**Mr. C.A.S Kabir**



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Age: 64

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Interviewed by: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Kabir organised and sponsored two groups in Britain involved in the War of Independence. These two groups, ‘Operation Omega’ and ‘Action Bangladesh’ brought awareness among the non-Bengalis, British and Europeans, about the genocide in Bangladesh.

**Q: Do you feel that the independence war is part of your history?**
Answer: There is a beginning of the beginnings, the sort of question I am to answer, I shall start from somewhere, but where should I start; I can remember so many things regarding our independence movement, our language movement, movement against the military rulers like Ayub Khan. I think I should start from 1952, when I was a student, there was the language movement in 21st of February, few of the Bengali people were killed by the police, with the order of the Pakistani government at that time. From that time we had a feeling, that some sort of Bengali nationalism arisen in my mind; that we are Bengali. We demanded the state language should be Bengali. That’s why that was the attack from the Punjabi ruled Pakistani government, on the people of Bangladesh. Since that time I had some sort of distaste for the Pakistani rule and afterwards against the military rule of Ayub Khan. In 1962 I was a student at that time; movements were going on against the military rule and the Ayub Khan’s rule. I participated in it, and in some stage my parents advised me to leave the country for time being and come back again and complete my university studies. In 1962 I left the country, I came here and joined a company, they used to deal with finance, I worked there, and from that company I had a mate who once told me about the arrival of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in London. I had the opportunity to see Bangabandhu, at that time he used to be called Mujib bhai. I heard discussion about the Bengali people, their condition in the then East Pakistan and Bangabandhu clearly told that it would be impossible to live with the Punjabis within one country. And it was clearly in his mind and he mentioned it in front of few other elderly leaders. From that time it was in my thought that East Pakistan may be separated or may be an independent country under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
In 1966, we joined in the movement of six points, by the call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In 1969, the people of East Pakistan revolted against the military regiment and here we demonstrated and we participated in the movement. It was clearly in our mind, that we are Bengali and we are going to separate from Pakistan. In the 7th of March in 1971; when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his speech in the Paltan, declared, “Aberar sangram, muktir sangram, eberar sangram swadhinatar sangram”. It means Bangabandhu called for the Independence movement. We took it that way in the UK and following that day according to the call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that, “you build up forts in every houses” throughout UK and many action groups were being formed and they started the movement. And they clearly declared about the independence of Bangladesh from the Pakistani rule. So we participated, there were so many groups been formed, I also belonged to a group. My group was not with Bengali people; my group was English people, plus other European people, there were two groups actually; one was called ‘Operation Omega’ and the other one was called ‘Action Bangladesh’. Action Bangladesh was led by Paul Connet, a school teacher and his comrade was Marietta Procope, who was an Oxford graduate, that organisation was run by their leadership, and ‘Operation Omega’ was run by several people including Roger Moodey and Ellen Connet. And I was the sponsor of both the organisations and I was an organiser as well. I worked throughout the nine months, full time, no break; I had my own business, I had my own house, I left them with other people, they looked after it and I contributed my full time with the movement. Through out the United Kingdom, there were so many organisations, all the organisations came under one organisation that was called Action Committee for the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury was the leader of the organisation on the other hand there was the Awami League party, they were also working, Mr Gous Khan was the president in that time. There were other organisations like, Luton Committee, Birmingham Committee, Manchester Committee, Swindon Committee. There were 110 committees. All of them were working for the liberation of the country. And then the liberation war started. After nine months we got our independence, our land was freed from the Punjabi rule. We were directed for those nine months by the Prime minister, Tajuddin Ahmed; who was the leader of the provisional Mujibnagar government situated in Kushtia. And according to my evaluation our independence war is a part of history. We demanded our independent and we deserved it.

