

# Celebrating **Bengali** Heritage in Luton



## INDEX

Page 1 - History / Bengali  
Architecture

Page 3 - Historic Language

Page 4 - Historic Religions

Page 6 - Colonial Times

Page 7 - Pre- Independence

Page - 9 - Language Protest

Page 10 - Emerging Leaders

Page 14 - Liberation War

Page 19 - Independence

Page 21 - Migration to Luton



# FOREWORD

My family settled in Luton in the 1960s, with my nanaji (maternal grandfather) making the arduous journey from what was then East Pakistan to make a life here in the UK. He came to the metropole of empire, the very place that redefined and shaped the trajectory of my family's life, including mine. I call it the metropole of empire, as this very island played a significant role in rupturing lives in the subcontinent through colonialism, imperialism and decimating the place economically. So, while many Bengalis settled in Luton, this was simply inevitable, as we are here because they were there.

Settling in Luton came with its own trials and tribulations for many Bengalis. Many Bengali men were settling in Luton, and it was during the 1970s they started to bring their family members to join them in the UK. For many, there was a swift realisation that they were here to stay and make a life here instead of returning to Bangladesh and building a life there. So, while Bengalis were fighting in East Pakistan for liberation, those who settled in Luton had a different battle. There was a lot of racism and discrimination the community had to contend with, realising that this required the community to fight back and organise against the racists. As a result, different strands of the Asian Youth Movement emerged, and one of its branches was in Luton. The community organised rigorously and showcased the true spirit of galvanising collectively.

CYCD's (re)tracing of Bengali Heritage in Luton is essential to recognising these long-standing local histories. The project connected Bengali people's history, focusing on their migration, language, and growth in Luton. Awareness of our heritage is important to stay connected with our past while trying to understand our present. I hope this project inspires many to dig deeper into their own family's migration history, connecting it to various historical moments. I have been researching the British Bangladeshi Muslim communities for over a decade, and I encourage Bengalis to familiarise themselves with their family histories because there are gems in our family stories. It has been a delight observing the development of this project at CYCD, and it is a welcome contribution to preserving the local Bengali history. I hope we all continue to strive to learn more and remember those who fought and resisted to preserve our heritage in Luton.

Dr Fatima Rajina, Senior Legacy in Action Research  
Fellow at the Stephen Lawrence Research Centre, De  
Montfort University

# History.

## BANGLADESH

A land with a fascinating and sometimes tragic history, Bangladesh is an undiscovered travel gem still well off the beaten tourist trail and yet home to so many cultural treasures just waiting to be uncovered. Historically passed through the hands of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, it was later part of Bengal under British Indian rule, until – as East Pakistan – it fought for and won its own autonomy in 1971.

## BENGALI ARCHITECTURE

### BUDDHIST VIHARA AT PAHARPUR - 850 AD



Head three hours' northwest of Dhaka to discover a historic city, home to some of the most famous and mysterious Buddhist viharas (monasteries) in southern Asia. Most famous among them is the Somapura Mahavihara – a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the largest in the world. The stone quadrangle structure was built around a Buddhist-style stupa by the second Pala king around 850 AD, and today its stones sprawl over green lawns, intricately carved and beautifully preserved. Visit the adjacent museum to find clay stone statues of deities that once formed part of the decoration

### KANTANAGAR TEMPLE DINAJPUR - 18TH CENTURY

Further northwest, in the countryside surrounding the city of Dinajpur, lies the breathtaking 18th century Kantaji Temple, sometimes called Kantanagar. One of the most famous Hindu temples in the country, it was built by Maharaja Pran Nath and is typical of the royal Mughal architecture. Admire the intricate designs of the facade, covered with plaques and panels crafted from terracotta and brick, to create frescoes telling the legendary stories of the Ramayana.





PUTHIA TEMPLE, RAJSHAHI  
- 1823 AD



On the outskirts of Rajshahi city, on Bangladesh's eastern border with India, are more sacred Hindu treasures. Puthia Temple City is aptly named, containing a large number of temples and palaces surrounding a verdant green lawn. Join the pilgrims and intrepid explorers who venture this way to explore terracotta masterpieces including ornate and grand Pancharatna Govinda, smaller and intricately-decorated Jagaddhatri – which is dedicated to Krishna – and beautiful Shiva, with its five spires overlooking the lake.

