

British Bangladeshis

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Summary

One of the smallest ethnic minority groups in Great Britain, the British Bangladeshi community comprises just 1.1 percent of the population (according to the 2021 census). Predominantly Muslim, this community has longstanding roots in Britain, linked to the British imperial project in India that preceded the disruptions of partition and the later struggle for Bangladeshi independence. British Bangladeshis have a distinctive settlement pattern, with dense concentrations in key urban areas. They are among the most socially and economically deprived groups in Britain and are most often framed through a discourse of disadvantage and discrimination. Nevertheless, the community has also played a crucial role in the struggle against racism and in the formation of modern multicultural Britain, particularly through its key role in the restaurant trade.

In the 21st century, the community, largely second- or third-generation British-born, is undergoing a dramatic social transformation. Success in education and rising numbers of young British Bangladeshis in higher education and in all spheres of public life, including politics, the arts, and media, has seen the emergence of a new and confident middle class. Religion, particularly Islam, has come to play a more significant role among younger British Bangladeshis and has challenged the secular nationalism of their parents and grandparents. However, entrenched issues of deprivation in the British Bangladeshi community, alongside racism and Islamophobia, remain an important concern.

The story of Bangladeshi Britain is one of empire, global migration, and diaspora. It is also a story of pioneer settlers, who forged new spaces of safety, of home, and of belonging in Britain, in the face of virulent racism and structural exclusion, and whose descendants still face significant barriers of exclusion and racism while building new paths for success.

Keywords: Altab Ali, Bangladeshi, Britain, “Indian” restaurants, Islam, Islamophobia, Tower Hamlets

Subjects: Migration/Immigration/Diaspora, Race and Ethnicity, South Asia

British Bangladeshis: A Contemporary Portrait in Numbers

According to the 2021 census, the Bangladeshi-descent community living in England and Wales numbered 644,881 people, comprising 1.1 percent of the population.¹ British Bangladeshis,² though one of the smallest ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom, are a fast-growing community, rising in number from 447,201 (0.8 percent) in 2011 and more than doubling in size, from 283,063 (0.5 percent), in 2001. An estimated 90 percent of British Bangladeshis have their roots in Sylhet, a province in northeastern Bangladesh.³

Bangladeshis have a distinctive settlement pattern in Britain, with dense concentrations in key urban areas—notably London but also Greater Manchester and Birmingham—and small numbers spread thinly across the country, due in part to the influence of the “Indian” restaurant trade. According to 2021 ONS data, 56.5 percent of British Bangladeshis are located in London, while 15 percent live in the West Midlands and 9.35 percent live in the North West.⁴

The largest Bangladeshi community is found in East London. In Tower Hamlets, Bangladeshis comprise nearly 35 percent of the population, in Newham 15.9 percent, and in Barking and Dagenham 10.2 percent. One in six British Bangladeshis (107,333 people) live in Tower Hamlets.⁵ Outside of London, sizeable numbers live in Oldham and Rochdale, Greater Manchester (9 and 2.3 percent respectively), Birmingham (4.2 percent), Bradford (2.3 percent), Newcastle (2.4 percent), and Cardiff (1.9 percent). These clusters, where Bangladeshis usually form part of larger South Asian settlements, are linked to earlier patterns of large-scale postwar labor migration.

- The majority of Bangladeshis in Britain are British citizens. Seventy thousand Bangladeshi nationals were resident in the United Kingdom at the time of the census (around 11 percent). In the 2011 census, 52 percent of British Bangladeshis were born in the United Kingdom, and this is likely to have increased by the 2021 census, although these figures are not yet available. The proportion of women and men is broadly equal (321,555 women and 323,325 men).⁶ Relative to both the White population and the wider British Asian population, the Bangladeshi community is young,⁷ with a median age of 27 years, compared to 43 years and 32 years respectively. However, this has increased from a median age of 24 years in 2011 (and 18 years in the 2001 census), suggesting an established and aging British Bangladeshi population.⁸

Over 90 percent of British Bangladeshis identify as Muslim.⁹ They form the second largest Muslim group in the United Kingdom, following Pakistanis, and comprise about 17 percent of nearly four million Muslims living in England and Wales (comprising 6.5 percent of the population), who self-identified in the 2021 census.¹⁰

Socioeconomic Profile

Entrenched historical and ongoing poverty and disadvantage make British Bangladeshis the most socioeconomically deprived minority ethnic community in the United Kingdom.¹¹ Indeed, “the Bangladeshi community” in Britain has long been a “problem” community and a synonym for the failures of migration, integration, and multiculturalism. Issues of poverty, discrimination, and disadvantage are still key factors in British Bangladeshi life, but data also show change over time. Increasing diversity within this community, with education in particular, points to a more complex and positive future.

Housing and Household Composition

British Bangladeshis have been historically overrepresented in the social–housing rental sector. According to data from the 2001 census, 63 percent of British Bangladeshis were living in social housing.¹² While this figure declined by 15 percent in the 2011 census, this was only due in small part to the increase in home ownership (an increase of 4 percent to about 40 percent). Instead, it reflects the contraction of social housing and an increase of entry into the more precarious private rental sector (an increase of 12 percent). British Bangladeshis in the private rental sector increased from 12 percent in 2001 to 21 percent in 2016.¹³

At 41 percent, Bangladeshi households have the highest levels of overcrowding, compared to only 5 percent of White British households.¹⁴ This is due in part to the prevalence of multigenerational households and larger family sizes.¹⁵ There is, however, also evidence of structural discrimination in the housing market for all ethnic minorities, with Bangladeshis in particular affected by the decline in the social–housing sector.¹⁶ Equal access to housing has been a particular point of resistance for British Bangladeshis in East London.¹⁷

Wealth/Poverty

Of all ethnic–minority groups in Britain, Bangladeshis have the highest levels of income and child poverty. In 2022, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that the poverty rate for Bangladeshis in 2019 and 2020 stood at 53 percent, compared to 19 percent of White British people.¹⁸ While poverty rates among Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups have been declining since the mid–1990s—in large part to rising levels of employment, especially among women—levels of in–work poverty are three times that of the White British population (at 34 percent), with higher levels of single–earner households, and a prevalence of part–time, insecure, and poorly paid work.¹⁹ British Bangladeshis have the second lowest levels of household wealth (after Black Africans), with a median family wealth of £31,000 per adult (less than one–sixth of White British median family wealth of £197,000).²⁰ In 2022, Pakistani and Bangladeshi employees had the lowest hourly rate of pay (£12.03 compared to £13.57 for all employees)²¹ and the lowest median weekly income (£363 and £350 respectively, compared to £547 for a White British person and £558 for an Indian person).²²

The impact on British Bangladeshi children is especially stark. The Millennium Cohort Study at University College London reported in 2010 that nearly three quarters (73 percent) of Bangladeshi children were living on poverty–level income (i.e., 60 percent of average national household income).²³ There are some signs of improvement, as well as ongoing inequality. For example, in February 2020 the Office for National Statistics reported that 41 percent of Bangladeshi children were living in low–income households (2.4 times more likely than White British children).²⁴

