how to cook. Every weekend I cook. My children love our cooking. Especially they love my cooking.*

### **What difference do you see in cooking in the UK and in Bangladesh?**

*The big difference is that in Bangladesh you will get the helping hand. But in this country, everything is in packet. In Bangladesh you will get the fresh ingredients. Other people can help you prepare the food. In this country you will get the ingredients, but all are processed and not fresh. That's a big difference. Even the food flavour will be different due to ingredients. In our country, by tasting the sauce you can say whether it is fish or beef or mutton. But in this country, it is not possible because of the difference in the ingredients.*

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## JAHID CHOUDHURY

### Tell me about your back ground

*I was born in Bangladesh and came to this country when I was very young. My great grandfather was in British Army and my grandfather was a British sailor. When I came to the UK, I used to go to local primary school, Park View in Saltley. In that time, my father and uncle used to work in the factory. That time in our community less family came from Bangladesh. We used to live in a small house all together. That time from early morning to evening, all elder people used to go to the factory. What I did during that time, I was alone. Young. I had to cook myself. My uncle showed me how to cook the food. That was when I learnt the cooking.*



*My first cooking was how to cook the rice and fried egg (Dim bhaji). Because that time we did not get so many things. Few halal shops were there. That's the way our family started hard working. No one can imagine how hard we worked keeping our family value and respect for the society and social structure to build from zero. Very unusual my life was when I started.*

### Tell me about your family

*My family, I am married and have three children all born in Birmingham. All are now University grad. My elder daughter is now a doctor. My son is studying Applied Physics, Aston University 3rd Year and youngest daughter has just started University. In Leicester. My wife is a housewife. I am married for 30 years. I have a very happy family.*

### How is cooking very important in your life

*Important because in Bangladesh, community only survive in this country by the cooking. Curry is the main foundation of our economic*

*strength. After my school, I did not have a chance to go to the college or University due to poverty and because of family commitments. Straight away I went to work for the curry house/restaurant. That time we used to call curry house not Indian restaurant. English communities in this country knew Indian restaurants as curry house.*

*I started part time first on Friday and Saturday. Then I started to learn how to cook the spicy food- Chicken tikka masala, chicken rogan josh, all sort of dishes. I myself is a chef as well.*

### **Who was your mentor in cooking?**

*Well, in my childhood when I woke up in the morning. All the elders had gone to the factory. Then I went to the school. I came back from the school and there was no food at home. I didn't realise I had to cook myself. My father and my uncle came back from factory in the evening and asked if I had food. I said no. Then they said look you should learn how to cook. Then my uncle showed me how to cook rice and dim bhaji. This was my first learning on how to cook.*

### **Can you tell me about your last meal before coming from Bangladesh?**

*Yes, when I came in 1979. I remember I was in my village market and my younger cousin who told me that I got visa from British home office. I then came to house and my grandmother told me next week you are going to the UK. I was so happy to meet my father, my uncle, my grandfather. I was so excited as well. I remember that I flew with Pakistan Airlines. And before we left Sylhet, my grandmother first cooked the food chicken korma, pilau rice and some koi machh bhaji and some vegetables. She cooked about 12 items for me. Because it was my last meal before I left for the UK.*

### **Tell me about your moving to the UK and leaving Bangladesh**

*When I left Bangladesh, it was a very sad day because I was leaving my motherland and leaving behind my family, neighbours and friends. I was very shocked for couple of days. But from one country to another there is a couple of changes, like different atmosphere, weather. When I arrived Heathrow, I did not realise it was very cold. Snow everywhere. I said to myself oh my God where have I come? It was very*

*different than I used to be. Then in the home office, immigration checked, and my uncle and father came to receive me. My uncle cried. He hugged me. It's amazing. I was a little boy. I was for couple of days, I did not know what I was going to do. It's all different country, colour of people. Then slowly I was settled with my father and uncle and their friends. My uncle took me to local school for admission. I still remember that the Headteacher welcomed me. I found at that time people had family value, social respect. But it is all gone now. I could not speak English. In 6 weeks' time I learnt lots of English. Teachers were very helpful. Even I remember one day, I lost my address to go to my house. I was in Alum Rock to go to my house. I was very much confused and felt shy to ask any one. Suddenly I cried myself and worried. I saw suddenly local Police. They came to me and asked what had happened. I gave my details and then they took me to my house. I remember my shoe lace was untied. The officer sat on the road and tied up my shoe lace. And this is amazing how good is the police officer in this country. Then I realised I came to a good country. I have confidence in this country and it has got a lot of opportunities.*