SIXTY DOME MOSQUE  
BAGERHAT - 15TH CENTURY

Deep in the south west, venture to Bagerhat to see the Shat Gombuj Masjid, or Sixty Dome Mosque; also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is the largest brick-built mosque in Bangladesh. Built in the mid-15th century by saint-general Khan Jahan Ali, it was used by the Muslim community around the swampy Sundarbands. Interestingly, despite its name, this vast mosque boasts 77 domes, though if you count, it does have exactly 60 pillars.



LALBAGH FORT,  
DHAKA - 17TH CENTURY



The Mughal prince Muhammad Azam, third son of Aurangzeb started the work of the fort in 1678 during his vice-royalty in Bengal. He stayed in Bengal for 15 months. The fort remained incomplete when he was called away by his father, Aurangzeb.



# HISTORIC LANGUAGE

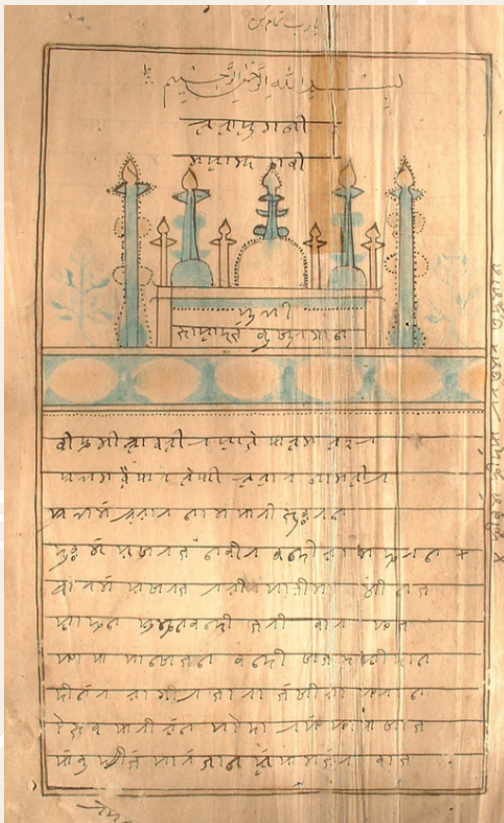
Bengali (Bangla), the national language of Bangladesh, belongs to the Indo-Aryan group of languages and is related to Sanskrit. Like Pali, however, and various other forms of Prakrit in ancient India, Bengali originated beyond the influence of the Brahman society of the Aryans. The Pala rulers of Bengal (8th to 12th century)—who were Buddhists and whose religious language was Pali—did not inhibit the emergence of a colloquial tongue known as Gaudiya Prakrit, the language from which Bengali developed.

## SILVER COIN OF DANUJAMARDDANA



Danujamardana Deva (1416-1418) Silver tanka  
Weight: 10.69 gm., Diameter: 30 mm., Die axis:  
3 o'clock  
3-line Bengali legend: sri sri da / nujamardda /  
na deva /  
3-line Bengali legend: sri chandi / charana pa /  
rayana,  
marginal legend with mint Chottogram  
(Chittagong) and Saka date 1339 (= 1417 CE)  
Ref: GG B316, Raj 305

## PUTHI SHAHADOTE BUZURGAN



The photograph on the left is the front page of the puthi 'Shahadote Buzurgan' ('Traditions of the Elders'), composed by Pir Mozir Uddin Ahmed (1863-1933) of Atuwajan, Saidpur, Sunamgonj District, Sylhet. 'Shahadote Buzurgan' is a manuscript book of 842 pages.

# HISTORIC RELIGIONS

## BUDDHISM – 200 YEARS BCE



STATUE OF BUDDHA AT  
KAMLAPUR, DHAKA

Ancient Bengal was a centre of Buddhist learning and art. Buddhist artifacts have been excavated throughout the region, particularly in Wari-Bateshwar, Chandraketugarh, Paharpur, Mahasthangarh and Mainamati. The Mauryan Empire led by Ashoka extended its sovereignty to the region in the 2nd century BCE. Ashoka played an important role in propagating Buddhism in his own empire and the wider ancient world.[2] Mauryan rule was succeeded by the Buddhist Samatata maritime kingdom in Bengal.

