**Mr. Mohammed Ibrahim Baksh**



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Age: 68

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Interviewed by: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Baksh was one of the founding members of Luton Steering Committee. He was also the chief auditor of the committee. He was an ardent campaigner and the committee collected donations to the amount of £23,000 for the cause of the War of Independence.

Occupation: I had a job here in the General Motors for a long time. I worked in Luton about 32 years. I came here in the UK on 9th January 1958. I first came to London and stayed in London for three days, and then I came to Luton. Since then I have lived in Luton.  
  
When I came to the UK I was 20 years old. At first I worked for other companies. I worked in civil engineering for about 18 months, and then I worked in Kent Meter engineering firm for 9 to 10 years. Then I worked for 27 / 28 years in General Motors Company. I am a pensioner now. I was in Luton during the (Bangladesh) war in 1971.  
  
**Q: How did you come to know about the war?**  
It was through newspapers. The Times and The Guardian used to cover the war and issues of Bangladesh. We used to watch the BBC as well. There were lot of Bengalis in Luton then. We were annoyed and we had our families in Bangladesh. We were worried about our families in Bangladesh. After some time we saw that the liberation war getting lengthy, then we formed a committee, with the local Bengali people in Luton.  
  
We had a Steering Committee. Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury was the Chief Justice then and when he came to the UK, he joined the movement in London. That was the time when we formed the Steering Committee. I was the auditor of the Committee. Every weekend we used to have meetings and we used to collect donations. Every two weeks we used to have an internal audit, and we use to inform people about the collection. I can’t remember the exact figure now; we used to transfer the money within the scheduled time. We had late Syed Momtaj Ali as the treasurer of the committee and the secretary was Burhan Uddin, we used to call him Mukta Miah, and the president was Abu Sayeed Choudhury. Mukta Miah lives in Bangladesh now. We formed the Committee unanimously, no voting was needed. We formed the committee to achieve the independence of Bangladesh and to help the country to get its freedom. We went house to house for fund raising. I participated in the fund-raising when I got time. We had other people with this responsibility. Burhan Uddin, Momtaj Ali and I were responsible to give the donors the acknowledgement of their contribution. I don’t have any copy of the receipts, it is 35 years now and I have lost all documents. We motivated and also pressed some people for their monitory participation. We told them about the situation and tried to convince them for their participation. I was the auditor of the Luton branch Steering Committee. We also demonstrated in Hyde Park. We also met Abdus Samad (Azad).  
  
I went to demonstrations in London 2-3 times. London Committee was responsible for informing us about the schedule of programmes. We all had communications. The Committee at Coventry was big. Abu Sayeed Choudhury who was the chief of the Steering Committee came to Luton two times. We had transferred money to him occasionally. We sent him £22,000 to £23,000 after the last audit. We transferred money on many occasions but the last transfer was of about £22,000-£23,000. He spent money for different activities needed for the movement. He also sent money and some other necessary things to the freedom fighters. He was secretive about the money spent and used to say to us, “Don’t ask me, it will not be good if these are discussed in this country”.  
  
We used to have the Steering Committee meeting in the weekends. We had no definite place for meetings, we used to meet up somewhere convenient for everyone. We met sometimes in High Town. Some times we met in open places. In the night we were always sitting and watching the television and talking to each other about the latest development of the war. We were all anxious for our country and our family.  
  
I had no communication with my family. Sometimes I got letters from them. No facilities of telephone then. We used to get information through letters. The letters used to come through the postal service from the then East Pakistan. But writing letters were not without fear. As they (Pakistani authorities) started screening the letters, the letters eventually stopped coming. Afterwards we used to get information from the people who were coming from Bangladesh. They used to provide us with the isolated incidents of war. Like, a military carrier was ambushed in Sherpur and there were many casualty of the Pakistani army.  
  
We demanded the UK government to recognise us, our country Bangladesh. Usually the gatherings were large and thousands of people participated in the rally. We went to Hyde Park on so many occasions.  
  
