

Impact of the British Bangladeshi Musicians of London: A Brief Look at the Popular Musical Styles of Postcolonial Migrant Peoples.

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Abstract: *This article focuses on the British Bangladeshi professional musicians of London, whether or not their music has any sort of impact on the local music industry. To be more specific, I investigated whether their compositions, lyrics and music genres have had any influence on the musical scenario of London, and has their brand of music been modified due to exposure to the local industry and surrounding environment. Five professional British Bangladeshi musicians based in London were interviewed and their responses serve as the primary data for this research. A brief summary of the globally popular and influential genres of music (namely reggae, hip hop, rai and bhangra), which originated from the diasporic postcolonial migrants, are presented in this article. The results of my investigation are analyzed in accordance to the musical discourse relating to these genres and their diasporic pioneers.*

Music is one of the elements that define a culture. Whether we look at its creative and expressional aspect or its commoditised form, it is safe to suggest that music is intertwined with the culture of a nation residing at a certain geographical location. The music that is considered local to a certain nation contributes to the uniqueness of the culture of that nation. However, culture is ever changing. The individual culture of a nation changes over time when it encounters other cultures. Patrick Calm Hogan concludes, "Contact leads to widespread modification or even loss of basic culture. But it leads simultaneously to a reification of that culture" (6).

For example, when people of two different cultures start to coexist, they tend to share values, beliefs and customs, out of necessity of communication and because of human's social nature; people from both cultures influence each other and both their cultures are altered. One of the reasons behind this change of culture is when the people residing at a certain area go abroad to live in a different location. Among these people, some will consciously try to hold on to their roots and cultural heritage, while others will adapt – that is a part of human nature. To quote Simon Frith, "Music is the cultural form best able to cross borders – sounds carry across fences and walls and oceans, across classes, races and nations" (269).

Music is thus an important vessel to carry the experiences and cultural practices associated with migration. John Connell and Chris Gibson state that the global distribution processes of music are significantly based on the movements of people instead of goods or money, although "... technological changes, marketing strategies and changes in taste and style" (160) are crucial as well (160). They also

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state that a huge number of migrants from postcolonial nations had brought with them their musical traditions to new destinations (mainly North America and England) since the 1970s (and even from 30 or 40 years before that) and these migrants all experience a sense of dislocation; thus music is a part of this experience, and provides the medium through which their culture and identity can be conveyed and resettled in a new location. (Connell and Gibson 160 - 161).

In this article, I try to find out whether the musical stylings of the British Bangladeshi Professional musicians settled in London, have had any impact on the local music scene. That is, I would like to investigate whether their compositions, lyrics and music genre have had any influence on the musical scenario of London, or have their brand of music been modified due to exposure to the local industry and surrounding environment. By the term British Bangladeshis, I mean people whose ancestors migrated from Bangladesh and came to England and also Bangladeshis who migrated to England more recently.

The alteration of music and cultural identities of migrants from postcolonial nations is not an uncommon phenomenon. Through the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty first century, people from Asian and Caribbean regions and from European countries as well have migrated to the British cities. The migration of these groups of people is sometimes termed as *Diaspora*. Stephen Constantine defines Diaspora as, "etymologically, derived from the Greek, the term only means scattering" (Bridge 17). Connell and Gibson make interesting connections between the music and cultural text of Paris with that of Francophone centres such as Montreal, Algiers and Abidjan; New York with Puerto Rico, Havana and Miami; Caribbean cities with London and Kingston (160); and "Indian diasporic networks link cities as diverse as Mumbai, Birmingham, Chicago and Kuala Lumpur" (160). Obviously, the music, which pertains to the culture of the migrated group of people, changes as well and it has an effect on the musical environment of their new surroundings. Some examples of these are the rai and mbalax of France, Haitian konpa of New York, Asian bhangra of English and North American cities (Connell and Gibson 160), Caribbean music in the United Kingdom and America, just to name some of the many. The music, which originated from migrated peoples, may sometimes converge with the local music to create a new hybrid genre. Through this research, I will try to unravel whether the music of British Bangladeshis had evolved in similar ways or has it gone through a different process of development.

