

Altab Ali Day 2012

Rajonuddin Jalal



Rajonuddin Jalal was the leading youth activist in the 1970s. He is the secretary of the Altab Ali Foundation and Chairperson and CEO of the NRB Foundation in Bangladesh.

Introduction

The annual celebration of the Altab Ali Day, is a very important event in the anti-racist and anti-fascist calendar. It vividly reminds us of the catalogue of racist murders and our struggle against racism and fascism in the United Kingdom. Last year [date] we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the “Battle of Cable Street”, which marks the defeat of Oswald Mosleys “Black shirts” in 1936-the thugs who wanted to get rid of the Jewish migrants from the East end of London. The slogan was “they shall not pass”. This year we mark the 34th anniversary of the murder of Altab Ali, which gave rise to the resistance movement by the Bengali community in the east end of London; and led to the “Battle of Brick Lane 1978”, defeating the thugs of the then National Front - a racist political party with its headquarters in Bethnal Green / Hoxton, which used to send out its “skinhead” thugs to carryout racial attacks on Bengalis and rampage through Brick Lane. Possible photo from Brick Lane 1978.

Racial attacks and murders in East London

In the early 1970s “paki bashing” was a common experience from Asians throughout the UK. Racist thugs, who were fostered by racist political parties and figures like Enoch Powell, regularly carried out racial attacks against Asians, because they believed that migrant workers did not have a right to live and work in the UK. Yet, the reality was that migrant workers were invited in to the UK to help with the industrial revolution that led to economic prosperity in Britain. Migrant workers were mainly hired from ex British colonies, empires and those who were suffering slavery in the hands of British imperialists. In the mid 1970s, racial attacks were rampant in the East end of London. The nature and categories of attacks have been profiled in “Blood on the Streets”, published by Tower Hamlets Trades Council and edited by Dan Jones. In 1978 a catalogue of racist murders took place in the East end of London. A young Bengali clothing worker, Altab Ali was murdered by racist thugs on 4th of May 1978. This murder took place in Adler Street, off Whitechapel High Street. This is why the adjacent St. Mary’s Church yard has been re-named Altab Ali Park. The same year an older Bengali man Ishak Ali was murdered in Hackney, Road, Tower Hamlets.

Michael Ferriera, a young West Indian was killed in Hackney. A Sikh young man, Kenneth Singh was murdered by racist in Newham. Another high profile murder was that of Blair Peach, a school teacher from Tower Hamlets, who went to join an anti-racist rally in Southall.

How did the resistance movement started against racism and fascism?

The existence of the Bengali community was not widely known in the UK. That is until the racist murder of Altab Ali in May 1978, which led to the resistance movement beginning with the first ever Bengali march against racism that started from St. Mary's Church Yard, going through central London, holding a rally in Hyde Park and on the way back stopping at the Prime Minister's Office in Downing Street to deliver a petition. For the first time some ten thousand Bengalis took to the street, supported by anti-racist organisations, trade unions, anti-Nazi League and socialist Workers Party. I believe the slogans given at the rally and demonstration at the time amplified people's anger, feeling and determination against racism and fascism:

- "Here to stay here to fight" [position adopted by young Bengalis, against the wishes of their elders]
- "Self defence is no offence"
- "End police brutality"[many police officers used to side with racist attackers]
- "Black and White unite and fight" against racism
- "What do we want? Justice now"
- "Smash, smash, smash the National Front"

How did the young Bengalis become vanguards of the anti-racist movement?

One of the key youth organisations that played a pivotal role in the battle for Brick Lane in 1978 and continued to be torch bearer of the anti-racist movement throughout the 70s and 80s, is the Bangladeshi youth Movement [founded in 1976].