Employment

The Bangladeshi presence in Britain has a long history, linked to labor migration during the colonial period and in response to postwar labor shortages from the 1950s onward. Through the 1950s and 1960s, the textile and steel mills of Birmingham, Greater Manchester, and Bradford recruited Bengalis as unskilled labor,²⁵ as did garment factories and workshops in East London.²⁶ From the 1970s onward when these industries closed, Bengalis found new work, often in the restaurant trade, though they remained subject to high levels of unemployment and low-paid precarious work.²⁷

This history shapes contemporary employment patterns. The Labor Force Survey for the years 2015 through 2018 shows that the British Bangladeshi community has one of the lowest economic-activity rates for both men (77.8 percent) and women (41.3 percent).²⁸ Of Bangladeshi men, 6.6 percent are unemployed (compared to 4 percent of White British men), marking a dramatic improvement on the 20 percent unemployment rates from the early 2000s. However, this improvement has been offset by the increase in part-time work (an eleven-fold rise between 1991 and 2001),²⁹ higher levels of self-employment, and longer periods of unemployment. Among Bangladeshi women, unemployment rates have nearly halved, from 24 percent in the early 2000s to almost 14 percent in 2018. Despite this, Bangladeshi women still have the highest unemployment rate among all groups, about four times greater than that for White British women.³⁰

Moreover, disparity is in not just the numbers but also the kind and quality of work. Data from 2021 highlights occupational inequality by sector, with Pakistanis and Bangladeshis underrepresented across all of the higher managerial categories. British Bangladeshis are concentrated in three main sectors: distribution, hotels, and restaurants (28.6 percent); public administration (27.3 percent); and transport and communication (17.3 percent).³¹ These proportions and occupational sectors have remained largely consistent since 2004, even as the type of work has changed.³²

Education

Educational achievement is one area that has seen significant success for the British Bangladeshi community. In the early 2000s, Bangladeshis were most likely to be unqualified, while nearly half of Bangladeshi women (49 percent) and 40 percent of Bangladeshi men had no qualifications. This lack of educational qualification has been linked to labor-market disadvantage.³³

Although educational underachievement has been a particular issue for Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people since the 1980s, Bangladeshi pupils have outperformed their White British counterparts from 2011, signaling dramatic improvements. For example, statistics from the Department of Education for 2016 and 2017 show that 48.4 percent of Bangladeshi pupils obtained A*–C grades in English and Math, compared to 42.1 percent of White British pupils.³⁴ Data show that British Bangladeshis also outperform White British pupils across eight GCSE³⁵ subject areas in (known as Attainment 8 scores), for both boys and girls, with girls outperforming boys in both groups.³⁶ At the A-Level,³⁷ British Bangladeshis fall behind (7.7 percent compared to

10.9 percent White British) although they have one of the highest rates of continuing education (further education or higher education), with only 9 percent of school leavers entering the labor market.

In higher education, British Bangladeshis made up 1.2 percent of UK-domiciled university students in 2016.³⁸ However, between 1996 and 2006 Bangladeshi and Pakistani students were over five times more likely to enter less prestigious post-1992 universities than Russell Group institutions (66 versus 12 percent respectively).³⁹ Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for 2016 and 2017 show that Bangladeshi graduates were less likely to obtain a “good degree” (first class or upper second class) than their White counterparts, irrespective of type of institution.⁴⁰ It is also clear that increasing educational achievement does not always translate into better or more lucrative employment opportunities.

Health

The COVID-19 pandemic shone urgent light on entrenched ethnic disparities in health. In 2021 the Office for National Statistics reported that in the first wave of the pandemic, Bangladeshi men were three times more likely to die than White British men, and Bangladeshi women were nearly twice as likely to die than White British women. In the second wave (from September 2020), British Bangladeshis death rates were among the highest. British Bangladeshi males were five times more likely to die from COVID-19 than White British males, while British Bangladeshi females were over four times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to White British females.⁴¹

This stark disparity reflects longstanding inequalities in health. Bangladeshis across all age groups experience poorer health. A 1999 Health Survey for England revealed that Bangladeshi people were three times more likely to describe their health as fair or bad rather than good.⁴² Bangladeshis have higher rates of heart disease and diabetes, high morbidity and mortality rates, high risk of maternal mortality, poorer mental health, and poorer levels of satisfaction in dealing with general practitioners (GPs) and the National Health Service (NHS). Karen Chouhan and James Nazroo stress, however, that poor health is rooted not in racial, religious, or cultural practices but rather in social and economic inequalities, exclusion and discrimination from mainstream health institutions, and the negative impact of racial discrimination on physical and mental health.

As the above portrait suggests, the British Bangladeshi community faces ongoing struggles against poverty and discrimination, as it has through the past fifty years of large-scale migration and settlement. Nevertheless, the data also show that this is a community undergoing change, particularly for third-generation young people, who are achieving well in education and entering the mainstream labor market. Moreover, it would be misleading to understand this small but vibrant community only through the lens of deprivation and exclusion. Indeed, the settlement of Bangladeshis in Britain reveals a long (pre-World War II) history of entanglement between South Asia and the United Kingdom, and the community has been a crucial part of the struggle against racism and of the formation of modern multicultural Britain.

History of Migration

While the majority of first-generation Bangladeshi migrants arrived in Britain in the years following World War II, and family-reunification processes for Bangladeshis took place later than that for other South Asian groups—mainly in the 1980s—there is a history of connection between Bengali migrants and the United Kingdom that predates, and shapes, the era of large-scale migration. Indeed, Bengalis have a long prehistory of mobility and migration, closely linked to the British imperial project in India that preceded the disruptions of partition and the later struggle for Bangladeshi independence.⁴³ Sylhetis, in particular, were linked to Britain through connection with the imperial railways and the merchant navy. As Yusef Choudhury has noted, the district of Sylhet lay along the shipping route from Assam to Calcutta, from where the international trading ships embarked.⁴⁴ Many young Sylheti men made the journey to Calcutta, where a network of agents and boarding houses developed, providing links to employment on the ships and to global travel.⁴⁵ Although most Bangladeshis who migrated to Britain did so in the two decades after Bangladesh achieved independence from Pakistan in 1971,⁴⁶ much longer histories of mobility and migration established the routes along which later generations would travel, linked to a long established Bengali community in the United Kingdom.