Connell and Gibson state that in some rare cases, the music of the migrants doesn't change, and it stays just as it was when the migrants left their home land (164). As examples, they point out Mikis Theodorakis who found authentic Greek music in Melbourne and the Chieftains brought back traditional Irish music from New York (164). Furthermore, migration is not simply the relocation of certain individuals, and when it comes to their music, there are diverse and complex processes acting on it thus shaping and reshaping it (Connell and Gibson 164). There is no simple way to view this matter, and according to Mark Slobin, a worldwide viewpoint on the music of diasporic communities does not exist yet (3: 243 – 52).

A qualitative approach has been selected for this research, since it is assumed that this approach will be most relevant and fruitful. The method of 'semi structured interviews' (112) have been applied, following Arthur Asa Berger's terminology. In this type of interview, there is a set of questions, which the subjects of the research will be asked to answer in a casual setting, and the researcher may try to go beyond the set of questions, if the conversation leads to further insightful information (Berger 112) and that is exactly how the interviews were carried out. The questionnaire developed for this research is given in the Appendix.

The focus of this questions was to explore the nature and altitude of the musical endeavours of the British Bangladeshi musicians. I tried to find out: whether they were playing traditional Bangladeshi music; were they heavily influenced by the music of their local media and the industry; did they experiment with new hybrid forms of music reflecting their postcolonial backgrounds; did they ever feel any pressure to change their musical style; what are the common obstacles; what sort of success have they achieved and most importantly, did their music styles have any influence or impact on the local music scene of London? The responses from these interviews serve as the primary data for this research.

A sample size of five British Bangladeshi professional musicians, based in London, was randomly chosen for this research. A sample is, as stated by Ranjit Kumar, a set number of people, whose ideas, opinions and knowledge, among other characteristics have been chosen to represent a much larger group of people who all share at least one defining characteristic (148). A random sampling method has been chosen in order to minimize bias and achieve the most accurate results possible (Kumar 152). There should have been ideally an equal ratio of males and females among the research sample, but this fact was considered while choosing the respondents for this research. The role of gender in determining the interview results were not focused upon and this research revolved around the British Bangladeshi musicians of London but ideally, it would have been better if the sample size was bigger, and it included individuals from all over the United Kingdom.

The interviews were conducted by the researcher in London in 2007. The summary of the responses made by the respondents of this research are presented and analyzed a bit further on in this article. But before that, it is important to look at some popular forms of music originating from migrants of postcolonial nations and diasporic communities, which have had a tremendous impact not only on the local music scene, but on the global mainstream music plane. The music of the Caribbean nations and the Indians, among others, demand attention as a huge number of migrants from these locations moved to the UK and the US, especially in the period between 1920s to the 1970s, and their music certainly influenced the overall history of musical discourse.

The most well known form of postcolonial diasporic music would have to be 'reggae'. Originating from Jamaica, "Reggae ultimately combined western technology with African and African American culture, and evolved from earlier local musical forms such as mento, ska and rocksteady, which in turn developed from the music of African slaves" (Connell and Gibson, 174). As suggested by Cooper, the meaning of the word reggae can be interpreted into something that comes from the people or it may also be used a term to mean a new sound or dance (Cooper 44.1: 153 – 68). During the immigration boom of the 1950s and 1960s, a large number of West Indian migrants moved to England, bringing with them their culture and reggae music (Connell and Gibson 176). During this period, reggae music was ignored by the mainstream radio but it received incredible acceptance at a more underground level, being adopted by Caribbean themed clubs and punks and skinheads. (Connell and Gibson 176). However, Connell and Gibson believe that reggae started getting mainstream attention when popular artists like Blondie and The Clash began to incorporate this type of music to their songs in the 1970s: Blondie's 'Heart of Glass' (1978) and The Clash's 'Police and Thieves' (1977) and 'London Calling' (1979) was influenced by reggae music.

Hebdige states that an audience for reggae music developed who were essentially young Brits, and they found this type of music appealing because of its rebellious nature (95). He also points out that most reggae musicians stayed true to their roots (Hebdige 95). This is very interesting because the migrant musicians brought their own brand of music to England, which was not immediately modified in the process of relocation. These Caribbean migrants came at such a time when there was a growing crowd of white English youth who could relate to the themes brought forward by the reggae songs, as around that period there were ongoing social, economic and political problems in the country.

