

## The Mic Drop Season One, Episode Seven: Ali

**Mo** [00:00:00] Hi, this is Mo. I work with people seeking asylum, and I've been working with the Many Hands One Heart since the start. So this is just a gathering, chatting, you know, we do a Mic Drop podcast and the co-presenter or co-facilitator is Adrian here with me. And just talking to Ali about his life. Ali, just tell us where you come from.

**Ali** [00:00:25] I'm from Pakistan.

**Mo** [00:00:29] How did you get involved with the Many Hands One Heart?

**Ali** [00:00:34] I involved with the Many Hands One Heart, first time like I heard from Armistead Centre in two thousand, beginning of 2018 somewhere in March. And at that time, Many Hands One Heart was preparing for International Day Against Homophobia and that was the first time I met the people at Many Hands One Heart and I started involving with them.

**Mo** [00:01:03] And you. Where are you from?

**Ali** [00:01:06] Pakistan.

**Mo** [00:01:07] And what was it like to live in Pakistan as a gay man? Were you out when you were in Pakistan? Did people know about your sexuality?

**Ali** [00:01:18] No.

**Mo** [00:01:18] Nobody knew?

**Ali** [00:01:20] No, I was not, I was like my sexuality.

**Mo** [00:01:26] And your parents, do they know about your sexuality now?

**Ali** [00:01:32] Yes, they do know.

**Mo** [00:01:34] What, what is their reaction? How did they react when they find out?

**Ali** [00:01:40] It was like totally outrage and anger and a totally homophobic response.

**Mo** [00:01:50] Do you have any contact with them now?

**Ali** [00:01:53] No.

**Mo** [00:01:54] Do you get any support from them, from your family? emotionally, financially? Not just from your parents, I'm talking about your sisters and brothers.

**Ali** [00:02:03] No, not at all.

**Mo** [00:02:04] You were you I remember you were telling us once that you were very close to your sister when you were little, younger.

**Ali** [00:02:10] Oh, yes, I was.

**Mo** [00:02:12] You used to play with her toys, with dolls is that right?

**Ali** [00:02:17] Like I had two brothers, older brothers and we were two younger and we have more attachment than other. So, yeah.

**Mo** [00:02:29] And another thing is you've told me about your disability. Can you talk a little bit about that as well?

**Ali** [00:02:36] Yes, I have a visual impairment and photophobia.

**Mo** [00:02:46] And that's, what was it like life as a child in Pakistan, not just about your sexuality, because it's lots of issues you said to me about, you know, the loneliness that you know, you didn't have many friends and you stay at home quite a lot. Is that is that because of your sexuality or disability or are just basically your personality?

**Ali** [00:03:09] I think my sexuality and my disability have had a lot of impact on my personality. Like my personality was developing within these things. And that's, oh, yeah, there's a lot of impact on my, yeah my personality and how I behave.

**Mo** [00:03:44] In regards to your like your family in, back home, when did you realise that, you know, when did you realise that you were different in regard to sexuality? Did your family actually suspect anything?

**Ali** [00:04:03] Like they did not suspect anything because I was not so much active, sexually.

**Mo** [00:04:13] But you knew that you were different from other men and boys?

**Ali** [00:04:16] Yes.

**Mo** [00:04:17] You were attracted to boys?

**Ali** [00:04:19] Yes, since my high school life, I was attracted to other boys and but I was not so much active like I have, I was not even active as a mostly going outside or something like that. And like playing with other schoolmates or something. So I was not active mostly. So that's why I think there was not much suspicion.

**Adrian** [00:05:08] Hello Ali, I'm Adrian, I know you are from two years, I think so, we've been sharing some experience in different projects. And I know a little bit about the story back in your country and just wondering, because we came from different backgrounds and it's important to remember people like me came from from countries that it's not illegal to be gay but there is also a lot of discrimination and persecution about LGBT people, but you came from a different society, where being gay is a crime, isn't it?

**Ali** [00:05:51] Yes, it is. And legally, it's like by law it's illegal and it's there is punish punishment for that. I think eight years in prison or something, more than that, not exactly. I don't know. But it is illegal. Yeah.

**Adrian** [00:06:13] Yeah, yeah. So it's important to to make point on that because you know in your life always will be at risk you, you'll be able sometimes to allow yourself to have a relationship with someone else or find love.

**Ali** [00:06:29] Sorry I didn't get your question.

**Adrian** [00:06:32] Yes. Yeah. Even if is illegal in your country and you know, your life was in risk, you were able to find in love with someone else and explore your sexuality back in your country?

**Ali** [00:06:43] Yes.

**Adrian** [00:06:44] Yeah. Yeah. So tell us a little bit more about that. How's that feeling?

**Ali** [00:06:52] In the beginning, like there's a lot of social pressure and you hear a lot of things religiously that this is wrong and this is not natural.