Early Settlers (1850s to 1945)

Travel between Sylhet and Britain can be traced from the 19th century onward, in particular through the region's connections with the imperial trading routes from Calcutta.⁴⁷ Caroline Adams has noted that Sylheti lascars were employed by the East India Company from as early as the 17th century. Historical records show the presence of itinerant and abandoned seamen in East London's ports from the late 18th century. From the 1850s onward, at the height of British imperial rule, Bengali lascars were crucial for the manning of the empire's shipping lines, and large numbers of Sylhetis worked in the engine rooms of the British merchant ships during World War I and World War II.⁴⁸

These early imperial seafaring connections are crucial in understanding the formation of the Bangladeshi community in Britain in the early 21st century. They established routes between East Bengal and the docks of East London and set up networks of patrons and facilitators that were to prove central to later phases of chain migration. As Choudhury's and Adams's evocative oral histories of early Bengali settlers in the United Kingdom show, from the 1920s there was a small number of settled ex-lascars living in East London who provided shelter and guidance to Bengali sailors passing through London, who were abandoned when their contracts ended or, occasionally, when they jumped ship.⁴⁹ The numbers of Bengalis in London rose through the 1930s and in the period up to the end of World War II. During this period the first signs of a community were apparent, under the leadership of individuals such as Ayub Ali and Shah Abdul Majid Qureshi who, together, established the Indian Seamen's Welfare League in Christian Street, Aldgate, in 1943.⁵⁰

These early settlers found employment in the garment industry in East London and the restaurants of the big London hotels, while others traveled to the Midlands and the north of England to work in textile factories. This period also saw the establishment of Bengali “coffee shops” catering to the new arrivals, which later became the first Sylheti-owned “Indian” restaurants. The end of this period saw the establishment of the East London Mosque and Muslim Burial Societies, and in 1946, the first halal butcher shop was opened by Taslim Ali (who became Imam of the East London Mosque in 1956).

Post-1945 Migration

Although the number of migrants was small,⁵¹ these early patterns of migration provided the template, and channels, for later migration in the 1950s and 1960s. From the end of World War II, a number of lascars settled in Britain, and others arrived after Indian independence and partition. In 1947 Britain’s Indian empire was divided into two nation states, India and Pakistan. The latter was a fractured entity, with its eastern wing (later Bangladesh) carved out of Bengal and Assam, separated from the dominant western wing by more than 1,000 miles of Indian territory.⁵² Adams estimates that in the 1950s the number of Sylhetis living in London numbered about three hundred, almost all of whom were men. By 1962 she estimates there were up to five thousand Bengalis in the United Kingdom, drawn by the British postwar demand for cheap unskilled labor.⁵³ Many replicated earlier settlers by working in the garment industry in East London as pressers or tailors,⁵⁴ while others moved to Birmingham, Oldham, and Bradford to work in the textile mills or heavy industry.⁵⁵ Most saw their stay in Britain as only temporary, as “sojourners” rather than “settlers.”⁵⁶ Family ties with the homeland remained strong; many men left wives and children in Bangladesh and returned there frequently, sent remittances regularly, and invested in land and housing in Sylhet.

Katy Gardner argues that the period from the 1950s until 1962 was “the golden age” of migration to Britain from the Indian subcontinent, when immigration controls were still comparatively open and work was plentiful.⁵⁷ The situation shifted in 1962, however, with the first Commonwealth Immigrants Act. This restricted primary migration from the Commonwealth into three categories: those with a specific job to go to in Britain; those with a recognized skill or qualification in short supply in the United Kingdom; and others (with priority given to those serving with the British forces in World War II). Katy Gardner and Abdus Shakur note that this encouraged Bengalis already in Britain to seek vouchers for friends and relatives, initiating a period of sustained “chain” migration.⁵⁸ By the 1980s, the British Bangladeshi community numbered about two hundred thousand, with about thirty-five thousand living in East London.⁵⁹

Family Reunification and Community Formation

In 1971, after a brief but savage war between East Pakistan and West Pakistan, the sovereign nation of Bangladesh was created. The period from the early 1970s to the 1980s saw a further shift in migration patterns, with a move toward family reunification and the formation of a more permanent community in the United Kingdom. The 1981 census recorded 64,561 Bangladeshis

living in the United Kingdom, including about 16,000 British-born “second generation” immigrants.⁶⁰ By 1987, the Labor Force Survey placed the figure of Bangladeshis living in the United Kingdom at about 116,000, of which between 52 and 56 percent were born in Bangladesh. This period saw the growth of a substantial young, British-born Bangladeshi population, rising from 25 percent in 1981 to 40 percent between 1985 and 1987. It also saw a dramatic re-gendering of migration patterns, from an estimated ratio of men to women of 40:1 in the 1960s to a ratio of 2:1 by the time of the 1981 census.⁶¹ The arrivals also included a large number of younger Bangladesh-born men and women who were at the forefront of many of the early struggles around racism in the United Kingdom.⁶²

These shifts can be explained by a number of factors. First, in the wake of the 1981 British Nationality Act, travel between Britain and the subcontinent became increasingly difficult, and migrants were concerned that they might be prevented from bringing their families to Britain in the future. Second, the struggle against West Pakistan throughout the 1960s, the declining material conditions in East Pakistan, and the Liberation War of 1971, which resulted in Bangladeshi independence, led to anxiety about the safety of family members in South Asia. Third, the decade of economic and political instability that followed Bangladesh’s independence reinforced these concerns. Fourth, the needs of aging male migrants led to a shift in domestic requirements. And fifth, there was a growing realization that, with increasing unemployment among Bangladeshis in the United Kingdom, insufficient money would be available for a return to their home country. In addition, it has also been suggested that the growth of established Muslim communities in areas of settlement meant that anxieties about the exposure of women and children to presumed Western influences were partially ameliorated.⁶³

However, this period of reunification and settlement also coincided with a steep rise in unemployment in Britain. This was the result of a long-term decline in manufacturing industries and an economic recession, which had a disproportionate impact on minority-ethnic communities, including Bangladeshis. Humayun Ansari notes that migration from Bangladesh reached its peak in the period from 1980 to 1988, which was also the period when UK unemployment was at its highest.⁶⁴ This factor, along with the high degree of concentration of the Bangladeshi community in the United Kingdom—due to the forms of localized chain migration, employment patterns, and segregation in a highly racialized housing market—reinforced existing patterns of poverty among the community.

This period also saw the establishment of a sizeable and confident Bangladeshi community, most notably in Tower Hamlets, with the growth of religious and cultural institutions and events. Indeed, it is apparent that when workers lost their jobs elsewhere in Britain, many returned to the Bangladeshi “heartland” in East London, consolidating the significance of this space in the Bangladeshi diasporic imagination.⁶⁵

Creating Community: Settlement, Resistance and Resilience

Rich oral-history accounts, such as those by Adams and Choudhury, paint a vivid picture of the conditions and struggles faced by early Bengali settlers.⁶⁶ However, it is also clear that, from the earliest periods of settlement, these pioneer migrants were actively involved in politics in the

subcontinent and also within the United Kingdom itself. In his early study of Tower Hamlets, John Eade⁶⁷ traced the growth of political activism through the 1970s and 1980s. Eade's work pointed to a generational shift from the concerns of the first-generation migrants with the politics of the subcontinent and the struggles for independence, to the emergent second generation, whose primary interest was on local government and antiracist struggles in the United Kingdom. These concerns have in turn been superseded by a new, third generation, whose members have rejected the nationalist and secular stance of earlier activists in favor of a denationalized/global and religious/Islamist identity. It is possible, then, to think of political mobilization and community identity in the public sphere as occurring in three phases, which can be broadly mapped onto the issues and concerns of successive generations of Bangladeshis in the United Kingdom. However, it is also important to recognize the shared and overlapping histories of political activism and resistance that span decades and cross transnational spaces (with Bangladesh, of course, but also the United States, Europe, and elsewhere).⁶⁸

First Generation

As Eade⁶⁹ and David Garbin⁷⁰ have argued, the first generation of migrants were actively involved in the politics of the subcontinent through the 1960s and into the early 1970s, most particularly in the resistance leading to the War of Liberation and Bangladeshi independence in 1971. Migrants in the United Kingdom mobilized in support of the freedom fighters and the Awami League through fundraising, public protests, and lobbying of the British government and media. As the authors of the Swadhinata Trust's oral history of Tower Hamlets argue, "the liberation war was not just fought in the Bengal delta."⁷¹ This promoted a strongly nationalist and secular identity among British migrants, asserting a collective Bengali identity that transcended class, caste, and religious boundaries.