## HINDUISM

Hinduism in Bangladesh developed slowly in Bengal and merged with folk religion and local customs. Though Bengali Hindus revere the Vedas as their scriptures, the Gita, Chandi, Bhagavata, Ramayana and Mahabharata are more popular. Though due to the partition of India and various political and social factors, there is a dilution of the religion. The basic principles of Hinduism inform the beliefs and practices of this community. Hindus are mainly guided by Shruti, Smriti, Tantra and Purana. Similarly, the caste divisions still persist and manifest in different ways.



HINDU DEVOTEES WEARING FACE  
MASKS CELEBRATE DURGA PUJA  
FESTIVAL IN DHAKA, BANGLADESH



## CHRISTIANITY, 16TH CENTURY

The Portuguese first introduced Christianity in the Bengal region in the 16th century AD. For about two centuries missionary work was carried on mainly by two Roman Catholic orders: the Jesuits and the Augustinians. In 1598-9, the Jesuits established a school and a hospital at Hughli where the Portuguese had obtained permission from Emperor Akbar to settle. The Jesuits remained in Bengal until the late 18th century. But it was the Augustinians who were responsible for the propagation of Christian activity. They established a monastery in Hughli in 1599, and it is from here they spread out to other locations, including Dhaka. By about 1630, there were 7000 Christians at Hughli, consisting of Portuguese, their Eurasian descendants, and converts, including slaves.

HOLY ROSERY CHURCH –  
1599 AD

## ISLAM

Islam came to Bengal comparatively late. Within about one hundred years of its advent, Islam penetrated into north western India, and Arab traders came into contact with the coastal regions of India, including Bengal. But it took about five hundred years for Muslim political power to reach Bengal. According to unconfirmed traditions, some Muslim Sufi-saints came to Bengal even before the political conquest, but Islam actually entered in full force with the Turkish conquest towards the beginning of the 13th century. Bangladesh today is a Muslim-majority country where it is estimated that 90% of the population is Muslim.



MUSLIMS OFFER FRIDAY PRAYERS IN  
FRONT OF BAITUL MUKARRAM,  
BANGLADESH'S NATIONAL MOSQUE,  
DURING THE HOLY FASTING MONTH  
OF RAMADAN IN DHAKA

# COLONIAL TIMES

COLONIAL PERIOD  
(1757-1947)



The East India Company (EIC) started trading in and from Bengal, specifically Kolkata, from the early 17th century. The EIC went on to ruling over a significant portion of India whilst extracting wealth through trade and commerce. The company's establishment in Kolkata and its subsequent state it built in the Bengal was one of the first events of its kind in the age of overseas expansions.