### **What are the children's attitude towards the Bangladeshi food available in this country**

*Actually, my children I found that they have gene from me and my wife. They eat our curry and our traditional food. Side by side they eat English food as well. There is no problem for them. They are quite happy to eat any kind of food as long as the food is halal.*

### **What difference do you see between Bangladeshi and English food**

*I found it totally different. Our food is spicy, but English is not spicy and kind of blunt. But still their food is their food. There is still big difference between their food and our food. Curry is more spicy.*

### **Do you see any change of cooking habit over these years**

*Yes, cooking and food habit has been changed. Because I remember the white communities used to come at late night after the pub shut. But now a days, people eat curry food earlier at 6 o' clock or 7 o' clock. After 9 o' clock restaurant trade is more slow. No customer. Long time ago*

20 years or 25 years ago, after 11 o' clock all curry house were full. This habit is changed now.

### Tell me one recipe you would like to cook most

*My favourite cooking is King prawn Jalfrazie. My style is different from other chef. Because what I do, I use the chopped onions, green chilli and garlic & ginger and fresh chilli powder with fresh coriander. Separately I do king prawn little bit fry from the garlics and touch of salt. Then I make king prawn jalfrezie. I use little bit of methi to make jalfrezie. But I do not use any gravy sauce for king prawn JF. If I put the gravy, the flavour of the spices will go out. My Jalfrazie is different than any other Jalfrazie in UK. I do not use any gravy sauce and this is the difference.*

### Tell me any other thing you would like to add to our project

*Your project is fantastic because your project shows our community history, show our community strength and also encourage the young generation of our British Bangladeshi community. Our young generation is going to the university for higher education and higher jobs. We should not forget the traditional way how to survive. Only the restaurant trade gives us an economic strength. So, I think your project encourages to our community lots of opportunities to keep our business run in this country and our young generation can come to our restaurant business to make it more modernised. They are young, educated and they can make new recipes through research and make more modern oriental curry in British society. It is good for the British society, economy and for the job also. So, your project is very good for our community and British society.*

### **3.4 Why to preserve the Bangladeshi Food Heritage?**

Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. Intangible cultural heritage includes culture traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as cultural heritage of cooking, oral traditions, performing arts, social practices etc. Whatever shape they take, these things form part of a heritage, and this heritage requires active effort on

our part in order to safeguard it. The best way to preserve the cultural heritage, whatever it may be, is to share it with others.

Culture and its heritage reflect and shape values, beliefs, and aspirations, thereby defining a person's national identity. It is important to preserve our cultural heritage, because it keeps our integrity as people. The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself, but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a country and is as important for developing countries as for developed ones.

Bangladeshi authentic food culture is fading out in the British Bangladeshi communities. British-born Bangladeshis are unaware of their traditional culture of cooking and their traditional foods. The curry restaurants change the original recipes to satisfy the changing tastes of the British people. They put artificially created gravy into the meat to cook a dish. Most of the hot ingredients like chilli and red chilli are often omitted in the recipes. The whole process in making the Bangladesh food is thereby losing its authentic aroma and taste. So, in these years since the settlement of Bangladeshis in the UK, the curry culture has got much deviation from the original recipe.

The argument for preserving traditional cuisines, ingredients, methods of preparation and recipes isn't just about 'authenticity,' which many people would concentrate in. Purists and snobs want to emphasise on claiming that they place a highly weighted value on 'authentic' foods and that things that don't taste right aren't worth the label—ignoring the fact that there's no real one true version of authentic. Within a region of culture, there are scores of ways to prepare a dish, each regionally authentic and with a rich history. So, if a Bangladeshi curry here doesn't taste right to you, the reasons may relate to you being familiar with the curries from that region in Bangladesh.

