

## Who was Altab Ali?

### Jamal Hasan



*Jamal Hasan was a leading anti-racist activist in the East End of London in the 1970s. He was the General Secretary of the Action Committee Against Racial Attacks which was formed to organise the National Demonstration following the death of Altab Ali.*

(Many years later in the future two young friends having a conversation in the Altab Ali Park.)

I never knew Altab Ali. I do not know much about him.

Do you?

Well, my dad said and so did my uncle and his neighbour that Altab Ali was a Bangladeshi youth who was a victim of a racist murder.

I am aware of that

but weren't there so many racist murders in those days?

Why was Altab Ali's death so different from the rest?

It is unbelievable, but true that some people were ignorant and would kill people only because they looked different.

However, most racist murders did not bring about changes in society and this is why we remember Altab Ali and will do so for eternity.

Tell me more. How was Altab Ali different from the rest?

The Jewish and the Afro-Caribbean community fought back the racists all over the country.

The racists looked for an easy target

So on the Asian community, they decided to concentrate.

Asians, a peace loving community, were helpless,

for, the authorities turned a blind eye and no one was there to protect them.

It was in 1976 when the racists were driven out by the Asians in Southall.

The thugs then moved to East London.

The East End was the area where we the Bangladeshis lived

We had not had any experience of being racist victims.

But Brick Lane became a battlefield

Between racists and the anti-racists.

Racial harassment, Paki Bashing and sometimes racist murders

Became intolerable; this was the gloomy picture.

People were scared to go out alone

mothers would wait until everyone returned home.

The Bangladeshis, like any other immigrant communities

Came to the UK to work and then to return back to their countries.

We did not have any security

Nor did we have any dignity.

People were scared

and questioned whether it was worth staying here.

The death of Altab Ali sparked and ignited the fuse,

causing a huge blast which inspired us not to give in to any such abuse.

We resolved to say 'enough is enough'

We shouted, 'Here to Stay, Here to Fight'

and 'Come Whatever May, We are here to stay.'

The death of Altab Ali united the community

and brought together anti racists all over country.

Frightened and uncertain Bangladeshi men, women and even the children

took to the streets and conquered in the battle of Brick Lane.

The resistance movement was so strong

that it ended up in a National Demonstration.

You see? Altab Ali was the source of our inspiration

Because of him we got our dignity and freedom.