

PASSION AND PARTNERSHIP: AN UNSTOPPABLE COMBINATION

The history of **Kashmir Crown Bakeries** is a true rags-to-riches story about a real entrepreneur who found success through hard work, courage and a sense of community. Ali Group company Mono Equipment has played a key role in the company's growth and transformation. Jim Banks explores how a relationship built on honesty and trust can help turn a dream into reality

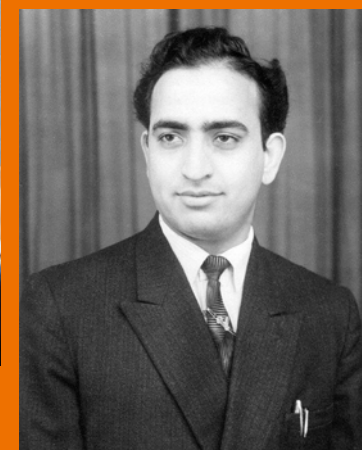


Kashmir Crown Bakeries was one of the first Asian bakeries in the UK and, from its base in Bradford, has grown into an international brand with a multimillion-pound turnover and is the biggest business of its kind in Western Europe. Its success is due in large part to the determination and ambition of one man, Mohammed Saleem, a man from a humble background who had a big dream.

Mohammed Saleem was born in 1940 in Kashmir. When he was seven years old the British partitioned India and Pakistan, leaving Kashmir as a disputed state, so he was displaced to Rawalpindi, where he ended up selling eggs at a railway station to support his family even though he was only seven. Eventually, when he was 20, he had the chance to go to the UK because the government had made a deal with Pakistan to provide labor as there was a shortage of workers after the war.

"He landed with £5 in his pocket and headed for Bradford because he had friends there.

He still had a desire to run his own business and with an investment of £55 he opened Kashmir Food Store. His idea was to provide a link to the homeland for local people. For people from Pakistan, India,



Mohammed Saleem (left) founded Kashmir Crown Bakeries in the UK in 1960, having left Pakistan aged seven

Mohammed Saleem's son Asim, above, is the managing director



Kashmir Crown Bakeries has had a close relationship with Mono Equipment since 1979

Bangladesh – the whole of the Indian subcontinent – Asian sweets were very difficult to find, especially for important festivals like Eid and Diwali, so he opened a small kitchen. He had a passion to provide what the people of his culture really wanted,” says Asim Saleem, the eldest of Mohammed’s six children and current managing director of Kashmir Crown Bakeries.

Across the road from Mohammed’s home, was a bakery run by an Englishman called Whitehead who sold Mohammed a small bakery for £3,000 in 1970 and gave him a crash course in baking. From there Mohammed started to experiment with the cake rusk that became the company’s signature product. Similar to biscotti, it is a double-baked cake that people from the Indian subcontinent eat at any time of day. It was an instant success and was the catalyst for the stellar growth of Kashmir Crown Bakeries.

“In 1979, when my father opened his third shop, he met Chris Huish from Mono, who sold him a Mark 9 cake depositor and that was the turning point for production on a mass scale, which allowed us to sell our products nationally and internationally. This business is all about people and our relationship with Mono is like a marriage. It is about friendship,” Asim Saleem explains.

A PARTNERSHIP BUILT ON TRUST

The relationship between Mono Equipment and Kashmir Crown Bakeries has grown stronger over the decades and Mono now supplies most of the equipment the company uses.

“It is a special relationship. I’ve dealt with them for 35 years now and it all began when I sold them a depositor. At the time we could not agree on a price and Mohammed showed me the machine he was using, which had broken and was not worth what he had paid for it. When he saw the equipment I was offering he gave me a blank signed check to buy it. He told me God had sent me and would guide my hand as I filled in the number on the check. I was honoured that Mohammed had showed faith and trust in me, it is something which I have never forgotten,” explains Chris Huish, director of independent sales at Mono Equipment, who are based in Swansea, Wales.