By the latter part of the 1970s, white British groups like UB40 and Madness began to exclusively play ska and reggae, gaining a much stronger foothold in the mainstream music of the British society (Hebdige, 98; Alleyne, 24: 15 – 30). One thing to notice here is that migrant musicians and bands can usually reach the mainstream only when their music is adapted by other white western bands, or when their music is modified to suit the western ear (Huq, 77). This idea is debatable, because Jamaican reggae music became popular in the 60s and 70s and is still popular in the UK as well as in the rest of the world. By the end of the 70s, reggae was being commoditised and Bob Marley's ascendancy into pop stardom sort of personified the whole process (Cushman 25.3: 16 – 61; Gilroy 169 – 170).

Rachael Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick state that migrants from Jamaica usually went to England before 1965, but there was a period afterwards where they migrated in great numbers to the United States (188). As Rubin and Melnick suggests, over 10,000 Jamaican migrants entered the US legally in 1967, Bob Marley being one of them (188). His music style may not have changed much since his early days, but his image through the 1970s, 80s and 90s changed from a Rastafarian Outlaw to the Natural Mystic - his

music representing ideological notions of national liberation, black power, multiculturalism, universal pluralism and transnationalism (Stephens 12: 139 – 67). Thus reggae became a global phenomenon in spite of the fact that it started out as the music of the Caribbean migrants.

Connell and Gibson suggest that besides reggae, the other genre of music that has captivated a cross cultural worldwide audience is 'hip hop' (182). Originating from the Caribbean migrants of the United States of America, hip hop is certainly a very popular type of "transnational urban soundtrack" (Connell and Gibson 182). As Rubin and Melnick notes, the Jamaicans arrived in the US with a "cultural apprenticeship" (178) of American culture and they would use this knowledge to become the "leading innovators in American music" (179). They state that Clive Campbell (later on known as Kool Herc) changed from a naïve immigrant in 1967 to the pioneer of hip hop music in New York by the late 1970s and they emphasize on the fact that his childhood in Jamaica exposed him to American television and musical tastes, enabling him, perhaps, to become an innovator of a new genre of music in his new homeland and pave the road to the future (179). The Jamaican migrant audiences residing in the US contributed to his success a great deal.

Russell A. Potter, in his book *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*, state that hip hop was originally treated as a means of giving voice to the deprived inner city African American communities (Connell and Gibson 184), but Flores suggest that Puerto Ricans and whites also contributed to its development (89 – 98). According to Rubin and Melnick, hip hop was ubiquitous in the Black and Hispanic communities occupying the inner-city neighbourhoods of South Bronx, New York in the 1970s (188) and it quickly caught on in other similar neighbourhoods in south-central Los Angeles (188) and in other "urban ghettos in major cities, like Houston's fifth ward, Miami's Overtown and Boston's Roxbury" (McLaren 25.2: 4).

Hip hop appeared in urban areas of other parts of the globe as well: for example, in France, hip hop developed in the suburbs of Paris and in Marseilles, where the performers and musicians were predominantly of West Indian and African origin; and, in Germany, young people whose parents migrated from Turkey and Morocco started to get involved with rap and hip hop (Connell and Gibson 184). It is very interesting to note that hip hop and rap were being localized everywhere, not only in terms of the language used in lyrics but also the contents of meaning delivered through the lyrics.

Another type of music coming from migrant musicians that has similar postcolonial precedents is 'Rai'. Tony Langlois defines Rai as popular music originally produced in urban western Algeria, a former French colony that has been transformed since its recognition in the world music scene (Bennet et al 194). According to Langlois, pop-rai was produced for a local market throughout the 1980s in the city of Oran, but it was not until 1983 that rai songs were aired on Algerian radio (Bennet et al 195). One of the

characteristics of rai music are its rather direct and unconventional lyrics and would traditionally be “associated with discrete social domains, single sex wedding parties, nightclubs and brothels” (Bennet et al 195). Longlois suggests that among the numerous rai artists of Africa, one performer named Cheb Khaled successfully brought rai music into the popular music scene of Europe, when he moved there in the 1990s (Bennet et al 194; Connell and Gibson 168).

