

Aminul Hoque

My Story

# About me

Dr Aminul Hoque MBE, @BrIslam2015

Lecturer/ researcher in Education, Goldsmiths College

PhD – 2011

Key research interests: identity, youth cultures, multiculturalism, race, migration studies, Islamic feminism

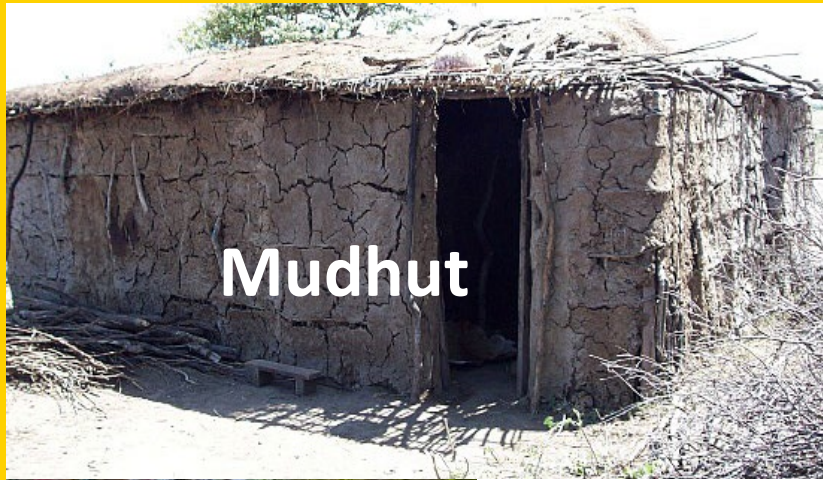
Key publications: *British-Islamic Identity: Third Generation Bangladeshis from East London* (2015)

Presenter for *A Very British History: British Bangladeshis*, BBC4, Feb 2020

Londoner, dad, gardener, football-mad







Mudhut



Estate life



Sussex



Intrepid traveler



Goldsmiths  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



California



Suburbia



Goldsmiths  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



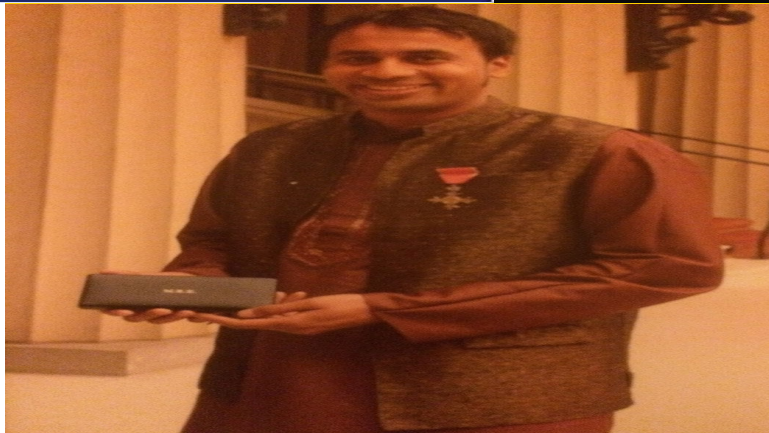
THE  INDEPENDENT

theguardian

**BRITISH-ISLAMIC  
IDENTITY:** THIRD GENERATION  
BANGLADESHIS FROM  
EAST LONDON  
AMINUL HOQUE



 ROYAL  
MUSEUMS  
GREENWICH





## A Very British History: British Bangladeshis, BBC4, Feb 2020

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p082bnt8>





# About the doc...

- The migration histories of British Bangladeshis
- Highlighting important issues of racism, housing, 1971 War, the role of women etc.
- Celebrates the many contributions Bangladeshis have made to wider British society
- Gave a platform for our ancestors to tell THEIR stories
- Going back to the ‘motherland’ with my British-born children
- Positive international attention to our wonderful British Bangladeshi community

