

Remembering the 1970s

Jamal Hasan



Mr. Hassan worked at Camden Community Law Centre. He was a community and youth worker in the East End from 1972 until 1981. He was also involved with the Bangladesh Welfare Association (BWA). He became secretary of the coalition organisation which staged the demonstration from Brick Lane to Hyde Park.

..... 1978 was the turning point for the Bangladeshis in East End. The anti-racist movement started to grow stronger and offer worthwhile resistance. In 1978, Brick Lane became the focal point for all anti-racist people all over the country. The Bangladeshi youths in the East End were highly successful, hosting the centre stage of the anti-racist solidarity movement and containing and directing the movement in a very positive way. Every individual in the community, either individually or collectively, took an active part in combating racist attacks. Activists from outside East London became involved and active in helping the Bangladeshi community stand up and resist the racist attacks.

..... I have to mention here four people, one local, but not Asian, Terry Fitzpatrick, three from outside, two of them Asians, Farrukh and Mala Dhondy and one Afro Caribbean, Darcus Howe. These four people got involved very successfully with a long term project which, to my mind helped enormously. These popular four started a housing co-op by squatting in a huge Council building, called the 'Pelham Building'. People of all ages regained the spirit of community feeling and became politicised and found it easy to revolt against injustice. Darcus Howe was the editor of 'Race Today' Magazine and was a well known anti-racist activist. These four people helped to politicise a huge number of elderly Bangladeshi people by involving them with Housing Co-Op, called 'BHAG' which in Bengali, coincidentally means 'Tiger' The effect was magical!

..... The youths played a very effective role in forcing the community to have one big national demonstration instead of three isolated small local demonstrations. I was involved in both the youth groups and the elderly groups and was considered to be impartial and able to relate to all the groups. As a result, I was selected to be the secretary of the coalition organisation to stage the national demonstration.

..... Following the success of the demonstration, the whole picture in Brick Lane changed. Altab Ali's murder closed the chapter of being attacked and being beaten by racists, with racism in general taking a back-seat. I thought it would be a good idea to celebrate the success of the demonstration in a local park. So, I organised a carnival.

..... It took us 7 to 10 days to organise and it was a huge event, where we renamed the park, 'Altab Ali Park'. All sorts of musical groups came; Asian groups from Southall and a number of White and African and Caribbean bands participated.