

# Introduction to 3<sup>rd</sup> strand

## **Popular culture - between tradition and innovation**

**Across three generations, mainly focussing on traditional and more recent British Bengali musical heritage, from the 1970s-80s**

With the success of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical 'Bombay Dreams' and the 'Bride and Prejudice' (2006), Asian music is now firmly rooted in Britain and has broken out into a mainstream audience. Missy Elliot, Madonna, Britney Spears, Bjork to name a few have all used samples or have remixed their tracks with British Asian music.

The rise of Asian music started in the 1970s by Biddu, Steve Coe and Sheila Chandra but it was in the late 80s that the British Asian youth first started to create a new musical genre by combining dance music with the music of their parent's generation. The youth were growing up in an environment of racial violence and political struggle for self-identity while drawing strength from street culture and their Asian roots. They took pride in their music as they could claim it as their own - neither white nor music imported from the Indian sub-continent. The artists, who emerged from this period, became some of the greatest Asian artists Britain has seen. Some of these artists (ADF, Joi, State of Bengal and Osmani Soundz) are of Bengali origin and are the true pioneers of the Asian underground scene.

At the same time there were a number of people (Alaur Rahman, Himangshu Goswami, Abdus Salique and Lucy Rahman) who were practising music from Bangladesh and managed to establish themselves over here. There is also a strong following in Baul music as most Bangladeshis who are here are from rural background. Abdul Lotif is a well known British Bengali Baul singer. In 1985 UNESCO declared Baul music of Bangladesh a National Heritage and this was a rare treat to hear it in London. Another trend is the third generation British Bengali (Suzana Ansar, Kishon Khan and Shahin Badar), who are practising contemporary Bengali music in the UK.

We explore these developments through interviews where our participants explain their involvement with and approach to music, the influences on own music and their relationship with their musical teachers, the role models which influenced them, their musical preferences in terms of instruments and musical styles), the festivals, events, performances which they participate in, their songs, released singles and albums, their interest in traditional music from Bangladesh, the mixing of different musical styles and their views about young musicians and the younger generation.

Ansar Ahmed Ullah and Jamil Iqbal

## Interviewees profile



### **Mr. Abdul Lotif**

Age: 66

Interviewed: 01 April 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal, Abdul Aziz and Riza Momin

Mr. Lotif is the lead singer of Ektara Group and a well-known Baul singer. He is one of the few British Bengalis who sings Baul songs in Europe. He still sings Baul songs with his ektara and has inspired many young British singers.



### **Mr. Abdus Salique**

Interviewed: 18 May 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Salique is well known for his song 'Trade Union' and is the lead singer of 'Dishari'. He is the chairman of Brick Lane Trader's Association, founder chairman of Banglatown Restaurants Association and owner of Bonoful Sweets and Salique's Restaurant.



### **Ms. Alberta Fatima Matin**

Interviewed: 06 April 2006

Interviewers: Jamil Iqbal and Natasha Jalal

Description: Ms. Matin was raised in East London. She was a dance member of Joi Bangla Crew and a vocalist with Joi Bangla Banned. She started rehearsing dance moves at the age of 14. She performed on BBC 2 programme with the Joi Bangla Crew.



### **Mr. Alaur Rahman**

Age 45

Interviewed: 07 April 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Rahman is one of the leading singers in Britain's Bengali community. He came to Britain in 1977 when he was just 14 years old and in 1985 appeared on BBC television singing three folk songs. Alaur and his group recorded their first cassette in 1985 and have since made 17 further recordings, either on cassette or CD. By the 1990s Alaur and his group were travelling widely.



**Mr. Ashfaq Kazi (Minto)**

Age: 43

Interviewed: 22 May 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Description: Mr. Kazi was a dancer crew member of Joi Bangla Crew. Joi Bangla Sounds & Crew exploded into the music scene and had coverage in all the national newspapers and had TV coverage. Mr. Kazi created his own dance moves. The style and the tempo of the dance moves were fused with the beats of Bengali music.



**Mr. Deeder Zaman**

Age: 27

Interviewed: 25 April 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Zaman was nine years old when he first started making music and performed his first live performance aged eleven. He became the lead rapper of Asian Dub Foundation. The 1998 album, 'Rafi's Revenge' was greeted with great critical acclaim and received a Mercury Prize nomination as well as the BBC Asian Award for Music. He left the band on New Year's Eve 2000 and is currently producing his new album 'Minority Large'.



**Mr. Himangshu Goswami**

Age: 54

Interviewed: 05 April 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Goswami is a household name for Bengali families in the UK. Composer of 'Sadher Lau', a song second only to the national anthem in its popularity for Bengalis, He was born in Sylhet and trained as a classical singer, before turning to folk and traditional songs. He built a successful career, teaching and performing in Bangladesh until 1978, when he was invited to tour London. That first concert in a cinema in London's Brick Lane was highly successful and with a personal recommendation from Ravi Shankar, he agreed to stay in the UK. Since then he has performed with George Harrison, Ali Akbar Khan, and worked with Ravi Shankar on the soundtrack for 'Gandhi'.



**Mr. Hassan Ismail**

Interviewed: 28 March 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Description: Mr. Ismail was a member of Joi Bangla Sounds. Joi Bangla Sounds promoted a sense of identity through their music to the younger generation in the mid 80s.



**Mr. Kishon Khan**

Age: 35

Interviewed: 12 April 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal and Ansar Ahmed Ullah

Mr. Khan is well established in World Music and Latin-Jazz scenes as a performer, composer and arranger. His international world fusion project 'Lokkhi Terra', mixes Bengali folk with other world traditions from Cuban rumba to Nigerian Afro-beat, representing a British-Bengali approach to this heritage.



**Mr. Mark Uddin**

Interviewed: 28 March 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Description: Mark was one of the members of Joi Bangla Sounds formed in 1986. Joi Bangla Sounds was an offshoot of the League of Joi Bangla Youth organisation. It was formed to give an identity to the British Bengali youths.



**Mr. Sam Zaman**

Interviewed: 28 March 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Zaman is the lead singer of 'State of Bengal', set up in 1987 after he returned to London from a visit to the village of Noakhali in Bangladesh where he met and interacted with traditional musicians and dancers. 'State of Bengal' mixes Bengali and Western street style dance to create a style that reflected the diverse facets and synergy between the two cultures in the UK. He has also worked intensely with Asian youth groups in London's East End, many of whose members went onto become some of the 'core' DJs of the Asian Underground Scene. Sam fulfilled a long time dream in 1998 - a collaboration album with the late Ananda Shankar entitled 'Walking On'. At present 'State of Bengal' is working on a dance music concept.



**Mr. Samiul Islam (June)**

Age: 45

Interviewed: 22 April 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Islam was the main musician, vocalist and key board player of Joi Bangla Banned. Mr. Islam came to this country in 1985. He was interested in mixing Eastern and Western music from an early age. Before coming to the UK, he was a popular musician in Bangladesh. He has performed in many melas and festivals and inspired many young generation Bengalis into pop music. Currently, he is a school teacher.



**Ms. Shahin Badar**

Interviewed: 13 April 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Ms. Badar is one of the female Bengali front runners of innovative musical collaboration with her blend of Indo-Arabic vocal resonance. Whilst many South Asian acts are now hitting the UK top 10 and international territories with their collaborations, she was one of the first to do so back in the late 1990s with her controversial contribution to the Prodigy single 'Smack My Bitch Up', which brought her a mainstream Triple Platinum award and a 'Fat of The Land' album which entered the Guinness Book of Records as the fastest selling UK album in 1999. The album was also nominated for a Grammy Award



**Mr. Shohid Jolil**

Age: 33

Interviewed: 15 June 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Jolil, also known as Osmani Soundz, started out as a member of 'Osmani Knight Soundz' – a collective of DJs, rappers, dancers and visual artists based in London's East End. By the late 1980s 'Osmani Knight Soundz' moved into the 'rave' scene, playing alongside top DJs as well as organising peace raves and cultural events in the Bengali underground music scene. By 1994 he had created the very first Asian Drum and bass track titled 'Spiritual Masterkey'. He currently holds a residency at Nasha's monthly club night 'Eastern Drum and Breaks' at Herbal, London and is working on producing The Nasha Experience live project.



**Ms. Suzana Ansar**

Interviewed: 17 May 2006

Interviewer: Jamil Iqbal

Ms. Ansar is a British-born Bengali singer. She started singing at the age five and started learning classical music at the age of eleven, by which time she had won many singing competitions. She is well known for singing Nazrul Geeti. She has her own music school where she trains young British Bengali children.

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Strand interviews

## 27. Involvement in Music and Approach to Music

### Suzana Ansar

My mother used to sing. And [when I was] very young ... my mother realised that I was very interested in music, especially in the traditional *Bangla gaan*. She used to listen to *Nazrul Geeti* and *khayal-thumri*. ... My maternal grandfather's side of [the] family [was] ... very musical. We have many *ustads* from *Brahman Baria*, where they are from. [There was] an organisation called 'Bengali International'. My mother was one of the founders of the organisation, which is still going very strong. I used to perform there from a very young age [on]. So from the age of about five I had a music teacher who taught me harmonium. Then, it basically continued until I started learning *Uchango Sangeet* and *khayal* [at] the age of [ten or eleven]. I performed in so many programmes. [At] the age of eleven I won many competitions here at Toynbee Hall. ... Then, it just carried on. And after the age of 15-16, I started to do other types of singing besides just *khayal*, which were *Nazrul Geeti* and folks and everything. Now I do a lot of traditional programmes as well as the fusion work that I am involved with.

### Himangshu Goswami

[Music] is in my blood. My mother ... is 82 now and she still is a good singer. At our home we had an environment for music [and I sang] from the very first day of my life. Later I learned music at my home. When I was in Class Five or Six, my parents brought me to a town for a better education. Thus I came to Sylhet Town. My mother, seeing my enthusiasm in music, took me to the Sylhet Academy of Fine Arts (SAFA) for getting training on music. ... Sur Sagar Pranesh Das and ... Ustad Hossain Ali taught me music. They were both prominent musicians [in] Sylhet. I got training from them for two or three years and afterwards I went to other music teachers [in] Sylhet. Then I started to perform in programmes.

After a few years the Pakistan Arts Council was formed. We started to attend programmes arranged by the organisation. They used to organise competitions of music in all the four districts of the Sylhet Division. The winners of [these] competitions used to participate in the central competition in Sylhet. The winner of the Sylhet Competition used to be selected for the National Competition in Dhaka. I have won many prizes then. I have learnt from many *Gurus* and *Ustads* and I am grateful to them. ...

At that time, there were many good singers in Sylhet ... [but not all of them] were spending their efforts on culture and education. I want to name some of the people like Daru Miah Mohammed Yousuf who was the chairman of the municipality. The next to name is Aminur Rashid Choudhury, [the] owner of tea gardens and the newspaper 'Jugabery'. ... *Kabi* Delwar and many other people were there who used to nurture the cultural activity. They used to [encourage] the newcomers in the music world to learn more. They played a great role in music, drama and all the cultural activities in Sylhet. They [have] to be credited for the role they played. I want to credit them for all my achievements.

### Alaur Rahman

When I came to Britain from Bangladesh, I was quite young. And I was missing my country very much and I was very lonely and very homesick. My family accompanied me but still I was missing my village, missing my home, my village road, friends and relatives also. When I [came] to this country ... in 1977, London wasn't that colourful, a totally different atmosphere was prevailing. I entered ... music because of my loneliness. [Because] I was engaged in music back in Bangladesh. I used to go to the *madrasha* and also the primary school. In the *madrasha* we used to practise *Hamd*, *Nath*, *Koshida* and other religious songs and in the school we used to sing the songs dedicated to Bangladesh. I was treated differently in the *madrasha* and in the school. It was quite interesting.

My father's ... dream [was] that I will become a *Hafiz*, *Moulana* or *Kazi*. He was a very pious man. I can remember a few memories even when I was only four. We used to go to the mosque with bare feet - in the morning, in the fog. My father used to [make the] call for the prayers and taught me the *Azan*. ... *Azan* has come to be my pride as the *Ekushe TV* has selected me for their *Azan*. Although I am mainly involved with music ... I [contribute to] my religion. I feel proud of that.

### Abdus Saliq

I am from a family where music is practised. My mother was a singer, my maternal uncle is Comrade Azahar Ali who was a Leftist politician and founder of Tajpur Degree College. He was very cultured and ... he used to sing here in London.... My mother used to go to sing in many of the marriage ceremonies. All my uncles and my mother have very nice natural tone. My uncle was a very nice singer and could play all the musical instruments like *tabla*, *dotara* and flute. He was very ... popular for his *Gano Sangeet* - so we ... were brought up in a music friendly environment. When I came to London in 1970 ... I was only 19 or 20. I completed my studies and I was more interested in politics than in music. My uncle used to persuade me to learn the tabla and other instruments. [He] was sometimes annoyed with me because of my lack of interest. I had naturally a good tone and used to sing occasionally. ... I had a knack for music.

As I came to London [I saw that] there was no Bangladeshi music group but ... Indian and Pakistani music groups. There were some people who used to sing pastoral songs in their homes with the *dofki*, *dotara* and other instruments. I thought ... [that] we have to have our own cultural groups ... to represent our country and our community. I was with NAP - the National Awami Party - and I had a leftist-leaning ideology. I joined the Labour Party and the trade union. I saw the Pakistani and the Indian people singing [at] those occasions, but no Bangladeshi representation was there. Some of the Indian people used to sing Bangla songs. I met some of them and talked to them. They ... said: "The Bengalis only sing the pastoral music." ... [So I decided] that I will make a music group and I collected some of the like-minded friends. I discussed with them. I had a cousin who could play the tabla and I could play the harmonium. We started to practise and our first appearance was at Altab Ali Park. It was the first Bangladeshi carnival in the UK.

### Abdul Lotif

I have spent all my life in ... Britain. In my early life I worked in factories and had a lot of friends. ... At first I worked at the High Commission of the then Pakistan. [Then I] came to Aldgate and took jobs in factories here and then I established a factory. I ... practised and performed music during all these busy days. From the very beginning I had many companions - some of them are still alive and some [not] - but I have spent all my life with joy. I worked hard and [was] also fond of music. ...