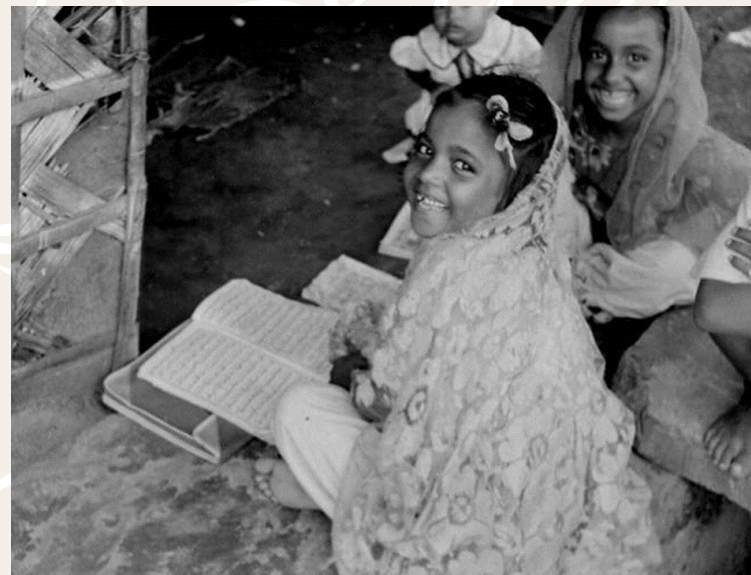
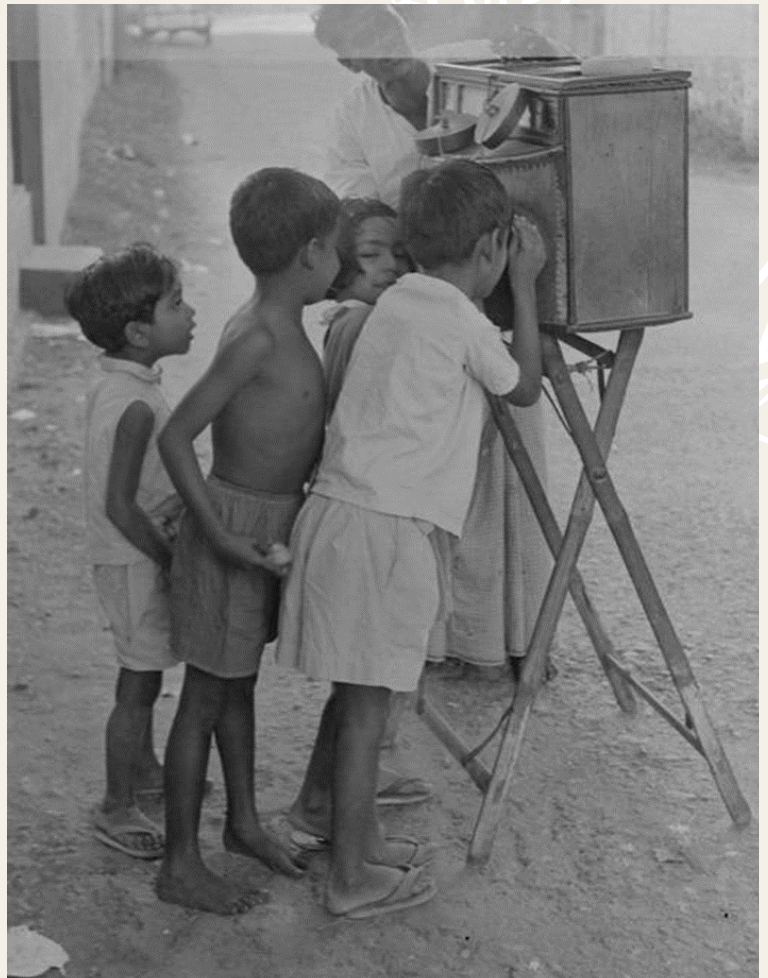


As European settlements were established, locals were employed as guards to protect company trading posts and participate in ceremonials. As the number of trading posts increased, these guards were more formally organised into companies led by British officers. Three independent forces emerged and became known as presidency armies and the troops as sepoys (a corruption of the Hindi sipahi, or soldier). Regular British troops also were incorporated into the presidency armies. In 1748, the three armies were grouped under a single commander in chief and organised, armed, uniformed, and trained by British officers



# PRE INDEPENDENCE

EAST PAKISTAN  
(1947)