**Mo** [00:07:14] I just I, I think what Adrian wants to know, I know he's a gossip, he wants to know if you kiss any men back home in Pakistan or...

**Adrian** [00:07:26] No, no! That was not the point...

**Ali** [00:07:26] No, I got his point, he is talking about what was that like you know, your society is against you. Your religion is against you. So what, what was your target? Am I right? Am I right?

**Adrian** [00:07:42] Yeah. So the question, yeah, because I know, for example, in your country, you're at a certain age you need to marry a woman.

**Ali** [00:07:50] Exactly.

**Adrian** [00:07:51] And you need to marry this woman because it's the right thing to do so all that preset stuff in your country affects your sexuality, of course, because you're not inside that pattern, that's what I'm trying to tell.

**Ali** [00:08:04] Yeah, like everybody presume you are supposed to marry. You get a job. You're supposed to marry and your makes family everything. So. Yeah. And in the beginning, like, I have many questions like why if I am, I'm gay, so why is it a if I'm not giving any harm to anyone? So why is it wrong religiously or socially? So yeah I had a lot of question and I spent a lot of time in that confusion. And I, you know, battling with myself, my own self. Is it wrong or is it right? So eventually I came to a point that, ah, if nobody and getting harm from me for whatever I do, I think it's not wrong.

**Mo** [00:09:14] So just again, I remember, tell us a little bit about your mom and dad, their education, what sort of education they had, what sort of a job they had.

**Ali** [00:09:24] They, like they both have master's degrees in education and they were, they were teachers, school teachers.

**Mo** [00:09:40] Were you surprised with their education they had and also they were like, you know, articulate and were you surprised that they they they didn't accept you or didn't...

**Ali** [00:09:49] I think that whatever model of education you have in that kind of society that does social, does social ideology and parts always on the top and they always pressurise everyone to keep in that kind of mindset and that kind of very narrow minded and

homophobic kind of mindset. Whatever education you have or whatever age, even if you are upper middle class economically, it's basically the society.

**Adrian** [00:10:41] Yeah. So tell me about journies, so I want to know your personal journey in terms of your mind. Do you feel you have evolved your your feelings or develop your personality as a gay man here in England or you feel are you still struggling and you need some more freedom to be yourself?

**Ali** [00:11:13] In England, yeah, I feel freedom to accept myself, whatever I am and whatever my sexuality is. And I, I can be open about my thoughts and sexuality.

**Mo** [00:11:36] You know, have you got Pakistani friends here, you know, friends from Pakistan.

**Ali** [00:11:41] Yes, I do.

**Mo** [00:11:42] Do they know that you're gay?

**Ali** [00:11:45] Some of them know who are very close to me but sometimes I even hesitate here to disclose my sexuality towards some Pakistani people. I'm I'm afraid of that their reaction will be not positive or helpful.

**Mo** [00:12:15] Just go back to Pakistan, when you you're in Pakistan, how old were you when you left Pakistan?

**Ali** [00:12:28] I came as a student here.

**Mo** [00:12:31] So you were in your twenties?

**Ali** [00:12:34] Yeah about ten years ago.

**Mo** [00:12:38] What, what did you expect? What was the main image you have about the UK or England? How did it change? Has it changed at all? Is it the same as you thought?

**Ali** [00:12:50] My like my first purpose was coming here were that to get away from that mentality, because I had an incident where there before coming here, I had a small incident with the police where I was harrassed from police. So my mentality my purpose was that to get away from that kind of hostility and homophobic environment. And yes it, most most mostly here in England, environment is helpful and a kind of freedom in that sense.

**Adrian** [00:13:51] Right. So, of course, we have different personalities, everyone else has, but there's moments of life when we allow ourselves to set free and I want to know what your experience on the on the Pride have you been in any Pride here in England? Any Pride March?

**Ali** [00:14:14] Yes.

**Adrian** [00:14:14] How do you feel being in that place where everyone's celebrating?

**Ali** [00:14:22] I feel confident yeah.

**Adrian** [00:14:25] You've been so you've been to Pride here in England.

**Ali** [00:14:28] Yes.

**Adrian** [00:14:29] Yeah. Tell us about that experience of freedom on a place like you certainly know where I can be as gay as I want.

**Ali** [00:14:38] It's kind of like I feel kind of different energy and the energy level and I feel kind of freedom to express myself. I like I like feel free. Yeah,.

**Adrian** [00:14:57] That's nice because it's important also to record there's some places where to do Pride marches is illegal, so you came from a place when you're not allowed to march for your rights or because there's places like in my country that would be we have the Pride march, if you if you are not out of the closet, you can go with mask or dress up or something like that. So people don't know who you are there, but still you are trying to express and release that but there are some places where you can't do it. You can't do anything.

**Ali** [00:15:34] So there's like complete censorship on these things. Yeah. Not only forbidden, but there's complete censorship.