[During the Independence War we supported the independence movement and dreamed of] peace in Bangladesh. ... We, the expatriates, [wanted to] go to Bangladesh to see our families and relatives and the countrymen, as well as ... our mothers. We have three mothers - one is the earth, one is our country and one is *Ma'Fatima*. I am telling all this because I have a bleeding heart. We worked for the whole week, we sang songs to leave behind all the tears. We wanted to forget the sorrow. ...



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I am now 66 [and until] now I play music and sing. I sing because my dream, my passion is music. ... One who sing songs from his heart ... will never speak a lie and he will not make fraud with anyone. Allah does not love [the person], who is not loved by [other human beings]. The world is a temporary place to live, and man is the greatest creature of Allah Almighty. ... I started singing from the very beginning of my life. ... A song is never a bad thing. ...

We started singing [in] '63. We were united and started singing together. Gulam Mostafa from *Moulvibazar* was the greatest singer of *Baul* songs in whole Britain. He was the disciple of Yaqub Miah of *Mymensingh*. He is my instructor and I learned *Baul* songs from him. We were a few people at that time and I used to sing with *ektara*. Many of them are dead now, including Gulam Mustofa. ... I played *dofki*, *mundira* and all other instruments - whatever was needed. I was completely absorbed in music at last and I was fond of *Ektara*. I have lived all my life with music.

## Shahin Badar

My mother was a *ghazal* writer, so I always heard my mum singing all the time. She was classically trained [and was] also taught by *Nawshadji* and ... has performed with *Mukeshji* as well. So I used to always hear her and I naturally had the talent but I never took it seriously. It was through her push and support [that I got] some interest in music. She got music Ustads, and I took few lessons here and there. But I never took it seriously. ... Later on I did some shows and the shows were fantastic. I performed in Kuwait [and] I used to [participate in] a lot of multicultural shows. So later on I started to believe that I have a kind of natural talent, because everyone was talking and pushing me. ... The older and the younger generation [were] telling me that I have something unique and I had to do something [with] it. Again, I never took it seriously. Later on, I think, when I came to the UK [and] did couple of shows here, I decided to take it seriously, because of my involvement [with] some of the producers here. That's how I think I got involved in music.

But music was not something I took seriously at [every time] in my life, because my father pushed me a lot more into my education. Music was something that just happened in my life through people just calling me up. So the involvement in music, I think, came obviously through the push through my teachers. They themselves pushed me a lot, my mother did and it was the talent. I think [that] I naturally have an [in-born] talent. The progression came, I think, mainly from the UK.

I always had in my mind [that] if I want to do something, it has to be something different. I never wanted to copy someone and I was very bad at it. I really couldn't imitate someone. I just couldn't, I was really bad. And if I did imitate a song, I ... changed the whole melody. This is what my mother used to get angry about. She said, "Shahin, I gave you a track. Why don't you sing exactly the whole song the way it is?" ... I would always change the song and that's one of the reasons, I used to get fed up of singing when a song is given to me. I would be like: "Yeah, this is great." And the melody would go somewhere else. So my mother was annoyed with me. ... I was never singing the complete song.

I still have the problem now and I think I get very bored, I think that's what it is. I get bored. It is not the fact that I don't want to do it but if I wanted to do something, I wanted to do something unique in my own sound. Whether people liked it or not is not my problem. This is natural to me. And I always had that from when I was a kid, always in my life. Obviously it is something that can be frustrating, because the music directors would say: "Why don't you sing me a song?" Here I am doing something of my own and they will look at me and say it was lovely and interesting, but it is so different.

When I was very young, *Bappi Lahiriji* called me and ... said: "Shahin, your voice is so different..." I was never interested in music so I used to think [that] it's like, I will be in the room, I will be going out, I will be going to school, I will be singing in the bus and everybody will say: "Wow!" "Oh, my God! She is so good." At the school, I had won the talent contest. I had sung one of the tracks by *Nazia Hassan* ...

## Shohid Jolil

In the very early stages when I was in school, coming up to the third and fourth year, I was looking for something broader, something creative. I was listening to different types of music at that time. ... I was growing up ... through watching either Bengali movie or Hindi movies ... So at some point I ... [learnt] ... Hindi from watching films. But it was the music that got me interested. Mum woke [me] up in the morning and there was Hindi music playing. And probably someone put the radio on and there was some English music happening there. So ... a blending of different styles of music was already happening. You walk from one room to another room [and] there is a different style of music. From there on the idea started for me. ...



Osmani Knights (went on to become Osmani Soundz), 1988.

[In] school, it was more about having parties. ... We used to have daytime parties between 11 o'clock [and] 4 o'clock ... So we were organising events in schools and then eventually in youth clubs. [The] age group was form like 13 to about 18. ... [We] started mixing different types of records. At that time I got hold of some Hip-Hop, Soul, R&B, Michel Jackson [and] started ... [to mix] them with a few traditional records of Bengali music [and] Hindi film music. I just worked on some ideas of mixing and blending and played [them] when I was actually performing at the club or the youth day ... and see how the crowd would react. ...



Technology was playing a big part as well. At that [time] ... a studio to work and experiment with music [cost] tens of thousands of pounds. ... So being in the youth club, [we tried to get] some funding ... [It] was quite difficult but it was a starting- point. And in the last ten years, the technology progressed so much, sound players were more accessible [and] prices came down on a lot of stuff. Then, eventually laptops came, computers ... so that really helped us a lot. The first computer that I got ... was [in] the year '91 and so I was messing ... with actually programming music rather than playing records. And [I] was trying out different ideas. So in '94, I [recorded my first track in a proper studio]. ... From then on, I just got involved with the club nights ... No one taught me till that point. It was just basically watching, going to events and ... learning from there. There was no one ... to tell you: "This [is what you have to] do." Basically, you were on the street - you [have] got to learn on the street level. There was no one going to teach you, either you wanted to learn or you [not]. ... If you want to learn, you are going to learn anyway.

### **Deeder Zaman**

I got involved [in music through] a workshop [of] ADFED... *Aniruddha Das*, who was the bass player [of] the *Asian Dub Foundation*. I went along to this workshop. ... It was a documentary focusing on young Asian musicians getting into music, in the industry. ... I would have been about six. ... I used to dance break-dance when [I] was young as well. ... I was also a member of the *Joi Bangla Banned* when I was young. ... That's how I got into music.

[The workshop] was actually a four days workshop and me and a bass player went on to start writing music. And I turn up to play ... [in] a place where people just come in and jam and do music workshops. ... Then we went on to [get] more and more members involved ...

### **Kishon Khan**

When I was very young, I was forced to learn piano. Then, as I got older, I took a jazz course. [When] I left school ... I got a band. At university [I] was studying something totally different. Then I fell into playing music professionally, because I played from young age. I started playing with different bands and different musicians learning about different types of music. So for me I got involved in music accidentally. As a youngster I knew nothing about [how] it would be to be a professional musician. It's not something that I knew I would do from young age. I thought I would be a doctor or an economist. [I became a musician] because I could play the piano and I found I was making money from that ... Then, when I started travelling after university, I also found that I could ... get a job with playing in a band or playing the piano ... That's how I fell into music.

I was forced, in terms that I started it when I was in Class Four. To be honest I hated classical lessons [but] now I thank my mother everyday for forcing me. ... Even though I loved playing the piano, I hated the education side of it. When I was old enough to go to piano lessons for myself, I bandaged my fingers together and said: "I hurt [them]." [I was] getting in lots of trouble there. ...

[The piano was the] choice of my parents, apparently I always liked the sounds of the piano, and I always rushed up to ... to try and play. ... It's funny, I used learning an instrument. When you then start listen to music, whatever music, you naturally get down to music with your instruments in it.

### **Ashfaq Kazi (Minto)**

When my family came over, we had a collection of 45 (rpm) records. They were published by the emerging record industry in Bangladesh at the time. A lot of the songs were patriotic songs and they were in our collection and that was my first exposure to Bengali music as such. ...

### **Mark Uddin**

We were ... involved in youth work and *Joi Bangla Sounds*. Sooner or later, when you are in things, you always [look for] ... your talents you have [for] it. At that time we were going through musical. That's why we were mixing ... we used to make [it] tasty for ourselves. And it just progressed ... and then the politics of organisation came into it and ... gave it even more meaning. It also gave us a little bit more of identity to do something that we were feeling good about. ... For us, anything we were doing had a good meaning and it was there for people to ... take [with them] wherever they want to go ... And it became inspiring to a lot of youth.

### **Hassan Ismail**

...[*Joi Bangla*] is a way of tapping into the creativity of your youth and the people around you in your community so that you can bring them out and give them to pass on the sense of identity in sense of learning. It also encouraged the youth. ... People ... who were involved in those things [are now grown up]. That may gave them ideas at that time and it was very positive thing to do like DJ. And Bengalis were into like *Harun* who got the youngsters to get into music

## 28. Influences on own Music and Musical Teachers

### Kishon Khan

I was exposed to a lot of Bengali and Indian classical during I was growing up. [Most of] my family [was] going to Bangladesh Centre in the late '70s and mid-'80s. My mum sang songs, so all over the house we were constantly singing Bangla songs ... traditional or Indian songs as well. And going back to Bangladesh, when I [went] back regularly, I was exposed to a lot of music in my family. When there were ... musicians coming over, including classical musicians, my mum [invited them] over and I [heard] them. ... As a youngster I wasn't aware of its relevance to me. But as I went into my teens and started to make an opinion about music then its relevance became much more important.

When I was growing up, mum ... probably sang folkloric songs, typical Bengali revolutionary songs, songs of her generation. My ... knowledge really changed when I finished university. I went to Bangladesh to stay there for a year. I went travelling around Bangladesh with local musicians and that's when I discovered things like Baul music. There is a huge variety of music [in] Bangladesh. We went into Eastern India as well. I went to some of the melas there. To be honest, I could spend ten years studying one of these types of music and I still [will] feel [that] I don't know that much. ...

I have to say I get described as a jazz musician but I don't play much of the American jazz. When I was a teenager, I had listened to a lot of American jazz and I was studying it just [after] I left school, before university. It's a wonderful music to explore improvisation. There is a wonderful energy [for me] especially [in] jazz ... from the '40s, '50s and '60s. At that time I played it because I loved that music. When I started travelling and trying to compose my own music in a more sophisticated way I used ... jazz, meaning improvised music. And I bring in lots of other influences - music styles I have been listening to from a young age. For example, in Indian classical music there is raag, scale, theme mode and then it is improvised. Jazz is much the same, so [a jazz musician is] just a musician who likes to improvise. I prefer to describe me in that way rather than [as] a jazz musician.

### Suzana Ansar

[I was influenced by] my mother and also [by] natural instincts ... I think my mother realised that I had a good talent. ... All the artists you can think of today like Himangshu Goswami, they used to see that instead of playing with the children at the back of the hall, I [was] watching the whole of the programme and I was three or four. And these artists put me on their laps and said: "She will be a singer one day." So that's how it happened. My mother was the influence and she made it easy for me and she encouraged me.

My first teacher was my mother, then Golak Mahan Chowdhury. He taught me the harmonium and my first fifteen songs. Then, when I went to Bangladesh in 1988-89, ... [I was taught by] Ustad *Zakir Hossain* and some other teachers. Then, from 1989, I started learning from *Pandit Haridash Ganguly*. who started [to teach] me on the *tanpura* ... I did 80 *Raags* from *Ektal Bilombit*, *tin tall* and *jhumra* and all the classical *talls* and basically a *khayal* of 40 minutes duration. That took ten years. It still is incomplete - you can [always] carry on learning.

### Alaur Rahman

My teacher was Pandit Haridash Ganguly. He was from West Bengal ...

and his wife was a homeopathic doctor. Pandit Haridash Ganguly was a student of Golam Ali, whose name and fame are history now. My eldest uncle, Abdul Goni, introduced me to him. Golam Ali was a great singer and teacher in the '50s and '60s. I was a student of Pandit Haridash Ganguly and I have learned music from him.

### Shahin Badar

[My music] has a lot of different influences. It has pop, it has dance influence, it has a slightly Sufi influence. I think it [is] a mix of all different sounds but it's mainly a kind of combination of East meets West.



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I was always influenced by *Sufi* music. I was a huge fan of *Qawali*. I was a huge fan of dance music. Now you can imagine if you put Sufi and dance, you can see what it has all to do with. It's a gift that Allah has given because you are ... connected spiritually to Allah. The whole nation, the world and the mind is not thinking of pop music - it is thinking of something very powerful. So when you are thinking of something very powerful, it's a combination between dance, which is again powerful, and Sufi which is also powerful but that power is connected with Allah. Your [songs are] about creation and about our Prophet - it's praising them. ... I think for me, the beat is important and I love powerful songs.

The UK was written in my fate. I came to the UK and I got involved with 'The Prodigy' in the track. So the whole music scene for me is like an inspiration and a gift and that gift developed a lot later in my life than in early stage. I had it in the early stage but because I was not serious about it. I never gave it a lot of thought. ... People say there is a place and time for everything. That is the truth. I guess we did not have that outlet. My parents didn't know these music directors and we were unable to reach them in the early stage of my life. Now as I grew up, I learnt a lot about life and the culture and now I know where to go.

### **Alberta Fatima Matin**

At that time, [our band's] music was very much Bengali music with rock influences. ... The dance was described as a mix of East [and] West, which was quite vague. I think ... that it was dance music and it was mixing of very modern beats with the traditional music.

### **Samiul Islam (June)**

I play all types of music. I play raag and I can play very classical music because I learnt classical first. You need to learn the basics otherwise you don't know what the base is. If your base is strong, you can go wherever you want to and you can climb up. You will not fall over if your base is strong. That's why I practised. ... If you are an engineer, whatever the plan is, you know how to build it. I know the basics so I can do any songs that come across. ... I can play spiritual songs, I can play ... any other song. I can play even ... Chinese songs because the music is basically the same with different themes and different tunes and different raags, so if you are a real musician, you have no problem.