**Q: Did you participate in any campaigns in London during or just before the war?**
Answer: We were involved in campaigns, we sent so many goods, volunteers in Bangladesh, through Calcutta, they crossed the border of Bangladesh and they demanded the independence of Bangladesh. They declared clearly Pakistan to leave Bangladesh. Bangladesh is for the people of Bangladesh. On the other hand, through Action Bangladesh, the first of August, we called the meeting in Trafalgar Square, that was the largest gathering in memory, Bengali gathering. No other organisations in this country until now could call and gather 25,000 people. That was the great success of the leadership of Paul Connet and Marietta Procope. By their call and their efficient organisational ability, we did able to gather 25,000 people. And Justice Chowdhury was the chief guest of that meeting, besides that we used to go and demonstrated against the Chinese Embassy, Pakistani High Commission and other high commissions or embassy, who were against the independence of Bangladesh. We did demonstrate in front of Pakistani High Commission, our workers particularly the English people, went on hunger strike days after days for the independence of Bangladesh. The other things we used to do were the street drama, showing the way the Pakistani people were torturing the people of Bangladesh. How they were burning houses, how they tortured people, all those things were done in street dramas, in the streets of London. We organised those, I was not the main organiser, but I was the sponsor, and I was the third or fourth organiser. The main was Paul Connet and Marietta Procope and Reba Francesca. There was one person his name was Lutfur Jehan Chawdhury, he was from Noakhali. He was a very good active worker. There were other about 30 Bengali people working for the organisation and we had about 250 people regularly working for us all over United Kingdom. Action Bangladesh, we had about 50 English and Bengali people. There were about 30 Bengali people who used to go and work. It was a huge organisation and their contribution, I will say, the largest contribution in the movement in this country. We demonstrated against the cricket match, which was being held; Pakistan (cricket team) was visiting at that time. We demonstrated in all the towns, in Manchester and in other cities. Where ever the Pakistanis were playing cricket, we demonstrated against the cricket match. But not only us, other organisations also worked. Steering Committee was also working, they used to call meetings. Streatham Committee ... was a very strong committee and Birmingham Committee was quite strong, and Luton Committee was quite strong. They were really working for the movement, for the independence of the country.

**Q: Do you have memories of any campaign?**
Answer: The gathering of the 25,000 people in Trafalgar Square is a record. And I was one of the organisers. You can’t organise this sort of big rallies in one day. That was in April, every year their used to be a meeting in Paris, about financing the Pakistan government; this was called the Paris Consortium. We went to Paris also, we demonstrated there, in Paris; to stop grants to Pakistan government. Paul Connet, with one Pakistani flag in hand, he went in front of Pakistan High Commission and he said ‘Joi Bangla’. That was recorded by the TV, and behind Paul Connet, Marietta Procope was there with another Bangladesh flag. So there were two White persons demonstrating against the military attack on the people of Bangladesh. One interviewer at that time from the television questioned Paul that ‘you are a single person, and you are an English man, how come you can free Bangladesh, from the rule of the military junta’. Paul at that time with his confidence declared, ‘you watch and see what I can do’ and later he was able to draw 25,000 people on the first of August, it did not happened in one day, I told you we had about 250 regular members of the two committee, Twin committee, in each and every town we had our people. We used to print our leaflets; our magazines and we send them all those things and organise things. And four months before the meeting of the first of August, we fixed the date and we booked the Trafalgar Square, and we were organising through all the medias, that first of August we were going to have a rally in Trafalgar Square, and we declared the independence of Bangladesh. By this time, Marietta Procope, by herself with Lutfur Jehan Chowdhury, he was a very good worker, they visited the British Parliament, and they invited each and every MP to join with the movement and took signature of about 200 people, 200 parliamentarians to declare the independence of Bangladesh. That was a great task. Veteran politicians like Tony Benn, Bruce Douglas Man, Michael Barnes, Sir Christopher May Hew, Robert Silkin (trade union leader and he was very young at that time). Those are the people actually worked very hard. And they were giving directions what we can do, how we can do and they sought so many experience and examples about Vietnam War and other world movement and politics. They used to guide us, that you are to do these things, that’s the way you will achieve independence and that’s the way, and you deserve it. Because you are Bengali people and you are a nation and you are separated from West Pakistan by about 1000 miles and in-between, there is another vast country called India. So this is a country, today or tomorrow it will collapse, that sort of advice we used to get from them. And we were very much inspired by their advice. So that’s the way, things were being organised, things were not been organised in one day, we had to go to different places, different people. Particularly I myself, I use to drive, at that time few people used to drive, and visited so many restaurants with the White people with my White Comrades. I mention here White only to describe it nothing else, not of race, we used to visit each and every restaurant, and we used to talk with the workers there, waiters and chefs and cook. And used to inspire them that, once there will be a Bangladesh. These people were very much inspired because at that time there were no media, no radio, and no television to speak for us. There was only one weekly, but at that time media was not so fast, news use to come late, one week, two week 14 days 15 days. However, we used to get fresh news each and every day from the Provisional Government of Bangladesh, and through other media, magazines, booklets and leaflets. Personal visit was very important, people used to be very much encouraged, when the people see that the White people are supporting the movement, they were very much pleased, and they used to help, they made lot of contribution towards the organisation. Also I should mention about the students, the students were involved and lot of them were studying law, some of them were working like Zakaria Chowdhury, Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, Mohammad Hossain Monju, Shamsul Alam Chowdhury, A K Nazrul Islam and Syed Muzammel Haque, and Prof Wadud, ABM Ishaq and lot of others. Actually they were the core people, who were working behind the movement. They are the enlightened one who got academic qualification, they used to know about the politics, they were experienced and when they used to speak with people; people took them with good faith, their words were taken with very good faith. So these sorts of things actually win us and inspired us. Also we got lot of support from the younger people. Ordinary working class people, Saturday and Sunday used to be closed day, and they could give their time to organise things, go to people, go to restaurants, go to meetings. So it helped in that way. So nobody can claim that he did something solely for Bangladesh, it was a collective support, it was a collective movement. People from each and every corner helped. But there were less coordination, but there were publicity. That is people gathered together, they talked, there were meetings, there were publicity, but there were less coordination, which will be a different story actually. There was a Steering Committee made by five people. They failed to form a full Action Committee, in nine months, maybe they were very busy with the liberation war, or in movements or that sort of things… our people were behind the movement and they deserve credit for it. They were fully behind the movement.