# 'Pick of the day' @Telegraph, @guardian, @thetimes

## 'Critic's choice' @theipaper

## 'Soul-stirring' @Telegraph

Television & radio

Last night on television Anita Singh

### A soul-stirring personal history of immigration



London lives: Aminul Hoque and his father, Shamsul, in *A Very British History*

**W**here is home? For many of us it is the place we live in now, but also the place where we grew up, and perhaps a faraway place where we have rarely set foot but where our family roots lie. For Aminul Hoque, an academic and presenter of this episode of *A Very British History* (BBC Four), it is the comfortable house in Walthamstow he shares with his wife and three daughters. It is also a council estate in the East End, where he spent his childhood playing football and trying not to get his head kicked in on the way to school. And it is Bangladesh, the country where he was born and lived for only three years before coming to Britain, but which exerts a strong emotional pull.

This engaging BBC Four series has previously examined Britain's Irish and Chinese communities. Like the Channel 4 series *My Grandfather's War*, it takes one personal story as a way into a wider history. Hoque's story begins with his father, Shamsul, who came alone to Britain in 1957 at the age of 26 from what was then East Pakistan. He was among a wave of Bangladesh's migrants who, as citizens of the Commonwealth, were granted work visas to find jobs in a Britain that needed industrial workers. Hoque

worked briefly in a Yorkshire cotton mill before moving to London, where he found employment in the Spitalfields rag trade.

One of the strengths of the series is the archive footage, which here documented a fascinating period of social change. We saw the men at work in garment factories; I would have loved the programme makers to have found the well-spoken gentleman who clearly hoped for better than menial work. "Actually, I don't like it. But circumstances compel me," he lamented.

The programme did trace some characters, however, including Rajamuddin Jalal. He was filmed in the 1970s being visited by a business housing officer who lashed away his request for housing. Luckily, Jalal was offered a place to stay by a local woman, Cathy Forrester, too kindly, they remain friends today.

Other Londoners were not so welcoming. The National Front was at its peak in the 1970s. Hoque and his cousin recalled the daily harassment they faced: a teacher had to collect Bangladesh children from the estate and walk them to school each morning to protect them from being beaten up. The tensions culminated in the battle of Brick Lane following the 1978 murder of a young textile worker, Altab Ali, who had abandoned the Bangladesh

community into fighting back against the racism. The East End park where All died is now named after him.

The documentary felt especially timely after the Brexit election. Prit Patel, unveiled plans to limit English and a salary of more than £25,000 a year. The vast majority of Bangladesh arrivals would not have passed this test.

Hoque reminded us that thousands of Bangladesh were interned during the First and Second World Wars, and many of them gave their lives to Britain. The generation that arrived in the 1950s, and those that came after, toiled in factories and lived in grim conditions – sometimes with up to eight men sharing a bedroom, using the toilet in shifts – while sending money home. When their families began arriving, the women would work as seamstresses.

At the heart of the film was Hoque's own family story. The early hours hearing about it as a teenager when he took his uncle playing football and was confined to the living room with his father – then a distant and "strange person" to him – for company. Mr Hoque no longer talks about his life, and the boy was captivated. In doing so, the older story was performing the same function as this worthwhile documentary, shining a light on the disadvantaged community (those who were not the lucky ones being our national love affair with curry, as Bangladesh is a regular stop-off for the majority of what we know as "Indian restaurants").

Hoque took his daughters and his father on a trip to Bangladesh – and visited the house built with Shamsul's savings – hoping that they would connect with their roots (when one of his daughters asked how she was communicating with cousins who spoke no English, he replied brightly "Google Translate"). He also dug out the old passport on which his mother had arrived in Britain with him and a sibling, setting him on a path to a British life. "It's quite soul-stirring," Hoque said, a description that could be applied to his film.

**A Very British History** ★★★★★

television & radio

### I'm hooked on this gentle, funny refugee story

Carol Midgley TV review



**Home** Channel 4 ★★★★★

**A Very British History** BBC Four ★★★★★

**T**wo programmes about "immigration", two different takes. *Home*, the comedy about a British family who found a Syrian refugee in the boot of their car and befriended him, is obviously not a documentary. Yet it can make a profound point about racism and bigotry in one 60-second scene when it might take a factual programme 20 minutes.

