

## A Mirpur Family's Story: Migration to Bradford West Yorkshire:

Mohammed Bashir was born in 1938 in a small village called Tangdew in Mirpur, now an area of Pakistan. His father and grandfather before him were farmers and they had owned land and a water well, so they were able to help all members of their community – a community that was poor in material terms.

Mohammed himself had set up his own business selling groceries in Tangdew when he was old enough, but a business partnership resulted in the loss of a lot of money from the business – about 5,000 Rupees – and Mohammed had then to travel with his brother, Abdul Rashid (born in 1933) to work in the textile industry in Multan, near Lahore, to clear the business debt.

After a time, his brother saw some advertisements asking for men to travel to Bradford, England to work in the textile industry there. It was the 1950s and Bradford was short of skilled workers in this industry. He had a difficult time raising the money for his ticket to travel to England and had to sell his family's silver jewelry to help towards the cost. He was helped by a retired soldier friend who also sold some of his wife's jewels to get the whole cost of a ticket.

The distance between Tangdew and Bradford is over 5 thousand miles and Mohammed's brother had to be very brave to make this decision to travel there. He was helped and comforted by the fact that a relative of his, Mohammed Shafir had settled in the Bradford area earlier. Mohammed Shafir had worked on ships and travelled a lot, he had met an English woman who he married and was raising his family in Bradford, near Shipley.

This meant that Mohammed's brother, Abdul Rehman, would have somewhere to live, so he set off on this very long journey and was quickly able to find work at one of Whitehead's Mill in Bradford. He could not speak English but worked very hard and was soon promoted – his experience of textile work in Multan was very useful to the Mills in Bradford.

After four years, he wrote to his brother, Mohammed Bashir and suggested that he should also travel to Bradford to work in textiles. Mohammed Bashir realised that this may be a good idea and he decided to have a go. At first, both brothers – like many of the men who migrated from Mirpur and other areas in Pakistan –

thought that they would only stay a few years to raise some money and then go home again to live.

When Mohammed Bashir arrived, he also couldn't speak English but he had close family members to look after him and care for him. Not long after his arrival, his brother began to talk about the problems that men like themselves were having in finding food that was familiar to them in this cold Yorkshire City. Although Mohammed had learnt to cook a little in Tangdew, most of the men who came from Pakistan could not cook and none of them could buy chicken or meat that was Halal killed in the proper Islamic way so that it was all right to eat.

This gave Mohammed and his brother an idea and they decided to stop working in the textile industry and set up a Halal butchers shop in Lumb lane, nearby to Green Lane School. They were very successful in their new business and were soon able to extend this and added a grocery store to the butcher's shop.

They also realised that there were a few men working in the textile industry that had been trained as chefs in either Pakistan or India and that another problem for the men was that they had no place to meet after work, talk about home or socialise. This gave the brothers another idea and they decided to buy number 110 Lumb lane and turn this small building into a café.

They were fortunate in knowing an Indian Sikh who was a skilled carpenter and they employed him to fit the small café out. They were not confectioners themselves but again, there were some men who had come to work in the mills in Bradford who were, so they employed some of these men and called their new Café the 'Sweet Centre'. They made sure that they provided newspapers from home and a tape recorder that could play Indian and Pakistani music to help the people coming to the café relax and feel at home. They also provided a private area in the basement for women – a Purdah space, so that the women weren't embarrassed to come.

The Sweet Centre Café opened its doors on 12 December 1964 and has grown and grown into a large restaurant today. At first, the café only provided snack foods such as kebabs, samosas and pakoras with Chai. The only curry they made at that time was with chickpeas and potatoes, served with Puri (fried chapattis) and a sweet desert – Halwa. Very soon their customers included important visitors and included politicians from Pakistan, such as Valli Khan and Zulficar Ali

Bahter. Many artists also came to the café – for example the famous Diliup Kumar, the actress Wajanti Mala and the folk singer Allum Luhar who all performed in the Sweet Centre Café on Lumb Lane

The chefs and confectioners that the brothers had found in Bradford's mills came mainly from the area of Gujarat, in the Indian sub-continent and Jehlum and Mirpur in Pakistan and so right from the start, the Sweet Centre was able to provide food that was familiar to many different people from Pakistan and India.

As the café became more and more successful – due to hard work and being the first place to offer South Asian Food - Mohammed Bashir decided to bring his son to England to be with him. In 1967, he arrived back from Mirpur with Zulficar Ali, aged 10 years. Zulficar arrived feeling nervous and quite sad because he had had to leave his mother and his sisters behind him. He couldn't speak English but started school at Cragg Road Primary School in Shipley. He only had one year at this school before he had to start at Northcliffe secondary school and his father was anxious that the local secondary modern schools did not offer 'O Levels' as the academic exams for 16-year-old pupils were then called.

Fate lent a hand here, because a friend of Mohammed Bashir's had a son, Farooq Azam, of the same age and together they both applied for a place for their sons at Beckfoot Grammar School (its old name) They were very lucky to get a place there and the headmaster at that time, Mr. Farmer Little, spotted that both boys were very bright and arranged for them to have extra time every day, after school to work on improving their English Language Skills.

This was the help they both needed and Zulficar and his friend got very good exam results at A Level standard. Zulficar was successful in getting a place at Nottingham Trent University to study for a BSC in applied chemistry and on achieving a first degree went on to study for a PhD in organic chemistry at Bradford University, where the professor who taught him was called Gordon Shaw. When he became Dr. Zulficar Ali, his father and mother must have been very proud.