This organisation was born out of the Asian studies Centre in Myrdle Street, Tower hamlets [which was a night school establishment of the local adult education institute]. This was a key meeting place for the Bengali community. This organisation was the brain child of a teacher at this institute and a Barrister, late Saha Lutfur Rahman. This organisation used to link with two other organisations that played a key role mobilising local people against racism, housing rights and police accountability. TOCH hostel at number 7 the Cresenet in Minories, near Tower Bridge, used to provide housing and recreational activities for young homeless Bengalis. This facility used to be run by Late Peter east, who was a friend of Saha Luftur Rahman. Late Caroline Adams from Avenues Unlimited youth project used to help with the camping projects that were organised for us at the Myrdle Street centre. There was also the Bengali Housing Action Group-BHAG, which used to organise the squatting movement for homeless Bengalis and physically attend to racist attacks by collecting young people from various bases. The torch bearers of this organisation included: Terry Fitzpatrick[an Irish activist], Late Mala Dhondy, Farak Dhondy, Nurul Haque, Anwara Haque, Kasrul Haque, Abudus Subhan Gadu and Rahim Boksh amongst others. The Tower Hamlets Law Centre played a key role by representing Bengali youth activists, who came into contact with the law enforcing authorities and they also

established a 24 help line for victims of racial attacks. The legal services were provided mainly by Nick Walker, Mithu Ghosh and Jamal Hassan. The second base for recruiting young Bengali activists was established at the basement of 39 Fournier Street, off Brick Lane, which is a freehold community centre bought by the elder generation of the Bengali community. But, this centre was locked up for a long time due to dispute and legal proceedings between two factions seeking control of the Bangladeshi Welfare Association. This base was used by the Bangladeshi Youth Association. This youth group was patronised by late Tasadduq Ahmed MBE, Late Fakharuddin Ahmed, Late Matiur Rahman Chowdhury and his younger brother Ataur Rahman Chowdhury. The key youth leaders in charge of this youth group were Late Shamsuddin, Akikur Rahman, Chmok Ali Noor, Abbas Ali, Koran Ali, Manik Miah and Rana Miah amongst others. The third base was another meeting point for the Bengali community in the western part of Tower Hamlets, at the Cannon Barnett night school.

This centre attracted a group of young people who used to be guided by Abdul Aziz, Late Zafar Khan, John Newbiggin and sometimes Muhammed Haque. Although they had not established an organisation, but they used to fight against racial attacks and were a part of the “Vigilante” groups that operated in the area. This group was publicity shy but later formed the Progressive Youth Organisation in 1979. Some of the names of young people who played a key role included: the two Abdus Salams, Ruhul Amin, Late Najabath Miah Niazi, Khan other names. May use a photograph from BYM opening day!

The summer of 1978 was the golden era of the anti-racist movement in Tower Hamlets

As a result of the successful and ongoing movement against racism and fascism, momentum continued to gather behind the London wide and nationwide anti-racist movement. Bengali youth organisations made connections with the Southall Youth Movement and the Bradford youth association. The success of the anti-racist movement in the East End of London was inspiring youth organisations throughout the UK. As the movement gathered culminating momentum in east London, the antiracists were becoming more fierce in their mobilisation. Against the background of police and various institutions appeasing older community to end the anti-racist movement, the younger generation became more determined to continue the anti-racist movement with the establishment of the Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee. The inner circle behind this alliance also chalked out a more vigorous and radical action programme, including the following events:

- Sit down protests outside the Bethnal Green Police Station, to end police brutality against Bengali youth activists and action against racist attacks. These events attracted thousands of participants.
- Occupation of the top of Brick lane and Bethnal Green Road, demanding the closure of the National front stall selling racist propaganda and closure of their headquarters in Bethnal Green/Hoxton.

- Patrolling at the top of Brick lane/Bethnal Green every Saturday night to stop the gathering of National Front thugs, who would normally plan their Sunday provocative rampages.
- Black solidarity, a day long strike was held in tower hamlets and the whole area was brought to standstill.
- The Greater London Council , created the ghetto housing plan in the name of safe council housing for the Bengali community. This plan was flatly rejected by the local community who were against a segregated housing policy. The local people advocated multiculturalism and vowed to establish a multi-cultural community in Tower Hamlets.