If you haven't yet caught up with it, please know that you are denying yourself a quiet classic. Because it

walks a seemingly impossible tightrope with dignity toes. It is not perfect, but it is frequently poignant without being sentimental, political without sermonising and satirical without being cruel. And it is consistently funny. Not always laugh out loud, mind, but quietly so. That is a lot to pull off.

Last week it took an ugly scene in which a woman on a bus scarily berated a man for not speaking English ("You're in our country now") and defused it into pure comedy. This week Sami (Youssef Kerkour) bought new clothes from a charity shop where the woman behind the counter had Syrian refugee posters on the wall, yet was cruel and judgemental to his host Katy (Rebekah Statton).

Sami, bearded, lonely and homesick, had registered with a GP and asked the nurse for a date while trying to shield the stool sample in his hand. She liked him because she had seen him handle the racist incident on the bus the week before. It earned something depressing into something life-affirming. You don't often see that in a half-hour comedy.

*A Very British History* was not about refugees, but did address the racism that Bangladesh people faced when they came to Britain in the 1950s and 1970s for work. Aminul Hoque, a university academic who arrived here in 1980 aged three to join

his father, who had gone ahead to work in east London's rag trade and send money home to his family close the archive footage well.

It showed in grim imagery the angry National Front marches, the broken windows, the abuse and the man beaten up just for being Bangladeshi. When another man, Altab Ali, was stabbed to death in 1978 it mobilised the Bangladeshi community to rise and refuse to be treated like lesser citizens. Hoque took his three daughters back to Sylhet province in Bangladesh to show where he had come from and to urge them to maintain links, and you could see how important it was to him.

It wasn't just thorny racism with placards that the 1970s Bangladesh had to contend with. Equally instructive was that footage in which a prison housing officer in pinks and too much blue eyeshadow looked at a young Bangladeshi worker seeking social housing all if he were something she had trodden in. She spoke to him as if he were an irritant, a nuisance who didn't know his place. She was almost a sitcom character, ironically.

But he was taken in by a young white woman living near Brick Lane in London and they were still friends. "I enjoyed having you," she told him. "Thank you," he said. In this small, individual case at least, humanity had prevailed.

Wednesday

### Pick of the Day

#### A Very British History

BBC Four, 9pm

Academic Aminul Hoque has spent his career working on the intersections of immigrant identity and in this sensitive film, he recounts his experiences growing up as a Bangladeshi-born child in 1980s east London and learning about his father's own journey – like many other Bengalis of his generation – to England in the 60s. Now taking his own children back to Bangladesh, Hoque questions the effects generational assimilation has had on their sense of what constitutes home.



**Saving Lives at Sea** BBC Two, 8pm

Telling the extraordinary story of the nationwide volunteers who make up the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.