Rai was not performed in public events like open concerts before the mid 1980s due to its devious reputation (Connell and Gibson 167). After his move to Europe, Khaled experimented with his music style, combining western pop patterns with North African ones, as noted by Longlois (Bennet et al 194). Longlois further states that artists like Khaled changed their localized, offensive, small community targeted lyrics, to lyrics which would appeal to a much bigger audience (Bennet et al 197). For example, Khaled took out the *dirty* lyrics altogether and became world famous. Longlois also comments that the result was the immense success of rai music in Europe, especially in French cities, so much as to suggest that the cultural centre of gravity of rai music moved from Africa to Europe (Bennet et al 197).

Much like the Algerian musicians, Indians have crossed over to the UK and US since the 1920s and 30s, around the same time as people from the Caribbean. The music of Indian migrants may not have created tidal waves in the world music scene like their Jamaican counterparts, but comprehension of their music is as important. Among the musical forms of Indian migrants, Bhangra music is amongst the best renowned. Bhangra by definition, according to Rupa Huq, is a mixture of punjabi folk, western pop and rock n’ roll; it is a subculture which originated from the South Asian youth of Britain in the 1990s (201).

Obviously, Bhangra or Asian underground music has not had nearly as big an impact on the mainstream music scene, as reggae or hip hop. Huq comments:

Bhangra is a musical style of very specific derivations, namely Punjabi folk dance, which by definition cannot carry equal appeal to the inhabitants of an entire subcontinent. The group Joi Bangla, of Bangladeshi descent and based in East London, for example, have expressed reservations about Bhangra’s narrow Punjabi focus and instead use Bengali lyrics, as have the Asian group Dub Foundation. It is something of an oversimplification to see bhangra as the one force uniting the disparate members of British Asian youth (202).

I agree with Huq that Bhangra is not the sole type of music that originated from Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities based in the UK or the US.

Huq points out that performers like the UK chart-topping Cornershop and Mercury Music Prize Nominee Black Star Liner both had only one Asian member (70). It should also be mentioned, Huq suggests, that Norman Cook’s remix of the track *Brimful of Asha*, was the song which entered the UK pop charts, not the original version by Cornershop (77). Whether the original song was not authentically Indian enough, or it needed to be modified to suit the tastes of the UK audience is open to debate, but the fact remains that the remix of the song is mainly what made some sort of impact in the mainstream music scene. This

argument is debatable because Cornershop's albums sold well and they were on BBC Radio. Furthermore, Asian artists are burdened with the responsibility to be perceived as the spokespeople for their diasporic communities (Huq, 71).

In an interview conducted by Huq in 1995, Tjinder Singh, Asian front man of Cornershop said, "Other bands are just there. We've had to justify ourselves a lot more than anybody else" (qtd. in Huq 71). Singh stated this when talking about how being categorised as a band with an Asian identity affected their style of playing, media representation and their career as a whole (Huq 71). Similar remarks were made by other migrant Asian performers in the UK like Dr. Das of ADF and Inder of Detrimental; they are constantly questioned when they go beyond the usage of sitar, tabla and other Asian instrumental sounds (Huq 71). These musicians all try to explain that even though they are of Indian or South Asian descent, they were influenced by a number of different sounds living in the UK for years, and many were born and brought up there, so their music reflects their upbringing? (Huq 71).

Bhangra has received some attention in the music scenes of major cities like London, Manchester (Huq 71), and Birmingham and in some states of North America (Connell and Gibson 169). I agree with Connell and Gibson when they state that with the introduction of rapping, sampling, and adding electronica with bhangra music, it has taken this genre far from its original Punjabi folk roots to a more symbolic status, allowing first and second generation South Asian migrants coming from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to share a common identity (169).

In my opinion, to find the root of Indian migrant music we have to trace it back to the famous Ravi Shankar, who after settling down in the United States, was responsible for introducing Indian music to the hippy crowds of 1960s and 70s America, with the appeal of mysticism, which came to be an obsession for the Americans and the English back in the 1960s (Huq 201). A mass migration from the South Asian subcontinent to North America occurred after 1965, due to the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, which modified the immigration quotas and professional preferences (Rubin and Melnick 129). Rubin and Melnick suggest that the way these Indian migrants were received and their culture perceived had a lot to do with "popular icons, styles and religious adaptations, and not through social realities produced" (130) by the migrants themselves (130).

