" IT JUST TAKES ONE BRAVE PERSON TO SPEAK OUT "

An interview between Asia Giuliani and Sandeep Uppal. The interview was recorded by the interviewer in Canning Town, London on 22nd July 2023.

Sandeep, thank you for agreeing to this interview. Can we start by asking you to introduce yourself?

My name's Sandeep, and I go by DJ Squarewave. I started out making drum and bass music, buying records, and mixing Drum and Bass. When Dubstep came around and Grime, I started getting more involved in that, and now I'm making Dub Reggae and Hip Hop beats. My music is U.K. and London influenced - a very British sound. But also, my parents came to the U.K. when they were teenagers from India, so early in my career, I was using a lot of Indian influences in my music as well. I released some tracks with a crew called Nasha Records; they were all from a Pakistani, Bangladeshi background, and the music was dance music with Eastern influences, from our **heritage**. I'm still running parties now, touring a few countries, and putting out records.

What is your family heritage?

We're Punjabi, which is Indian, and we're Sikh. Half of Punjab is in Pakistan. Pakistan and India and Bangladesh all used to be one country before **Partition**.

A VERY BRITISH SOUND

Earlier this year there was some backlash from a comment made by YouTuber, boxer, and rapper, KSI. When did you first see the clip on his show, Sideman, and how did you feel when you first saw it?

I saw it on Twitter. KSI was trending, and a few people that I know who are of Asian background shared it. They were trying to educate people that it's not OK to use this word. I think it was on Instagram as well. It went viral. Firstly, I couldn't believe that it was allowed to air. There were editors and producers and a lot of senior people that all seemed to think it was OK to broadcast. If it was another **racial slur** for another community, I feel it wouldn't have been allowed, so they must have felt this wasn't as bad – I was surprised by that.



Photograph: Asia Giuliani, DJ Squarewave at Outlook, July 2022 ©

Your brother, who is also a DJ, going by the name Sukh Night, tweeted an article in response to the KSI show, about your Dad. Sukh's tweet went viral. Can you tell me what that Tweet was about and why your brother felt he should put it out?

For him, hearing that word and seeing it displayed on the screen, and in these viral clips, brought back traumatic memories; **trauma** that has been blocked away and not discussed for a long time. The article you're referring to is a newspaper cutting that reported my father's death. In 1989 there was a robbery at his shop, and then he unfortunately passed away during the incident. When the culprit was arrested, he was heard boasting about the incident and calling my dad the P-word. So, for my brother, that clip brought back bad memories, traumatic memories.



Photograph: Family photo, Kulvinder Singh Uppal, date unknown ©

Kulvinder Singh Uppal tragically passed away in a racist incident at his shop, in 1989.

This tragic incident happened to your Dad when he was only 26. Is there anything that you can share about his life that celebrates the time that he had?

He was a musician as well. He released a couple of albums. He was a singer and songwriter – the lead singer. He created a band, wrote songs, and put out a cassette and a vinyl. At the time of his death, he was starting to get popular and starting to tour. Also, at the time of his death, he had a few shops around London. For his age, he was a successful businessman and entrepreneur. So, he's left his **legacy.**

A WELL-LIKED, WELL-RESPECTED PERSON, FUNNY, FASHIONABLE, SMART, A SHARP DRESSER

Even today, people say to me and my brother, he was a well-liked, well-respected person, funny, fashionable, smart, a sharp dresser. He's left a positive legacy. He gave us the creative genes, as me and my brother are both musicians as well. I've got his lyric book at home. Knowing that he did music, it felt natural for us to do music, even if it was subconscious.

What would you say to a young person who thinks that the P-word is just an abbreviation of Pakistani, or it's just a bit of banter?

I think it's education. If young people were aware of the history of the word and how it was used, they wouldn't use it. There are people like me and my cousins, people who are still alive that were around when it was used as a bad word. In Britain, in the eighties and nineties, it was used as a **derogatory** term. For example, people would say that they're going out P*** bashing, just to go out to fight or abuse people of Asian background. It was used as a **slur**, as a racist insult. I hadn't heard it for a long, long time. Maybe since I was in primary school. Even in secondary school, it wasn't used that much. It felt like the word had gone out of fashion. Most people were aware that it's not OK to say it. It was surprising to see it again, and then it hurt me to see that my brother felt strongly about it, and that it brought back memories for him as well. I understand guys like KSI and his crew, they're much younger, so I think that they're not aware of the history of the word.

Do you think there is less racism in the UK now?

I feel like it had improved. It's like a kind of wave. It improves, and you feel like things are going well, and then something like Trump getting into power or political movements happening, for example, the rise of nationalism in a lot of countries becomes an enabling factor. The public almost feel like it's OK to be racist again, where public figures start using certain types of language or **marginalising** certain communities. It goes in a wave of ups and downs; racism comes and goes.

YOU SHOULD BE THE BRAVE PERSON. THAT SHOULD BE YOU

After KSI used the P-word in the show, the other panellists all started laughing, suggesting that they felt it was OK. How do you think someone should approach it when they hear slurs like this used?

It wasn't a live programme; it was a recorded programme. So, someone on the panel, or in the audience or the team easily had an opportunity to say, 'I don't think it's OK to broadcast – it's not OK to say that word'. If only one person spoke out, they would have been supported. It just takes one brave person to speak out in the first place and say, 'I don't feel comfortable with that.' You should be the brave person. That should be you.