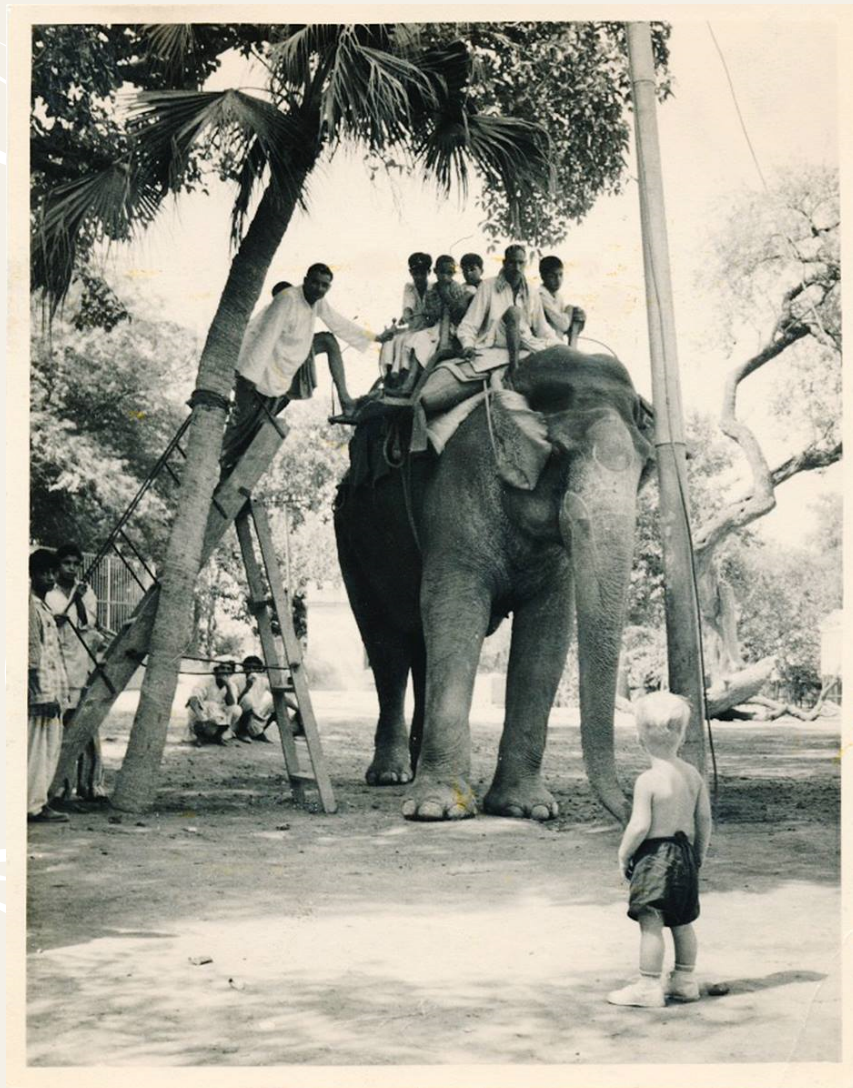
East Pakistan was home to 55% of Pakistan's population. The largest ethnic group of the province were Bengalis, who in turn were the largest ethnic group in Pakistan. Bengali Muslims formed the predominant majority, followed by Bengali Hindus, Bengali Buddhists and Bengali Christians.

East Pakistan was home to immigrant Muslims from across the Indian subcontinent, including West Bengal, Bihar, Sindh, Gujarat, the Northwest Frontier Province, Assam, Orissa, the Punjab and Kerala. A small Armenian and Jewish minority resided in East Pakistan.

In the 1960s, British photographer Roger Gwynn came to Bangladesh as a volunteer for the non-governmental Service Civil International.

He visited various parts of the country, which was then East Pakistan, and took photographs.

Recently, some of his photos of were republished on a Facebook page called Bangladesh Old Photo Archive and went viral among Bangladeshi users.





# LANGUAGE PROTEST

## THE BENGALI LANGUAGE MOVEMENT (1952)

The Bengali language movement was a political movement in former East Bengal (renamed East Pakistan in 1952) advocating the recognition of the Bengali language as an official language of the then-Dominion of Pakistan to allow its use in government affairs, the continuation of its use as a medium of education, its use in media, currency and stamps, and to maintain its writing in the Bengali script.



The Bengali Language Movement (also referred to as the Language Movement) consisted of protests by Bengalis to demand the inclusion of Bengali as one of the officially state-recognised languages. This demand was at the fore, as Urdu was declared the official language to represent both wings of Pakistan, even though Bengali Muslims did not speak Urdu. The central government responded to the protests by banning meetings outside in large groups. The movement reached its peak on 21 February 1952, when the police shot students by Dhaka University for continuing their protests against the imposition of Urdu. This confrontation led to multiple killings of student demonstrators.

# EMERGING LEADERS

SHEIKH MUJIBUR  
1920 - 1975

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur (1920-1975)  
Father of the nation and first president of Bangladesh (26 March 1971 to 11 January 1972).

Sheikh Mujib is credited with leading the successful campaign for Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan. He is revered in Bangladesh with the honourific title of "Bangabandhu" (Bôngobondhu "Friend of Bengal") which is used around the world.

He was a founding member and eventual leader of the Awami League, founded in 1949 as an East Pakistan-based political party in Pakistan.