## **29. Personal Role Model**

### **Suzana Ansar**

I have got lots of role models. I have *Girza Devi*, my teacher Pundit H. Ganguli, my mother. I do like *Runa Laila* a lot - she is classically trained and she speaks very good Urdu. And she can pronounce the ghazal and she understands. Similarly she is a good ambassador of Bangladesh. I saw her in many international programmes representing Bangladesh and I think there should be more people like her from Bangladesh - eloquent in English and Urdu and be able to represent our country. There are many whom I like very much, like *Farida Parvin*, *Parvin Sultana*, *Abida Sultana*. I like Sufi artists.

### **Alaur Rahman**

I follow *Mohammed Rafi* very much. I follow him because ... he was away from all kinds of cigarettes, wine, *betel leaf* and all the objectionable drugs. I was not lucky enough to see him but I have heard it from many people. The second thing is: To me his ... voice [is] absolutely God-given. There are many better singers - like *Mehdi Hassan*, *Lata* and others - but he is special [for] me. And he was pious. So I try to follow him truly in all ... points and I am still following him accordingly. He used to practise the songs deep in the night and [was] busy all the day with recording and film songs. I have found many talents in [this] artist. He sang spiritual songs, ghazals, film songs and also *Bhajan* with great success. He was a very good singer of Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu folk songs. He even sang English songs. So I am basically the follower of Rafi.

### **Shahin Badar**

If I ... have a role model then I am a huge fan of *Abida Parvin*. I love Michael Jackson (I know Michael Jackson has problems), *Nusrat Fateh Ali Khanji*, *Pavarotti*. There is not someone I will pinpoint and say: "This is [my role model] ...!" No, I don't have one like that. Because I am a very creative person, I create a vision, the sounds that I create, it's my own thought. Because I am an extremely creative person, it has been mainly the people that I have mentioned. It is the people and the music of *Qawalis* and also my mother. She had been a huge inspiration [for] me and the guidance has been there.

But I had no specific role model. I am a very spiritual person and it is inside me. ... I used to listen to everything. I used to listen to old time songs, I used to love Indian movies and I used to love all that, so all those are there. But I think in terms of my own sounds and how I am as a performer ... I haven't gone to any specific school of dance, I haven't gone to any specific school of music.

I have been my own person, from when I was a kid and my parents had the most wonderful influence on me, because they always pushed me into what I wanted to do. You know a lot of people go to some fantastic classical schools or they have got a lot of backing. For me it has been actually a gift and opportunities came my way. ... Even the stuff that happened with 'The Prodigy' - it's because *Aki Nawaz* of the 'Fundamentals' said: "You got to listen to this girl." And he saw me four years ago ... and for him to remember my voice all those years later was just amazing. And when the demo was sent it was fantastic. ... My work with 'The Prodigy' has left its mark internationally and I am very proud to be one of the first female vocalists, if I may say so, to have crossed over with the first and the only dance band in history, because there hasn't been anyone whose work in the chart was created and left a mark. ... A lot [of] people nowadays say: "We were the first, we were the second, whatever." But I think when you leave a mark in the history in whichever way ... that's your own creation. It's not a remix, it's not a copy of something or whatever.



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Now a lot of people are doing collaborations but a lot of them have disregarded my collaboration. They didn't want to acknowledge that there was an Asian girl, a lot of people thought that I was an Arabic singer, nobody knew me as a Bengali singer. I am proud that I have left this mark and it will ... always be there, regardless whether people accept it or not ... It has been used in a number of biggest movies like *Charlie's Angels*, *Lara Croft's Tomb Raider*. These are all big movies, Grammy-nominated movies. I think ... my achievements came through a lot of hard work. ... You have to be consistent with your work. You can't say: "Oh well, that's only collaboration". Part of the fact was that it was the fastest selling album in [the world's] history - until today it's known and it's around [in] the world.

### **Samiul Islam (June)**

Unfortunately, I didn't have [a] role model, but many of my family members used to sing at home. They are not professional singers. ... My aunty can sing well and this all motivated me to learn music. I really enjoyed music. When I was in school I used to participate in the school shows and when people clapped, I was very proud. All this helped me to go up.

## **30. Musical Preferences**

### **Alaur Rahman**

I like the spiritual music very much nowadays and this is related with age. We have different ages. We have our childhood, we have our youth and we have our later part - ... our old age. Everything, including choice, changes with age. There was a time I used to like love songs a lot. Now ... I do like love songs but [at] the same time I like the spiritual songs more. I like Urdu and Hindi ghazals, including the ghazals of Mehdi Hassan and Golem Ali. I also like the Islamic ghazals. The Nazrul songs are also included in the ghazals. I like the local music of Sylhet and the *Loko Geeti* very much. In total, all ... songs are good, but how much interest, tune, measure, life and absorption the singer can bring [to] the song is the most important thing in music.

I am not a good singer but I do try to be a good singer. The television will telecast one of my programmes soon. It was shown once and now it is being repeated because of the viewer's request. In the programme I sang spirituals, *nasheeds*, ghazals, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Folk, classical and semi-classical music. The host Rafiquzzaman asked me: "How did you achieve the skill to sing all these different kinds of songs?" In reply I asked him: "What [does] one have to do if he wants to sing in a film?" He [answered]: "Everything is knowledge, and the greatest knowledge of all was the knowledge of the Creator. If he likes you and you try to achieve something, you will be the successful person." I find harmonium the most useful [instrument] because it helps us to understand the grammar of the song. In the past, people used to practise music with *tanpura* [but] the harmonium has made it easier. Among the musical instruments I like the violin, though it is a Western musical instrument. *sitar*, *sarangi* and *dotara* are natural instruments - they give a true feeling. The manual instruments give the true feelings ... spot-on. The music [was] created ten years back. The same thing is being edited by modern technology. That is why there is no spirit in the modern day's music, [it is] ... dummy music.

The modern day musicians mainly play with dummies, so they can't create the true feeling and the spirit of the music. There is no soul and the music seems to miss something. The next thing is that many of the artists don't practise enough. Those who come to the spotlight too soon, are lost soon also. But [the one] who becomes popular slowly will hold his position for a long time and will lose his popularity very slowly. There is no one who can forget *Lata*, Mukesh, *Kishor* and Golam Ali. Some of them have passed away before our age but still we talk and love them, because we have got pure and original spirit of music from them. They are like symbols to us. We can never forget them.

### **Ashfaq Kazi (Minto)**

I ... ended up playing lot of pop music, currently popular English band music. ... My personal inclination was towards the music of Black origin. ... When I came to the country it was purely rock 'n roll and it lasted for about four to five years. I wasn't an integrated member of the society. ... My exposure of music was based on what people have around them. As I started to get more integrated and started making friends, my musical experience [was] broadening and I started to see other styles of music. Then only I was able to make a choice.

### **Suzana Ansar**

Because I am a mixed person - I am a British-born Bengali, I have a mixed identity - I like Nazrul Geeti, I like Khayal [and] classical music. That's where my training came from. Similarly, I like traditional Baul music or folk music because I can find similarities in the two. I also like Western music. I like hip-hop and R&B, and so it's very broad.

I love harmonium more than anybody - that's my core instrument. I think I play it very well as well. I play *tanpura*. Tanpura is a necessity. It's like a *sitar* but with four strings. That's the basic droning instrument so you [can] perfect your vocal. Because if you are singing classical music, the harmonium restricts you to the notes you play; whereas if you play a tanpura you can get more abundance ... I play a bit of sitar. I did Grade One in piano ... in school but I didn't go very far with Western music.

## **31. Festivals, Events and Performances**

### **Suzana Ansar**

I performed in the *Baishakhi Mela* for the last five years.... I think the melas have an environment [where] the music should be a very fast ... [and include] folk songs which I do as well. I enjoy all of [the events]. I don't have any special. [preference] ... I get a lot more personally out of the smaller *Jalsha* types of events, where there is more serious appreciation for the music. ... Those jalshas that we attend [last] until three, four or five in the morning depending on the raag, because raags have different times of the day. Melas are fun [and are] very different.

Three weeks ago we went to Switzerland [for] a Baishakhi mela. They don't have ... a big Bengali community but they arranged three or four coaches to bring people from all over Switzerland and Austria. There were about 600 people there and they did a little book fair and *panta-llish*, saree stalls and it was very good. It was in Lausanne, so people from Geneva came and a few of us went from London.

I performed on *BTV* when I was twelve, after winning a few contests here. They [selected] me to do a programme on *BTV* [and] that was my first TV experience. I toured with Sam Zaman and we did it in Osmani Memorial Hall. ... We did that in 2001 [and it] was arranged by the British Council. Then I did '*Gharowa Jalsha*' and more traditional programmes.

### **Himangshu Goswami**

I have performed in melas arranged by the Bengali community here in Britain but I think the standard of the music in melas should be better. We need to [develop] our culture by these sorts of programmes. For example, Bengali food is so popular in Britain now but our music and culture is not moving ahead. It is facing stagnation in my opinion. The state is also responsible for this and also the community has to play a big role in this sector. The state has to ensure proper and good quality education in music. But our Bangladeshi government [does] not give attention to the issue. Why is the same music performed again and again? Because we don't have the quality.

Recently some young people got interested to learn more on culture and music. I have found one Sylheti [from Bangladesh] student studying music in Baroda University in India. We need to develop the infrastructure and facility in our country. In Britain the culture is being practised but it is not developing in a [way] that is needed to fight the challenges of the new age. The new generation is listening to the music including the Bengali music but the extent is not enough. We are unable to fulfil the demand of our new generation, i.e. the third generation of youths here in Britain. They are still listening to the music of Abdul Karim and other musicians of the '70s and '80s. The music is a bit changed by the use of the modern instruments but the song is the same.

### **Alaur Rahman**

In 1985 I performed on BBC1. *Krishon Gould* was [the] sponsor of the programme and he offered me to sing on television. I was so happy and I said: "Why not"? In the first television programme I sang a song of Nazrul, one song of my own, and one song of my uncle. The programme's name was '*Naya Zindegi, Naya Jibon*'. BBC used to play Asian music from Tamil, Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi. All types of music were there - each week they used to broadcast different music. I performed in that programme and the Bengali community supported me very much. In that programme I told that [that] I am fond of the Brick Lane area. The community people were very proud of me and I was supported by them very much. I used to have programmes almost every day. ...

I have performed on Bangladesh TV. In Bangladesh, in my Jogannathpur thana, they have a big group, who once gave me a huge reception in 1986. Recently, I opened the memorandum they gave me in that programme and I broke [out in] tears. I have not done anything special but still they congratulate me so much. I have a programme with Satya Saha (the music director) on BTV. I am proud of being with Mehdi Hassan, Golam Ali, Jagjit Singh and other great singers of the sub-continent. I have learned so much from them. Music is a pure entertainment. Those, who have a pure soul, can never go off track - music will guide them all their life.

Some three or four years back, Bangla TV organised the Brick Lane Festival. *Andrew Kishore, Sabina Yasmin* and many other artists from Bangladesh were invited and I was also there. *Liala Banu* was the presenter of the programme and I was singing the song 'I am a Bengali boy', singing the songs of Bangladesh - 'The delta of Surma' and 'Kushiara is my birthplace' ... There were probably 1800 to 2000 people in the audience. The crowd was dancing and I can still see the scene any time I close my eyes. I also have so many awards and crests. I thank Allah for everything I got.

### **Abdul Lotif**

I remember the Scotland festival - my performance was [of] very high quality. I was not after the money. People paid me according to their ability and satisfaction. People loved me and I believe people still love me a lot. But I am an aged person now and I have left my golden age behind me.

I tried to sing the songs, especially the Baul songs. ... People invited me everywhere and I participated. Some people tried to confine me but I am still singing. I sing every Saturday. People still invite me and attend in most of the cases. I never say I am a learned person. I am a man with no knowledge but I love the company of people and people also love my company. Now I am a diabetic ... so I am a bit less active.

I wanted to serve people of all ages. I am the person who is holding the historical Baul music in Europe. I participated in all the exhibitions and in all other places. ... I have spent all my life with the people. I like nothing in the world except [people]

If I claim to be a great one, I am never a great one. I demanded nothing [from] anyone but I have gone to every part of Europe for the music. Once there was nobody to sing on the stage. Nowadays many people demand that they are singers but they are way beyond ... music.

### **Shahin Badar**

The most amazing gig for me was in Singapore and I performed in front of 40 to 50 thousand people and it was absolutely amazing. It was actually with Joi (British Bengali band). I performed and it was absolutely mind-blowing. Apart from that, my other performances were with Tim Deluxe. ... When I went to the Global Gathering festival, thousands and thousands of people were present. It is so amazing to see [when] the crowd goes crazy, their hands are up in the air. There are not just Asians - there are non-Asians. ... The respect and the love that you get, it's just absolutely mind-blowing. You just go back thinking: "I am on the top of the world." I haven't done [so] many gigs in the last couple of years. ... I have been taking time out. But when I did those gigs it was absolutely mind-blowing. As soon as you enter the stage, the [people] scream and it's just [as if] they want to come on ... the stage and pick you up and kiss you and hug you, thinking: "Oh, my God, you are the woman with the voice." It is really strange and crazy.

I also love the East End. [At] one ... festival ... the crowd was, I think, [about] ten thousand. ... When I entered the stage - I guess it was the mela - the chant 'Smack my bitch up' was played. And straight after the chant, I came [on] with my dance and my stuff. The girls, they were just gob-smacked ... Especially as [a woman], rather than ... just wearing skimpy clothes and all that, [I did it] just by performance alone [and] the crowds go crazy. That is the biggest gift that I can think they give me - to appreciate me and what I have given back to them. I think that is most amazing - to make them rock constantly, non-stop, they are screaming. It's just amazing and to sing live and not mime and to get their reaction. Because to get a reaction and you are miming doesn't do nothing. Because they might as well hear a CD or a recorder and jump up and down, and say: "Oh, the song is really great." To actually sing live and put them to rock, to the sound and then [they are] coming up to you and taking your autographs and really appreciating you.