His friend, Farooq Azam, achieved a degree in pharmacy and is now a senior manager with Boots the Chemists. Zulficar went on to teach at Bradford College and entered public life in Bradford. He was elected as a Councillor for University

Ward, Bradford and served for many years as the chair of the Schools and Further Education Committee.

Zulficar now enjoys helping out in the Sweet Centre Restaurant, where his eldest son Waqar Ali Mughal is now the manager.

**(new additions below)**

Over the years, the Sweet Centre café has been able to expand both its range of dishes and its premises. The current premises are now a large restaurant that is beautifully decorated and furnished, situated on Lumb Lane, next to a modern small and separated café specialising in confectionery.

The South Asian community had continued to expand and had become very mixed with people coming from many different areas of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Some new 'home favourites' – such as brain and Quail curries – were added to the menu and became firm favourites.

The business became so busy that some of the staff and family members went on to establish their own businesses. The initial efforts of Mohammed Bashir and Abdul Rehman have – over time - made a significant contribution to Bradford's economy and Mohammed Bashir's son, Zulficar has also contributed a great deal to public services in Bradford over the years.

**A Time to Celebrate:**

**2014** was to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sweet Centre and

The Asian Express Newspaper of December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 reported that –

'Over the past 50 years, Bradford has seen some monumental changes, yet one thing that remains as popular today, as the day it was founded, is Manningham's world renowned Sweet Centre and Restaurant. It was on Saturday 12th December 1964 that the famous establishment first opened its doors to the public, bringing Asian sweets and Asian cuisine to Yorkshire for the very first time.

With Pakistani and Indian migrants arriving in Bradford to work in the city's mills, a new market was being developed with no dining establishment catering for foods from the South Asian continent.

So, when brothers, Abdul Rehman and Mohammed Bashir, first coined the idea of setting up an eatery to serve the rising Asian population, the concept of the Sweet Centre Cafe and Restaurant was born.

Pulling together all their savings, the siblings set up the business at 110 Lumb Lane in the mid-60s, and with three generations of the same family now managing operations at the site, it has remained a much-loved eatery for people from all backgrounds'

The newspaper report acknowledges that the Sweet Centre is now a household name – known by many, many people.

Similar reports were made in the Bradford Telegraph and Argus and many important people attended a celebration of the Sweet Centre's success – built on the legacy of hard work and early migrations from Pakistan and India to work in Bradford's textile industry.

### **Recent Events:**

#### **Television Programme in 2015**

In July 2015, Waqar Mughal, told the local newspaper - "We were contacted by the BBC production company who said they had heard a lot about our restaurant and its history and wanted to come and film in our kitchen".

"They came and filmed over two days and I actually cooked with Ainsley myself, having learnt everything from our head chef. I can't say much about the programme until it airs, and I'm not allowed to say what we cooked".

The Sweet Centre was chosen by the BBC to feature in a new programme where TV Chef Ainsley Harriott took the Strictly Come Dancing Judge, Len Goodman, on a 'Big Food Adventure' during July 2015.

The pair were filmed as they were treated to a popular Sweet Centre curry with lamb on the bone. Len, who had previously never eaten spaghetti – never mind a curry – was very impressed with the meal cooked by Waqar and thoroughly enjoyed his meal. The film made there was shown on television on Monday 23 November.

## **Sweet Centre in The News, 2016**

On 29/01/2016 The BBC news (amongst many others) reported that:

**About 30 firefighters are still at the scene of a blaze that has destroyed a former mill in Bradford.**

'West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue crews worked through the night to contain the fire at Drummonds Mill in Manningham. [ an event that was witnessed by the children at Green Lane School]

Ian Bitcon, of West Yorkshire Fire Service, said in his career he had not seen firefighters "work as hard as they did to try and knock this fire back". Nearby homes had to be evacuated after the basement of the building caught fire at about 11:30 GMT on Thursday. The flames spread to the roof and part of the four-storey property in Lumb Lane has now collapsed.

Officers said the fire was still smouldering and was still emitting a plume of smoke. The badly damaged building is regarded as too dangerous for crews to get inside, they added. Crews are expected to remain at the site throughout the weekend monitoring remaining hotspots'.

The fire caused destruction of the small businesses that were housed in the mill but also caused damage to nearby shops and businesses. **The Sweet Centre – situated directly opposite the burning mill - suffered great damage.**

**On 30/01/2016, the Telegraph and Argus Reported:**

Lumb Lane remains closed as the emergency clean-up continues after the Drummond Mill fire. Haroon Habib of the Sweet Centre opposite the destroyed building has praised fire crews and demolition workers for their swift action.

"We are still not being given the go-ahead to go into our building, but the firemen have done a great job, as have the demolition men who have cleared a lot of the site already.

"We are hoping to be allowed back into the Sweet Centre in the morning after some more safety assessments," he said.

However, the Sweet Centre premises, when examined later were found to be badly damaged by falling masonry, smoke and water. The cafe ceiling had collapsed, the kitchen was full of water, a cellar wall had developed a crack and the main entrance to the restaurant has been shattered. Perhaps saddest of all, the tropical fish always on display in the restaurant, had been killed.

Undaunted and after much hard work, the Sweet Centre was fully repaired and re-decorated was able to open again four months later and the tradition of cooking and serving authentic Pakistani and Indian food continue.