

# Bangladeshi contributions to east end london



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What contributions have the Bangladeshi people made to the East End?

The East End of London is home to different diverse migrant neighbourhood. It is easy to see the legacy of the different migrant community, from the infamous Beigel Bakery in Brick Lane to the Altab Ali Park in White Church Lane, which is a symbol of unity against racial hatred. The contribution made by migrant communities is imprinted onto East End history and it is inspiring to see how the different ethnic groups fought against discrimination, identity struggles and class differences to make the East End what it is today. In this essay, I will explore the contributions that the Bengali community has made to the East End as it is fascinating to see how they overcame difficulties and to evaluate the extent of the contributions. Arrivals of the Bangladeshi community first became aware in the 1950s where men came to Britain in search of employment and families were fleeing from a war-torn Pakistan. Coming from a Bangladeshi background, it will be interesting to see the legacy of the community whilst delving into my history.

One way in which the Bangladeshi community has much contributed to the East End was through culture, from the music to the food. Brick Lane is the heart of the Bangladeshi community with many music festivals and food stalls to commemorate the Bengali culture. The curry houses that are situated in Brick Lane are award winning. For instance, Aladin curry house in Brick Lane has won many awards. It is the winner of "Taste Brick Lane Curry Awards" and it was praised by "HRH Prince Charles when he visited the East End".<sup>[1]</sup> This is important in understanding the importance of the contribution made by the Bangladeshi community as it infers how the Bengali people unite other people through the food and how food is a

stimulus for harmony as the awards show that food brings people together from different places. What's more is that the restaurants in ' Banglatown' were known as the area that " embodied the Olympic spirit" because it was " triumphing over adversity" as it greeted new cultures, thus showing how the Bengali community contributed to the East End by instigating change and encouraging diversity.[2]Similarly, with food, the Bangladeshi community has contributed to the East End via music. Established in 1998, the Boishaki Mela is the biggest Bengali festival which is a celebration of culture. It allows different communities to come together and it " helps Bangladeshis to take pride in their roots and contribute to the regeneration of the area".[3]This was important because the Mela gave the Bengalis a sense of identity because when the Mela first started, " racial harassment and violence" still dominated lived of many people.[4]So, by introducing a festival, it brought many people together and it was a centre of diversity. The Mela is the embodiment of reducing racial tension because it encouraged many people to come together and settle down. Therefore, culturally, the Bangladeshi community has contributed to the East End because it gives out a message that food and music triumphs over racial divisions as it brings people together and it encourages people to work in harmony.

Similarly, literature from the Bangladeshi community interlinks with the food and music produced by the Bengali community. This was because it helped break down racial tension as it allows the readers to connect with each other. Literature is a powerful tool as it permits the readers to expand their horizon and it gives them access to different cultures and societies. An example of a piece of literature that contributed to the East End is Brick Lane

by Monica Ali. It centers on a woman named Nazneen, who arrived in London at the age of 18, and it breaks social barriers and conventions that society has placed on her. She gains her own independence by venturing out into the unknown and claiming her space in society. Brick Lane offers an insight into how powerful literature is as it shapes readers minds and it makes the readers more accepting of different cultures. This marks the contributions made by the Bangladeshi community as it shows how literature breaks the stereotype of not only the Bengali community but the different migrant groups. This then reduces the chances of racial tension as it broadens the reader's minds, thus exposing those to different cultures.

Furthermore, the Bangladeshi community has contributed to the East End economically. When the UK opened its borders after World War Two, Britain saw an influx of immigration, mostly from South-Asian countries. " There were many reasons given for the emigration from Sylhet", but the most important reason for this choice was the possibility of " money being made by coming to Britain".[5]In the 1970's, Bangladeshi men who emigrated worked in low paid, unskilled jobs in small factories and the textile trade. This meant that the Bangladeshi community was contributing to the East End as they were taking low skilled jobs and jobs that people didn't want as it didn't pay much. What really contributed to the economy was when the Bangladesh communities opened a chain of restaurants and shops- " Brick Lane alone has 57 Bangladeshi- owned curry houses. Throughout England, around 90% of all curry houses are owned by British Bangladeshi".[6]This meant more jobs opportunity for the unemployed. Evidence of Bengali contribution was found in 1614 when the first East India Company dock was

