

The Story of Altab Ali

Salam Jones



Salam Jones is a prominent Bangladeshi writer, poet, human-rights activist and philanthropist. He is a co founder of 'Hope n Mic', a charity based poetry group that hosts a monthly event to provide a platform for new poets and writers, whilst trying to raise funds for, and awareness of different charitable causes.

Have you heard the word, my mother told me
One of our own was just killed near Brick Lane
She pulled me closer so she could hold me
But I was too young to understand her pain
My life had just begun, I was a mere eight years of age
When Altab Ali was murdered on this very spot
I would have, should have really, cried tears of rage
When Altab was killed for something he was not
Altab Ali was a working class Bengali man
An eager new comer to distant British shores
Leaving his family and home in a faraway land
With a simple desire to provide them with more.
After a long day sweating in a sweatshop factory.
He strolled casually down
Brick Lane to catch a bus
With no desire for a fight, or trouble with anybody
The young Mr Ali was a peaceful man, like the rest of us.
Yet they harassed him and eventually gave chase
Fearing for his safety, he fled down to St Mary's Park
Three racist delinquents took his life in this very place
He fell to the ground engulfed by a deep cold dark
As his lifeless limb lay there on the cold concrete
Blood flowing faster than the ambulances call
The three youths ran off laughing down the street

Unaware of how their actions would liberate us all.
The youths were caught and imprisoned, but not for long
Serving short sentences due to the justice system
But ten days later, a crowd of seven thousand strong
Marched with Altab's coffin and got Downing Street to listen
A turning point in British Bengali history in the east end
Although countless Asian men had been killed before,
The time had come stand up and make amends
The camels back was now broken, with this final straw
For the next 20 years, we pulled together as a community
We had to fight many a fight, on many a night for many a right
We raised our children to understand and respect our history
For fear that they would forget Altab and we would lose sight
Today in 2016 we are standing here to remember his death
Standing here, all nationalities united as one.
On the very spot where Altab Ali drew his last breath
Because unless we learn from this tragedy the fascists that killed Altab will have won.