Let me tell something. I was in Green Street just [the] day before yesterday and I was looking very dead. [I] was very tired. [When] I came out of there ... there were two guys at Upton Park Station. They were behind me and they were constantly singing songs. They were singing some love songs. I ignored them and I went and sat in the corner somewhere. I went into the train and they got [on] ... the train with me and one of the guys just tried talking to me. He was a college kid and he introduced [himself]: "I am Jitu and the other guy [is] Shah." ... They were lovely boys. I was looking dead, I was very tired and I was looking horrible. I had to go and picked up my outfits for the show from Green Street. ... One of the guys said to me: "You know, you remind me of a celebrity." I said: "Do I?" and he said: "Yes ... you look like Shahin Badar." I said: "It is me, my dear." He became crazy and was saying: "No, no, no, it cannot be you." I said: "It is me without my make-up." It was so sweet and he said some really lovely stuff. These guys were very trendy guys. Obviously, my sound is different, I don't do R&B, and I don't do *Bhangra* as much. I always do something different. They have influences of those and I have those elements in my songs. [He said] ...: "My God, your voice! And you are delivering it in some way that you are an artist, it is so different." It is so wonderful to get a comment like that from this young generation [and that they] remembered me, even if I [have not been] on ... stage for about a year and a half now.

... [Leaving] a mark as a woman - I am very proud. You can go to any part of the world and find someone who loves your voice. It's just amazing. I have a friend in Camden Town [and] he said [that] his friends [who are] ... rough guys in Camden Town ... just got mad [when they hear my voice]. ... And to see a hundred thousand people when 'The Prodigy' is performing and to see ... lights or candles [being] lit up or people [putting] their cigarette lighters on. And everyone is just on my voice. This is what I mean, I am thinking about it as well. You have left a mark. It is Allah's gift.

Hits are there, lots of them, but [to be picked up] internationally at that level ... [and put] into numerous massive films. To know Cameron Diaz, to know this person, [that] was it. Drew Barrymore picked up my chant and put it on Charlie's Angels ... I was with *A.R. Rahmanji* in two movies, ... called '*Zobeda*' and '*Youga*'. ... The song, which was the most amazing song I did with him, is called Azizi, [unfortunately] never got released because the film, which was called the '*Thief of Baghdad*', didn't get released, and it had Jean-Claude Van Damme and it had *Aishwarya Rai*. The movie never got released because of finance or other problems.

I have done a lot of melas and lot of festivals. I haven't done melas or festivals in [the] last couple of years and I performed hajj with my father. And I had to be there for my father. ... One of the reasons [is that] ... we are only two daughters and I had to be like a son for my father. I had time off for about a year and half. One of the reasons - I have to be honest now - [why] I stopped doing melas for a while [is] ... when I go on ... stage [now], unfortunately, at least the two rows of the crowd, (this is my past experience) ... get extremely violent: They throw things as soon as they see women. These boys or people who do this - I feel very sorry for them, because they are representing a community at the end of the day. When I go on there, I want to give ... my performance and my love to these people. We are Asians. ... I performed in front of completely White crowds - 40 or 30 or 20 or 10 thousand people. When I have done such big crowds ... none of them has behaved this way.

... [When I] come on ... stage ... I am not revealing myself clothes-wise. I am a respectable girl, I came from a respected family. ... There are thousands of people who come to watch, they come from respected families. ... If I behave in an obnoxious manner, I am actually offending my culture, my religion, my people. ... The security must be very strong at that time but boys are allowed to have things like bottles in their hands, papers in their hands, stones in their hands. ... It's so disrespectful ... When I come there, if something hits me ... I could die (God forgive me). Anything can happen. A stone can hit [my] head or my eye or whatever.

It's disrespectful not only to a woman, it's disrespectful to men, to bands as well. They are doing music, they are not going to come and burn your house down. They are not having drugs in their hands. They are doing music, they are doing it for you, and they are doing it for the community. They are trying to make you happy. ... Even in the Bengali community, it's very important for the organisations themselves to have extremely strong security for their own reputation. Because [otherwise] a person like me will never turn up there again.

### **Alberta Fatima Matin**

Festivals and melas are great. I have seen the Brick Lane Festival just growing and growing. ... The great thing [is that] ... festivals, if they work well, do create an atmosphere where people come together in a place. ... London is known [for] its share of issues. And festivals are great to bring people and musicians and artists [together] and create a real buzz and excitement. It's brilliant. The Brick Lane Festival has [become] so big. ... I probably missed the last one because that was too big. ... It [has been] growing from the smallest event to something that actually brings in a lot of money. It is good, it's good for lots of reasons and I think participating in [melas] benefits me in lots of ways.

### Sam Zaman

[Festivals and melas] ... get the community together. [They] get [the] community out into one place, but there are not many events for kids and families. [To have] melas and festivals means [that] there is a possibility [to get out]. If the families are open enough to go to them, at least you have a congregation and you have the mind-set of a certain group of like-minded people. They are very good for that reason alone. ... For example, Baishakhi mela and stuff like that - you have so much funding coming in ..., but it seems that they don't spend any money on the festival. I have participated in melas. ... I did the Bradford Mela last year. I did a workshop and I [was] a DJ. ... I have done a few different things. I still do them but not just in this country, most of my work [is] overseas. America, India, China, Europe - wherever it takes me I just go. We also did in Brazil in February. ...

[We] have the name 'State of Bengal' ... [and] we played in Dhaka, Chittagong and Calcutta in 2001. So for us that was the 'State of Bengal' playing in the state of Bengal! That made me feel very proud. My grandfather was very proud but he was very unhappy ... to see me after 13 years. I saw him for [only] an hour after 13 years [and] then I had to leave the next day or following day. Certain things are very difficult in music also. When it comes to family and friends, you go to Bangladesh, you go to the villages, you want to see your cousins and aunties and uncles and the chicken and the fish and the snakes. ... So those kinds of things are something else. ... Unfortunately, when you are touring very heavily you don't always get what you want. So you are a slave to the music more than you are to life itself. ...

I played in the Osmani Centre [in Dhaka] two nights running - both shows sold out. I was playing with musicians from Bangladesh as well. Having extreme orchestras from Dhaka was amazing. ... 'Miles' and some other rock bands were there. It's cool, they love their rock and stuff like that. I have a lot of respect for them for doing what they love. But it would be nice to hear something that is unique. The Bengali rock bands can make some other kinds of music. I will wait to hear that. But I am sure people will be making that kind of stuff.

### Samiul Islam (June)

We were doing gigs all over the UK. Somehow Channel 4 came to know us ... 'Joi Bangla Banned', the first Bengali band in the UK. ... All the young generation was involved in the band. It was a good idea to have a programme like 'Bandbaja'. They ... also invited the Punjabi bands. ... They found it very interesting because it was the first time they had a Bengali band. And we were using East and West rhythms to different kind of instruments and things. That made them interested to give us a break and see what happens, what [would be] the reaction. ... [Many from the] young generation [were] coming to practise, they showed they were interested to play musical instruments. We were busy with other things as well. I was doing my university degree and also *Ansar (Ahmed) Ullah* was busy with study. We gradually broke up because of our other engagements. We were busy with our own lives and jobs.



June (2nd from left) with Joi Bangla Banned performing for Channel 4, 1990.



I have participated in lots of melas and festivals. There are lots of [the] young generation. They come and dance with the songs and they say: "It's really good." It's very good for them that we [are a] Bengali band and we are doing pop-star songs like 'Ore Saleka, ore Maleka' of Azam Khan. We call him Guru in Bangladesh. We are singing his songs, and basically the songs have a lot of meaning about Bangladesh and about life and lots of things. The new generation accepted us very well and they enjoyed it. We ran the band for three or four years.

### **Kishon Khan**

In my teenage [I] probably [did not find cultural events entertaining] but teenagers have more about wanting to break away from family and explore things, which are not so familiar with. In my 20s and 30s, I found it musically interesting here in London. Even ... now the Bangladeshi melas are very important to me because it can explain my identity. [I performed in a] lot of melas in the East End. The Bangla mela in the last July ... was great. ... I do a lot of not just South Asian melas but kind of world music events. I think in Spitalfields, there was a gigantic one five years ago. For me it also gives me a chance to see other people in arts.

### **Ashfaq Kazi (Minto)**

Still I can remember the event in Pall Mall, the organiser was the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). It was a week-long event and they were basically showcasing Asian music. We had bands like 'Alaap' ... there were all sorts of different groups and all of them performed. And we ... were the only group that performed twice. Being Bangladeshi we were asked to perform for the second time, so that event is one of the memorable events to me. Our performance was picked as the highlight of the week-long event. That was a very good feeling and this was not just at the local community audience. We were at quite a broader audience and they appreciated us. It is easy to do something in front of a local community because ... they understand the song that is sung. But if you go out to an audience, who has not heard you before and [has] no affinity to Bengali music, and you see that they appreciate you after the performance, it is a very nice feeling. ...



Minto performing with Joi Bangla Crew at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Pall Mall, 1987.

At the time of my university the Asian dance style, which was popular, was the Bhangra. With the Asian Society I spent quite a bit of time following a group called Alaap. I performed in various events in the university. ... We used to practise every evening. ... We had a space in the Mulberry Girls School. We had a good relationship with the school after our performances, so we were allowed to practise in the school [in] the evening. We also practised in the building of the Tower Hamlet's Association for Racial Equality in Cambridge Heath Road. We weren't a professional group of dancers. ... We all [had] some amateur experience but we were a crowd who was more outgoing. A lot of us used to go to party and club and dance. So we were not shy of getting up and dance.

... We used to sit down and listen to the music. ... When we were happy and we liked the combination, then we moved forward to the music. Every evening we used to get together after work to rehearse. Once the rehearsal has ended the core group - with Ansar, myself, Harun, Faruk and a few others at the time - get together at either Harun's place or my place, listened to music, created music, came up with dance moves. The whole group was created because we had the slot at Mulberry Girls School. Right from [the first day on] we didn't create a dance group, we didn't have a dance move, we didn't have a dance routine ready for public consumption. We had an event and we had to perform and we had to come up with it. We had a time pressure to come up with the routine ... and [to] get everyone trained. From that moment on we had a commitment. ... This organisation wants us to do this event. We got the exact amount of time.

[We received] some payment but it was mostly on expenses, because ... it wasn't that the individuals got paid. Because the money we were getting was spent on buying some records or some instruments or costumes or [paying] travel costs. Sometimes we had to hire some equipment. These are not commercial enterprises, these are voluntary organisations so they can cover your expenses but they can [not] pay you professional fees.

## 32. Own Songs, Released Singles and Albums

### Shahin Badar

I am working on an album right now and, *InshaAllah*, the album is going to be out in about the next couple of months. My manager is working on it as well ... so at the moment we are looking for some sponsors for the marketing. I hope people are going to enjoy it. I hope they will appreciate it really. I was really busy travelling. I have been to Lebanon and Germany and have some amazing productions. I have also finished working with 'Super Fly', who was No.15 or No. 16 in the charts last year. That track is coming out in the summer. I am really busy writing and composing some of the sounds the younger generation is going to like as well. It's a mixture. Later on the year, I am hoping to release a *Nath* album. It's for all my people, all the people who do love me and all the people who can get influenced by me. I have got a lot of very wonderful fans, who I admire, who always supported me. It's actually for them as well. So, *InshaAllah*, ... there is something positive I can leave and they can learn something from me and ... they can feel something. If it can help them in any way or at any time of their life, I would like to give them back, when I am still alive. ...

My first single ... was with the producer called Johny Zee, who is now called 'Stereo Nation'. I just released the single and the single did pretty well. It was number four in the Bhangra chart in UK. After that I took a break because the whole industry was ... not very cooperative. I just found they weren't extremely cooperative with female singers. ... They just wanted to tie you down for four or five years. So I think the whole music scene put me off for four or five years and I just wasn't really bothered about it until I got a call from a record company, and basically they told me to do an album together. Again my sound is very Arabic, it has a lot of Arabic influences and that's natural. I think I started doing that from a very young age, because I was brought up in Kuwait. ... I used to sing *Nath* in school assemblies [and] obviously read the Quran. ...

We released our first album named 'Destiny' which was quite nice. It was very simple - it wasn't the kind of sound I was used to, because the sounds I like are the dynamic sounds. I [had a] very big production ... in my mind. But unfortunately [it] didn't come out in that way but the album was very well received. It had a very soft kind of production. After the album was [released], the marketing of the album was not great. ... The whole Asian scene wasn't the kind of scene where I wanted to be in. I started writing my own melodies. I started producing my own material. So it was always composing. ... The ustads always influenced me to do a lot of ghazals, which was all great but I wanted to create something. I always brought in a different sound and they found it quite annoying because they felt that I was very creative but my voice wasn't what they expected. They were trying to train me in a certain sound but I was doing something completely different when I was singing a ghazal as well. They said [that] I had a very unique kind of talent and I should pursue it. Then, after I released ... the 'Destiny' album, they left it for a while and then I got a call from 'The Prodigy', and that was it and that was the biggest thing that ever happened, and I left a mark internationally.

They called me up and they said: "Shahin, we have heard so much about you. Can you send us your demo?" Then Aki Nawaz of 'Fundamental' mentioned about me to 'The Prodigy' and at that time I was doing a lot of shows and I was doing a lot of melas. I was doing it as a hobby. I never took it seriously, because I just thought, music was great and I have got a voice and so what. ... I was more interested in my educational career. I was doing management [and] doing well there as a government officer.

... When the call came, I sent them the demo I worked on. And that demo was just a demo, it wasn't a finished product, it wasn't a finished sound. But they loved the voice and straight after that I was invited to the studio, 'The Prodigy' studio. I met Keith, I met Liam. Liam is the producer. Then we recorded the chant on the single. It was a very controversial track and I didn't know that the track was going to be called 'Smack my bitch up'. But when the demo was given to me, it was given as 'Change my bitch up'. ... It was an amazing collaboration ... because Liam was fantastic. When I went to the studio, he just said: "You know Shahin, you will listen to this." He had an idea what he was looking for. But when I heard the sound, I said to him: "Liam, look, I am going to do something. If you like it, you keep it, if you don't like it, you scrap it." He said: "OK, let's try it." ... I sang ... and it was absolutely great and he loved it straight away. Keith - he was playing with his spiky hair - he said [that] it was awesome and everybody loved it and it was amazing and that was my cross into the mainstream. ...

### **Alberta Fatima Matin**

We wanted to send a message to both - the Bangladeshi community and to the non-Bengali community. I think the perception within the community ... in terms of ... exposure was not ambitious in the creative art sense. ... And this was something that has broken that mould. And then I think the attitude in the community was ... [that they] could believe that they could go out there and create this. ... People really did wake up. ... I didn't know what the community thought. Probably afterwards the reaction has been: "Wow, you have been brilliant at that time! ... You influenced me and you inspired me." So ... the feeling in the community wasn't that ambitious in the art sense. Now, they have just taken what we did - what we did probably not even innocent and very simple. But it needed to happen and what we created was a buzz among the community and ... the community was proud of us. ...