Shankar was a Sitar player, who never viewed himself as a popular musician and always played very classical based compositions and ragas (Rubin and Melnick 133). Just like the case of reggae music, the music of Shankar got most attention after the massively popular white band of that era, the Beatles embraced his style in a couple of songs. Even then, the music of sitar in the context of popular culture, were usually associated with the notion that "something freaky is about to happen – whether in the realm of spirituality, drugs or sex" (Rubin and Melnick 160).

Coming back to the main focus of this research, let us now proceed to short introductions of the respondents of this research, followed by the summary of their interview responses. Farhan Shah has been involved professionally with music in Bangladesh since 1994, but he moved to London in 2001. He is a singer/song writer/ keyboard player who currently plays fusion. Idris and Zoe Rahman are siblings, and they were born and brought up in London. Idris plays the Clarinet and Zoe the Piano, and they started professional music from 1999. They play classical music, but are also involved with jazz and Afro styles. Shila Chowdhury is a student of Westminster University, but she is also a professional singer of “Rabindra Sangeet” and “Nazrul Geeti”, which are traditional Bengali styled songs. Her family moved to London in 1999, and ever since she has been performing at Bangladeshi community programmes and festivals. Back in Bangladesh she was trained in a renowned music school from a very young age. Kishon Khan is the front man of the fusion band ‘Lokhi Tera’, but he is a session player by profession and so he plays a lot of different types of music, including African jazz, classical, pop, hip hop, reggae and latin. He himself categorized his style as ‘World Music’. Kishon was born and brought up in London, but he traveled to Bangladesh and many other countries like South Africa, to study and experience different styles of music. He has been involved with the music business since the early 1990s.

Among them only Farhan Shah had the ambitions of getting into the mainstream music business while the others were content in playing their style of music in their respective music scenes. However, irrespective of their backgrounds, ambitions and genres of music involved with, there are certain things that they all agreed upon. All the musicians stated that London is a great place to do music. It is probably one of the few cities in the world where almost any type of music can be performed and recorded. This is obviously because the population of London is highly varied, with people from a number of different cultures and ethnicities residing here. There is a wide variety of audiences who enjoy many different genres, so the support is there for diasporic musicians to play different styles of music here. Kishon Khan comments that Indian musicians probably get more support than their Bangladeshi counterparts, both financially and in terms of fan base, mainly due to the stronger infrastructure of Indian immigrants in London. But overall, all the respondents of this research agreed that Asian musicians get a lot of support to have a career in music here.

When asked whether Bangladeshi migrant musicians get proper support, Farhan Shah said, “They do, but it is tough. It is very competitive since my music has to stand out from all the other fusion bands coming from Pakistan, India and other parts of Asia” (2007). When asked this same question, Idris and Zoe Rahman replied:

There is a lot happening in terms of music in London, a lot of different styles is appreciated here and the opportunity is there to become a professional musician because of the growing market for diasporic music. It is a financially lucrative profession but we cannot stress enough on how difficult it is (2007).

When asked about the obstacles and difficulties faced in being professional musicians here in London, all agreed that it is the similar case with doing music anywhere else in the world. They commented that getting recognition for one's music is never an easy job, and standing out from many other professional artists and musicians is always a challenge, regardless of which city they are based on. Idris and Zoe Rahman specifically talked about the decreasing number of venues for live gigs being a major problem as of late. This is because the live music licensing law put to effect in the last couple of years has made it very expensive for entrepreneurs to get this licence. Farhan Shah stated that his biggest obstacle is getting signed with a good record label, as there not too many companies that would want to sign an experimental fusion artist like himself. Kishon Khan also makes a similar comment stating that the record companies here in the UK and perhaps anywhere else in the world are always very business oriented and they would always have the tendency to sign artists whose music are less experimental and has a higher probability of being commercially successful. However, both Shah and Khan agreed that these are difficulties that each and every musician must face anywhere else in the world, and to overcome these obstacles are part of the challenge of doing music professionally.

