

Who was Altab Ali?

Jamal Hasan



Jamal Hasan was a leading anti-racist activist in East London during the 1970s. He was the General Secretary of the Action Committee Against Racial Attacks which organised the National Demonstration following the murder 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.