Albeit, authenticity isn't the problem. The problem is that food is an integral part of the culture—food is necessary, food is life, but it's also the way we express ourselves, communicate, relate to our own history. Food is woven into so many elements of human existence, with the very act of cooking and food preparation marking a huge shift in our evolutionary

history. The reliance on available ingredients and tools has resulted in the creation of incredibly diverse global cuisines.

Traditional dishes and recipes are probably one of the easiest and more fun ways to preserve the heritage! Cooking food you grew up eating that is passed down from generation to generation is a wonderful way for children to learn more about their heritage, plus it's a delicious way at that!

Bangladeshi cuisine has already been fused with British culinary tastes and styles. We aim to revert Bangladeshi cuisine back to its original form and therefore protect the history and heritage of Bangladeshi cooking. This has been done through educating members of the community about the traditional Bangladeshi food, engaging themselves into cooking traditional food with the help of the recipes and telling their stories through Oral History interviews.

### **3.5 How the Bangladeshi Food Culture Impacts the UK**

The history of the curry is intertwined with the British colonial past. From the empire to the streets of England's towns and villages, the curry has had a remarkable journey.

“The worldwide rise of curry well beyond the Indian sub-continent to a virtual state of global domination was thanks in no small part to the exploits of the British East India Company and British Raj in India. The British rapidly developed a love affair with their newly discovered spicy food and took the dishes back home.” As stated in the article “Our Love Affair with Curry” by Mohammed Bushra. It was around the same time that a number of Indian sailors landed in the ports of Cardiff and London. These seamen, mainly from the region that would later be known as Bangladesh, initially opened cafes to cater for fellow Asians. However, they soon skilfully adapted themselves to British tastes, selling curry and rice alongside traditional fish and chips. The after-pub trade was capitalised on by staying open into the late hours, and it was here that the ritual of the post-pub curry was born.

### **3.6 Bangladeshi Recipes**

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Bangladeshi food varies from the scale of being very sweet and mild to extremely spicy, and even tourists from other South East Asian countries find the food spicy. It closely resembles north-east Indian and S.E. Asian food – more than any other part of the Subcontinent, most likely due to geographic and cultural proximity.

Bangladeshi meals almost always include plain white rice or bhat. Fried rice, in the forms of polao and biriyani, are mostly eaten on special occasions. The most important flavours in Bangladeshi cuisine are garlic, ginger, lime, coriander, cumin, turmeric and chili. In sweet dishes, cardamom and cinnamon are amongst the natural flavours.

Fresh sweet water fish is one of its most distinctive features; Bengal's countless rivers, ponds and lakes teem with innumerable varieties of fish such as rohu, hilsa, koi or pabda. Almost every village across Bengal has aquaculture ponds and at least one meal a day will include a fish dish.

The variety of fruits and vegetables on offer is amazing. A plethora of gourds, roots & tubers, leafy greens, succulent stalks, lemons and limes, aubergines, onions, plantain, beans, okra, banana tree stems and flowers, jackfruit and pumpkins are available the produce markets.

Chicken and mutton are always the favourite meat items across Bangladesh. Beef is more popular now and often cooked in nawabi style, influenced by Awadhi cuisine (Lucknow-style cuisine). Pork is eaten mainly by Anglo-Christian community and tribal people.

Here are few recipes of Bangladeshi cuisine which has been demonstrated in our Heritage Cooking workshops.

#### **Recipe 1:**

Vegetable Niramish (Mixed Vegetable Curry)

#### *Ingredients:*

Potatoes- 1, pointed gourd- 1, white gourd- 1, aubergine- 1, sweet pumpkin- 1 piece, salt- as required, green chillies- 2 crushed, bay leaf- 1, panchforan- 1 tsp, cooking oil- ½ cup, turmeric (powder)- ½ tsp, red

chilli (powder)- 1/2 tsp, coriander (powder)- 1/2 tsp, ginger (powder)- 1/2 tsp, water- as required

*Methods:*

Peel and cut vegetables into cubes. In a sauce pan, place potatoes, pointed gourd, white ground, salt and spice powders. Add water just to cover the vegetables. Cook over a moderate heat. When vegetables are half cooked, add aubergine and sweet pumpkin. Cook till the vegetables are tender. Add 1 tablespoon sugar. In a saucepan, heat the oil. Put in panchforan, bay leaf and green chillies, stir and add boiled vegetables. Bring to boil. Serve Immediately with rice or chapatti.