Eade also notes that this first generation acted as intermediaries between the Bengali community and local government officials in the United Kingdom. In Tower Hamlets this led to the establishment of the Pakistan (later Bangladesh) Welfare Association (PWA), modeled on the Indian Workers Associations that were founded across Britain from the 1930s onward.⁷² The PWA was a crucial initial point of contact for new arrivals from the 1950s onward and became central in the struggle against racism in the East End of London from the late 1960s onward.⁷³ In Oldham, the United Kingdom's second largest British Bangladeshi settlement, the community joined with their more numerous West Pakistani neighbors to form a Pakistan Association from the 1960s onward. The Association split during the liberation war, and a Bangladeshi Welfare Association was formed from 1970 onward, building the foundation for other community institutions such as a mosque, schools, and the Oldham Welfare Association.⁷⁴

These early settlers were the victims of widespread, and often violent, racism as well as structural exclusion, particularly in the areas of housing and employment. However, they also played an active, if often overlooked, role in challenging racism and discrimination. In East London, the local cafes catering to the mainly single migrant men were a locus for political activity in the United Kingdom as well as "back home" in South Asia. Bangladeshi migrants were also integrally involved in the wider Squatters Movement from the mid-1970s onward. Excluded from social

housing by the Tower Hamlets council's racialized policies, Bangladeshi families took over abandoned properties around Spitalfields and challenged the council to provide better options for the growing community⁷⁵ Shabna Begum's evocative account of these struggles, drawing on the oral testimonies of the early migrants, argues for the importance of these early forms of UK-based political organization. As Begum notes, these local organizations formed the foundation for the later antiracist youth movements that were crucial in claiming Tower Hamlets as a safe place for the Bangladeshi community through the 1980s.

While the ties with the subcontinent have become partly attenuated with the growth of a second generation of British Bangladeshis, it would be misleading to see the impact of this group as being completely superseded by later developments. Eade and Garbin note that, by the 1980s, nearly all of Bangladesh's major political parties were represented in the United Kingdom, testifying to the ongoing engagement between the diaspora and Bangladeshi political spheres.⁷⁶ These kin- and village-based networks continue to provide platforms for politicians from Bangladesh to come to the United Kingdom to raise campaign funds and have also established a range of UK-based community representatives linked to businesses both in the United Kingdom and Bangladesh. Political and religious loyalties and divisions in Bangladesh continue to be played out in the United Kingdom, while political activism—such as the UK-based Nirmul Committee's campaign to prosecute presumed war criminals from the 1971 Liberation War—has an impact on politics “back home” in Bangladesh. These ties are invigorated further by daily transnational practices of connection, such as remittances, marriage, and religious solidarity.⁷⁷

Second Generation

From the 1970s onward, a new generation of younger activists emerged, mainly young men who were either born or had grown up in the United Kingdom and whose focus shifted away from the transnational concerns of their elders toward the struggles against racism in Britain. Many came up through local youth organizations, which had mobilized against the high levels of racist attacks and police harassment through the 1970s and 1980s. In Tower Hamlets, young men organized self-defense groups to protect the community from daily, violent, racist attacks, and these groups developed into an organized antiracist resistance. Two groups, the Bangladeshi Youth Front and the Bangladeshi Youth Movement, established links with other South Asian groups across London and in Birmingham, Manchester, Leicester, and Bradford.⁷⁸

In Tower Hamlets, the movement was given greater urgency after the racist murder of Altab Ali, a young garment worker, in May 1978. The murder has often been seen as a turning point in the community organization of the British Bangladeshi community. Ten days after the murder, a large group of demonstrators marched from Brick Lane to Westminster. Rajonuddin Jalal, who was one of the founders of the Bangladeshi Youth Movement, and one of the organizers of the march, described the events in 2007:

For the first time, Bengalis marched from Whitechapel to Parliament House, on the way round Hyde Park Corner and back to Whitechapel. It took about 8 hours. About 10,000 people. That was the first time Bengalis came out.⁷⁹

It was through these struggles that Tower Hamlets came to be seen as the “heartland” of the Bangladeshi community in Britain. As one youth worker and activist, Ansar Ahmed Ullah commented, “In the ’70s and ’80s, it did provide a safe haven, I guess, for our people.”⁸⁰

As with the Squatters Movement, these second-generation activists also forged alliances with leftist and antiracist movements, and with the broader Black political movements of the period, to tackle local issues of discrimination in housing, education, employment, police-community relations, and other areas.⁸¹ They were also strongly influenced by the struggles for independence in Bangladesh; indeed, many of the organizers had been actively involved in the struggles for Bangladeshi independence.⁸²

Through the 1980s, these activists moved into mainstream politics. Many Bangladeshi men became active participants in the local Labor and Social Democratic parties and fielded a number of local council members, particularly in Tower Hamlets but also in Oldham. This has provided a strong foundation for engagement with local politics that has continued into the early 2020s. As Garbin notes,⁸³ many of these second-generation activists later became local councilors or politicians or moved into white-collar jobs in local government or the public sector, dealing with education, housing, health, and employment.