### **Sam Zaman**

[One album] is a collaboration album with *Ananda Shankar* from Kolkata, who is the nephew of *Ravi Shankar*. ... [It] was ... the first time Ananda Shankar was going to play in the UK in his entire history. We wanted [something] translated modern but yet something that would have the sensibility of Ananda Shankar's writing also. ... That was 1998. ... It was with nine musicians and about ten venues across the UK. The largest venue we played was [in front of] ... 40 thousand people.

That was just [the] rock 'n roll style of writing - a live project - and I got very ill actually recording that, because we were working from 11 in the morning till 4 the next morning - non-stop for about two weeks. I ended up in hospital for a couple of days. Unfortunately, Anando died after we had [planned] two years of solid touring around the world. [It was] already lined up in advance, maybe a month before he passed away. But yet it was a phenomenal album ...

The last album 'Tana Tani' was recorded with Paban Das Baul, the Bengali Baul singer who lives in Paris. 'Tana Tani' was recorded entirely in his living room and also in a studio in Paris [by] a friend of mine. Again the idea behind the album was ... to promote Bengali experimental Baul music in the twenty-first century. But unfortunately it was stopped because of money [problems]. ... Sometimes to promote an album you have to promote it first and then wait for the money to come in. But sometimes people don't have the patience for that. I spent four and half year writing the album. It's unique ... People may say 'Real Sugar' was similar to it, but it was not. It's a different sensibility. 'Real Sugar' contains songs that existed already. 'Tana Tani' was about producing Baul songs that did not exist. ...

Baul has a system of 256 or 286 or more melody structures, which [the] classical field of music has also adopted and taken and changed in shape. So [we had] ... to go and investigate melody and melody structure in Baul song writing. Well, you can call it Baul or you can call it non-Baul, [that doesn't] matter. The point is [that] you are writing new songs. ...

Now, I am writing a new album, called 'Skip-IJ'. ... There are also a couple of Bengali songs in the album, again experimental level stuff. ... I am writing ... for [a] documentary which has already taken shape. ... We started to write back in December when I went to Kolkata. I will be working with local folk musicians in Kolkata, who are probably classical musicians, so it will be ... different. ...

I got to write for [another] project ... for a contemporary music network tour of the UK in July. I have got to write an hour and half show, which features Taufiq Quraishi, who is Zakir Hossain's brother [and] ... a classical singer [who] was the lead actress in 'Monsoon Wedding'. I have started writing already - and let's see, how it turns out.

### **Alaur Rahman**

Mr. Moshahid Ali was my first promoter. He had a shop in Brick Lane. [Jhankar] ... He requested me to sing some old songs but I preferred to sing my own songs, so that I have my own product and my own identity. I recorded 12 songs in one night, the entire tune was set by me. The songs were of old age and some Indian and Pakistani musicians supported me. In those days some funfairs were there in Britain and my promoter Mr. Moshahid Ali advertised the cassette at these fairs. People were very interested to buy the cassette.

I went to Bangladesh soon after the release of the cassette and people were looking for me as the cassette was a huge hit in the Brick Lane area and especially in the Bengali community. I was in Bangladesh at that time and I got a copy in Bangladesh and I also liked it. Some prominent figures of this field in Bangladesh appreciated my music. ... All this made me happy. I remember some of the songs of that cassette till now. There were 12 songs. ... All were very popular at that time. Even today people request me to sing [the] songs from the first album. I have 36 albums including Hindi and Bangla songs. I have four albums in the pipeline.

### **Suzana Ansar**

I am producing my album now, which is to come out at the end of July 2006. [It's] three quarters complete. I work for different albums. I have been very late with the album, doing more programmes and studies and other commitments. But I am doing [the] album now. I have worked with 'State of Bengal', I have written with Sam Zaman. I wrote the vocal track of his first album ... which was quite a hit song. ...

The album is going to be mixed. It is remixed. It is going to be interesting. I remixed three or four Nazrul Geeti with a very modern music. That is fusion. I have kept the vocal and the lyrics intact ... but the track is completely ... apart. It's a very western track but it is treated very carefully because the producer is my younger brother and he understands the raag, he understands the essence and the feeling of the Nazrul geethi. But he is a very westernised boy, playing the guitar. So I got folk songs and Nazrul Geeti. My brother is [also] doing [the distribution of the CD] ... and his friend Imran, who is a Pakistani boy learning Bengali. ...

I have done two *natoks* and two movies. They are very different from each other. One is called 'Mayer Tanee'. It was done half in Bangladesh and half in the UK, [in] Manchester [and] was released in the last Baishakhi mela. The other one is called 'Pohela Baishaki', which was done with local people, and I am doing one in Dhaka. I did a stage show with *Amzad Hossain*. ... [and it was] the first I have ever performed. I really enjoyed that. I do natok as a hobby - I like anything artistic. Singing is very important to me. I want to create and write and make something new. I have got few businesses like restaurants and teaching. My dad is a chartered accountant and he has a firm, I help him. I prefer teaching. I am doing teacher training and my ambition is to be a deputy headmistress. I would love to be headmistress and to do singing.

### **Abdul Lotif**

I have my own song, but I don't have it written. I can find songs whenever I need, so I was reluctant to write it down. I was not interested in writing; otherwise I would have written some of the songs.

## **33. Traditional Music from Bangladesh**

### **Suzana Ansar**

[I sing Baul music] but not that much. I sing some mystical music, which are Bengali Sufi ... My training comes from Khayal, which isn't Sufi - [it's] another side. ... [Although] it is not my actual field, I do listen to a lot of Sufi music.

### **Himangshu Goswami**

At the beginning of my music life, I learned classical music (the Raga music). ... I sang songs of *Nazrul*, high profile classical Nazrul. ... In '69 I attended an interview on East Pakistan Radio in Sylhet and qualified ... I started on the radio with Nazrul gethi. They recorded the song and gave a date to air the music. I went to the village with a joyful heart and told everybody about the time of the programme. When the song was aired, I went to those who listened to my song and wanted their opinion. They said: "We don't want to listen to these sorts of classical music. You'd better try the *Polli Geeti*, *Loko Sangeet*, pastoral music and so on."

I then realised that the general people will not like the classical music as much as they will love the *Loko Sangeet*, *Bhatiyali* etc. and I also was convinced that I should sing for the people, and that will be the best use of my skill. So I started to sing *Loko Sangeet*. I started pastoral music and soon the Liberation War of Bangladesh started. After the liberation some of my friends, like Himangshu Biswas [and] Akramul Islam, ... started a music school in Sylhet. *Ansar Ahmed Ullah's* family had a big house, which was empty as they were staying in Britain. We started our music school in that house. The name of the school was *Nabarag Music School*. We were too young then, so we requested Prof. Shafiq of *Madan Mohon College* to be the Principal of *Nabarag*. So we started the school. The two sisters of Ansar Ullah (Emily and Janet) used to sing and dance in that school with others.

That was the beginning of my music life. We formed a *Loko Geeti* group in Sylhet - it was [at] the very beginning of Bangladesh. We came from India and my home was destroyed and that's why I was staying in the home of Prof. Shafiq. He was [a] maternal uncle of Ansar Ullah. In our *Sylhet Loko Sangeet Dal* we included Bidit Lal Das in our group - he was also known as Patalda. He was senior to us and the legendary *Subir Nandi* was in our group. In 1973 there was a *Loko Sangeet Union* held in Dhaka. In that programme many groups from all [over] the country attended. We sang the song written by Giash Uddin Ahmed, '*Sylhet Prothom Azan Dhoni Babay Diachen*' and some other songs. *Kabi Jasim Uddin* was the chief guest. He was so pleased with us that we used to sing the songs in group. And most of the time I was the leader.

This incident gave us a huge lift. We got popularity, even [at] the national level. We were the only music group without a woman. I collected the song 'Shader lao'. It was incomplete then and I requested the writer of the 'Sylhet Prothom Azan Dhoni Babay Diachen' to edit it and modify it. He added four more sentences. And the song was a super hit in Bangladesh. Runa Laila and others also sang the song later. We were also invited to perform in the *Bangla Bhabon*. All the national leaders of Bangladesh were present, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Gen. Osmani and others. ... The President and others were very pleased hearing our music. When Zia came to power, we also got invited to the ... Sheraton [Hotel] to perform. Zia, Ershad and many others were admirers of our group.

Two traditional genres of music touch the soul of every Bengali. One is Loko Sangeet, and the other is *Kirtan*. This music is the music of the general people of Bangladesh. This is the aboriginal music of Bangladesh and this helps people to get energy, to get inspiration, and all the specialised professions had their own rhythms and musics in Bangladesh. The Bangla Loko Sangeet has its music for various purposes and it is the best in the world. All this brought me to the music. I am here in Britain for 30 years. I went to Canada, India, Spain and many other countries to perform Loko Sangeet.

### **Abdul Lotif**

In the whole arena of different types of songs, Baul is the mainstream music. All the music has evolved from the Baul songs, and the Ektara is the first instrument of Baul songs. Say, for example, Nazrul Geeti, *Lalon* Geeti and songs of Jalaluddin have evolved from the Baul music. All the poets who have composed songs, either the pastoral songs or the local songs or the *Lalon* Geeti, all the music has their roots in Baul music. The Kirtoni tune of music is basically the tune of Baul. The pastoral tune is the local tune and the tune of modern music has come from the Sanskrit. Baul has the essence of all the music. That is why Nazrul and *Rabindranath* have written this kind of songs. Baul is the soul of all ... music. For example, Nazrul wrote: 'Oh boatman, take me to *Madina*.'

### **Alberta Fatima Matin**

Anything is preserved, because [at] the end of the day, you can keep something as it is, but my view is to bring it to a bigger audience. ... If it means preserving it, it's fine. If it means sometimes playing about with it, it's fine too. I think, what would be a shame is, if [in] 20 years time, maybe the 6th or the 7th generation [of] Bengalis can't think what traditional Bengali music is because they have never heard it. But it's how ... you make anything appeal. ... But I think it can be preserved in lots of ways. Maybe it can be preserved by mixing with something.

I don't really know that much about traditional Indian and Pakistani music but what I do know ... [is that] traditional folk music in all different parts of the world [has its] own sounds. ... I can listen to a certain piece of music and [realise] if they [are] using very obviously traditional [or] ... conventional sorts of instruments.



Alberta Fatima Matin performing with Joi Bangla Crew, 1987.

### **Samiul Islam (June)**

Sufi has a special meaning, because they are saying something, and you have to listen with patience all the way down. Nowadays people don't have patience. They just want to move and enjoy and then go home, that's all. That's why nowadays it is hard to grasp the concept of the Sufi song, any folk-spiritual song. [It] is very, very hard to grasp the concept what they are saying. And the other problem is [that] our new generation in the UK doesn't understand Bengali well. They understand some of the phrases and don't understand some of the phrases. So they end up with no conclusion. But I like Sufi and spiritual songs. But it is very hard for the new generation.

### **Ashfaq Kazi (Minto)**

I don't have a wide experience in Bengali music. If you listen to popular music, it's not much different from the Western music because a lot of the popular music is using Western instruments like synthesizers, guitars and drums. So the music is pretty much westernised anyway. I don't particularly enjoy that ... type of music. [It] is not a fusion, I think we have taken the worse aspects of Western music and put [them] into our own culture. ... I like traditional old music, especially I like flute music as Bangladesh is a land of rivers. ... You will find [that in] a lot of the regions in Bangladesh they have the music and they play it on the flute and the songs are old. That, I think, appeals to me more, because it is not only different - it is unique.

## **34. Mixtures of Different Styles**

### **Alberta Fatima Matin**

Music, like anything with time, adapts and evolves and responds to what is happening out there. Mixing musical styles, when it is done well, ... appeals to different audiences. Because I don't make music I am probably not very technical, but I would produce an example. ... People are very much exposed to classical music. ... Classical music has ... been mixed with some dance tracks and therefore you are [attracting] ... classical audience and dance audience. Mixing brings creativity ... it's brilliant. ...

I think [in the '80s] ... we were ... probably a bit ahead of the time. ... We wanted to appeal to the masses, we wanted to get [our] message across. But how much ... effort we ... have made, I don't [know]. ... We were ahead of our time. I think it reflected the multicultural society very much. It reflected the Asian, the Indian subcontinent Asian and more traditional Western dance bits. That's not world music, but it was two very different types and styles of music working together. And it did reflect multiculturalism but I think today, ... [when] everything becomes better and better and bigger, that now ... one can ask: "Where is multiculturalism? Is it ... mixing two different languages of music together?" ... I don't know. But thought at that time we had done a great job.

### **Suzana Ansar**

You do it badly if you don't know what you are mixing. It is not just a case of picking a very good ... old song and putting some terrible bits [on it] and marketing them. It's not the way to go about it. If you understand well what you are mixing, then it is fine. If you are mixing something that is raag-based - you are taking a raag and a specific *taal* - ... you have to keep the essence of that raag, you have to keep the feeling and the emotion of the song. You have to maintain that and mix it correctly [and] then you will have something very good. I think [that] to continue the music and the art, you need to mix good music ... it can be done well and it can be done badly.

Many people find me very much multicultural. Some of them saw me wearing saree and reading my Bengali song in English. They didn't first realise that I am a Bangladeshi from here because I am traditional. Depending on the programme, I present myself that way and they can't quite make how. Especially in Bangladesh, where I am wearing *footie* and jeans, they think I am Western and when I sing something very classical, they can't make it [out]. That's how we are, we are the second generation. We are going to have the mix.

### **Alaur Rahman**

[When you remix, the] spirit is not there, it is being modified. But there is a saying: "Days are not always the same. Today's king will be tomorrow's beggar". It is a quotation of Nazrul and *Nowshad*. If I have everything fulfilled - why should I borrow from others? ...