We had demonstrations in Luton also. I remember, we marched down to the town hall, sometimes the Pakistanis used to watch us from afar. We did not have good relations with Pakistanis then. We had no direct fight with them, but there were possibilities of direct fight. We were ready to face them and they were also prepared. The Pakistanis used to think that, we were separatist and trying to be separated from them so they were not very happy about it. I didn’t have any Pakistani friends at that time.  
  
When Sheikh Mujib came to this country after he was released from Pakistan I went to see him. We went with coaches to the airport and we were in large number. Muhibur Rahman was the president of Bangladesh Welfare Association (Luton), Burhan Uddin was the secretary and I was the assistant secretary of the association’s Luton branch. Sheikh Mujib came to this country after the independence of Bangladesh, I could only manage to see his face and nothing else. So many people gathered around the hotel that it was impossible to go near him. He told us, “We will go to Bangladesh and run the country peacefully”. Barrister Kamal Hussain was with him. We went to see him and after few days stay in the UK he flew to Bangladesh. After that we got some peace at last.  
  
Police kept an eye on the whole situation when we had demonstration, it was difficult for us or the Pakistanis to start a fight. When we used to go to London for any march or something, police used to cordon us, making lines around us. The Pakistanis were never able to oppose us, our demonstration went on peacefully.  
  
I first got the news of independence through the newspaper. We were miserable during the war. When we came to know about the victory, we were very happy. We arranged many programmes on that day, as we still arrange different types of programmes on the Victory Day of Bangladesh. Sometime I attend the programmes when I get time.  
  
The White people sometimes helped us in the movement in Luton. We never asked for their monetary participation.  
  
Mr Ajmat Ullah lived in 55 Leagrave Road. We used to meet there sometimes at his corner shop. Many of the small towns were connected with us. They had their own committees as well. But when we went to demonstration we got united. We used to go to different places and they used to come to Luton also. We usually had big gatherings. We usually ended with our rally near 10 Downing Street. Many of the Black people participated in the demonstrations. I was a general participant of the rallies, I was never a speaker. There were limitations of time as well. Chief Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury came to Luton on some occasions.  
  
Sometimes Abdus Samad Azad used to come and he was a good orator. He was a convincing speaker. We all had a common feeling about the country and our relatives.  
We sometimes gave all our wages we got in a week. We had two types of participations, one was on regular basis and one was special. We used to give £2-£3 regularly, apart from that we used to donate the whole weeks wages sometimes. I can’t remember how much I gave to the fund personally but I gave my full wages on several occasions. I used to get £18-£20 a week. We gave those all to the fund on many occasions. The Pakistani people also raised fund for the war in favour of Pakistan.  
  
I go to Bangladesh every year. And the country has developed a lot, all parts of the country have developed. The road communications has improved a lot. It attracts us, we feel for the country, we want to go and stay there. I am not a politician and I don’t know lot about politics.  
  
I wish to settle in Bangladesh but my children don’t want to go and live in Bangladesh. I first went to Bangladesh in 1972. Just after liberation I wished to see my home and so I went to Bangladesh. The country was just freed then. It was nice feeling to see a newly independent Bangladesh.  
  
Some of the people wanted to have a united Pakistan. Most of the Muslim Leaguers were for a united Pakistan.  
  
I am not involved in any politics here in the UK, but I am involved in many socio-religious activities here. I am the founder member of the Jalalabad Mosque. I was the vice president of the committee for the first two years. The next two years I was the treasurer of the mosque. The next two years I was the president of the committee. The mosque was established in 1996. We bought the land with the building. It was a three storied building. We renovated the 2nd and 3rd floor first, to make it usable for prayer. The second floor is also used for prayer and the 1st floor is for the children. This term I am not the president, may be the next time I will again take the charge. People want me to take the chair. I was the assistant secretary of the Bangladesh Welfare Association in Luton. My family came to UK in 1976.