This participation in local political arenas coincided with a period of regeneration of inner-city communities, such as Tower Hamlets, and saw the funding of a range of Bangladeshi organizations concerned with “multicultural” projects around identity, culture, and community. The 1990s saw the emergence of “Banglatown” in Tower Hamlets, a “cultural quarter” based on the “Indian” restaurant trade, with the alliance between Bangladeshi entrepreneurs, regeneration agencies, and City businesses.⁸⁴ As part of this regeneration, the Boishakhi Mela was established in 1997 and has since grown to become the second-largest street fair in Europe, after Notting Hill Carnival. As a wider marker of the cultural and political significance of the British Bangladeshi community in East London (and particularly in Tower Hamlets), the area has also seen the erection of the Banglatown Arch at the southern entrance to Brick Lane in 1997, the renaming of Altab Ali Park in 1998, and the building of the Shahid Minar in 1999. The local ward around Brick Lane was renamed Spitalfields and Banglatown in 1998. However, these developments have not been without controversy, both from local White “heritage” conservationists and, later, between religious and secular factions within the local Bangladeshi community.⁸⁵

Third Generation

From the late 1980s and through the 1990s the predominantly secular and nationalist orientation of these second-generation activists was challenged by the growth of religiously oriented and Islamist groups. These were particularly encouraged by the new Labor government’s policies promoting faith communities as a key agent in urban regeneration and as a way of defusing or containing the political activism of the Asian youth movements.⁸⁶ While at a national level, Bangladeshis have been largely invisible in Muslim organizations such as the Muslim Parliament, or the later Muslim Council of Britain, Muslim organizations have been active and significant at a

local level, particularly since the cutting back of government funding to secular and ethnic/nationalist cultural and youth organizations.⁸⁷ This shift also needs to be placed in the broader context of the focus on Muslim identities, particularly after the *Satanic Verses* affair in 1989, the first Gulf War, and the rise of Islamophobia throughout the 1990s. In the new millennium, this was exacerbated further after the riots in the northern mill towns in 2001, the events of September 11, and the subsequent war on terror initiated by the United States.⁸⁸

In Tower Hamlets, this shift was demonstrated by the rising significance of the East London Mosque, which took on a range of community functions and which established close links with local youth groups, particularly the Young Muslim Organization (YMO). The mosque collaborated with local government agencies on issues concerning drug addiction, family breakdown, housing, employment, and particularly youth issues and initiatives, aimed at Bangladeshi youths, perceived as being “at risk” from gang and drug culture.⁸⁹ The expansion of the East London Mosque reflects an expanded sphere of influence in the locale and more broadly. Eade and Garbin⁹⁰ have pointed to links between the East London Mosque and prominent Islamist organizations, for example the Da’wat Ul Islam and, after a split in 1988, the newly formed Islamic Forum Europe (IFE), which also have presences in Oldham and Birmingham. While the role of faith organizations has been seen to be promoting community and social cohesion, there is also evidence that there is a developing tension between secular and religious trends in East London—for example, around the secular Mela and the role of Banglatown.⁹¹

Bangladeshis in other parts of the United Kingdom have a very different engagement with the political sphere. In Oldham, for example, which was a major site of the 2001 riots, the comparative absence of local political organization has proved to be an obstacle to the organization of Bangladeshis to access regeneration funding. However, the first Shahid Minar monument in the United Kingdom was built in Oldham in 1997—a year before its counterpart in Tower Hamlets—and testifies to the strong Bangladeshi national/cultural identity in the area. Eade and Garbin⁹² have argued that the acquisition of land in Oldham to build a Muslim Centre, along the lines of the East London Mosque in Whitechapel, may indicate a potential shift, as does the increased presence of the Tablighi Jamaat organization and the Jamaat I Islami (through links with IFE and YMO) in Oldham and Birmingham. However, to date, radical Islamist groups have failed to have a significant impact on the British Bangladeshi community.

It is important again, however, not to see this latest trend as completely overturning earlier traditions of political engagement. Indeed, organization against racism remains a common concern in the contemporary setting, and the distinction between religious and secular concerns is not always clear. This is particularly the case at the level of the informal and everyday interactions and lives of Bangladeshi people. In addition, the impact of anti-Muslim, racist, and Islamophobic sentiments around forms of ethnic or religious expression and mobilization remain salient.

It is also important to consider gendered and generational dimensions of this political engagement and the politics of community formation. The public political sphere is almost exclusively a male one and, in terms of access to formal power, is dominated by the first and second generation of activists.⁹³ Young people and women tend to be marginalized in the political

realm, and it has been argued that it is this sense of marginalization that can lead to the attraction of Islamist activities and ideologies.⁹⁴ Eade and Garbin argue that faith-based organizations have worked to successfully manage the frustrations of young Bangladeshis and have also provided space for Bangladeshi women to organize.⁹⁵ In East London, the youth outreach of YMO in particular appeals to young men and women, while the East London Mosque also offers Women's Relief, an advice center tackling issues such as domestic violence, training, and employment.

However, interviews with young people suggest that religion plays an important, but not necessarily overriding, part in their identity formation.⁹⁶ Sarah Glynn has argued that religious identity offers an alternative to the parental traditions of Bangladeshi elders and to the alienation of young people caused by poverty, racism, and social exclusion. She argues further that young women use religion as a way of negotiating freedom from repressive parental cultural traditions. Aminul Hoque has argued, in contrast, that British Islam has been a key force through which young third-generation British Bangladeshis make sense of, and resist, ongoing institutional racism, isolation, and poverty. It is likely that the importance of religion has changed during the first two decades of the 2020s, given the prominence of Islam in public, policy, and political discourse in the years following the attacks in the United States in 2001 and the ensuing US-led war on terror.⁹⁷ The British Bangladeshi community seems to have been largely invisible in the concerns around Islamist extremism, which have focused instead on the British Pakistani community. However, the community was rocked in February 2015 when three British Bangladeshi schoolgirls, Shamima Begum, Amira Abase, and Kadiza Sultana, traveled from East London to Syria to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).⁹⁸ Kadiza Sultana was reported killed in 2016, while Amina Abase's fate is unknown. Shamima Begum has been stranded in a Syrian detention camp, and in 2019 the British government revoked her citizenship, effectively leaving her stateless and trapped.

Conclusion

While the British Bangladeshi community remains one of the smallest ethnic-minority communities in Britain, its significance far outweighs its size. The story of Bangladeshi Britain is one of empire, global migration, and diaspora. It is also a story of pioneer settlers, who forged new spaces of safety, of home, and of belonging in Britain, in the face of virulent racism and structural exclusion; their descendants still face significant barriers of exclusion and racism while forging new paths for success. The British Bangladeshi community's impact on British culture and identity—from “chicken tikka masala” to Bengali Brick Lane; from the Asian youth movements to members of Parliament (MPs) Rushanara Ali, Rupa Huq, Tulip Siddiq, Apsana Begum, and Foysul Choudhury; from TV cook Nadiya Hussain to choreographer Akram Khan; from Asian Dub Foundation to graffiti artist Mohammed Ali—has been profound. The earliest decades of the 21st century have witnessed new patterns of Bangladeshi migration to Britain, with the “onward migration” of those relocating from countries like Italy and Spain.⁹⁹ As the community evolves, it will continue to shape the future of Britain.

Discussion of the Literature

Scholarly literature on the history of migration and settlement from Bengal, and Bangladesh (from 1971), to Britain can be divided into four broad areas of work: (i) on the early Bengali presence; (ii) on post-1945 South Asian migrations; (iii) on political activism and antiracist resistance; and (iv) on migrant communities in London's East End. It is important to note that historical studies on British Bangladeshis have not been the sole preserve of academic historians. Sociologists and anthropologists, as well as “community” historians working outside the academy, have made important, indeed pioneering, contributions to historical understandings of the British Bangladeshi experience.