**Mo** [00:15:44] Do you, I mean, your case was rejected. Is that right? You're not getting any support at all?

**Ali** [00:15:52] No.

**Mo** [00:15:53] From the government?

**Ali** [00:15:53] No.

**Mo** [00:15:54] Do you find it easy, you know, as a gay man from Pakistan to have relationships with other gay men from Britain or any other countries, do you think it's easier for you here? Obviously, it is a very liberal country, and if not what are the barriers? What are the issues that stops you to have like gay friends from gay community here.

**Ali** [00:16:26] There's not much obstacles, hurdles. But I personally feel difficult to make the relationship because of my disability. I, when I can't even see someone's face, can I make relations. I take a lot of time then other people do, in making relationships and everything.

**Mo** [00:16:57] Do you think the colour of your skin has anything to do with it?

**Ali** [00:17:00] I don't think so. Some times it depends on national and cultural nationality, but mostly people don't.

**Mo** [00:17:13] You don't think the gay community are racist or things like that?

**Ali** [00:17:16] No, I don't think so.

**Adrian** [00:17:19] I think it's important what do you say, Ali, that people with disability needs to have more visibility in terms of sexuality, you know, it's sad because when you think is someone gay, you think it's someone who is jumping around, is totally outrageous,

but you never think someone could have a disability in everything and someone that struggling with some stuff could think of sexuality. And that's something that we should mention and carry on that the fact that everyone has a sexuality. And like I said in my interview, people is constantly trying to blame you for all that stuff.

[00:18:03] So tell us a little bit more if you feel comfortable as a gay man with a disability, how do you find that in this society, do people really care about that? Do you think that's trying to be putting in a second decision on your life?

**Ali** [00:18:26] Like, I, I, I see it as a it is a freedom because I can go to a gay bar, I can meet different people there and and yeah there there's a chance that I can meet someone. So that's a long way from where I came from. That I can easily meet people like me with the same sexuality like me.

**Mo** [00:19:10] I just, I remember talking to a Muslim gay man from Afghanistan he was, and what he was saying to to me that he said, you know, he was actually talking to a group of people. He was saying that, you know, when you when he wants to go out to a gay club or gay bar and to pull, to looking for someone to pick up, you would say that usually doesn't tell them that he's a Muslim and he doesn't tell his name. I think his name was Ahmed or something like that, because he said, when I go there and I start talking to English people about, you know, where are you from? If I say I'm from Afghanistan or I'm a Muslim all they want to talk about is about Islam..

**Ali** [00:19:55] And war and terrorism!

**Mo** [00:20:02] Or they want to talk about terrorism or ISIS or something like that.

**Adrian** [00:20:09] Are you serious?

**Mo** [00:20:09] No, honestly. And he was saying they were saying that he goes and he just pretends he's from Spain. The funny thing was he said what he said he was from Spain, then they asked him talk to me in Spanish and he couldn't speak any Spanish, so then, well, he said after that, he would say he was from Malta. Because he thought hardly anyone would speak that language. Have you had that experience? Have you ever felt that apart from your sexuality there's other barriers for you to actually make friends with the gay community here?

**Ali** [00:20:39] Yeah, yeah, I I've met people like that who stereotype you and who presume everything on their own when they see you and they just don't want to change their thoughts.

**Mo** [00:21:00] Okay, just have just one question, my last question was that I don't know if obviously Adrian was going to ask you more questions is, let's hope that your case gets accepted and you become a refugee or you become a citizen of the UK. Where do you see yourself in five years time? What do you want to do? What do you want to do with your life? And you know what, what are your dreams? Aspirations?

**Ali** [00:21:29] Yeah. I give a lot of thought to this thing. The first thing I can say that I will feel more consistency in my life that is not present at this time and more like a settling of myself.

**Mo** [00:21:58] You got it, I mean during the years I've known you, you've got lots of you know, you you're into the photography, you make films, you've been with the Movema dancing. You do a lot of charity work and you used to work here and also you studied here. So do you think that those things are going to help in the future to to build a life here and to contribute to the society?

**Ali** [00:22:22] Yeah, like a lot of things ah, I can't do right now, because there is all of the time, there is a fear what will happen with my case next, I can be detained or something. So that thing keep me holding from doing a lot of things like that. Even then, I try to keep myself busy with the different organisations.

**Mo** [00:22:50] Do you ever think, sorry about this Adrian, that's the last question then, do you ever want to go back to Pakistan or what do you miss about Pakistan?

**Ali** [00:23:03] Like, I spent my whole childhood there. But when I see the behaviour of my family, so it's not possible to go there for me, I don't think I want to go there.

**Mo** [00:23:23] You don't miss the country?

**Ali** [00:23:23] I miss the country sometimes. But if it's dangerous for me to go there, how can I go there?

**Mo** [00:23:31] Thanks very much, Ali.