At this juncture, I feel a tribute is also due to the key activists, who led the anti-racist movement. Joe Abrams, an South American school teacher, Dan Jones , a trade unionists, Patrick Kodikora and his girlfriend Cathy. Cathy Forrester and her family played a key role in mobilising local white people in support of the anti-racist movement. Alom Biswas, Brojon Chatterjee, Bengali left wing activists from Hackney became a part of the movement in Tower Hamlets. Revered ken Leech mobilised the church community in favour of the movement. Pat and Alan Henman, Michael Myers, late Bill Kelly also became key supporters of the struggle against racism and fascism. Paul Beasley, the leader of the council became a key supporter of the anti-racist movement and Late Jim Thomson, former Bishop of Stepney, as did Councillor Geoff White. The youth organisations remained united, guided by Tasadduq Ahmed, Fakaruddin Ahmed and a number of youth leaders emerged as the full time vanguards of the movement, including: Zia Uddin Lala, Shoiab Ahmed Chowdhury, Dr Zidul Hassan, Dr Harris Ali, Akikur Rahman, Chomok Ali Noor, Late Abdul Bari, Sirajul Haque, Rafique Ullah, Sunahwar Ali, Kutub Uddin, Chunu Miah, Fakaruudin Billy, Shirin Mukaddar, Late Kamrul Ahsan JJ, Enamul Haque, Syed Mizan, myself and many others. The two local Bengali women who used to take part in some of the anti-racist activities were Anwara Haque and Fakoruudin Sahebs wife Amirun Nessa.

The movement decisively defeated the national Front from Tower Hamlets. They were forced to move their head office from Bethnal Green. However, they continued to enjoy support in the ballot boxes!

The anti-racist movement of the 70s brought together progressive, secular and many left wing political activists. These key leaders believed in a secular, multi-cultural and socially progressive society, ensuring freedom, equality and justice for all human beings.

Possible photo Paul Trevor picture of various demonstrations!

How and why the Federation of Bangladeshi Youth organisations –FBYO-formed in 1982.

As the Battle on the streets came to an end by the end of 1978, the youth leaders and youth organisations were redefining the agenda for the future. This is why it was agreed to establish the Federation of Bangladeshi Youth Organisation-FBYO. Consultation and liaison activities continued for about two years and we were able to establish the FBYO with the participation the following organisations:

- Bangladeshi Youth Movement [represented by Chunu Meah, Kutub Uddin, Fokoruddin Billy, Shirin Mukaddar, Feroz Alom, Abdus Shuker, Abdul Asad and Rajonuddin Jalal]
- Bangladeshi Youth Association [represented by Shamsuddin, Akikur Rahman, Chomk Ali Noor]
- Progressive Youth Organisation [represented by Abdus Salam, Monuhor Ali, Ayab Koram Ali, Raja Miah and Ruhul Amin]
- Birmingham Bengali youth Organisation [represented by Jan Alom, Saha Abid Ali, Foyzur Rahman]
- Sunderland Bengali Youth organisation [represented by Olid Uddin Khaled]
- Bengali Youth Approach, represented Syed Nurul Islam, Abdul Jalil, Shamshir Qurishi, Late Syed Amin Ali and Sheikh Noor]
- Shapla Youth Force [represented by Sahabuddin Belal, Rosenara Chowdhury, Sanu Miah and Sundor Miah].
- Weavers Youth Forum, [represented by Abdul Mukit Chunu, Mohammed Ali, Shrijul Islam, Nizam Miah and Tunu Miah]
- Bangladeshi Youth league, [represented by Late ABM Ruhul Amin, Noor Uddin Ahmed, Ala Miah Azad and Syed Ashraful Islam]
- Bangladesh Youth League Luton, [represented by Ansar Ahmed Ullah, Sadik Ali (Kun Fu), Abdull Khan and Lulu Miah]
- Eagal Youth Organisation, [represented by Alogir Rahman, Shwokt Miah]
- Oversea Youth Organisation, [represented by Sunahwar Ali, Aroj Ali, Motin Miah, Turon Miah and Abdul Kadir (Kayki)]
- Hackney Bengali Youth Organisation, [represented by Ana Miah, Bodar Uddin]
- Brimigham, Wallsol Youth Organisation, [represented by Bambul Miah]

- Bradford Youth Organisation, [represented by Shwokath Ali]
- Young Muslim Organisation but they did pull out from the FBYO initial stage
- Other organisations?