Mujib is considered to have been a fundamental figure in the efforts to gain political autonomy for East Pakistan and later as the central figure behind the Bangladesh Liberation Movement and the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971.







TAJUDDIN AHMAD  
1925 - 1975

Tajuddin Ahmad was a Bengali statesman. He led the Provisional Government of Bangladesh as its prime minister during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and is regarded as one of the most instrumental figures in the birth of Bangladesh.

SYED NAZRUL  
1925 - 1975

Syed Nazrul Islam who served as the acting President of Bangladesh in the absence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman during our glorious Liberation War in 1971.





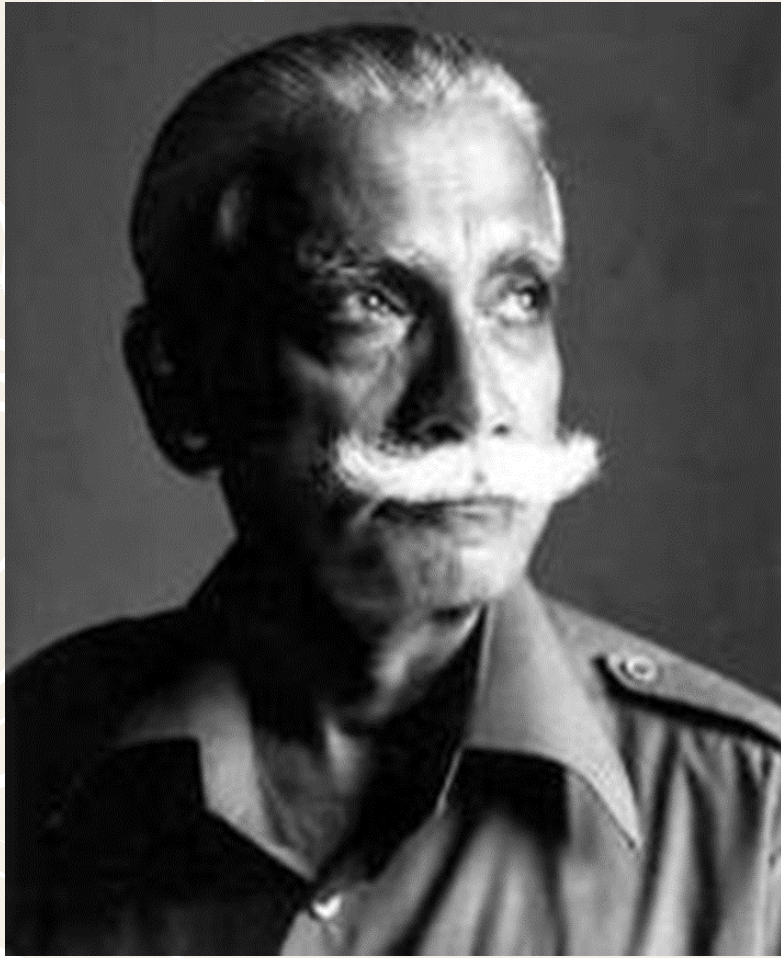
MANSUR ALI  
1925 - 1975

Mansur Ali played an important role in the liberation movement, particularly the 6 point programme put forward by Banglabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Ali was elected a member of the Provincial Assembly from Pabna in 1970. He was the Finance Minister in the cabinet of the Bangladesh government in exile, and played a vital role in organising the War of Liberation. Following independence in 1971, Mansur Ali was the Minister for Communication, and then the post of Minister for Home Affairs and Communication in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's cabinet.

ABUL HASNAT MUHAMMAD  
KAMARUZZAMAN  
1923 - 1975

Kamaruzzaman joined the Awami League in 1956. He was elected to the National Assembly of Pakistan in 1962, 1965 and again in 1970. He rose to national party leadership posts in the late 1960s, becoming a close ally of Mujib. During the Bangladesh Liberation War, Kamaruzzaman served as the minister of Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation in the provisional government of Bangladesh formed in Mujibnagar. he won the election for national parliament in Rajshahi in 1973





MUHAMMAD ATAUL GONI OSMANI  
1918 - 1984

Muhammad Ataul Goni Osmani, also known as Bangabir (the Hero of Bengal), was a Bengali military leader.

