**Strand 2 Preface**

**Community creativity-dialogue between second and third generation on welfare and community involvement in the UK, from the 1970s-80s**

In this strand we focussed on the emergence of the second generation of Bengali community activists and their entry into mainstream politics during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bengali community politics moved away from preoccupations with political struggles in Bangladesh which were discussed in the first strand and an alliance was forged between some of the first generation, such as Tassaduq Ahmed and Fakhruddin Ahmed, and the younger activists such as Rajonuddin Jalal, Noor Uddin Ahmed, Jamal Hassan, Akikur Rahman and Sunahwar Ali, for example, who are interviewed here and others such as Abbas Uddin and Ala Uddin. They seized the opportunity of gaining both access to the local political system and to state funding channelled through the local borough council, the Greater London Council (GLC) and the Inner London Educational Authority (ILEA).

They also saw the importance of building alliances with activists outside the Bengali community, such other ‘Asians’ from Hackney, Newham, Camden & Southall and those from the white majority such as Caroline Adams, Mark Adams, Peter East, Terry Fitzpatrick, John Newbegin and Claire Murphy. Through various ‘redevelopment’ schemes – the Spitalfields Project and BENTH are two examples discussed here – government money began to flow into Spitalfields and other wards where the Bengali population was rapidly expanding. Although it was mostly Bengali men who contributed to these developments, the interviews with Mithu Ghosh, Shila Thakor and Claire Murphy reveal the important role played by women and the influence of debates about women’s rights and gender equality.

The interviews also look beyond this period of Bengali community formation and political mobilisation to events leading up to contemporary situation in Brick Lane. They point to the crucial economic and social changes – the decline of the garment industry, the expansion of the service sector, especially restaurants and shops, the emergence of a third generation where the highly educated pull away from those without prospects. In Spitalfields the impact of the ‘global city’ was felt by the gentrification of the conservation areas by rich white ‘immigrants’, the colonisation by high technology, advertising, media and the artistic sector, the arrival of City of London businesses and across the borough generally the transformation of the derelict docks in the south into the gleaming Manhattanesque landscape of Canary Wharf and the new housing for white middle class newcomers on the Isle of dogs and other southern localities. Brick Lane is still the centre of Bengali enterprise but it has become, a global icon, and attempts by local Bengali entrepreneurs and others to market the area’s Banglatown - the East End’s answer to the West End’s Chinatown.

Another key development since the early 1980s has been the increasing importance of Islam. This has been driven by the arrival of wives and dependants during the 1980s and 1990s and debates about what beliefs and practices should be handed on to the very large third generation. The secular radicalism of those interviewed here has been challenged by Islamist critiques of western materialism and the British government’s involvement in two Gulf conflicts etc. This critique is associated with the expanding influence of faith based organisations, and political developments back in Bangladesh.

Jamil Iqbal and John Eade

P.S. from John Eade: On a personal note I would like to express my pleasure in reading the interviews of those whom I met during my doctoral research on Bangladeshi community representation. I began the research at a crucial time - 1980. This was only two years after the murder of Altab Ali, which features so large in this strand of the project. I originally wanted to research the Bangladeshi involvement in the garment trade - another theme in this strand - but the factory owners were understandably suspicious and I made little progress. However, as one door closed another opened because many of them were eager to tell me about their role as community leaders and the thesis developed into a study of how Bangladeshi activists articulated the needs of Bangladeshi residents in the housing and education sectors. Between 1980 and 1986 I focussed on how this political struggle played out within Spitalfields and was fortunate enough to publish my thesis as a book – *The Politics of Community* – through Ashgate in 1989. I have continued to research and publish the issues outline above and have had the pleasure of working with some of the younger cohort of white and British Bangladeshi researchers such as Jamil Ahmed, Halima Begum, Isabelle Fremeaux, David Garbin and Georgie Wemyss. Inspired by this project I will ensure that *The Politics of Community* is reprinted with some chapters from my subsequent work and put on the Swadhinata website.

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