The FBYO also used to publish the bilingual “Jubobarta” newsletter/ magazine, initially edited by Sahabuddin Belal. Also the FBYO made 3 documentary films for Channel 4.

The Bangladeshi communities existence in the UK was well recorded by the media and public institutions. The government of the day launched the Home Affairs Select Committee Report on Bangladeshis.

The Tower Hamlets Association for Racial Equality - THARE and Federation of Bangladeshi Youth Organisations-FBYO played a key role in compiling this report, articulating the needs and aspirations of the Bangladeshi community in all spheres of British life. By now we have become the British-Bangladeshis in UK.

Sadly, this also marks the era when the FBYO became institutionalised, receiving funding from various sources, working closely with various institutions and by now taken over by a group of professionals. By this time, many individuals were interested in promoting self interests, political opportunities and. Many of the activists have by now become establishment figures and the purpose of the movement lost in the process.

Use a picture from the FBYO conference in Birmingham.

Jagonari Womens Association

The impetus created for civil rights, following the success of the anti-racist movement, also gave a voice to the women's section of the community. A group of professional women decided to establish the Jagonari Womens Association. They were supported by the FBYO and other organisations. They were successful in getting a plot of disused land on Whitechapel road next to the Davenant Centre to establish the Jagonari Womens centre. This achievement was possible, because they received support from the local Spitalfields Project [Bill Blair] and the Greater London council [Housing Chair George Nicholson].

The leading lights in the organisation were Shila Thakor, Mithu Ghosh and Alma Chowdhury [Pola Uddin]. This organisation did a lot of good work for the women's section of the community; but lost direction with the disappearance of the founder members/activists.

FBYO, THARJ and Jagonari helped to initiate specialist health projects for the Bengali community, including nursing training courses and the Maternity Liaison scheme in the Tower Hamlets NHS. These organisations also helped to create the social work training courses for Bengalis with Tower Hamlets Council, with section 11 funding [led by Jalil Bhuyia]

Any pictures from the original Jagonari Centre?

Bengali Educational Needs in Tower Hamlets-BENTH

Following the success of the anti-racist struggle, the Bengali community organisations were re-defining their role. This new role was often linked with token gestures of funding from the authorities. BENTH was the theme of an education seminar, which was later converted into an education campaign group. There was a strong feeling amongst the community activists that the future progress of the Bengali community dependent on educational achievement that could potentially lead to public sector jobs. The then Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) Chief-Peter Newsham was persuaded by BENTH, and follow up by Peter Bradbury, Peter Clain, Late Pattoply, Des Cloines Hurman Ousley, ILEA Cllr Sir Ashley Bromal, Cllr Belle Harris and ??? [our case presented by Syed Ashraful Islam at a meeting], to create a special fund for the educational needs of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets (Tower Hamlets Initiative). This resulted in specialist youth work, teacher training and Bengali mother tongue projects. The key players involved in this organisation included: Tassadduq Ahmed, Fakharuddin Ahmed, Muhammed Haque, Ala Uddin, Ms Nila Ahmed Hashi, Noor Uddin Ahmed, Sunahwar Ali, Aftab Ali and Rajonuddin Jalal amongst others.

BENTH also used to produce an educational supplement to raise education issues called the BENTH Bulletin, edited by Muhammed Haque [which proved to be very controversial at the time].