“This unwavering trust is still there and we now provide all of their equipment including mixers and pastry lines, and over the years they have bought ten depositors. They consider me to be part of the family and I have helped them to

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AN INTERNATIONAL BRAND IN NUMBERS

KASHMIR CROWN BAKERIES NOW DISTRIBUTES TO **2,000** INDEPENDENT **RETAILERS** IN THE UK AND HAS A LICENSED DISTRIBUTOR IN THE US. ACROSS THE US AND EUROPE IT NOW HAS OVER **5,000** **OUTLETS** AND ITS ANNUAL TURNOVER IS **£7M** IN THE UK AND **\$6M** IN THE US.



Mono Equipment provide all of Kashmir Crown Bakeries' equipment
Left: Mohammed Saleem's van in front of his first bakery



Kashmir Crown Bakeries has had great success adapting its recipes to local markets

grow the business globally. Even though Kashmir Crown Bakeries is a big company now, the relationship is still personal," adds Huish.

Huish began his career as a baker and his first job at Mono Equipment was as a test baker before he moved into sales. It is partly his in-depth understanding of the bakery business that has helped the relationship with Kashmir Crown Bakeries to blossom, but also a shared philosophy he has with them.

STRENGTH THROUGH COMMUNITY

"Family and community are still the foundation of this business. There is a real sense of community among the people in the UK whose origins are in the subcontinent and traditional foods unite them. Our motto is 'strengthen each other so that we may prosper' and that message is still at the core of our business. Profit is the end result of what we do, but it is not our goal. We recognize that everyone is a stakeholder in our business," says Asim Saleem.

Today Kashmir Crown Bakeries has grown beyond all expectations; larger than Mohammed could ever have imagined. The company has expanded along with its innovative product range. It is adapting some recipes to local markets and is taking traditional Western

recipes and blending different ingredients to suit Asian tastes.

"The challenge now is to keep the soul of the business. We must be a corporate entity without compromising our identity and our core values. We want to keep growing and also remain a family business in which everyone shares the rewards rather than driving value for shareholders," says Saleem.

"The UK has a large Asian community and this is still our core market but our wider market is much more cross-cultural now. We are now looking at the Middle East and Australia as potential markets. My father built a national business and I have taken it international. One day I hope my children will come into the business and take it even further to the next stage."

The story of Kashmir Crown Bakeries is one of passion, ambition and hard work, but more than that it is a story about the strength of relationships and community. Whether it is the community of customers or the network of suppliers, the company has a philosophy of shared values and collaboration that is still its greatest strength. ■

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ABOUT MONO

Kashmir Crown Bakeries found its perfect partner in Mono, which is the longest established confectionery depositor manufacturer in the world and a one-stop shop for the full suite of bakery equipment for clients that include the UK's leading artisan bakeries and some of its best known supermarket chains.



ACCREDITATIONS AND AWARDS

- BSI ISO 9001 QUALITY MANAGEMENT
- BSI ISO 14001 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
- CE QUALITY MARK SAFE CONTRACTOR APPROVED



Kashmir Crown Bakeries are looking forward to using their new 3D-X confectionery depositor from Mono Equipment



THE NEXT STEP

Mono Equipment's latest innovation is the Universal 3D-X confectionery depositor, which features the ability to deposit in all three (XYZ) directions. It also has the option of using a single, double or triple hopper system enabling up to three different colored mixes to be deposited simultaneously.

The combination of the XYZ depositing and the three hopper system means truly eye-catching and highly original products can be created. Complex shapes such as Christmas trees, incremental spirals and pyramids can

be easily constructed with consistency and precision.

"Kashmir Crown Bakeries has ordered the very first 3D-X confectionery depositor.

The company likes to be the first to use our new equipment and by testing our products it helps us to find new ways to improve them. Our equipment, including this depositor, will help keep Kashmir Crown Bakeries at the forefront of new product innovation for many years to come," says **Chris Huish** (pictured above), director of independent sales at Mono.