Everything has a good side and a bad side. I am not in favour of change, but still people are listening to the Bengali songs, they are listening to Bengali and later they will be interested to dig in the songs, and they will try to find out the origin of the Bengali language. They will search and find many things; they will know the language movement, know the liberation war and so many things, which they do not know till now. I am not against the change, because the new generation is listening to Bengali at least. And this is the achievement of this changing.

### **Hassan Ismail**

[When I say East-West crossover, I mean] music from the East like Bengali music, Pakistani music and Western, obviously Western music - could be Hip-Hop, could be pop. ... [Our music] was [a] mainly traditional kind of Bengali folk music, our village music with tablas [and] sitars which blended well with the music we were bringing out.

[The transformation is] good. It's good for business, it's good for our own people who like to find who ... they were. Music, the clothes, the shops - people are interacting with all sorts of people, people from all over the world, from all walks of life, from all types of works coming here buying goods from there, eating in the restaurants, talking to our people, traditional Bengalis. This will give them insight to our people [and the] kind of culture they have.

## Mark Uddin



Mark Uddin (left) with Sam Zaman (who now leads State of Bengal) at a Joi Bangla Crew performance, 1987.

If you talk about us, we are talking about ... Bengali music and hip-hop house music from the time like 1986 and onwards. ... We are using Indian music or Pakistani or any other Asian influences as well as Western music. Western music is of all sorts for us at that time. Because we were youth, we were obviously into hip-hop, I mean the house music, and the influence was from everywhere. ...

To a certain extent [our music reflected multiculturalism] because we were mainly dealing with bringing the Asian sides. ... It was multiculturalism because the same thing was happening with other groups in East London ... it was happening there for the Afro-Caribbean people. They were doing the same thing. It was generally happening at that time, the experimentation with the music.

... I would say that we took inspirations from our culture on all levels, be it politically or musically or poetically. We used traditional music. Actually we took folk music, Baul music, Sufi music etc. [It] was important to get a cross-identity. [It] was not good just taking Bengali pop records. ... It didn't necessarily work with Western pop records, because it was on different beats. That was one main problem.

## Shahin Badar

Remixes are great but the original sounds, you don't feel it anymore. The singer, the voice, the deliverance, the tone, the tune, the music production, the class - you can try and do thousands of them. But what the producers are doing right now, they are trying to create a sound for their generation or our young generation, who only dance to the rhythm and kind of feel. But our generation people - or fathers, mothers, ... uncles, aunties - they use to feel, they were poetic, they were cultural. So with that kind of feel, I think some of the producers ... are putting quick beat in there and think it will be fine. They don't want to concentrate talking on the production and few of them kill the song. They get someone who possibly doesn't get the same tone of the original singer and trying to get the sound produced as the original. I don't mind, in the sense that you want to create something different. But if the remix itself is not very good, they are absolutely degrading the whole song and the tradition from where the song came.

I really believe in originality. That's why maybe I have never covered a song ... because maybe I don't believe in it. But I will do it, I will do it, but I just don't want to offend someone who has done something great. If you want to do it, do it properly and create something different with the sound. But it's difficult to get the copyrights as well. So obviously you are saying: "Let me just create something" and there is no problem. I don't mind them doing this. Because obviously, this is what the younger generation want now. Our generation wanted something totally different, this generation wants something different. Sounds are always changing. After three or four years the classical music could be the hippest music.

Now Bhangra and R&B [and] all these kinds of stuff are working ... with influences ... which are really funky. I love today's sounds. I think they are great. But when you make a bad mix or something, I have no respect for that whole sound. But they should keep the original stuff. They should keep the original sounds. ... The feeling [that] we used to get in the older generation, you don't get that now. When you hear a couple of versions, except for some producers, I must say they have done a classic job, they have done a fantastic job of it. But I think, you have to retain some of the original sounds. And people don't think that way. It is also sometimes not the producer's fault because the record companies themselves demand it. ... Because the buyers are [the ones] who are buying this kind of stuff.

Same is true for the downloads. If [you] are going to download something, there is no copyright and legal obligations to stop it. Then it's going to be downloaded anyway. So who is it? It's the public, so you can't really blame the producers, you can't really blame the artists because they are trying to move forward. ... At my mother's time ... [we had] the original sounds and the production [in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh]. They were using the original instruments. There were fantastic musicians. It was mind blowing. In the UK, you don't have that. It is very difficult ... [for] the poor young producers. I do feel ... for them. The knowledge is limited ... But still they combine it. ... But in India, it's like, in the morning they know ... what they have on the face. That's what they do, day in day out. ... But I don't agree with them. Mixing something which is really bad, but if they are signed to record companies, they must be careful. I will tell you why.

For me when a production is given to me, I create a certain kind of melody, sound and composition to it. But people ... might think this is different, this is mad. They love it later on, because it is original. For me you can never beat originality, you can never beat pop. Even when Nazia Hassan and all of them did it original – now, people are trying to copy it. When *Lataji* releases something it is original. ... Some of our Bengalis in Bangladesh, some of the music [is] amazing, the original Bengali guitarists, their voices, it is just mind-blowing. ... I'm proud of Bengali music but here they don't take it seriously.

### **Himangshu Goswami**

Folk and *Hasan Raja* and these sorts of music are popular in Britain. We can't have name and fame singing English sex and violent music in Britain. We don't have the element of sex and violence in our music. We have Sufi music and this type of music in Bangla. The music which touches the heart is the pure music. ...

Being a musician I am a servant of music. I want the music of the '71 times to be recorded and preserved well. There is an American company, which is recording the music of all the renowned artists of the present day. They will market the music after a long time. I want the music of '71 to be preserved for the next generation of Bangladeshis. There are songs of 1971 [that] are not known by the present day Bengalis, but I want them to be preserved, even by using the latest types of musical instruments. I also appeal to all to produce a very good quality cinema based on 1971. Our nation is an emotional one, we need to develop ourselves and work for our nation.

### **Samiul Islam (June)**

I came in 1985. I was a musician in Bangladesh. ... I used to go to many different countries. I used to play drums, keyboard, guitar ... - you can't name [what] I can't play. ... When I came here, I started talking with our local singers. They were using harmonium and tabla, very traditional instruments. Then, after a few months, I asked them to use some westernised musical instruments which will help our young generation to get more interested. ... The main point is to encourage our young generation to listen to our music rather than to listen [to] any other different culture's music. They can listen to different culture music but they are not getting our culture enough. So that's my main point - to encourage them to do our own culture and to practice our own cultural things. Sometimes I was talking with the veteran singers ... here and they said: "We don't pay a lot, so there is no point to bring two or three musicians." So it was very difficult and they were not used to do with that kind of East and West mixing. ...

I was always interested to mix East and West because the world is changing. For example, if I give my child harmonium and tabla [it] will not listen [to] my song. [The children] will say: "Ok, I will come later on." If I put lots of multicultural instruments with the same song, they will be interested and that will be something new to them. They are listening to that kind of beat music with a very remixed music everyday. So it was good for them and interesting for them as well. That's why I always use that kind of mixing [Eastern] and [Western] ... instruments to make the song more interesting.



### **Abdul Lotif**

The Baul music is going out off its track. The tune [had been] changed. [The] theme of the song is the main thing [in] Baul music. The heart will sing with the singer, then it will be Baul music. But people are changing the tune and the theme of the Baul music. There are masters to teach the basic things of the song, but people are going according to their will. They are trying to sing the songs but it is out of the main track. I have heard in the television that the Baul music is losing its purity. I regret ... the change of the basic tune of the pastoral and Baul songs. Jasim Uddin, Abdul Alim and Abbas Uddin were great singers of ... pastoral songs. ... Pastoral songs have a tune of separation. Baul has kirtani tune ... Baul also has *Dari-Comma* tune. The present day singers are altering the original tune of the Baul music. Many people can sing the Baul music according to the theme of the Baul music. But in Britain there are very few or no singers, who [are] holding the original tune and some singers from Mymensingh are experts and maybe credited on this.

I have performed at the Altab Ali Park on a Baishakhi Mela. Amir Uddin was the best singer of the Sylhet district. Abdul Karim was a good singer of high (scale) tune. Kamal Uddin is the top class singer in the Sylhet district. No one has been successful to copy Amir Uddin, in true sense. People are even changing the music of Lalon. One should sing a song according to the tune of the music, according to the writer who has written it and according to the tune he has sung the song.

All the instruments have [their] own tune in ... music. The music will not be a complete one without any ... instrument. All the music has its own grammar but people are not following the rules of the music basically. I try to bring the basic tune and the theme of the music, when I sing.

### **Sam Zaman**

[At the] first time 'Visual Audio' was more than experimental - sculpturing sounds and figuring out, how I want them to sound, linking relation to the feeling in a club setting. ... But [there were] ... also special pieces written for people's wedding and stuff like that. It also is more of a psychological mindset. The philosophy behind the visual audio was based on having a vision as a picture frame ... and writing music to the picture frame. So they all are based on psychosis of some kind. Drama communication was basically [that] any entity [living on] this planet [was] returning back to sea, what is happening to the planet and hopefully ... express [itself] ... as an outer being.

... [The] Chittagong tour was about the nightmares I encountered in Chittagong, when the student riots were happening like in '87. So, elephant ride was a journey in the Dhaka Zoo with my grandfather on the back of an elephant. So these things are very fixed in my mind as ... experiences that really kept with me, stayed with me, whether it is dark or light, or philosophical or not philosophical. For me, there is no boundary between any of those. So when I write, I write without [bias] ... because I am not writing for any fixed moment. ... When I write music, I am not saying [that] I ... write hip of the house. I don't think about that. So that's one thing that's unique to 'Visual Audio', which came out in 1999 in the UK and ... worldwide around 2000 and then in America in 2001. ... People [are] still discovering it and people [are] still finding it. ...

Some people say ... to me [that I am the pioneer of mixing East and West]. Yes, we were doing it before anyone else was doing this. ... Bengali music was being mixed with other styles of music. ... So Bengalis were the pioneers of mixing Asian music before Bhangra with the exception of maybe Sheila Chandra, who was going under the name of Monsoon. ...

The concept of westernism and how to fit the Indian identity in the Western construct is opposed to saying "No" to whatever the construct is. This is what we are going to do, irrespective of [what] the construct is. So that really took shape of us, because we were mixing ... *Amir Uddin*, ... James Brown and [others] ... , Bengali classical [and] Indian classical. So for us I think back then [it was] very different. You could go to different places and most of the [times] ... we did not advertise anything and normally 500 to 600 people turn out to some space and as [it] progressed ... 2,000. ... Liverpool - in each room there were like 5,000 people and there were 20 rooms. So we did get to another space. ... I don't think it exists today. ... There [are] a lot of things that have happened. ... We don't ... see too much of them now.

Nowadays ... you have followed American ideology of music and try to combine a little bit of Bhangra, a little bit of Arabic or American hip hop, and not produce anything as anywhere near. Quality [is] what the Americans produce. We are still trying to justify, because it's our Asian heritage. ... [It] has developed something unique from us that will challenge everything just out there and that's what I think. ...

I have been working with some young people in East London. Suzana Ansar ... is a classical singer but has got a different way of working with classical and experimental music and music that young people would feel. It's a fine balance, not an easy balance. There needs to be more – it's my problem of the whole thing. Bengali community I find very fragmented.

In the old days I remember we used to have festivals and events that were arranged by Bangladesh Youth Movement on Cannon Street [Road]. Those don't happen now. I don't hear anything about it. So ... we have taken a step backwards in terms of modern day Bengali-culture or Bengali-influenced music. That is something that needs to be addressed and readdressed. Because unless that happens you can forget about Bengali culture and music, because it won't exist in this country. Because the young people are not into it. And the reason why they are not into it [is] because they don't see any relationship. And they don't see enough of it. ... They need to see a lot more. ...

Sometimes the reason why they are into hip hop is because they saw so much of it. It's so much hip hop out there. The American gangstas, the ideology, [the] culture it's in every single element of culture, especially in the UK. The UK lives the American culture. ... So I just believe the young people [must] really search for whatever they are, whether they are Bengali or not Bengali. Whether they produce Bengali music or not produce Bengali music ... [but] there are not many Bengali producers at all. ...

There is definitely a shift away from what Joi Bangla did years ago. ... Young people did feel empowered to see other Bengalis out there doing that and I gave them a bit of self-confidence. We are about to do whatever we want now. There needs to be another young group of people like the Joi Bangla group – [a] young group of kids, who really have the intention of saying we do value our culture. We do value what musical history ... [has] developed in [the] last five to six thousands of years. It is not entirely Bhangra or Arabic or so on. Society is so diversified that you have far more choice now. Because you have far more choice, you have to work that much harder ... otherwise no one is going to know.

### **Deeder Zaman**

A lot of people ... expect me to have Asian sounds. And [I] have got Asian sounds in a lot of my music, but not the majority of my music. I would say a lot of this is hip hop ... but a lot of traditional sounds are coming in a lot of tracks. It's like punk, jungle punk ... but now it is a lot root based. ...

My father listens to Asian music and he really likes it. I don't really know what that [discussion about mixing East and West is] about. That's about purity. ... I will move up to the North and in a few years I will have a Northern accent. So you can't really tame it down when it happens. It happens for a reason and you can't really do enough about that. ... We have got our own crowd that moves to it and it's a way we at least stick into our roots in a way. So you should be glad really.

I love [Bangladeshi sufi music and traditional Bangla music]. ... The music needs to spread even more in the UK. ... 'Tana, Tani' ... was a prime example of the East [and] the West. ... I love Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and the Sufi side of his [music]. ...



Music is always changing because the scene is always changing. So in the early '80s, there were a lot of Asian sounds that were mixed into the scene. ... I don't really know if it has moved on since then ... [and it will] soon move again and you will hear again different changes in the sounds.

### **Ashfaq Kazi (Minto)**

Different people have different views on [mixing Eastern and Western music]. [As] someone who has been brought up with a very classical view point, I am not an expert on Bengali music but I am sure that there are different styles. So from a purist point of view, it beholds to keep those styles alike and obviously to make people aware of the different styles. ... With Western music I can listen and say: "Well, that's ... R&B or that's pop or rock." ... They set a style that makes that song belonging to that particular [music] ... but ... we didn't have that level of complexity. For us this is Bengali music, this is a Bengali song that is sung in a language that we barely understand. We didn't have the complexity to specify the style of the music.