Participation in mainstream politics

By the early-mid eighties the activists attention was turning to mainstream politics and political parties. Vast majority of the Bengali community used to support the labour Party and felt a natural affinity with this party. However during this period the Labour party used to be dominated by a group of White working class activists. The party was often run as a private club, dictated and dominated by a select group of individuals. Many Bengali people applied for membership of the Labour Party, but their applications were not acknowledged and reportedly thrown into the bin. Although a handful of us had been recruited as members, by enlightened middle class white activists [Dan Jones, Paul Beasley, Geoff white, Phil Mixwell, Jil Cove and Bobby McDuff].

There was growing frustration amongst the community activists for not being allowed to join the party. As a result key community activists decided to convene a meeting at 52½ Hanbury Street, London E1. At this meeting the People's Alliance of Bangladeshi in 1982 was formed, which also decided to put up three independent candidates in the local council election in the Spitalfields Ward in Tower Hamlets (now Spitalfields and Banglatown) two and the St Mary Ward one but in the Spitalfields there were other rival Bengali candidate Sherajul Haque. One of the candidates Nurul Haque won the election and the other two candidates Syed Nurul Islam and Rofique Ullah in St Mary Ward and they narrowly lost. This election victory sent an important message to the political establishments in Tower hamlets, that the Bengali community can no longer be ignored! By the mid eighties, the Labour Party was also infiltrated by a new group of white lefties, and combined with the demise of the old guard and increased membership of

Bengalis the nature of the party membership changed. The first Bengali Councillor elected was Ashek Ali, followed by another half a dozen or so at the next election [date] and at the present time more than 60% of the local Councillors are of Bengali origin. Many of the key council positions, including leader was held by Bengali councillors.

The Liberal Democrats also reacted, but under the leadership of Jeremy Shaw adopted a divisive and racist stance. The kind of tactics, language and strategy they adopted appealed to the racist elements within Tower Hamlets. They were able to gain control of the council in 1986.

However, the community groups and mainly the Tower hamlets Homeless Families Campaign continued to campaign against the racist policies of the Liberal Democrats in Tower Hamlets and eventually forced Paddy Ashdown Leader and the national party to disband the local party, because their stance in Tower Hamlets violated the national anti-racist commitment of the Liberal Democratic Party.

The conservative party is traditionally viewed as a party that does not promote the interest of the migrant communities. This is why there was no significant participation by the Bengalis in the Tory Party.

By the early 90s political polarisation has taken place. The global political scene has changed with the demise of USSR. Both the Labour Party and the conservative party have shifted their position-approaching the middle ground. It is now difficult to clearly distinguish the policies of the respective parties.

The Labour party, which continued to enjoy the support of the vast majority of Bengalis and its key policy makers systematically denied the Bengali activists to make any further significant progress in political representation. A longstanding demand of the Bengali community was for their symbolic representation in the House of Commons with an elected MP from Tower Hamlets. But the NEW Labour policy makers played the classical divide and rule game and instead of supporting a Bengali candidate, parachuted in a non- Bengali, as the MP for Bethnal Green and Bow.

As a failure of the labour party in Tower Hamlets and because of the illegal war on Iraq, RESPECT, a new political party was born in Tower Hamlets in May 2005. This party was supported by many disgruntled Labour supporters , Islamists and ant-racists who were opposed to the war on Iraq. RESPECT successfully defeated the Labour party and elected their own MP. However, this party and particularly its leader soon became controversial, especially after his appearance on the reaty TV show "BIG BROTHER". Therefore, this party was now looking for a new initiative and agenda. They decided to launch a campaign to launch a campaign to establish a directly elected Mayoralty in Tower Hamlets 2010.

Although, the mainstream political parties in Tower Hamlets opposed this campaign, but they were defeated because they were disunited, disorganised and did not commit necessary resources to promote the "NO" campaign.