created. This was built in Blackwall, Tower Hamlets. The “ warehouses, dockyards, foundries, sawmills work grew to meet the needs of the new international shipping industry”.<sup>8</sup> This directly contributed to the East End because as the warehouses and mills were expanding, there was a demand for cheap labour. This then resulted in the “ migration of cheap labour from India”.<sup>8</sup> Many of the Indians that migrated to Britain would have been from Calcutta, which meant that many of the Indians “ would have been Bengali.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the contribution would have been seen through the “ exchange and trade between Britain and the state of Bengal” and it can, therefore, be “ directly traced to the creation of the East India Company”. [7] The trade links established and set the foundation, to an extent; of the Bengali communities because through trade, spices were made available and because of the need for labour, Bengali men had to move to Britain, more likely migrate to Tower Hamlets as the Company was built there. This, inevitably, lead to the creation of many curry houses, which shows how early on the contribution of the Bengali community were made and how in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, curry houses are still at the heart of the East End. To end, the Bangladeshi community had contributed immensely through the East India Company. Due to the fact that spices were traded and there was a need for cheap labour, Bengali men moved to the East End, which inevitably meant the creation of curry houses. The expansion of curry houses, mainly around Brick Lane, also called for employment, which meant more job opportunities. Through the creation of the East India Company, Bangladeshi contributions were seen to improve the East End socially. A notorious example was a Bangladeshi man called Fredrick Akbar Mohamed, who in 1871 joined the <https://assignbuster.com/bangladeshi-contributions-to-east-end-london/>

Central London sick asylum in Stepney and Poplar. Fredrick not only transformed the health system but improved it by making the East End more aware of high blood pressure. From studying the sphygmograph tracings of many of his patients with signs of Bright's disease, he showed that high blood pressure could exist even in apparently healthy people. This seemed almost revolutionary in the East End, especially in Poplar and Stepney, as the literacy rate would have been very low. So, any knowledge to do with the improving the health would have helped the poor because citizens that resided in the East End tended to be ignored. Another individual named Mohammed Osman Gani also helped the poor and educated the East End. By 1979, Mohammed became engaged in community work and he " helped to set up and manage Spitalfields Housing Co-operative".[8]His legacy is still seen today as his company is now known as the " Spitalfields Housing Association Ltd".[9]This highlights the expansion and success of Mohammed's work and how his work contributed to the East End because he helped improve the housing situation in Tower Hamlets. It is also important to mention, as well as Mohammed, Farrukh Dhondy was also a key instigator for change in housing problems and discrimination as he worked with the " Race today collective".[10]This not only helped the Bangladeshi community but other ethnic groups. This shows how the Bangladeshi community helped to give to the East End because key people helped improve the housing and stood up for racial justice. It is worth noting that there was " resentment and hostility towards the Bangladeshi community from 1971" and there were often " aggressive young white men, and anti-immigration marches through the East End".[11]This illuminates how important the organisations, such as ' Race today collective', set up by Mohammed because it showed unity and

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strength against racial hatred. This was certainly the case for the murder of Altab Ali in Whitechapel in 1978. Altab's murder instigated protests and "about 7, 000 people marched behind his coffin through central London".

[12]This shows the harmony in the Bangladeshi community and other communities in order to resolve racism as " everyone joined the protests- Bangladeshi people, Caribbean people, Indian people, and Pakistani people." [13]This summarises the contributions as key individuals helped improve the health system and stood up for racial justice.

In conclusion, the contributions made by the Bangladeshi community were significant and the legacies are still found in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The commitments made to the East End culturally was perhaps the most significant contribution because it was the embodiment of change and curry houses brought people together as it encouraged the need for harmony. Literature also contributed as it broadened people's perception of the Bangladeshi community, which reduced racial tension as it expanded the reader's mind. The organisations that were founded by Bengali men were pivotal in establishing Bangladeshi contributions as it improved the health system and fought for racial justice. Coming from a Bangladeshi background, it was interesting to read into the contributions as it mostly affected the East End in terms of making it making it more culturally accepting for everyone. It was also fascinating to see the contributions dating back to 1610 and how the legacies still stand today.

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