**Mr.Abdus Salique**



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Interviewed by: 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.

**Q: How did you become involved in music?**
I am from a family where music is practiced. My mother was a singer, my maternal uncle is Comrade Azahar Ali; he was a leftist politician and founder of Tajpur Degree College. He was a very cultured and he was a player and he used to sing here in London. Our home is near the home of my maternal grand parents. 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 much popular for his Gano Sangeet (revolutionary songs). So we from our very childhood were brought up in a music friendly environment. When I came to London, in 1970 and I was only 19 or 20. I completed my study and I was more interested in politics then music. My uncle used to persuade me to learn the tabla and other instruments, my uncle was sometimes annoyed with me because of my lack of interest. I had naturally a good tune and used to sing occasionally. I am a boy from a Hindu dominated village, we had so many Hindu neighbours and so I had a knack of music also.
As I came to London suddenly and saw; there was no Bangladeshi music group but there were 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, it can’t be, we have to have our own cultural groups of our own to represent our country and our community. I was with the NAP, the National Awami Party and I had a leftist leaning ideology. I joined the Labour Party Trade Union. I saw the Pakistani and the Indian people singing in 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 were a bit … they were mocking to me and said, “The Bengalis only sing the pastoral music”. This made me determined that I will make a music group and I collected some of the likeminded friends. I discussed with them. I had a cousin who could play the tabla and I could play the harmonium. We started to practice and our first appearance was at Altab Ali Park. It was the first Bangladeshi carnival in the UK.
That was the first Bangladeshi carnival in UK and I was a part of the main organising body. It was a huge carnival and a lot number of Bangladeshi and English people gathered. To the best of my knowledge it was the first time the Bengali people were singing with the English people. There were Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian groups. We were the only Bengali group. Our group’s name was ‘Dishari’. I had formed Dishari Shilpi Ghosti back in Tajpur, Bangladesh. I came here and as if I brought up my group with me. We used my house as the rehearsal place and the Bangladeshi musical instruments were not available at that time. So we collected them from different places.
Anyway at that time we had better singers in our group than me, but as I was the organiser.
When the Bengali carnival was approaching, we had huge enthusiasm; it was a new experience for us. After the murder of Altab Ali, the whole community had a movement against the racism and people of all generation were involved and I was also involved too. I was the first singer and I sang the song of Hason Raza. I sang the song better then my expectation, and people were dancing to my song. It was the first time I was singing in front of a huge audience. To our surprise nearly all the newspaper made us the headline; they printed my picture and gave us huge coverage. The carnival committee also gave us money for the performance. We suddenly found, music has name and fame along with money. We also got information that we can be selected and get grants. We were the only group who were representing the Bangladeshi community. We were the sole representative of the Bangladeshi community in the GLC (Greater London Council), Labour Party, Trade Union. We got valued, as there were no other groups; we started to perform in Cardiff, Scotland, Manchester and all over the UK. We also got publicity in the newspapers. I got another advantage soon, my younger brother came to Britain and my children and my wife also came to UK. We started to perform on television with our family. To the best of my knowledge, we were the first Bangladeshi representative in the television. I also had political connection and we used our political connection for the betterment of the group. There were some programme usually dominated by the Pakistani and the Indians. We started to pursue for the Bengali representation. We got the chance to perform in the Royal Albert Hall. The old and veteran musicians usually have programme in the hall, whereas being a newcomer, I got chance to perform in that hall. I made 5 appearances in the hall and 32 appearances on television. I was taken as a celebrity and also Dishari was famous soon.

An opportunity came to us, the (Kabi) Nazrul Centre was started, and I was also with the people who were working hard for the establishment of the centre. It created two new jobs. Nearly all the community worker and the renowned people applied for the post. It was a very attractive post; my friends advised me to apply, as I was the relevant person for the job. I had my own business at that time and the business was a bit dull, so I applied for the post. They selected me for the job. I was more enthusiastic and ran the centre proudly.

The community was benefited from the Centre and our activity. Some 4-5 years later the community was divided and there were some fighting also among the community and I was disappointed and the Centre was closed.
Then I started a restaurant just next to the Centre. The name was Salique’s Restaurant. I kept a stage in the restaurant for music. By that time in the unconscious mind, I became a singer and music was in my blood. The restaurant was a huge success. I am old enough now and my daughter is a renowned singer now. I work for the community now and all the people come here are community workers. We have some connection and Rafiq Ullah was the Secretary of the Centre. Now I am a retired person, I am planning to go to Bangladesh and live there permanently, if my health permits.
I came to London in 70, and I am an eyewitness of the anti-racist movement. My father used to work in a ship; he came to London and went back Bangladesh in 1960. Soon we had financial problem and that is why I came to the UK.
I am a happy man, I am not a big business man, but I am a successful man in my life.

We had many problems in Brick Lane, we had housing problem, we had unemployment problem and so on. The educated and nak uccha (snobs) people didn’t liked Brick Lane. They were not interested to come to Brick Lane. All the illiterate and low class people of Bangladesh lived here. People created the jobs and the Banglatown here in Brick Lane. I name my restaurant ‘Banglatown’ in 1983. To the best of my knowledge I used the term for the first time. All the things changed in front of our very eyes. No educated people have any credit to build the Brick Lane as the Banglatown. Now the educated people come here for the jobs and business.

I was a member of the Trade Union, Dan Jones who was the Secretary of the Tower Hamlets Trade Union. Fortunately or unfortunately, he was my next door neighbour. His wife (Denise Jones) is the present Leader of the Council. He had two sons and one daughter as I had too. They were of the same age also and they were very close to us. His daughter learned to sing Bangla songs. I didn’t know him as a person with so much power. He is a very dedicated social worker. One day he asked for my advice on, how to make popular the Trade Union movement in the Bengali community.
I wrote a song and sang it; all the cinema halls were playing the song in their halls. Once I was singing in the Royal Albert hall, I saw one very renowned singer of 1960; he met me after the programme and inserted my song in his series. It came in the chart of City Limit; I don’t whether it was for his song or for my song. They recorded the songs and published them and we got huge amount of money as royalty. This song gave me recognition.
Later we gave chance to the young singers as guest singers under the banner of Dishari, many of them are famous now. You need music to know your root, if one knows about his arts and culture, he will know him.

**Q: What is your comment about the young generation?**
When we were new parents; we were in a dilemma, whether teach our children English or teach Bengali.
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 more confused. We were confused ourselves, about the betterment of our children. We were even unaware of the reason why parents need to go to the schools and colleges of their children.

**Q: What type of instrument you like most?**
Dotara, bashi, mondira and dofki are the instruments I like most.