Once again, the Labour Party behaved disgracefully. They wanted to select their chosen white candidate by hook or crook. This approach was rejected by majority of the membership of the Labour Party in Tower Hamlets. Lufur Rahman, who was democratically selected by the membership was illegally disqualified by the Labour Party's NEW labour policy makers. He won the legal battle and stood as an independent candidate which is backed by Muslim fundamentalist force. He now runs Tower Hamlets Council as a directly elected Mayor, the most powerful Bengali politician in UK.

This is the legacy of RESPECT, kept alive by the saga and mistakes of the Labour Party. Otherwise, RESPECT would have disappeared with the departure of their leader George Galloway.

We can take pride at the fact that we do have symbolic representation in the House of Commons with Rushnara Ali MP; We have representation in the Greater London Authority with GLA member Murad Qureshi. It is also possible that sometimes in the near future we will have a Bengali Minister. However, the point to note is that we are not in control of our political destiny, because our fate is directed by ill motive policy makers of all mainstream political parties. Any success we have achieved so far is for deflator reasons. If it wasn't for RESPECT and George Galloway, it is unlikely that we would have had a Bengali MP.

When will the labour party learn to accept the natural reality?

Photos from political rallies?

Bengali community rooted in the East End of London?

There are some half a million British-Bangladeshis residing in the UK. There are around fifty thousand Bangladeshis residing in Tower Hamlets. In other East London boroughs like Hackney, Newham, Barking and Dagenahm and Redbridge, it is estimated that people of Bangladeshi origin will be around sixty thousand. The total London British-Bangladeshi population will be around one hundred and fifty thousand.

All the Bengalis outside Bangladesh and those living in Europe and North America are inspired by what happens in Tower Hamlets. The British Bengali community is deeply rooted in the East End of London, depicting its history and cultural heritage. There are a large number of community centres that have been purpose built for the Bengali community, including: The Kobi Nazrul Centre, Berner Centre, Jagonari and Davenant Centre, Weavers Trust Centre, the BWA centre. A number of schools have been named after key Bengali figures including: Bangabanhu Primary School, Osmani primary school, Shapla primary Schhol and Kobi Nazrul Primary School. There is a mosque in almost every housing estate in Tower Hamlets. There are also temples and religious organisations for Bengali Hindus and Christians.

The re-naming of the Spitalfields Ward in Tower Hamlets, adding Banglatown, registered with the Boundary Commission firmly puts the British-Bengali community on the map of UK. Erection of the Banglatown arch in Brick lane and Bengali language Myrtyrs movement [Soheed

Minar] gives us a permanent presence in Tower Hamlets. The street signage in Bengali has the same effect on residents and visitors alike.

Historically, we as Bengalis have had an identity crisis. Back in 1947, when the British Empire gave freedom to India, also gave birth to a country called East Pakistan in the name of religion-Islam, ruled by west Pakistani administrations and army generals. They tried to impose Urdu as the language of Bengalis in East Pakistan. This was opposed by the masses through the language movement of 1952, in which west Pakistani armed forces killed students of Dhaka University in 1952, Bangladesh became an independent country through an nine months armed struggle known as the “Muktijuddo”. There is an ongoing question in the minds of some people about our identity. Are we Bengalis or Bangladeshis? Are we Bengalis or Muslims first. Different interpretations are provided by people on the basis of their political stand point. I hope we can agree on our common identity without any fear and share it with others. In summary, I see my identity as follows:

- I am a British-Bangladeshi in multi-cultural Britain
- My cultural heritage is Bengali, I want to be able to speak Bangla, enjoy Bengali literature, music and dance, without being called a non-believer
- I originate from Bangladesh-the country of origin
- I am Muslim by religion and want to have the freedom to worship without any reactionary indoctrination. I believe religion should not be mixed with politics. It does not work.
- I want to be an internationalist Bengali, who as a human being give and get respect from other communities and cultures.

Photos from Banglatown opening ceremony in 12th September 1997/ Soheed Minar or Three generations of Bengalis [or Ansars book]

How do we assess our achievements and failures as a community?