**Recipe 2:**

Chicken Bhuna

*Ingredients:*

Chicken- 1 pc (weight 500gm), onion finely chopped- 1/4 cup, ginger paste- 2 tsp, garlic paste- 1 tsp, cumin powder- 1 tsp, turmeric powder- 1/2 tsp, red Chilli powder- 1 tsp, garam Masala (Cinnamon, cardamom, clove, bay leaves, cumin seed, coriander seed)- as required, green Chilli- 5 no, cumin powder- 1 tsp, oil- 1/2 cup, salt- to taste, water- as required

*Methods:*

Take 1 chicken and cut into 8 pieces. Wash the chicken pieces and drain the water. Add salt, turmeric powder and chilli powder to the chicken pieces. Fry in a lightly heated oil. In a separate pan, fry the onion until brown. Add ginger paste, garlic paste, cumin powder, garam masala, turmeric and chilli powder. Cook at least 5 minutes with continuous stirring. Add half a cup of water and cook until oil comes out. Add the chicken pieces. Cook for another 10 minutes on low heat (keep stirring while cooking the chicken). Leave the



chicken for another 5 minutes with lid on. At the end of cooking, add split green chillies, as well as cumin powder and stir in well for the final 2 minutes before serving. Serve hot with rice or flat bread.

### **Recipe 3:**

#### **Beef Bhuna**

##### *Ingredients:*

Beef- 2 kg, onion finely chopped- 1 cup, garlic paste- 1 tbsp, ginger paste- 1 tbsp, turmeric powder- 1 tbsp, red chilli powder- 1 tbsp, coriander powder- 1 tbsp, cumin powder- 1 tbsp, mustard oil- 1 cup, meat spices- 1 tsp, yoghurt- 1 cup, green chilli- 10/12, black pepper powder- 1 tsp, cinnamon- 5/6 sticks (2 cm long), cardamom- 5/6, nutmeg powder- 1/2 tsp, mace powder- 1/2 tsp, fenugreek powder- 1/2 tsp, salt- to taste, water- as required.

##### *Methods:*

Wash the meat and drain the water. In a bowl, take the meat, put oil, yoghurt, turmeric, red chilli powder, coriander powder, meat spices, ginger and garlic paste. Then cut onions and salt then marinate. Fry half of the cut onion to brown. Put the marinate in a saucepan



and cook on a high flame. Add 2 cups of water and cook further on a high flame. Cover the pan and cook at a medium heat until the meat becomes tender. When the water dries up, add slitted green chilli, cumin powder. Cook on a medium flame for 10 mins. At the end of cooking add the fried onions before serving. Serve hot with rice or flat bread.

### **Recipe 4:**

#### **Fish Curry (Rohu Fish)**

##### *Ingredients:*

Fish pieces (4 nos), onion finely chopped- 2 cups, cooking oil- as required, cardamom- 1, turmeric powder- 1/2 tsp, cumin powder- 1/2 tsp, red chilli powder- 1/2 tsp, coriander powder- 1/2 tsp, ginger paste- 1/2 tsp,

garlic paste- 1 tsp, fish seasoning- 1/2 tsp, green chilli- 2 longitudinally slitted, salt- to taste, water- as required.

*Methods:*

Wash the fish pieces and drain water. Add turmeric, red chilli and salt to the fish, then mix. Add oil to a frying pan and fry the fish. In the same oil, fry the onion, green chilli, ginger and garlic. As the onions turn brown, add all the remaining spices. What follows is that, you should fry the spices for 1/2 mins. Add water and fry again until oil separates. Now put the fishes in and fry for a few minutes. Add a cup of water and simmer until water evaporates. Put down the pan and serve the fish with hot rice.



**Recipe 5:**

Chicken Korma

*Ingredients:*

Chicken breast- cut into cubes (weight 750gm), onion finely chopped- 2 cups, ghee- 4 tsp + 2 tsp, cooking oil- 4 tsp, bay leaf- 2, cinnamon- 2, cardamom- 2, sultana- 4 tbsp, turmeric powder- 1 tsp, ginger paste- 1 tsp, garlic paste- 1 tsp, coconut milk- 4 tbsp, salt- to taste, water- as required.

