



## My Memories by Saiqul Miah

*I would like to finish my career at The Ashiana*



Saiqul Miah

The following memories and thoughts of the owner of The Ashiana Restaurant were recorded by Geoff and Anne Readman. We began by talking about the restaurant <https://ashiana.net>.



### The Ashiana

The Ashiana opened 12 years ago on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 2009. I can honestly say that, throughout those years, it has been a privilege to work in North Muskham and welcome so many customers from the village. The

Restaurant has been a success in every way. My customers have always been my first priority and my intention has always been that they have a satisfying and enjoyable evening when they come for a meal. I also ensure that my chef and all the staff understand this and are fully aware of my aspirations regarding the importance of the village in the way the restaurant operates.

I have been determined to ensure that our customers are happy, the staff is content and the quality of the food is of an excellent standard. I have always used the same suppliers to retain and guarantee the quality.



Photo of the Restaurant: Indoors

### My Family Background

My Grandfather had travelled from, what was then, East Pakistan to Hull, where he worked in the docks from 1945-1949. He married Grandma and she came to the UK in 1953. Our family roots are actually still in my Grandfather's village, which is called Tajpur, in what is now Bangladesh. My Father also returned to Bangladesh to marry and he brought my Mum to the UK in the mid-70s. The family subsequently moved to Keighley in Yorkshire, where I was born in 1980. I now live in Skipton with my wife and three children.

My school days were very happy at Holycroft Primary school, Bronte Middle school and Oakbank Grammar school. I had a Catholic education, but my family did not see this as a problem for a practising Muslim. They wanted me to learn about different religions. This has

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always been a priority for me and I have studied the great world religions to discover their commonality, as well as their differences.

## Why North Muskham

I had studied at The School of Finance in Canterbury for three years. I qualified as a Financial Adviser at the age of 22 and worked in financial services. My decision to leave the world of finance and enter the catering and service industries occurred 2007, when I was invited by a friend to visit North Muskham and view The Muskham Inn, as it was then. After the landlady had shown us round, I can remember sitting in the car park trying to decide if we should make an offer.

My Father was a great support and re-mortgaged his own house to provide me with the funds. Unfortunately, my friend could not see the plan through and I found a different partner who lived in Sleaford. However, that partnership came to an end and I have been the sole owner for some time.

## The Impact of the Pandemic

During the pandemic, I decided it was an ideal time to re-design the outside area of the restaurant. I had always had plans to do something like this, but the pandemic seemed to create a good opportunity. I am delighted with the results of this investment.

The situation has, of course, been very serious. My regular customers confide in me with their stories and some of these are very tragic indeed, particularly those from people who have been unable to access their hospital treatment.

Although any further lock-downs will be seriously detrimental for small businesses, we have managed to 'hold on' during the last year. The people in the village have been very supportive, particularly of our take-away service. My personal feeling is that, in such difficult national circumstances, we have to consider the problems from every perspective: saving lives, education and schools, small businesses and children's wellbeing. We should be trying to carry on as best we can, but also remain vigilant, recognising how hard people are

working to keep everyone safe. We should all be asking ourselves *What can we do together?*



**Photographs of the Restaurant: Outdoors**

## Indian and Bangladeshi Food

The Ashiana is a Bangladeshi restaurant. There is a great difference in the flavours, ingredients and cooking processes between the many varieties of Indian food and Bangladeshi food. It is a little known fact that over 80 per cent of Indian Restaurants in this country are actually Bangladeshi-owned. In the 1950s and 1960s, restaurants such as these were always known as the local 'Indian Restaurant', as Bangladesh did not yet exist. However, once Bangladesh was formed, more Bangladeshi influences and ownerships developed and became apparent.

One thing that I am particularly proud of is that our spices and ingredients continue to come from the small village of Tajpur, from where my family originate. I have resisted the temptation to use the international suppliers in order to preserve the unique flavours of our menu. The



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food chain, between Bangladesh and North Muskham, takes three months from the fields of Tajpur to the dining tables of the Ashiana. The chilli powder we use is made from hand-picked sun-dried chillies, which are then ground into powder in a large hollowed out tree trunk by two women with large pieces of wood.



## Onion Bhaji

I have been to visit the village to meet the people we employ and observe the processes involved. We aim to provide the kind of food that we eat ourselves - 'home cooking' - not quick commercial meals. It is a source of some pride that the restaurant and our food orders provide work for fifteen people in the village of my Grandfather.

British Bangla-culture is sadly dying, as when people leave, they do not want to return and their villages are often empty and abandoned. Regrettably, none of my three children speak Bengali.

## The Staff

I employ 15 staff at The Ashiana, who all 'live-in' for five days a week and they are able to return home for two days. I mainly recruit from Birmingham and Sheffield. My recruitment policy is effective because I provide the staff with a home, food and the council Tax is paid. In their leisure time, staff go into Newark, go for walks and they used to enjoy the village shop before it closed.

## The Customers

Initially, I thought that there would a lot of trade from people passing through, but actually my customers are locals and regulars from places as far afield as Oakham, Norwich, Lincoln, Leeds, Northampton and Doncaster.

## Memorable Events

The Official opening was certainly memorable, as was winning four national awards and meeting people like the television presenter John Snow in 2020.

Other important memories have been about charities and fund-raising. We held an 'Elvis Night' to raise funds for Cromwell church and I took part in the London Marathon, raising £6,000 for Leukaemia research. My belief is that if God has given you the 'means' to succeed, then it is your responsibility to share this success with those who are in need.

## Final word

I say to the staff that our success will not simply be about me. It is about North Muskham, the Parish Council, our customers, the quality of our food, our take-away service and relationships with communities such as local schools. This is what keeps me motivated. As I have already said: 'I would like to finish my career at The Ashiana'

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*Photograph credits*

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