Osmani's career spanned five decades, beginning with service in the British Indian Army in 1939.

He fought in the Burma Campaign during World War II. After the Partition of India in 1947, he joined the Pakistan Army and served in the East Bengal Regiment, retiring as a colonel in 1967.

Osmani joined the Provisional Government of Bangladesh in 1971 as the commander-in-chief of the nascent Bangladesh Forces. Regarded as the founder of the Bangladesh Armed Forces, Osmani retired as a four-star general from the Bangladesh Army in 1972.





# LIBERATION WAR

The Bangladesh Liberation War, also known as the Bangladesh War of Independence, or simply the Liberation War in Bangladesh, was a revolution and armed conflict sparked by the rise of the Bengali nationalist and self-determination movement in erstwhile East Pakistan which resulted in the independence of Bangladesh.

CHILDREN AMIDST SHELLS



The war began when the Pakistani military junta based in West Pakistan under the orders of Yahya Khan launched Operation Searchlight against the people of East Pakistan on the night of 25 March 1971, initiating the Bangladesh war. It pursued the systematic annihilation of nationalist Bengali civilians, students, intelligentsia, religious minorities and armed personnel.

APRIL 1971: PEOPLE FLEEING TO INDIA  
THROUGH LAKSHAM, COMILLA. EAST  
PAKISTAN.

The junta annulled the results of the 1970 elections and arrested Prime minister-designate Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The war ended on 16 December 1971 when the military forces of West Pakistan that were in Bangladesh surrendered in what remains to date the largest surrender of soldiers since the Second World War.





SOLDIERS MOVING ON A  
TRUCK THROUGH A  
CROWDED ROAD IN  
BANGLADESH IN 1971.



FIELD MARSHAL SAM  
MANEKSHAW OF THE  
INDIAN ARMY  
ADDRESSES TROOPS  
WITH HELMETS, DURING  
LIBERATION WAR.  
BANGLADESH. 1971





NEW MARKET OF  
KUSHTIA, DESTROYED  
BY ALLIED BOMBING.  
DECEMBER 11, 1971..

A SOLDIER CARRIES HIS  
INJURED COMRADE AT  
HALUAGHAT,  
MYMENSINGH.  
BANGLADESH. DECEMBER  
6, 1971.





A VIOLENT  
PROCESSION AGAINST  
THE GOVERNMENT OF  
YAHYA KHAN IN  
MYMENSINGH.  
BANGLADESH. APRIL,  
1971.



A QUEUE FOR FOOD  
AT A REFUGEE  
CAMP. BANGLADESH.  
1971





ARMS TRAINING  
BEING HELD IN ONE  
OF THE MILITARY  
CAMPS

A PAKISTANI  
SOLDIER BEATING  
UP AN UNARMED  
PEOPLE





# INDEPENDENCE

DECEMBER 1971

General Niazi of the occupation forces was the first to sign the document of surrender, sitting beside him was General Aurora of the Indian army. They are flanked by commander of the Bangladesh Air Force, A.K. Khondokar and Indian Army officers. Bangladesh. December 16, 1971.



Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on his return to Bangladesh from Pakistan. 10th January 1972

A group of ecstatic freedom fighters or Muktijoddhas in Shahid Minar, after Liberation War. Dhaka, Bangladesh. December 16, 1971