# Searching for Secrets: London. *Smithsonian Channel, USA, June 2021*





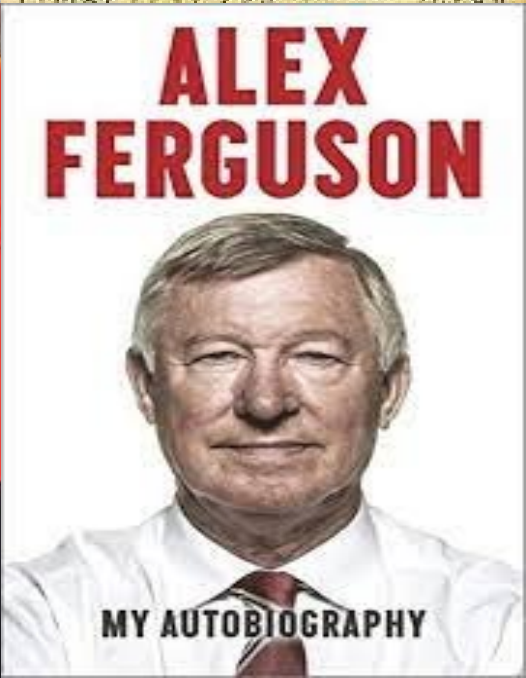
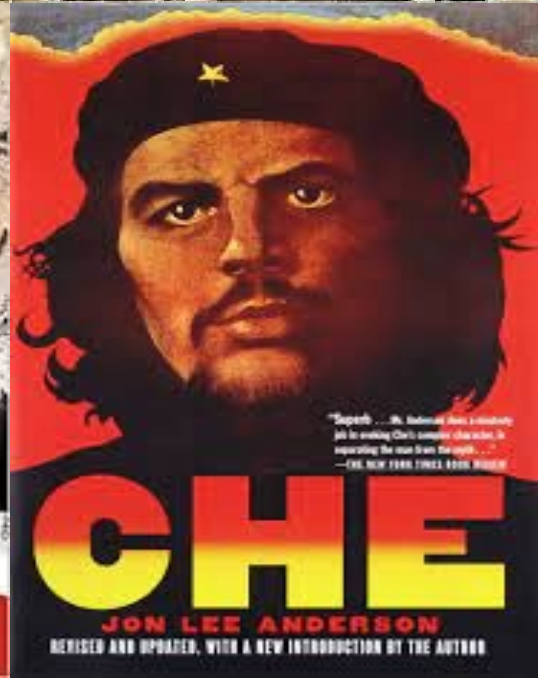
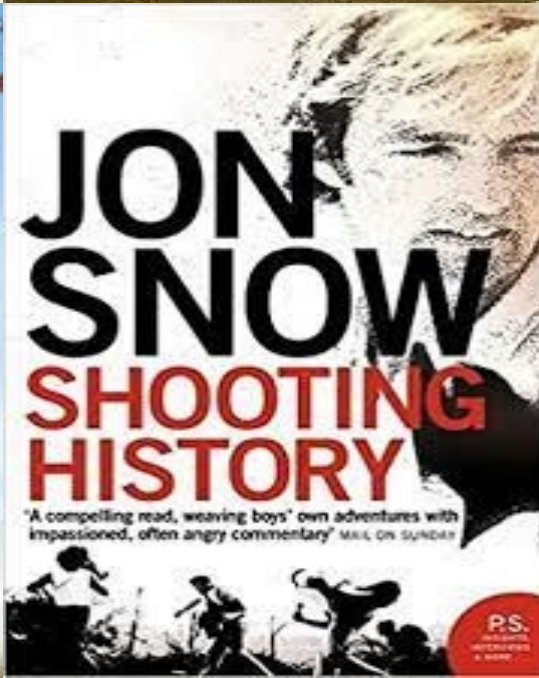