[We are] ... trying to educate them into appreciation of the Bengali music. ... Our aim was purely to give them some exposure, whether it be a small snip ... of a popular song. We think that [is] an achievement. So I suppose there are audiences that will appreciate pure and unadulterated [music] ... But who knows? Maybe a sizeable generation who appreciate a fusion. ... I think it's the view point at the end of the day. Music can never be static, people are creating new styles, old styles are being modified. ... It's a very organic growing thing and it comes from people's heart and as long as you have an audience who appreciate it then that music is growing. If you create something new and nobody likes it, that's going to die. ... You can't put a framework and say that these [are] the boundaries of the particular music. ... You have to use the freedom to grow. And it will grow as demands of the business change. ...

We produced the music [and] had used Western music and Asian music and it sounded good to [the] audience. ... We have to appeal to the both sides of the population. We just needed to get it out there. We just needed to get it promoted. People listen to music in the stores and on the car - that is one aspect. But to get a wide audience we needed to have something visually. We just created an event. ... If you have a group of young people dancing the audience has a visual stimulation as well as the audio stimulation. That's the reason [why] we had the dances. Nowadays people may probably don't want a visual stimulation to detract from the music, so they want to perform and they want to sing. They want the audience to focus on that. They are obviously promoting themselves. We weren't in the game to promote ourselves as individuals. Our aim was to promote the music. We didn't really mind dances or any other things as long as the music got out. ... That was enough for us. ...

[I was proud of being a member of Joi Bangla]. I think it was an achievement. We did our best at that time to try [to] promote our own culture. [It] ... had [success]. ... We should be proud of our achievement. We were only a youth organisation, trying to do things in our own way. And none of us was a professional, and we were not guided by professionals. We didn't have experts coming in and telling us the way of doing the best. ... We decided it ourselves. ...

I was quite heavily involved with local young people and I was actually a member of the Bangladesh Youth Movement, based in the Cannon Street Road. ... At the time I was working at the Montefiore Centre for an organisation called the Federation of Bangladesh Youth Organisations. I was in the management committee. So through the FBYO ... we did quite a lot of work with the youth organisations ... in Bradford, London and all other areas. It was very natural to me to get acquainted with personalities working on the 'League of Joi Bangla Youth'. ... [which was] mainly a collection of personalities ...

My first involvement with the 'League of Joi Bangla Youth' was with a scheme organised by them. They had the funding from the authority to take a group of young children, bring them in school holiday periods on various activities and play scheme activities, taking them out to the fun fare, to the sea [and to] museums. ... On the other side, we would have discussions on other areas and avenues that we could explore, we could diversify. ... And one of the areas that we highlighted was to promote the Bengali culture. And when we speak [about] the Bengali culture, it is obviously the music and the dance etc. ...

[The entire] first generation had a huge barrier to overcome to get established. So ... a lot of my friends had a very [low] education and they were more pressed to work in the ... trade and the restaurant trade. By the time I finished my education, the generation [was] coming up, who [was] ... born in this country. [They] had actually no exposure to Bengali culture and heritage. They didn't know [that] our heritage was diverse and stretches back thousands of years. We have a very accomplished music in terms of poetry, in terms of music. So [it was] the basis [to bring] our culture ... over to the young people. The way we decided to promote it was through the medium of English music and dance because lot of young people ... [liked] English music and dance.

We thought ... we can introduce our own culture ... in a way that the young people will be interested to listen. We thought [that it would be a] good idea ... to present it as a fusion. I think at the time, Harun, who was a musical genius behind Joi Bangla Sounds, was experimenting with music. From then we played around him and came up with this style or fusion of mixing western music style with Asian music style. When I say Asian, it is not only the Bangladeshi music, it was all the popular Hindi music and Punjabi music, classical Bangla music as well. ...

Breakdance was very popular in the mid-'80s, but there were some members with different musical interests. The style and the tempo and the beat the Bengali music has - I think it will be very hard to generate a fusion of Bengali music and hip-hop because that's quite a fast music whereas [Breakdance has a] slightly slower tempo. It tends to fuse much more musically with the Bhangra style. Breakdance fusion with Bengali music probably would have [a] rather unpleasant result.

## 35. Young Musicians and the Younger Generation

### Abdus Salique

When we were the new parents, we were in [a] dilemma, whether teaching English or teaching Bengali will be better for our children. Nowadays the children are luckier. We now know what is better for the children. I tried to make my elder son learn English, Bengali, music, tabla all these things in the same time. The entire load made him nothing but confused. We were confused ... ourselves. ... We were even unaware of the reason why parents need to go to the schools and colleges of their children.

### Himangshu Goswami

We don't have a good quality music school or music institution here in Tower Hamlets. Many of the boys and girls want to learn music, but they are not getting the proper resources and facilities. Some of the institutes are there but they are all guided by some political ideology. One has to get the trust to send his or her children to an institute, to learn something. We have to have good quality teachers and good management and of course good ideology that is independent from politics. We don't have any good quality institution of music in Britain. Some of the good artists will still come out but we have to improve the situation.

### Samiul Islam (June)

When we had the *Joi Bangla Banned*, I tried to teach some people but it was very, very hard for them to practise. Because, first of all, we didn't have enough support ... Because people used to live in the Council flats, ... we didn't have that kind of facility to practise at home. If it was an extended family, there were [only] two [or] three rooms, so it was very difficult for them to practise at home. We had only the Montefiore Centre but not enough space to practise. And children need to practise, otherwise they can't be musicians. They used to come to [the] Montefiore Centre and we used to practise. On the other hand, they didn't get enough time to practise, so they had a lack of musical interest and gradually ended up with nothing. We tried our best, and we appealed to many of the people to give us [rooms], but we didn't get through. ...

I don't think [that] the new generation [is] coming with that kind of music ability but they have the talent. You can see the changes in music right now, like some of [the] new singers are doing different types of music. One of them is *Krishna* (*name of album*). [He is] a musician ... from Bangladesh. He (Habib) came here to study music and got the software and he knew that we can change it; so he did it and people got the new kind of music and [it] was a hit. His songs were number one not only [in] ... Bangladesh, but all over the sub-continent. Krishna is very [successful] because of the use of different types of technology. We have to believe in technology, because the music is changing. People [have] talent but I don't think people have that much interest in music because of the family background and probably they are busy with their lives, and people are busy with educational things. I don't find the talented people are coming into this kind of activity. There are some artists in every town.

### Alaur Rahman

[The young musicians] have [a] bright future if they continue to work hard and stick to the music. Hard work contributes the most behind everything. Everyone has to have a target - one will have to dream for the success in life. You will have to look [for a] way beyond the possibility. ... Then you will have to work hard [and] ... you will achieve the impossible. Another thing is that one ... has to enjoy his job. If one doesn't enjoy his duty, then he will never be successful. In any part of life, one cannot be successful if he does not pay one hundred per cent of his effort to that.

We have many bright singers in our community, I do have some programmes with them but I cannot name them. We spent very little time together so I cannot remember their names. We have them all over Britain. They are more interested [in] ... folk music. They are interested because they find their roots in the folk songs. Many of the other young singers have the potential to become great [musicians]. They have the interest in music. I am making a new album and some of them have become interested listening to [it].

### Abdul Lotif

[The young] are spoiling the Baul music. They are not maintaining the tune of the Baul music. The *mundira* has a specific way to play it, but they are not playing [it] accordingly. The *behala* and the *ektara* have a specific tune, which must be similar, but they are not playing them [in] the tune. Some people are trying to hold me back [and] many have exploited me and earned money.

**Alberta Fatima Matin**

I think essentially [the young generation of musicians], it's brilliant. ... They are aiming high. ... they [are] travelling around the world. ... It's very much among the young Bengali males ... It's a hard industry so I think often you [have to be] ... somebody dedicated to music. You [must] love music and ... love creating music in your room. ... Whatever you want to do ... the reward is that you might [have] a regular gig. ... The reward is not monetary. ... I think performing art, playing art - ... you do it because you love it. And if you make money from it, it's brilliant. ... This is the passion - something about performing - and Bengalis are not different [from] anyone else in wanting that.

**Sam Zaman**

I think [you] have to have passion for music - [a] ... real love for music. You can't do it because you want to have a big career or a gold chain or impress the women. You can't use those reasons for wanting to do music. Unfortunately, [for] most of the younger generation musicians - Bengali or non-Bengali - that's the main reason why they go there. There [are] ... very few exceptions. ... I have a friend, his name is Jake. He is only fifteen. He does it because he loves [the] guitar and he loves melodies - a good enough reason for me. He is not looking at the gold chain and big car philosophy - money, money, money. Music is another thing. Most musicians don't make money.

**Suzana Ansar**

The situation [in] the UK is very different from Bangladesh. ... In Bangladesh the young generation listens to ... band music, and there is no trend here for ... band music. The trend here is for Baul music. ... [The] majority of the people who are Bengali here in this part, particularly from Sylhet or more rural parts back home, their music taste is just [like] my taste, [coming] from my home environment. The same thing is for folk and Baul music. So there is a trend here for Baul music more than anything else. They don't really listen to Nazrul Geeti or Rabindra Sangeet because they don't listen to [this music at] ... home. ... Something is dying, which I am trying to preserve with my music school. Because there is a lot that we have that isn't being learned. ... It disappoints me that [the Bengali youth] can't speak Bengali, as well as they should be able to. They are very different to the youths back home.

**Mark Uddin**

[The younger generations should] be proud that [they] are Bengali and ... are in London. ... [They should] always make the best. Wherever you are, be progressive!



1987

# Glossary

*A.R. Rahmanji* – an Indian singer and producer

*Abdur Rob* – educationalist and community leader of Bangladeshi community in London's East End, born in Bangladesh, died of cancer in London in 2000

*Abeda Parvin* – a popular Bangladeshi singer

*Aberar shongram, muktir shomgram, aberar shongram shadhinator shongram* - This struggle is for the struggle of freedom, this struggle is for the struggle of Independence

*Abida Sultana* – a Bangladeshi popular singer

*adda* – chatting

*Aishwarya Rai* – a popular Indian actress and former Beauty Queen

*Aki Nawaz* – British Pakistani producer and a singer

*Al-Badr* – Bengali paramilitary force, which collaborated with the occupying Pakistani Army during the independence war in Bangladesh in 1971

*amar sonar Bangla/Brick Lane, ami tomai bhalo bashi* – My golden Bangla, I love you - first line of Bangladesh's national anthem, people of Brick Lane in the late '70s used to sing this song with Brick Lane instead of Bangla

*Amir Uddin* – a popular Baul singer

*Amrit Wilson* – writer and political activist, published extensively on various aspects of British and Black politics, particularly on issues of gender and race, author of 'Finding a Voice – Asian Women in Britain'

*Amzad Hossain* – a producer, director

*Ananda Shankar* – an Indian musician

*Andrew Kishore* – a popular Bangladeshi singer

*Aniruddo* – a popular singer

*Ansar* – Ansars are members of a voluntary force to help maintain safety and security in rural areas.

*Ansar Ahmed Ullah* – former lead singer of 'Joi Bangla Banned'

*Asad, Shaheed* – student leader in former East Pakistan, who was killed by the Pakistani army in 1969. A lot of people took down *Ayub Khan* nameplates and replaced them with Asad's name engraved on them, i.e. Ayub Gate turned to Asad Gate. The name of Asad became a symbol for struggle against repression.

*Asain Dub Foundation (ADF)* – a British Asian rap group

*Ashraf Gazi* – a politician during the independence of Bangladesh

*ATN Bangla* – a satellite Bengali channel

*Aup Kaisa hai?* - How are you? (in Urdu) - said to someone you respect

*Awami League* – main opposition party in Bangladesh, which led the independence war of Bangladesh

*Ayub Khan* – President and Martial Law Administrator of Pakistan during the time of the independence movement of Bangladesh

*Azan* – call for prayers

*Azam Khan* – pioneer of Bengali rock

*Baba* – father

*Baishakhi Mela* – Bengali New Year Festival, in the UK. Brick Lane is transformed into a bustling market place with over 45 curry houses spilling out onto the pavement and hundreds of stalls giving a taste of Bangladesh through a wide range of merchandise, such as handicrafts and traditional Bengali fashion wear.