**Q: Were you proud of the new nation?**
I myself particularly, when I was a student, during my teenage I used to write, and I was fond of my language, and I was also a cultural activist; so I used to love my language, I used to love my culture. I fully identify myself as a Bengali, I think that’s culturally I am a Bengali, my language is Bengali, so I am 100% proud of being a Bengali.

**Q: Did you feel a second class citizen in East Pakistan before the war?**
There are personal story about that, while I was trying to come into this country, I was in need of a passport, so I applied for the passport, when I went to the local passport officer, and I met him, there were hundreds of people in the line. But he respected me very much and issued me passport immediately without taking any sort of time. Then I was suppose to send my passport and my admission, I took admission in the Gray’s Inn, to be a lawyer, to be a Barrister. My application was sent to Lahore, for five to six months it was stuck there, that some one should go and collect it then they would leave it. So after five to six months, I got the reply from the Lahore educational department and by this time I took permission of the DPI of East Pakistan, that I am leaving the country, I am going out for the studies. So that’s the way they treated us; when we were Pakistani. On the other hand, the person from West Pakistan, he could get his passport in one week’s time. He has not had to face all the sorts of formalities. In each and every way we Bengali people were being deceived in Pakistan, We are the second class citizen; we could not get a good job in the army, in the civil service, and other ordinary works even. Percent was very low, in trade and business we were denied; all the six families or five or seven richest people used to be West Pakistani, not that time any East Pakistani. Every way, when we used to meet with the Pakistani people, they used to neglect us. They rather say meant that we are second class citizens. We felt we were second class citizen. The man when I was travelling from Dhaka to Karachi, there was a man sitting with me; he asked me ‘Where are you going?’ I told him, I was going to London. He told me “Why you are so sad?” I told him, I am sad because I am leaving my parents, and my country. Then he remarked that you are a homesick Bengali, so that’s the way they used to treat us. They used to treat us badly and they had some sort of superiority complex. We were deprived from all the facilities, in business, in job in service, in teaching, in education, and in everywhere. And I personally thought, we were second class citizen at that time.