- (i) The history of Britain's earliest Bengali settlers is documented in a body of well-established work on the movement of people from the Indian subcontinent to Britain in the years prior to 1945. Rozina Visram's seminal contributions, for example, draw on a rich source base to trace the presence of South Asian migrants in Britain since the early 17th century, among them Bengalis, including domestic servants, traveling elites, and laboring seafarers.¹⁰⁰ The latter, known as lascars, were numerically the most significant arrivals in this early period, arriving by way of the East India Company and later imperial trading routes. Between 1900 and 1947, about fifty thousand Indian seamen passed through British ports each year. On arrival, some jumped ship, in the hope of finding better employment ashore. Many of these seamen had roots in Bengal's northeastern province of Sylhet.

Scholars have documented the origins of Britain's Bengali seafarers,¹⁰¹ their patterns of recruitment and conditions of work aboard British and European vessels,¹⁰² responses to them in Britain by employers, unions, and the state,¹⁰³ and their experiences of settlement in Britain.¹⁰⁴

One strand of literature on Bengali seafarers in Britain in the years preceding World War II focuses firmly on their historical relationship to London's East End.¹⁰⁵ Adams's pioneering study of Sylheti seafarers, for example, draws on oral-history interviews to trace a long history of seagoing employment, including involvement in both world wars, and their arrival and settlement in London.

- (ii) Another body of historical work on South Asian migration to Britain documents the arrival and settlement of increasing numbers of Commonwealth citizens after 1945, including those from newly independent East Pakistan (1947) and, later, Bangladesh (1971). These works consist of general histories of post-partition South Asian migration to Britain, histories of postwar “Muslim” migration to Britain, and works on Bengali migration, which adopt a global framework of analysis. General histories of South Asian migration to Britain since the 1950s provide broad—and, in some cases, brief—insights into the social, political, and economic lives of newcomers from East Pakistan and Bangladesh to Britain, including experiences of arrival and settlement, immigration controls, economic struggles, social cohesion, diaspora politics, and family and community lives.¹⁰⁶ Histories of “Muslim” migration and settlement in post-1945 Britain offer comparatively greater depth. Jed Fazakarley's exploration of Muslim integration into English society between 1960 and 1990 deals, in part, with Bangladeshi migrants' engagement with welfare,

education, and youth organizing.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Ansari's analysis of Muslim migrants in Britain since the 19th century offers an analysis of Bangladeshi migrants' political and religious organization in post-1945 Britain, as well as their struggle for education.¹⁰⁸ Finally, a smaller but important body of scholarly work on specifically Bengali migration to post-1945 Britain adopts a more global framework of historical analysis.¹⁰⁹ Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji, and Annu Jalais's interdisciplinary work, for example, explores migration to Britain following the partitions of 1947 and 1971, alongside parallel "internal" migrations within Bangladesh and India, while Nazli Kibria situates the movement of Bengali migrants to Britain after World War II within a transnational framework. Focusing on the "source" rather than "destination," Gardner's work examines the long-term impact on sending societies in Sylhet of emigration from Bangladesh to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s.

- (iii) Bengali migrants have, since their earliest arrival in Britain, been subject to state racism; discrimination in housing, welfare, and employment; and racist street violence. Literature on the community's resistance to this treatment makes up another significant component of the historical literature on British Bangladeshis. Historians have documented patterns of resistance among Sylheti seafarers since the earliest decades of the 20th century, including lascar strikes against unequal conditions of employment on British and European ships¹¹⁰ and resistance to discriminatory mobility controls.¹¹¹ However, much of the scholarly work on British Bengali struggle and resistance focuses on the latter half of the 20th century.¹¹² The 1970s emerge as particularly important in this work: the decade witnessed increasingly harsh immigration laws, widespread discrimination against British Bangladeshis in the housing market, the laying-off of British Bangladeshis from textile and steel mills in Britain's deindustrializing north, the growth of the far-right National Front party in Britain, and the racist murder of Altab Ali in London's East End. The latter, for example, prompted the political organization of Bangladeshi youth in East London. Drawing on a series of oral history interviews, Shabna Begum has documented the struggle of Bangladeshi families in 1970s East London to secure basic housing through the medium of squatting. Other political histories have focused on British Bangladeshis' relationship with progressive leftist politics,¹¹³ and on the influence of political developments in the "homeland" on politics, culture, and community in Britain.¹¹⁴
- (iv) Beyond histories of South Asian migration to Britain, the literature on migrant communities in London offers important insights into the British Bangladeshi experience. While most accounts of early South Asian migration to Britain draw on the East End's small seafaring community as a familiar departure point, there is more to the historical dimension of the London story. On histories of migrant London, Panikos Panayi's account of newcomers to the city from the Roman era to the present day includes helpful analysis of East London's Bengali community, including post-1945 employment in the rag trade, the establishment of "Indian" food shops, and local histories of racism and resistance.¹¹⁵ More specific work on histories of migration to the East End are also important. For example, Kershen's study of the impact of migrants on the urban environment in Spitalfields traces the Bengali presence in the locality from the arrival of Sylheti lascars through to the challenges endured by Bangladeshis in the area between the 1960s and 1990s, including

unemployment, housing, and racism.¹¹⁶ Jane Jacobs's work, also on Spitalfields, focuses on how late-20th-century processes of gentrification and development had an impact on the large local Bangladeshi population, creating spaces of exclusion.¹¹⁷ Popular histories have also added to historical understandings of Bengalis in the East End. Artist-turned-amateur-historian Rachel Lichtenstein's book on Brick Lane, for example, offers an interview-informed account of the Lane's residents past and present, including a chapter titled "Bengali Lives."¹¹⁸ Interestingly, though, much of the scholarly work on the Bengali community in London's East End has been penned by professional sociologists and anthropologists rather than historians. This important body of work, some of which has been discussed in this section, focuses mainly on the latter half of the 20th century and, in particular, on historical as well as contemporary dimensions of the Bengali community's various local campaigns for recognition and resources, as well as on local diaspora politics.¹¹⁹

Primary Sources

The India Office Records at the British Library <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/india-office-records>, London, consist of the archives of the administration in London of the East India Company and the pre-1947 government of India. Here researchers will find official files relating to the administration (before 1947) of the territories included in present-day India, Pakistan, Burma, and Bangladesh, as well as private papers relating to the British experience in India. The British Library also holds historical and contemporary resources on the long history of people of South Asian heritage in Britain <https://www.bl.uk/asians-in-britain>. These include archival and manuscript collections relating to the Asian presence in Britain since 1600, publications from and about Asia in various forms, manuscripts in South Asian languages, diasporic literature in the United Kingdom since 1945, and oral histories of migration, ethnicity, and postcolonialism.

The National Archives <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/seafarers-stories/>, Kew, the official archive for the UK government, holds records of central government departments relating to the British Empire <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/colonies-dependencies-further-research/> from 1782, the partition of British India in 1947, the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, and immigration to Britain from the British Empire and Commonwealth. The National Archives has assembled a series of educational resources, with links to digitized documents, on topics including Black, Asian, and Minority Histories <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-histories/> and Mirpuri, Bengali, and Panjabi seafarers in Britain <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/seafarers-stories/>.

The Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives <https://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history>, London, holds historical records from London's Borough of Tower Hamlets, including the long history of the Bengali community in the area. The collection includes photographs of South Asians in East London, records relating to local Bangladeshi organizations such as the Bangladesh Youth League, and Caroline Adams's papers and oral history interviews relating to her book *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers: Life Stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain*.¹²⁰

The Bishopsgate Institute Special Collections and Archives <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/archives>, located in the Spitalfields area of East London, holds archival collections on the history of London, including pamphlets, press cuttings, guidebooks, maps, photographs, and oral histories. Researchers on British Bangladeshis will find the Tales of

Three Generations of Bengalis in Britain <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/swadhinata-trust>¹²¹ oral-history collection of particular interest. The recordings—collected by the Bengali history and heritage group, Swadhinata Trust, and the Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism, University of Surrey (CRONEM)—cover three areas: dialogue between first and third generations on the history of Bangladesh and the 1971 war of independence, dialogue between second- and third-generation Bangladeshis on welfare and community from the 1970s to the 1980s, and dialogue across three generations on British Bangladeshi musical heritage from the 1970s to the 1980s.

Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre <https://www.racearchive.org.uk/>, Manchester, holds archival collections relating to race, ethnicity, and migration in Manchester and on race relations in Britain. This includes papers of the Commission for Racial Equality and the Institute of Race Relations, records relating to local social-justice movements and legal campaigns, and papers of Manchester community organizations, such as Ananna, a Bangladeshi women’s organization. Among the archive’s oral-history records are the “Memories of Partition” collection (a community project to collect personal experiences of partition among local residents) and the “Exploring Our Roots” collection (oral-history interviews with seventy-two Black and Asian residents of Manchester, including some of Bangladeshi heritage).

Links to Digital Materials

Bangla Stories <http://www.banglastories.org/>

Beyond Banglatown <http://www.beyondbanglatown.org.uk/>

Our Migration Story <http://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk>

The British Library: South Asians in Britain <https://www.bl.uk/asians-in-britain>

The British Library: Voices of Britain <https://www.bl.uk/voices-of-partition>

Making Britain: South Asians in Britain from 1870–1950 <https://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/>

The Swadhinata Trust (resources) <https://swadhinata.org.uk/resources/>

The National Archives: The Independence of Bangladesh in 1971 <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-independence-of-bangladesh-in-1971/>

Further Reading

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Alexander, Claire, Joya Chatterji, and Annu Jalais. *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration*. London: Routledge, 2016.

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Begum, Shabna. *From Sylhet to Spitalfields: Bengali Squatters in 1970s East London*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2023.

Choudhury, Yousuf. *The Roots and Tales of Bangladeshi Settlers*. Birmingham, UK: Sylhet Social History Group, 1993.

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Gardner, Katy. *Narrative, Age and Migration: Life History and the Life Course amongst Bengali Elders in London*. Oxford: Berg, 2002.

Glynn, Sarah. *Class, Ethnicity and Religion in the Bengali East End: A Political History, Class, Ethnicity and Religion in the Bengali East End*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2016.

Kabeer, Naila. *The Power to Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka*. London: VERSO, 2000

Kibria, Nazli. *Muslims in Motion: Islam and National Identity in the Bangladeshi Diaspora*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011.

Visram, Rozina. *Ayahs, Lascars, and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700–1947*. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

Notes

1. Office for National Statistics <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021>>. The 2022 census data for Scotland has not yet been published, but in 2018, 2.6 percent of the population was of Asian, Asian Scottish, or Asian British background. Statista <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/367842/scotland-ethnicity-of-population/>>. Bangladeshis do not appear as a separate category in the Northern Ireland census (1.61 percent of the population is of Asian background, and "Other Asian" comprises 0.3 percent of the population). Nisra.gov.uk <<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-1-statistical-bulletin-ethnic-group.pdf>>. In 2011, Bangladeshis comprised less than 0.1 percent of the Northern Ireland and Scotland population. See William Shankley, Tina Hanneman, and Ludi Simpson, "The Demography of Ethnic Minorities in Britain," in *Ethnicity, Race and Inequality in the UK: State of the Nation*, ed. Bridget Byrne, Claire Alexander, Omar Khan, James Nazroo, and William Shankley (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2020), 15–35.

2. While some scholars use the terms "Bengali" and "Bangladeshi" interchangeably, this article uses "Bengali" to refer to migrants and settlers who traveled to Britain from the Bengal delta before the creation of independent Bangladesh in 1971. It uses "Bangladeshi" to refer to migrants and settlers from independent Bangladesh since 1971 and British-born people of Bangladeshi heritage.

3. John Eade and David Garbin, *The Bangladeshi Diaspora: Community Dynamics, Transnational Politics and Islamist Activities* (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2005), 27; and Katy Gardner, *Narrative, Age and Migration: Life History and the Life Course amongst Bengali Elders in London* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).
4. Office for National Statistics, *Population Estimates by Ethnic Group, England and Wales* (2021) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/datasets/populationestimatesbyethnicgroupenglandandwales>>.
5. William Shankley and Nissa Finney, "Ethnic Minorities and Housing in Britain" <https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/News_events/2022/December-2022/New-Tower-Hamlets-census-data-released.aspx>," in Byrne, et al., *Ethnicity, Race and Inequality in the UK*, 149–166.
6. "Census 2021: Ethnic Group by Age and Sex" <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/datasets/ethnicgroupbyageandsexinenglandandwales>>" (Office for National Statistics, 2023).
7. Shankley, Hanneman, and Simpson, "Demography of Ethnic Minorities," 15–35.
8. Shankley, Hanneman, and Simpson, "Demography of Ethnic Minorities in Britain," 15–34.
9. Hindus from Bangladesh have also moved to Britain but in small numbers. See John Eade, "Bengalis in Britain: Migration, State Controls and Settlement," in *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, ed. Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (London: Routledge, 2013).
10. Muslim Council of Britain, *Census 2021: First Look* <<https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/MCB-Census-2021---First-Look.pdf>> (2022).
11. Ceri Peach, "Muslims in Britain," in *Muslim Britain: Communities under Pressure*, ed. Tahir Abbas (London: Zed Books, 2005), 31–46.
12. Peach, "Muslims in Britain," 31–46.
13. Shankley and Finney, "Ethnic Minorities and Housing," 158.
14. Shankley and Finney, "Ethnic Minorities and Housing," 161–162.
15. Shankley, Hanneman, and Simpson, "Demography of Ethnic Minorities," 15–35.
16. Shankley and Finney, "Ethnic Minorities and Housing," 161–162.
17. Shabna Begum, *From Sylhet to Spitalfields: Bengali Squatters in 1970s East London* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2023).
18. *UK Poverty 2022: The Essential Guide to Understanding Poverty in the UK* <<https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2022-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>> (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2022).
19. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *UK Poverty*, 52–55.
20. *Wealth Gaps between Different Ethnic Groups in Britain Are Large and Likely to Persist* <<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/press-releases/wealth-gaps-between-different-ethnic-groups-in-britain-are-large-and-likely-to-persist/>> (Resolution Foundation Press Release, 2020).
21. *Average Hourly Pay* <<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/pay-and-income/average-hourly-pay/latest/>> (Office for National Statistics, 2002).
22. Brigid Francis-Devine, "Who Has the Highest and Lowest Household Incomes?" <<https://www.commonslibrary.parliament.uk/who-has-the-highest-and-lowest-household-incomes/>>" (Insight: House of Commons Library, 2021).