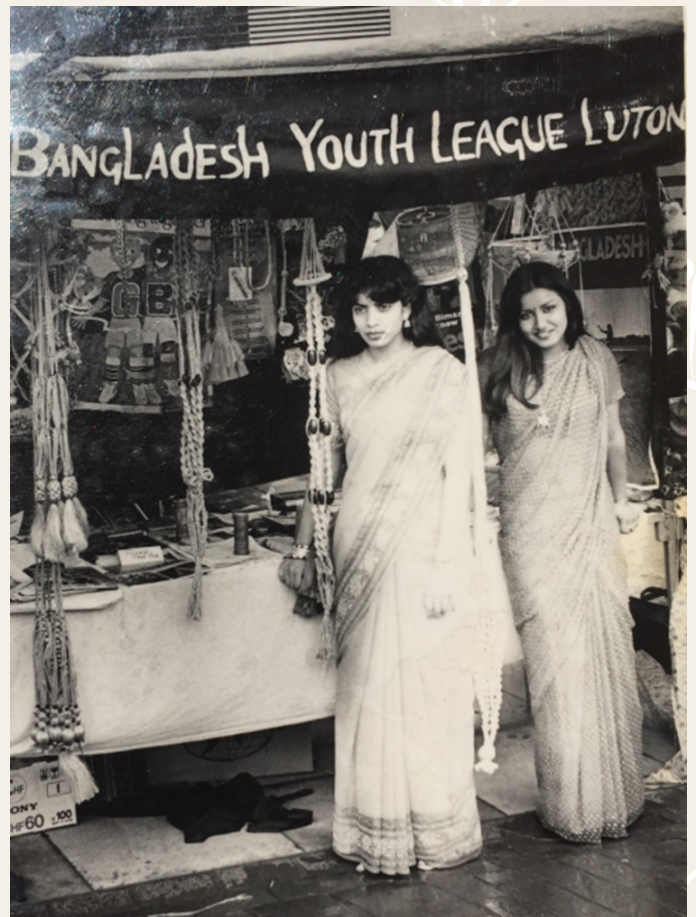
Mukti Bahini army celebrate in the back of their truck after the Pakistani army surrendered



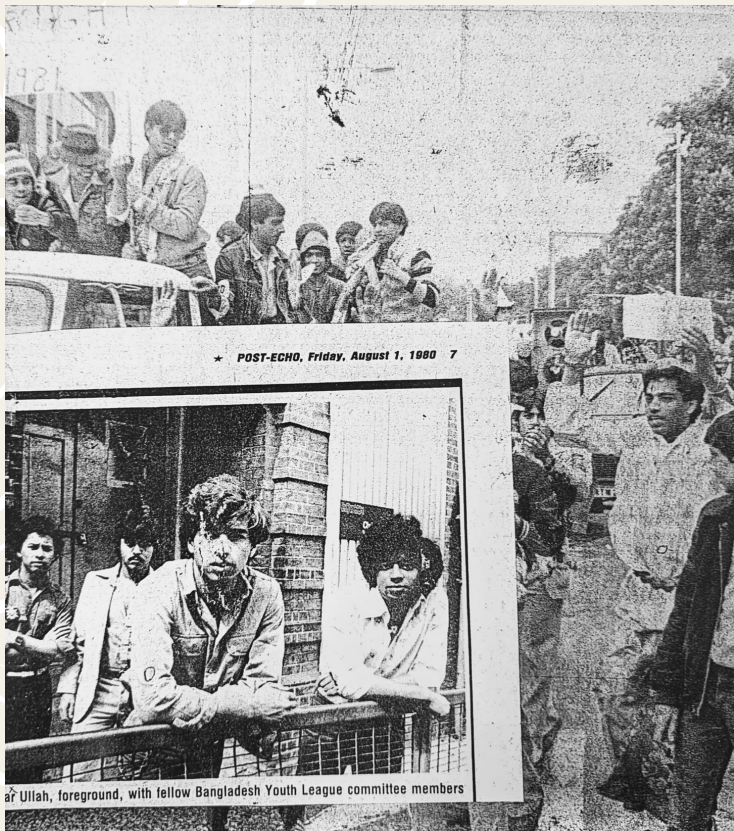
# MIGRATION TO LUTON

Bangladeshis are one of the largest immigrant communities in the United Kingdom. Significant numbers of ethnic Bengali peoples, particularly from Sylhet, arrived as early as the seventeenth century, mostly as lascar seamen working on ships. Many Bengalis were also arriving as citizens of East Pakistan following the end of World War Two. Following the founding of Bangladesh in 1971, a large immigration to Britain took place during the 1970s, leading to the establishment of a British Bangladeshi community.

Bangladeshis were encouraged to move to Britain during that decade because of changes in immigration laws, natural disasters such as the Bhola cyclone, the Bangladesh Liberation War against Pakistan, and the desire to escape poverty.







Majority of the Sylheti men, who initially arrived, believed in the myth of return and that they would accumulate enough wealth and return to Bangladesh. However, following the Liberation War and the desire for a better life, many realised they were here to stay and starting bringing their families over to the UK