The respondents were then asked whether they ever felt the pressure to change their style of music here in London, bearing in mind the tendency of record companies mentioned above. They all stated that there was no real pressure, although Farhan Shah commented that since he composes fusion music, he would always add some familiar bits of sounds and instruments so that his tracks would get mass appeal to the mainstream UK audience. It has already been mentioned in this paper that Rupa Huq believes that diasporic musicians may have to alter their sound so that it is more suitable to the local audience (77). After hearing the responses of all the musicians, it seems that this modification of music style (such as writing English lyrics and having familiar sounds in compositions) may be necessary only if a foreign artist wishes to be a part of the mainstream scene – but this is the norm anywhere in the world. Just like in the case of rai music as already mentioned in this article, Khaled with his music, gained global popularity when he replaced the dirty lyrics traditionally associated with this genre.

Among the respondents, only Farhan Shah mentions that he sparingly felt the need to improvise with his music in order to produce music acceptable by the UK audience. However, we should bear in mind that Zoe, Idris Rahman and Kishon Khan were all born and brought up here. They do not play Bangladeshi music. Quoting Idris:

From our parents, we got into Western Classical music, later on, Jazz and Reggae. We just got influenced by our surroundings and we were very open to new styles of music. We also listened to Bangladeshi popular music from our cousins in Bangladesh, but that's about it. We were always more influenced by English and a whole other variety of styles, since we were born and brought up in the UK. We don't speak Bengali (2007).

Shila Chowdhury relocated from Bangladesh as well and she sings Bengali songs but she has no ambitions of getting into the popular music business. As already mentioned in this article, Hebdige notes

that sometimes the migrant musician's music does not change after they relocate (95). This is true in the case of Shila Chowdhury.

Speaking about altering their style of music, they were also asked whether they had any pressure to sound Bangladeshi or if lack of influence from their ethnic backgrounds in their music ever came into question. The general response of the respondents was that hardly anyone ever made such comments. Kishon Khan replied that, "Whenever any journalist asks me why my music doesn't sound Bangladeshi, and this hardly ever happens, I always say that you should close your eyes and just listen to the music I play, and not bother with my ethnic origins (2007)."

This is contrary to the responses made by Tjinder Singh, Dr. Das and Inder when they were interviewed by Huq (71). As already mentioned in this article, these diasporic musicians stated that they were always questioned when their music went beyond their Asian roots (Huq 71). In my opinion, this is because all of the above musicians were competing for a spot in the mainstream music scene of London, if not the UK, while the majority of the musicians I interviewed had different aspirations. Singh, Das and Inder explains that their music reflects their upbringing, local media and surrounding environment (Huq 71) which can be related with the responses made by the Rahman siblings (Idris and Zoe), who were both born and brought up in London.

The British Bangladeshi musicians that I interviewed were asked whether they were bothered by the narrow view of Asian musicians portrayed by the international media. All the musicians had a common response, and they stated that the media is always going to be a bit stereotypical and narrow in their views, but that is something that doesn't bother professional musicians as they are used to it.

When asked about what kind of impact the British Bangladeshi professional musicians of London had on the local industry, Farhan Shah said "I think they have had a good impact in the sense that, Asian musicians and artists are slowly getting more and more recognition. We still have a long way to go, but the prospects are exciting for Asian musicians here (2007)." The Bangladeshi musicians have yet to gain international popularity, but as have been stated in this article earlier, many diasporic musicians gained recognition when international bands started to embrace their styles or performed cover versions of their tracks.

This has yet to happen for Bangladeshi artists, especially in the mainstream music scenario. However, Bengali lyrics can be found in some tracks of UK based artists like Nitin Sawhney's 'Sunset', Chicane's 'Locking Down' and in songs of the Asian Dub Foundation and Joi Bangla. As also stated earlier in this article, many Jamaican musicians migrated to the UK and USA in the 1960s and 1970s, equipped with cultural apprenticeships relevant to these regions and they ended up making musical history with reggae

and hip hop. The same can be assumed from the Bangladeshi migrants coming to London in the 1990s and 2000s, like Farhan Shah and Shila Chowdhury, who came to their new homes only after being exposed to music and television from the UK and USA, in the form of satellite and cable channels back in Bangladesh.