**Q: Do you remember, what sort of impact the war had on your relatives back in Bangladesh, and how did you communicate with them?**
It was very sad, at that time there was industrial strike in this country (UK), postal strike. So we could not communicate at that time, we failed to communicate with our parents, or families in Bangladesh. It was very hard, and we had no telephone at our home or residence at that time. It was very very difficult, then the war started. We could not communicate at all with families. My father he was a retired government officer, and he was the convenor of district Awami League of Moulvibazar at that time. So he was the number one enemy, and my father had a good family background; so what he had to do, he had to leave our house, with all the family, and he walked for miles and miles, with my brothers and sisters, to take some shelter. What we got in our house, we had huge rice stock that was looted, our cows were looted, everything that were left there had been looted. Personally myself, I lost one of my brother-in-law; he was my cousin’s husband. He was a Post Master in Chittagong. He was the first target in Chittagong; he was helping with the movement, so they went inside the office and shot him. My other two brother-in-laws were killed in the ‘Mukti Juddo’ that is freedom fight.
One of them has been memorized in Chittagong, as there is a stadium called Aftab Kader stadium in Chittagong, given in his name. The other one was Motiul Kader. So two of my brother-in-laws were killed. One of my brother-in-law and two of my cousin’s husband were killed. Our house was ransacked, and just opposite to our village there was another village where 350 people were killed, they were filed in and then each and everyone were shot down by machinegun. And some of them were drowned in the Monu river. These are the facts.

**Q: What do you think of Bangladesh now, after 35 years of independence?**
We had a dream about Bangladesh. We had a sweet dream. But which was not been realised. It was not realised because, the first thing was, the country was independent, and Punjabis left the country and were free. We thought that’s the end of it. We did not take any care of our enemy. Where as in every revolution there is counter-revolution, we were not prepared. Not our bureaucrats not our parliamentarians, not our Police force, they were not aware of it. There were people working from behind, from overseas, and they had friends like Pakistan, friends like China, so that’s the way they were able to overthrow the government of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. They killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the four founding pillars of Bangladesh, were killed, Tajuddin, Syed Nazrul Islam, Kamruzzaman and Monsur Ali. Bangladesh was leaderless, some how rather Ziaur Rahman came into power. Actually from that time, Ziaur Rahman gave arms and invited the Jamaatis in his government, he gave them the permission as a political party. From then the conspiracy started, it was developing and our enemies particularly the Pakistan were helping them. Nobody could stop it. That’s going on since the advent of Ziaur Rahman in power, until 1990, it was all Marshal law, there were no civilian rule. Nobody could stop the Jamaatis, those people do not believe in the independence of Bangladesh, they are working behind, and they were working behind with the collaboration of the present BNP. And now the power is in their grip. So what we expected, our dream was that Bangladesh will be democratic, truly secular. It was in our mind. And Bangladesh will be a secular country. When we were freed from the Punjabi rule, when we were independent, the western people used to call us Victorious nation, now we are the most corrupt nation in the world. It was never in our expectation. So our enemies were active, to achieve their goal, we were sleeping and still people in favour of independence of Bangladesh, are not united; they are divided. They are looking to power only, how can we go to power. How to keep the sovereignty and freedom; they were not keeping it in their mind. On the other end the Jamaatis and other Islamists, are against democracy and they are united and they are more powerful now. So sort of sweet dream in our mind, it’s not been realised. But personally, Bangladeshis, they are very very hard working people; they are trying to stand on their own feet. Another thing I realised, there are some academic people, and some intellectuals, they are working from behind. There is a cultural movement already started in Bangladesh. We can’t see it just in the ordinary look, we are to go to the inside and see it. The way articles are written in newspapers and there are couple of channels like Channel I and ATN Bangla, some intellectuals are actually working behind and trying to give the idea to the people that we are Bengali, Bangladesh is our country. This should be sovereign country, we got our own culture, we got our own literature, and we are to save our country from the occupation of the other people and we are to stand with the other countries of the world alike as a democratic secular country. This is the massage coming through the medias. But you must be sharp to realise all these things. These things are working, (BNP-Jamaat) government is not in favour of it, but still some intellectuals are working behind it and people are accepting this sort of things. One thing I found particularly in …that the ordinary working class people, they got the guts to protest, which is a good thing. If the oppressor oppresses us and we take it without any protest, then they will oppress us more. But that’s not the case of Bangladesh. The working class people, they know how to protest. And people are doing it in various way particularly, Dr Yunus (founder of Grameen Bank), Fazle Hasan Abed (founder of BRAC), and Dr Qazi Faruk Ahmed (founder of PROSHIKA) and these sort of people, they are enlightening the people and not only that in the same time, they are trying to improve the financial condition of the people, which is a good example for Bangladesh. In that field Bangladesh have made lot of progress, particularly I observed it in family planning and health keeping, Bangladesh is tremendously doing well.