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24. Vasileios Antonopoulos, Nadyne Dunkley, Arpa Radia, Lualhati Santiago, and Rebecca Williams, *Child Poverty and Education Outcomes by Ethnicity* <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/compendium/economicreview/february2020/childpovertyandeducationoutcomesbyethnicity>> (Office for National Statistics, 2020).
25. Y. Yusuf Choudhury, *The Roots and Tales of Bangladeshi Settlers* (Birmingham, UK: Sylhet Social History Group, 1993); and Yusuf Choudhury, *Sons of the Soil* (Birmingham, UK: Sylhet Social History Group, 1995).
26. Naila Kabeer, *The Power To Choose: Bangladeshi Women and Labour Market Decisions in London and Dhaka* (London: Verso, 2000).
27. Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji, and Annu Jalais, *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration* (London: Routledge, 2016); and Choudhury, *Roots and Tales*.
28. Compared to 82.2 percent for White British men and 78.8 percent for White British women. Ken Clark and William Shankley, "Ethnic Minorities in the Labour Market," in Byrne, et al., *Ethnicity, Race and Inequality in the UK*, 127–148.
29. Dharmi Kapadia, James Nazroo, and Ken Clark, "Have Ethnic Inequalities in the Labour Market Persisted?" in *Ethnic Identity and Inequalities in Britain*, ed. Stephen Jivraj and Ludi Simpson (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2015), 161–180.
30. Clark and Shankley, "Ethnic Minorities," 127–148.
31. Office for National Statistics, *Employment by Sector* <<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/employment-by-sector/latest/>> (2022).
32. Clark and Shankley, "Ethnic Minorities," 127–148.
33. Lucinda Platt, *Poverty and Ethnicity in the UK* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007).
34. Claire Alexander and William Shankley, "Ethnic Inequalities in the State Education System in England," in Byrne, et al., *Ethnicity, Race and Inequality in the UK*, 93–126.
35. General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) are exams completed by 14- to 16-year-old pupils in schools and colleges in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
36. Alexander and Shankley, "Ethnic Inequalities," 104.
37. Advanced Level (A-Level) qualifications are exams completed by pupils age 16 and above in schools and colleges in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
38. Alexander and Shankley, "Ethnic Inequalities," 117.
39. Vikki Boliver, "How Fair is Access to More Prestigious UK Universities?" *British Journal of Sociology* 64, no. 2 (2013): 344–364.
40. Alexander and Shankley, "Ethnic Inequalities," 119.
41. Office for National Statistics, *Rates of Deaths Involving the Coronavirus (COVID-19) by Ethnic Group, England and Wales* (2021) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/ratesofdeathsinvolveingthecoronaviruscovid19byethnicgroupenglandandwales>>.

42. Karen Chouhan and James Nazroo, "Health Inequalities," in Byrne, et al., *Ethnicity, Race and Inequality in the UK*, 73–92.
43. Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *Bengal Diaspora*.
44. Choudhury, *Roots and Tales*.
45. C. Caroline Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers: Life Stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain* (London: Thap, 1987); Choudhury, *Roots and Tales*; Choudhury, *Sons of the Soil*; and Ashfaque Hossain, "The World of the Sylheti Seamen in the Age of Empire, from the Late 18th Century to 1947," *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 3 (2014): 425–446.
46. Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within* (London: Hurst, 2004).
47. Adams, *Across Seven Seas*; Choudhury, *Sons of the Soil*; Gardner, *Narrative, Age and Migration*; Hossain, "World of Sylheti Seamen"; and Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *Bengal Diaspora*.
48. Adams, *Across Seven Seas*; and R. Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars, and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700–1945* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).
49. See also, Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*; and Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2016).
50. Adams, *Across Seven Seas*.
51. Choudhury estimates that there were between 150 and 200 Bengali men in East London in 1939. See Choudhury, *Roots and Tales*.
52. Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *Bengal Diaspora*.
53. Vamplew, Eade and Peach (1996) estimate the number of Bengalis in 1961 to be six thousand; however, exact numbers are difficult to ascertain. John Eade, Ceri Peach, and Tim Vamplew, "Bangladeshis in Britain: The Encapsulated Community," in *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census*, ed. Ceri Peach (London: HMSO, 1996), 150–160.
54. Kabeer, *Power to Choose*.
55. Choudhury, *Roots and Tales*; and Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *Bengal Diaspora*.
56. Katy Gardner and Abdus Shakur, "I'm Bengali, I'm Asian, and I'm Living Here," in *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, ed. Roger Ballard (London: C. Hurst, 1994), 142–164.
57. Gardner, *Narrative, Age and Migration*.
58. Gardner and Shakur, "I'm Bengali, I'm Asian," 142–164.
59. Adams, *Across Seven Seas*. Peach, however, has noted the difficulties of assessing numbers of Bengalis who were generally subsumed into the category "Pakistani" for much of this period. He calls Bengalis "a concealed community." See Ceri Peach, "The Muslim Population of Great Britain," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, no. 3 (1990): 414–419.
60. Peach, "Muslim Population," 414–419.
61. Kabeer, *Power to Choose*.
62. John Eade, *The Politics of Community: The Bangladeshi Community in East London* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1996); and Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *Bengal Diaspora*.
63. Sean Carey and Abdus Shukur, "A Profile of the Bangladeshi Community in East London," *New Community* XII, no. 3 (1985): 405–417; Kabeer, *Power to Choose*; Gardner, *Narrative, Age and Migration*; and Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *Bengal Diaspora*.

64. Ansari, *Infidel Within*.
65. Eade, *Politics of Community*; and Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *Bengal Diaspora*.
66. Adams, *Across Seven Seas*; and Choudhury, *Roots and Tales*. See also John Eade, et al., *Tales of Three Generations of Bengalis in Britain* (London: Swadhinata Trust, 2006); Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais, *Bengal Diaspora*; and Begum, *From Sylhet to Spitalfields*.
67. Eade, *Politics of Community*.
68. Nazli Kibria, *Muslims in Motion: Islam and National Identity in the Bangladeshi Diaspora* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011). cf. Carlotta Foretti and Paola Briata, "Consumption and Encounter in (Multi)Cultural Quarters: Reflecting on London and Rome's Banglatowns," *Urban Research and Practice* 12, no. 4 (2019): 392–413.
69. Eade, *Politics of Community*.
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71. Eade, et al., *Tales of Three Generations*, 8.
72. Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); and Talvinder Gill, "The Indian Workers Association Coventry 1938–1990: Political and Social Action," *South Asian History and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2013): 554–573.
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