None of the respondents of this research mentioned this, but there are a rising number of British Bangladeshi rappers and hip hoppers currently in London, who rap with Bengali lyrics especially using the Sylheti dialect. This is because these people are mostly second or third generation British Bangladeshis, whose ancestors migrated to London from Sylhet, a district in Bangladesh (Sandhu). Hip hop became global and gained international success with artists from different parts of the world using different languages and dialects. The British Bengali rappers and hip hoppers are quite popular in the local London music scene, with some of their tracks being played on local Asian based radio and television stations and clubs (“Bangla gangsta rap”; “Bangla Rap/MC”).

I asked the respondents to name some successful Bangladeshi or diasporic Asian musicians of the UK music scene. In terms of commercial success, they put forward some common names of Asian artists like Nitin Sawhney, Asian Dub Foundation and A.R. Rahman. In terms of Asian musicians who may not be famous but are very well recognized within the industry, they mentioned Joi Bangla, Cooljit Varma (Tabla player who played in the theatre production of ‘Bombay Dreams’), Robin Banerjee (Guitar player currently playing for Amy Winehouse) and the Drummer who played for the Spice Girls. Kishon Khan commented that Bangladeshi musicians or artists may not be very famous, but there are many of them working professionally within the UK music business, who are well respected and quite influential within the industry.

In conclusion, the British Bangladeshis have an impact on the music scene of London on a variety of levels. A trademark genre of Bangladeshi music has yet to be as globally influential as the music of the Jamaican immigrants, namely reggae and hip hop, but the prospects look favourable for the near future. The British Bangladeshi professional musicians already play an important role within London and the UK music industry, as mentioned by the respondents of this research.

There is a huge community of Bangladeshis in London, and their numbers are regularly increasing. Many Bangladeshi musicians play their local music within this community and often get some local media attention, even if that is confined to Bangladeshi community based television channels, radio and newspapers. The already mentioned music of the British Bangladeshi rappers serves as an example. I agree with Kishon Khan (2007), that the huge Indian community of London provide some evidence behind the success and influence of Indian music and the music of British Indian musicians, in the local industry. The same hypothesis sheds light on the iconic popularity of Shankar in the US during the 1960s,

where a growing Indian community existed and continues to exist today (Huq 201; Rubin and Melnick 130 – 133). The respondents also mentioned that London has a very wide and varied music audience, giving musicians from any part of the globe, the chance to experiment with different styles and genres here.

The point that I am trying to make is that there is an established platform for Bangladeshi musicians in London, allowing them the opportunity to take their music unto the mainstream level of not just London, but of the whole UK music industry in the future. Whether the diasporic musicians gain commercial success or not, depends on a diverse number of reasons – some of which have been highlighted in this article. But the aspirations of these musicians obviously play a vital role. When I asked the respondents what they consider as success, their common response was that they would consider themselves successful if they were able to continue to do their music, get proper recognition and were able to earn a decent living from their music. Only Farhan Shah stated that he would want all this and commercial success as well.

This article definitely does not encompass an exhaustive research on the impact made by the British Bangladeshi musicians of London. However, there is a lack of substantial academic work on the music of British Bangladeshis, as compared to the music of other postcolonial diasporic communities of London. That is why this exploratory study should hopefully contribute something to this field, paving the way for many further studies.

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Appendix

Research Questionnaire for British Bangladeshi Music Professionals based in London

1. What is your name?
2. What is your current profession?
3. How long have you been involved with the music business? (What year?)
4. How long have you been involved with the music business in London?
5. What type of music do you play now, and (if applicable) is it different from the type of music you used to play back in Bangladesh?
6. Do you think Bangladeshi or South Asian musicians and artists get enough support to make it in the London music scene?
7. What kinds of difficulties have you faced and what are the main obstacles in establishing a successful career in London?
8. Have you ever felt pressure to alter your style of music?
9. What impact has London based British Bangladeshi musicians had in the local music scene?
10. What are the high points or can you describe some success stories in the music business?
11. What would you consider success?