*Methods:*

Take 750 gm chicken and cut into cubes. Heat oil and ghee in a pan, fry the onion until brown. Add bay leaf, cinnamon, cardamom, sultana, ginger paste, garlic paste, turmeric, salt and little water. Add chicken pieces into the gravy, add water and cook for 15 minutes, whilst stirring occasionally. Add ghee and coconut milk, then cook for another 5 minutes. Once that's done, check the taste. If it's to your liking, serve it hot with rice or flat bread.



## **Conclusion:**

In 2008, the United Nations body inaugurated its ‘intangible cultural heritage’ into its listings. The point of the designation, the organisation explains, is not to set “any standard of excellence or exclusivity” but to ensure protection of “the wealth of knowledge and skills” transmitted by a culture over generations.

The richness of Bangladesh's culture is tangible as well as intangible. It is a reality and it goes back thousands of years. The heritage of cooking, a vital component of the generational evolution of life in our part of the world, has been a cementing factor in linking Bangladesh's people across historical time. And yet there is the other side of the truth, which is that owing to negligence or indifference or both as well as the relentless infiltration of the putatively modern, this heritage has been under assault for a long time.

A sense of history is what a nation lives by and indeed thrives on. History, once the sense of it goes missing, it is an entirety of cultural tradition which comes under threat, to a point where the story of a nation, of a society, faces the stark possibility of losing itself in the detritus of time. It is especially the intangible heritage that is rendered vulnerable to the ravages of time and man-made negligence. Additionally, and crucially, the involvement of the community in upholding cultural traditions, through nurturing it's citizens is a sense of importance of the historical past, which was a responsibility one could not ignore.

The way forward ought to be clear to everyone. Through coming forth with the support of Heritage Lottery Fund in underlining the significance of a preservation of the cultural history of Bangladeshi food, an intangible cultural heritage. The culinary and cultural traditions of Bangladesh have close relations with that of the neighbouring Bengal and northeast India, with some unique traits of their own. Rice and fish are traditional favourites with vegetables and lentils also forming a part of their staple diet. The river Brahmaputra, which meets the Bay of Bengal in Bangladesh, has a large influence on

the culture and cuisine of this small nation. The culture of this country has been shaped by many renowned poets, writers, saints, filmmakers, musicians, and thinkers.

New Hope Birmingham has received a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for an exciting project, 'Preserving the Cultural History of Bangladeshi Food', in Birmingham. Made possible by money raised by National Lottery players, the project focused on recording and exploring the cultural heritage of cooking Bangladeshi food in Bangladeshi and other South Asian communities in Birmingham.

Commenting on the award, Mohammed Foiz Uddin MBE, the Chairman of New Hope Birmingham said, "*We are overwhelmed with joy to receive this support for our project from the Heritage Lottery Fund. We would like to thank National Lottery players for their help and support to uphold the cultural history of Bangladeshi food in Birmingham communities.*"

The project enabled younger and elder members of the community to join heritage workshops, which introduced the long and proud history of Bangladeshi cuisine, and the culture of cooking Bangladeshi food. The volunteers recorded oral history interviews as well as documenting the materials and methods behind traditional dishes. They also helped translate and transcribe interviews and wrote a book based on their research. Staff and volunteers had the opportunity to undertake training on oral history interview and archive skills.

Traditional Bengali cuisine is a comprehensive cultural model comprising of farming, ritual practices, seasonal variations, age-old skills, culinary techniques and ancestral community customs and manners. It is made possible by collective participation in the entire traditional food chain: from planting and harvesting to cooking and eating. From the culinary point of view, some major historical trends influenced Bengali food.

New Hope Birmingham is thankful to Heritage Lottery Fund, members of the community, our partners and stakeholders for their all-out help and support to carry out the project activities in and around Birmingham.

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## Author Biography:

### **Mohammed Foiz Uddin** MBE, MInstF

B.Com, M.Com, PG-Cert, MSc, ILGS

### **Chairman, New Hope Birmingham**

Mohammed Foiz Uddin was born, brought up, and educated in Bangladesh. After obtaining a Master's degree in Management and Accounting, he went on to serve six years within the financial sector of Bangladesh. He then moved to the UK and obtained a second Master's degree and diploma in Public Policy Management from the University of Birmingham.



