

Remembering the 1970s

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Mr. Salam is the founding member of Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO), which was based at the Robert Montefiore Centre. In the late 1970s PYO took the lead in street confrontations with racist NF and was associated with many distinctive social youth activities.

..... Brick Lane has now become world famous, it has attracted the whole European community, it has become one of the icon of our country. In 1970s Brick Lane was very rundown, there were rundown buildings and apart from couple of restaurants, there was nothing much. There was lots of rag trade and tailoring factories, here and there but now things have changed.

..... There was the Truman Brewery, producing alcohol and so on. I was young myself, it was difficult to perceive then that after 25-30 years, Brick Lane would be one of the icons in Great Britain and it would be one of the tourist attraction place in the country. 1980s was a much different age. It was dream. Today's businessmen and today's community workers, politicians in Brick Lane are enjoying, that is what we have established in 1970s. We knew that there will be time, we will be able to drive the young people and drive away particularly street racism from this part of the world. We may not be successful to drive institutional racism from Tower Hamlets but it would not be possible politically because in the parliament there is more right wing MPs. I think the whole European politics is towards right wing.

..... However, I think today's racism is kind of more subtle, institutionally more subtle. Still in Town Hall in Tower Hamlets, the employment and the training sector is not reflecting the community in Tower Hamlets. There should have been a fast track system. There are people coming up, both male and female are coming up with the first class degrees and are not getting jobs in the borough.

..... We made UK our home. We are part of the country, part of the society. It is our home, I believe myself as second generation. My kids are the third generation, they are here growing up, born and brought up. They will marry and extend their family as well. Then obviously you can't get out. Basically it is our home. Like people who live in Bangladesh, they would not want to come to England for their retirement. They might come to the UK for a holiday, but they will not be away from the whole entire family, only for the retirement. Similarly we here in Britain, we are part of the society and part of the community, we are here. This is our home. Back home obviously we will go to see our fatherland, motherland. Of course we will have to go to Bangladesh, I took my whole entire family to Bangladesh last year. They visited Chittagong, Dhaka and so on. Then we went to India, Calcutta, Delhi and so on. They love to go again, but it is very expensive. So we are here. That was our aim in 70s, that in order to stay here with some dignity, we have to fight on three levels; socially, politically and physically. We have kept on pressuring the local authorities and still we are not able to achieve the complete solution of the housing problem. Education to some extent has been solved, but there is a big gap, and we have to narrow the gap. And the parents have to become more aware. Otherwise we are in deep trouble.