**Q: Can you remember how much money you had donated to the war of Independence?**
Well, in various source the fund had been drawn from people. But the …was very high. Sort of money expected to go in to the … in the treasury of Bangladesh … we thoroughly donated in the fund of Action Committee for the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, led by Justice Abu Sayed Chowdhury.

**Q: What do you think of the Pakistani people now?**
Well, I got no prejudice against the Pakistani people. You are to make friends, I had not got any sort of prejudice. I had a Pakistani friend, who used to be in Multan at that time. He was … in Pakistan and he was a Maulana and he was also academically qualified, he was a very very good friend of mine. So I wrote him a letter at that time, that we are going to be separated, we will be an independent state, we will be Bangladesh, and you will be Pakistan, when you come back here you will see it. In reply he wrote me that you will be separated from us, but can’t be separated from my heart, you are my friend. Then you are a Muslim and I am a Muslim as well. We are Muslims, country may be two. So there were many elite Pakistanis they realised that … it is not possible to keep these two wings together. I got no prejudice, but I got the hate against the Pakistani army. The way they behaved and the way they tortured the Bengali people, we will never forget them, we will never forgive them.

**Q: Do you plan to go to Bangladesh after the retirement?**
This is a very good question you asked me, I just came back from Bangladesh and I build up a bungalow there. I got my own house in Dhaka as well, and I have more properties, I plan to go to Bangladesh back, after retirement. I plan to live there, but I love Britain as well.

**Q: Do you celebrate Independence Day (Swadhinata Dibosh), The Martyr’s Day (Shahid Dibosh), (Victory Day, Bijoy Dibosh)?**
Well I was involved with political parties here, actually we did and now we do celebrate these days. At the moment I am running an organisation called ‘Nagorik Mancho’. And we are going to celebrate the Independence Day on the 9th of April.

**Q: What would you like to say to the younger generation about Bangladesh, generation of young people?**
It is a great for the younger generation of Bangladesh, we have got more enlighten people now. And again we have got professionally educated people, more experienced people, and more trained people. We did not get that chance in the Pakistani rule, now in every field, everywhere, we got our experts, when I used to go to the Pakistani High Commission, before the independence to get a passport; it was very difficult to go inside the office, there was a Punjabi man with … And when you are there just … but now a days when I go, I see from the front, the security man to the High Commissioner is a Bengali. In the Pakistani rule, we did not get the opportunity to get the highest most trading. All those things used to go to the Punjabis. Now it’s our people our Bengali officers, they are getting all the opportunity to got the top most post. We got our generals, we got our ambassadors we got our president, we got our prime minister, and so there are more opportunities. These are the positions created by us, we have created it, and we have created the nation. You are the younger generation fulfil those positions, and do your duty, so your job; like that the English people doing the job in this country… perfect role, and build up Bangladesh, bring it to its old reputation. Bangladesh was once used to be one of the richest countries in the world. Even it’s been written by Lord Clive in his book, about Bengal about the part we live in Bangladesh, about Murshidabad, Its wealth, the Bengali heritage, its arts, its architecture. Why you should not get it back again. Because I know, I have my full confidence over the Bengalis; they are the cleverest people of the world. Why they should be lagging behind, they should go forward, and I got my full …. I got my full confidence, that if they make the contribution we will go forward and again in the world community we will be a nation, we will be proud of our own identity, our own nationality, our own country, our own sovereignty.