*Banga Bhabon* – the official residence of the President

*Bangabandhu* – friend of Bengal

*Bangla gaan* – Bengali songs

*Bappi Lahiriji* – a popular Indian composer & singer

*Baridhara* – residential area in Dhaka

*Batiyalli* – Bengali folk (boatman) songs

*Baul (music)* – folk songs, a vehicle for preaching mysticism

*beatniks* – term used to describe late 1950s and early 1960s pre-hippy counter-culture

*Behala* – a violin

*Bengal ka baccha, koi nehi accha* – Bengali sons are the worst kind of people

*betel leaf* - dried, ripe seed of a palm tree; the nuts are chewed together with the leaves of the betel pepper, the seeds of which contain a narcotic that produces some stimulation and a sense of well-being

*bhaia, bhaia ither aow* – brother, brother come here (in Urdu)

*Bhajan/Bojon* – bhajan or kirtan is a devotional song, often but not necessarily of ancient origin

*Bhangra* – Punjabi song, related to harvest celebration, love, patriotism or current social issues, nowadays more associated with dance pop music deriving from the traditional accompaniment of musical instruments

*bidrohi* – rebellious  
*bidrohi Bangla* – rebellious Bengal  
*Bihari* – people from Bihar in India  
*Bishwanath* – a sub-district of Sylhet district  
*Blackshirts* – black uniformed paramilitary stewards, led by *Oswald Mosley*, a British fascist of the 1930s  
*BNP* – Bangladesh Nationalist Party  
*Bonani* – residential area in Dhaka  
*BRAC* – Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, NGO, campaigning against hunger, poverty, environmental degradation, exploitation, started as a rehabilitation project after the independence war  
*Brahman Baria* – a district of Bangladesh  
*BTV* – TV channel, owned by Bangladeshi government  
*Chris Harman* – editor of the 'International Socialism', former editor of the 'Socialist Worker', member of the Central Committee of the Socialist Workers' Party  
*Crore* – one crore = 10 million  
*dal* – lentils  
*Darcus Howe* – writer and social commentator, best known as the 'Devil's Advocate', which is the name of a current affairs programme he fronted for Channel 4 television in the mid-eighties, political activist, wrote a regular column for the magazine the 'New Statesman' since the 1960s, editor of the political magazine 'Race Today'  
*Dari-Comma* – Bengali for full stop and comma  
*DIT* – Dhaka Improvement Trust, a statutory body entrusted with the responsibility of initiating and implementing urban development plans through planning, was replaced by *Rajuk* in 1987  
*Dofki* – a musical instrument, a version of the *tabla*  
*Dotara* – a music instrument with two strings  
*Ektal Bilombit* – Indian musical rhythm  
*Ektara* – a musical instrument with one string  
*Ekushe* – 21<sup>st</sup> February, also known as Martyrs' Day, on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1952, when students, who were demonstrating at the Dhaka University Campus and demanding Bengali to be one of the state languages of Pakistan, were shot and killed  
*Ershad, General Hussain Mohammed* – President of Bangladesh 1983-1990  
*ETV / Ekushe TV* – a Bangladeshi satellite TV channel  
*Farida Parvin* – a popular Bangladeshi singer  
*Farrukh Dhondy* – political activist in the 1970s and member of the 'Race Today' Collective, published several books of stories before entering television  
*Fazle Hasan Abed* – founder of *BRAC*  
*Fotua* – a South Asian shirt for men  
*Gano Sangeet* – revolutionary songs  
*Ghazal* – a poem containing between five and twenty-five verses, the opening verse is called *Matla*, the last *Maqta*, which usually contains the penname of the poet; *ghazal* is the soul of Urdu literature and the most popular form of Urdu poetry  
*Gharowa Jalsha* – an informal gathering of people to sing songs  
*Girza Devi* – a popular singer  
*Gous Khan* – president of the *Awami League* in the UK in 1971  
*Grameen Bank* – Bank based in Bangladesh, supporting rural development  
*Gulshan* – residential area in Dhaka  
*Guru* – teacher or master  
*Hafiz* – somebody who knows the Koran by heart  
*Hajj* – main pilgrimage to Mecca (Makkah) in Islam, compulsory to a Muslim  
*Hajjis* – title of those who have been on pilgrimage to Mecca  
*halal meat* - meat that has been slaughtered in the manner prescribed by Islam  
*Hamd* – poem, written in praise of God  
*Harun* – one of the founder members of 'Joi Bangla Sounds' (now known as 'Joi'), who sadly passed away  
*Hijabi* – Islamic code of dressing for women  
*Hasan Raja* – mystical poet and songwriter  
*Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy* - politician from Bengal in undivided India and later in East Pakistan, Prime Minister of Pakistan from 1956-57

*InshaAllah* – ‘God Willing’

*Jamaat-e-Islami* – political party, opposed to the independence of Bangladesh

*Jamaatis* – referring to *Jamaat-e-Islami* members

*Janata Party* – Party which was formed by *Gen Osmani*

*Jhumra* – Indian musical beat

*John Stonehouse* – British politician, minister under Harold Wilson, ardent supporter for the Bangladeshis in the UK during the War of Independence 1971

*Joi Bangla* – Victory to Bangladesh!

*Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury* – jurist, President of Bangladesh 1972-73, Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka-University 1969, resigned from the post as Vice-Chancellor in 1971 in Geneva to express his protest against the genocide in East Pakistan, moved to London, mobilised world opinion in favour of War of Independence.

*Kaaba* – House of Allah: literally, Kaaba in Arabic means a high place with respect and prestige. The word Kaaba may also mean cube.

*Kabi* – poet

*Kabi Jasim Uddin* – a well known poet of Bangladesh

*Kabi Nazrul* – Bangladesh’s national poet and writer who struggled against tyranny, oppression and religious sectarianism

*Kabi Nazrul Centre* – community centre, named after the Bengali poet *Kabi Nazrul*, opened in 1982, has become a symbol for Bengali culture and language

*Kamal Hossain* – Bengali politician, statesman and law expert, one of the principal authors of the Constitution of Bangladesh, Minister of Law 1972-72, Minister of Foreign Affairs 1973-1975, Minister of Petroleum and Minerals 1974-75

*kameez* – long shirt, together with *salwar* a traditional dress worn by Pakistanis and North Indians

*karai balti* – ‘balti’ refers to a Hindi word and means a steel or iron pot in which food is cooked or served, however the Hindi word means bucket, the term for metal container, ‘karahi’ or ‘kara’, comes from Urdu; in general, ‘karai balti’ is used for steel or iron pot in which is both cooked and served

*Kata* - measuring unit of a plot of land, 1 acre = 10 kata

*Kazi* – a legal Islamic scholar and judge

*Khayal-Thumri* – term used for changing of the vocal chord with music

*Kirtan* – devotional Hindu songs

*Kishor* – a popular Indian singer

*Koshida* – a long poem in Urdu, Persian or Arabic which usually describes battles or is written to praise kings, princes or the poet’s patron, no limit of verses, it may even go beyond hundred lines

*Krishon Gould* – a presenter

*Lalon* – a popular Bengali mystic poet, famous for his spiritual tunes

*Lata / Lataji* – a well know and very popular female Indian singer

*Liala Banu* – a popular singer

*Lindsay German* – member of the Socialist Workers’ Party and currently convenor of the ‘Stop the War Coalition’

*Loko Sangeet* – Bengali local songs

*Loko Geeti* – local folk songs

*lute* - a stringed instrument, having a body shaped like a pear sliced lengthwise and a neck with a fretted fingerboard that is usually bent just

*MA Jinnah* – Mohammed Ali Jinnah – founder of Pakistan, Governor-General in 1948

*MA Munim* – Muhammed Abdul Munim, born in Dhaka, studied in London, Barrister-at-Law from the Lincoln’s Inn, returning to Bangladesh, former Chief Justice of Bangladesh

*Ma’Fatima* – Fatima was the daughter of Prophet Mohammed, people call her Mother Fatima

*Madan Mohon College* – a local college in Sylhet Town

*Madina* – religious city in Saudi Arabia

*Madrasha* – religious seminary

*Mala Dhondy* – political activist in the 1970s and ex-wife of Farrukh Dhondy

*Mama* – maternal uncle

*Matriculation examination* – similar to GCSE, the exam at the end of school



*Mehdi Hassan* – a popular Pakistani singer  
*Meriatta Prokop* – white British pro-Bangladesh liberation activist  
*Military junta* – Military dictatorship  
*Mohammed Rafi* – a well known Indian singer of the '60s  
*Moulana* – Arabic word, literally meaning 'our master', is mostly used as a title preceding the name of a respected religious leader, in particular graduates of religious institutions, e.g. a *madrasha* or scholars who have studied under other Islamic scholars  
*Moulvibazar* – a district of Bangladesh  
*Mujib Bhai* – brother Mujib  
*Mujibnagar* - place where the exile government of Bangladesh was formed, named after *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*  
*Mukesh / Mukeshji* – a popular Indian singer of the '60s and '70s  
*Mukti Juddo* – War of Independence  
*Muktibahini* – freedom fighters, guerilla force which fought against the Pakistan Army during the independence war of Bangladesh  
*Muktijudda Shangshod* – Freedom Fighters' Council  
*Murshidabad* – one of the 18 districts in West Bengal, agricultural district with rich historical and cultural background  
*Mymensingh* – a district in Bangladesh  
*Nabarag Music School* – a musical school in Sylhet  
*Namaz* – pray  
*Nasheed* – singing in praise of the prophet Muhammed  
*Nath* – versus, written in praise of the Holy Prophet  
*Natok* – drama  
*Nawshadji* – a popular Asian singer  
*Naya Zindगी, Naya Jibon* – an Asian programme, shown on BBC in the 70s  
*Naz Cinema* – Café Naz in Brick Lane was a cinema theatre in the 1960s and 1970s, visited by prominent Bollywood actors of the time  
*Nazia Hassan* – a popular British Pakistani pop singer of the late '70s  
*Nazimuddin, Khwaja* – Prime Minister of undivided Bengal, Governor General and Prime Minister of Pakistan, became the Governor General of Pakistan after the death of *M.A. Jinnah* on 11 September 1948, took over the additional charge of the Prime Minister on 17 October 1951 after Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated on 16 October  
*Nazrul* – see *Kabi Nazrul*  
*Nazrul Geeti* – songs, written by poet Nazrul Islam  
*Noakhali* – a district in Bangladesh  
*Nowshad* – a popular singer  
*Nurul Islam* – local community activist in East London  
*Nusrat Fateh Ali Khanji* – a well known Pakistani *Qawali* singer  
*'Ore Saleka, ore Maleka* – a very popular Bangladeshi pop song  
*Osmani* – Commander of Bangladeshi forces during the independence war in 1971  
*Osmani Memorial Hall* – a community centre in Dhaka  
*Oswald Mosley* – British politician, known as the founder of the British Union of Fascists, supported by paramilitary stewards who were nicknamed '*Blackshirts*'; the party was frequently involved in violent confrontations, particularly with Communist and Jewish groups especially in London, in October 1936 Mosley attempted to organise a march and violence resulted between local and nationally organised protestors trying to block the march, now called Battle of Cable Street  
*Pakistan ka baccha, koi nehi accha* – Pakistani sons are the worst kind of people  
*Polli Geeti* – Bengali folk songs  
*Paltan Maidan* – a historic place where huge public rallies are held  
*Panta-Ilish* – a meal made of watered rice with Ilish fish (Hilsha)  
*Parvin Sultana* – a popular Bangladeshi singer  
*Patrick Kodikara* – a political activist from Sri Lanka, active during the anti-racist struggle in Brick Lane  
*Paul Connet* – white British pro-Bangladesh liberation activist

*Pola Uddin, Baroness* – Bengali member of the House of Lords  
*Pandit Haridash Ganguly* – a teacher and singer who also teaches song in the UK  
*Proshika* – Bengali NGO, name is an acronym of Bengali words for training, education and action, campaigning above all for sustainable development, social justice and equality, democracy  
*Qawali* – devotional song, expressing the love and oneness with Allah, sung by a group of people accompanied of musical instruments, nowadays, a popular form of covering subjects of romance, liquor, etc.  
*Qazi Faruk Ahmed, Dr.* – founder of *Proshika*  
*Raag* – melodic modes, used in Indian classical music  
*Rabi Shankar* – world famous Indian sitarist  
*Rabindra Sangeet* – songs of poet Rabindranath Tagore  
*Rabindranath Tagore* – see: *Tagore*  
*Rajshahi* – a district of Bangladesh  
*Rajuk* – Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha, which means Capital City Development Authority  
*Rastodrohi* – treason charge  
*Razakars* – Bengali para militia who collaborated with the occupying Pakistani Army during the independence war in Bangladesh in 1971  
*Runa Laila* – a popular Bangladeshi singer  
*Sabina Yasmin* – a popular Bangladeshi singer  
*Salwar* – loose trousers, together with *kameez* a traditional dress worn by Pakistani & North Indians  
*Sarangi* – a musical instrument with four strings  
*Sayedee* – alleged committed war crimes during the independence war in 1971 and currently *Jamaat-e-Islami* MP; his party opposed the independence of Bangladesh  
*Shader lao'* – a very popular song  
*Sheikh Hasina* – present leader of the Awami League, former Prime Minister of Bangladesh  
*Sheikh Mujib* – popular name of *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*  
*Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* – leader of the Awami League during the time of the independence war in Bangladesh, outlined the Six Points autonomy plan for Bangladesh, first President and later Prime Minister of Bangladesh, popularly referred to as *Sheikh Mujib*, honorary title of *Bangabandhu*, assassinated with his family by a group of army officers in 1975  
*Sherpur* – a district in Bangladesh  
*Shida jailer* – a colloquial term which translates to honest person in charge of a prison cell or a jail  
*Shomiti* – association  
*Sitar* – a stringed instrument from India, made of seasoned gourds and teak, having a track of 20 movable frets with six or seven metal playing strings  
*Subir Nandi* – a popular Bangladeshi singer.  
*Sufi* – one who has submitted himself to the will of God, lives in union with God and has devoted himself to find the truth  
*Swadhin Bangla* – Independent Bangladesh!  
*Sylhet Loko Sangeet Dal* – a local music group of Sylhet  
*'Sylhet Prothom Azan Dhoni Babay Diachen'* – a Bengali song  
*Taal* – a musical rhythm  
*Tabla* – Indian drum  
*Tagore, Rabindranath* – a Bengali poet, philosopher, visual artist, composer and novelist, reshaped Bengali literature and music in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Asia's first Nobel Laureate, winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913  
*Tajuddin Ahmed* – Awami League Leader, formed a provisional government and took the office of the Prime Minister in April 1971, Finance and Planning Minister in the first post-independence government, killed in Dhaka Central Jail after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib  
*Taka* – official currency of Bangladesh  
*Tanpura* – a musical instrument, a tambura (South India) or tanpura (North India) is a long-necked Indian *lute*, a stringed instrument

*Thana* – administrative subdivision of the six Bangali districts (zilas), refers to the area within a police station, except for those in metropolitan areas, further subdivision into unions and wards

*Tin tall* – musical term for classical rhythms

*Toc H / Talbot House* – Talbot House became known to the soldiers of the First World War as Toc H. Toc was the army signaller's code for 'T'; Toc H runs many community projects, one of them was a youth hostel in East London behind Tower Hill Underground Station in the late 1970s, Peter East was the warden, the hostel became known to everybody in the East End not as Toc H but as No. 7.

*Tu Kaisa hai* - How are you? (in Urdu) - said to people you know; if it is said to a stranger or someone you don't know, it could be taken as an offence.

*Uchango sangeet* – higher classical music

*Ulamas* – clerics

*Umra* – pilgrimage to Mecca in Islam, second to the main pilgrimage *hajj* and often called 'little pilgrimage'

*Ustad* – teacher or master

*Wari* – a place in the old part of Dhaka City

*Yahya Khan* – Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan, President of Pakistan and Chief of Army Staff from 1969 to 1971, following the resignation of Ayub Khan

*Younus, Dr.* – founder of *Grameen Bank*

*Zakir Hossain* – a *tabla* player

*Zannat* – heaven

*Zia* – see *Ziaur Rahman*

*Ziaur Rahman, General* – President of Bangladesh 1977-81, founder of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party