I believe it is safe to claim that we are deeply rooted in the multi-cultural British society. Our children who were born in Britain will think of the UK as their home. I hope that they will not forget their roots, history and heritage. We fully take part in all spheres of British life. We make a significant contribution to the British economy. We make a valuable contribution through public sector jobs. Educational achievement amongst our young people is high and we are making steady progress. British-Bengalis make a significant contribution in the private sector too, through employment and businesses. If we are to make a short list of our main failures, then we will find that we are dependent on the white party policy makers to decide our fate. We are not in control of our political destiny. So far, we have only gained token political representation in the political system. In tower hamlets, there is a visible presence of Bengalis in local authorities, but no real presence outside the borough. We do not have a significance presence in

the regional or national civil services. Nor do we have a notable presence in the various quangos. In-terms of the economy and the private sector, we have not diversified and tend to be concentrated in the grocery, food and catering trades. We do not either have a significant presence in the mainstream media. Our biggest failure in Tower Hamlets is the lack of ownership of land and properties. Bengalis are being priced out of the area. The fact that we failed to acquire the Truman Brewery premises and British Rail as an asset in Banglatown, means that vast majority of our businesses are run from leased and rented premises, costing sky high amounts and making our businesses unviable. More importantly, the community sector that was once thriving and campaigning for community rights, benefits and opportunities no longer exist. We have lost the heart and soul of the Bengali voluntary and community sector organisation. Individual needs and ambitions have replaced collective community objectives.

What are the present challenges facing the Bengali community in the East End of London?

Whilst Tower Hamlets will be the capital of the Bengalis outside Bangladesh and West Bengal and the hub of the community and we will draw our inspiration from there, we have to take on board the fact that a large percentage of the Bengali community now live in other parts of East London and are spread all over greater London.

Although we defeated the former National Front on the streets of East London, they have regrouped and operate as the English Defence League-EDL. The other side of the coin is the presence of the more respectable and sophisticated political in the form of the British National Party-BNP. They enjoy around 10% of the popular electoral support. whenever, local, regional and national and European elections take place in the UK, the mainstream political parties intentionally bring race, migration and religious issues to the top of the political agenda and this is how they gain further momentum. Institutionalised racism is still a major concern for the Bengali and other ethnic minority communities, which is holding back progress.

Issues are further complicated by the existence of “Islamophobia” and the interference of western political powers with Islamic countries and affairs. The young minds often react to what they see as unfair treatment of Muslims throughout the world, often very simply to achieve economic gains and energy security. Many of the young people would regard Laden, Saddam and Gaddafi as their heroes, but are sophisticated enough to admit this publicly. What exists at the moment is various secret societies and training cells, patronised by some religious organisations providing reactionary indoctrination. For example some these secret societies, distributed a leaflet in all the household in the East End of London, seeking to create Islamic Republics in the area. Whilst the proposition is impractical and not viable; it is providing ammunition to the racist and fascist organisations to gain public support in the name of “defending their way of life”. This presents us with the biggest question - who should be the vanguard of the ant-racist movement today?

Ironically, it is also true that some key political figures, who often claim to be progressive and of left wing persuasion, appease these reactionary forces for their own political gains. How long are we going to let them get away with this tactic?

Way forward

Yes, we have won the battle against racism and fascism and did defeat them through the Battle of Brick Lane in 1978. But, they have re-emerged with a new agenda, action plan and strategy. Are we making the appropriate response to defeat them? I believe we need progressive vanguards to lead the anti-racist and anti-fascist movement. I believe that the EDL and BNP do not enjoy a lot of support amongst the ordinary public; unless we give them ammunition in the name of religion. EDL will only provoke on the streets, because they know that the police force have a duty to protect them in the name of freedom of speech. We have to defeat institutionalised racism, which adversely affects our everyday lives. Our march goes on equality, freedom and justice-but who is going to be the torch bearer and vanguard of our movement?

NB The opinions expressed in this article are purely of the author and he accepts full responsibility!!