Mohammed was greeted by Her Majesty, The Queen Elizabeth II on an occasion in Buckingham Palace

His mission and vision are to develop and aid the healthcare, well-being and police reform strategy for the disadvantaged sectors of the society. This applies especially to the British Bangladeshi community, nationwide and to those from his country of origin including all the public policy related research work and community cohesion champion for local government.

In addition, Mohammed used to work on various strategy development, policy implementation and community regeneration locally, regionally, nationally and internationally through his local government and charity services. Since February 1985 he has made significant contributions to poverty alleviation and social welfare through innovative and sustainable projects working to promote social enterprise and network.

His career has grown over the last 32 years with support from the local community and the Birmingham City Council allowing him to develop an organisation that people need and deserve.

Following his departure from Birmingham City Council, Mohammed founded New Hope Birmingham; a registered charity in England and Wales which serves the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups of

Birmingham, in working to achieve community cohesion, poverty alleviation and cultural integration.

Mohammed feels responsible to continue supporting people who are most in need. Our youth, adults, families or any individual in need may find aid in these services, which strive to provide the highest quality of service to address pressing issues in the UK, Palestine, Bangladesh and other South Asian Countries.

In 2012 Mohammed was honoured as Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) by Her Majesty the Queen for his huge contribution to community cohesion within the UK at the local, regional and national level. His unwavering support for local communities continues in his humble efforts to plan for the further development of Bangladesh.

In the next few years he plans to expand his operations in various areas to further the livelihood of Bangladesh. These include issues surrounding employability, skills and language training, physical and mental health well-being and safe guarding, entrepreneurial and youth development - including local government strategy development, police and health strategy development - among many others. The motto 'hope attracts change' may provide people with a drive and dedication to aim to build a harmonious and integrated holistic society within Bangladesh. Mohammed continues to reach out and connect communities to sustain this humble cause to develop a better more holistic society for future generations.

## **Maruf Ahmed, PhD**

### **Coordinator for 'Preserving the Cultural History of Bangladeshi Food' project**

Maruf is hardworking, sincere, organised, punctual and able to work independently or in a team, to meet required goals. He has gained substantial knowledge, skills and experience over 15 years in teaching and conducting research at University, including various community initiative programmes. He also has experience of organising and leading successful community development programmes.



For example, after the completion of his Master's degree in Pharmaceutical Science, he worked for a multinational pharmaceutical company Ciba-Geigy as a Quality Control Officer.

Over the year, he developed and implemented various projects. Later on, he joined one of the renowned Universities of Bangladesh as a Lecturer and was soon promoted to become a Head of the Pharmacy Department for 15 years. During this period, he also served as the Chairman of the Department for 3 years.

During his University teaching career, he was involved in the organisation, planning, development, budgeting and negotiation of several projects. In 2001, Maruf started a PhD at a University in Japan, graduating as a Doctor of Philosophy in 2005. As a Chairman of the Department in the University, he managed a huge Budget, Human Resources, Equipment and Curriculum of the Department in the University. Maruf then left Bangladesh and moved to England with his family, working as a Post Doctorate Fellow in the University of Wolverhampton.

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) supported 'Preserving the Cultural History of Bangladeshi Food' was an exciting project of New Hope Birmingham which explored the cultural heritage of cooking Bangladeshi food in the Bangladeshi and other BAME communities in Birmingham. This book contains the history, tradition and the pride of culinary heritage of Bangladeshi food. It includes the transcripts of the oral history interviews of early settlers of Bangladeshi origin in Birmingham and the recipes of some popular dishes of the region.

The project enabled younger and elder members of the community to join heritage workshops, which introduced the long and proud history of Bangladeshi cuisine, and the culture of cooking Bangladeshi food, fun activities and cooking demonstrations.

Commenting on the grant award, Mohammed Foiz Uddin MBE MInstF, the Chairman of New Hope Birmingham said, *"We are overwhelmed with joy to receive this support for our project from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). We would like to thank National Lottery players for their help and support to uphold the cultural history of Bangladeshi food in Birmingham communities"*.

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