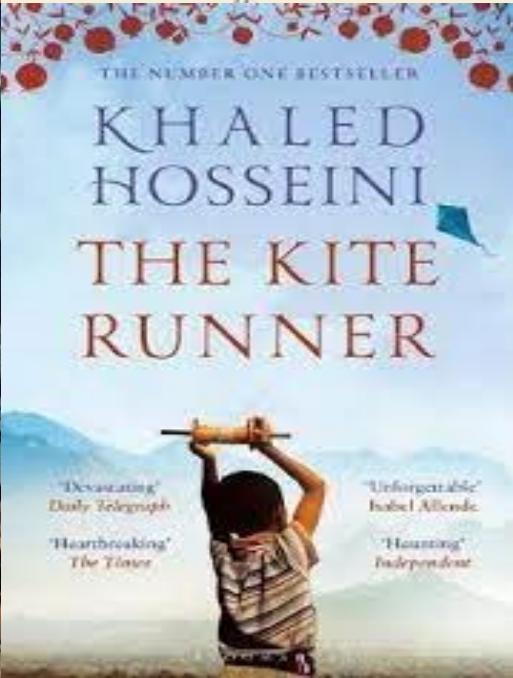
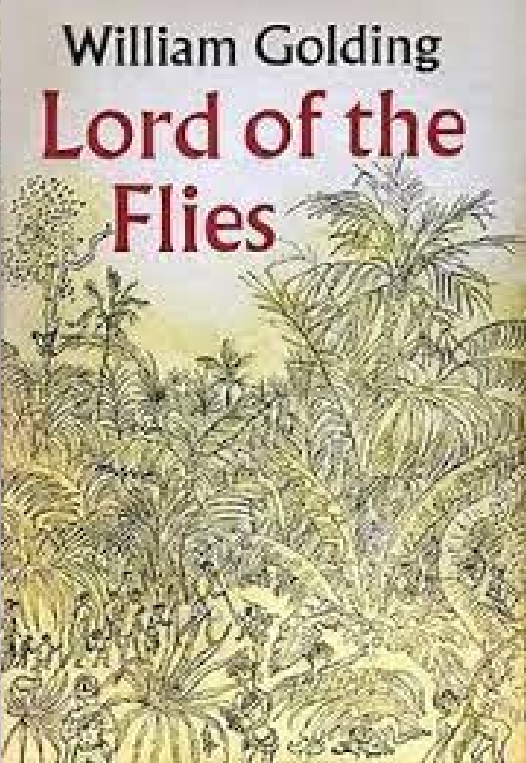
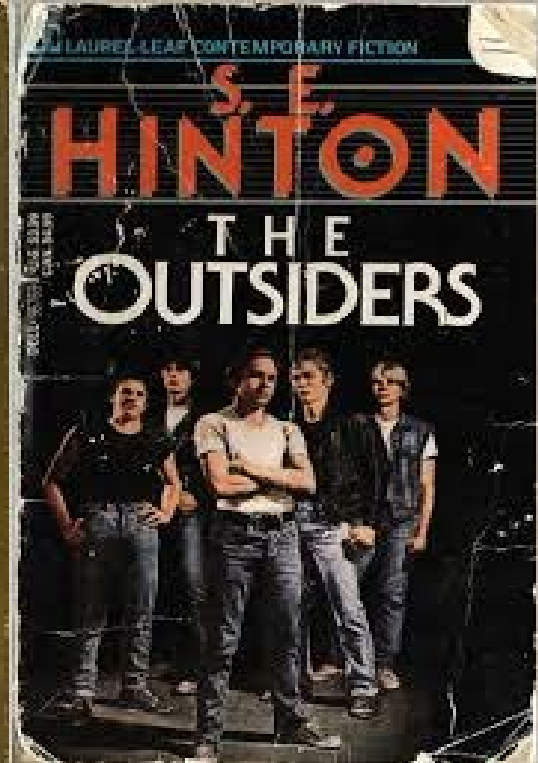
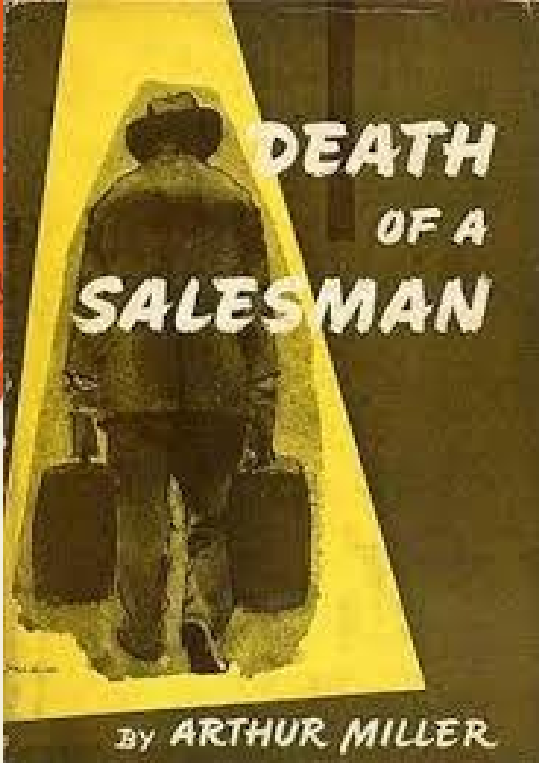
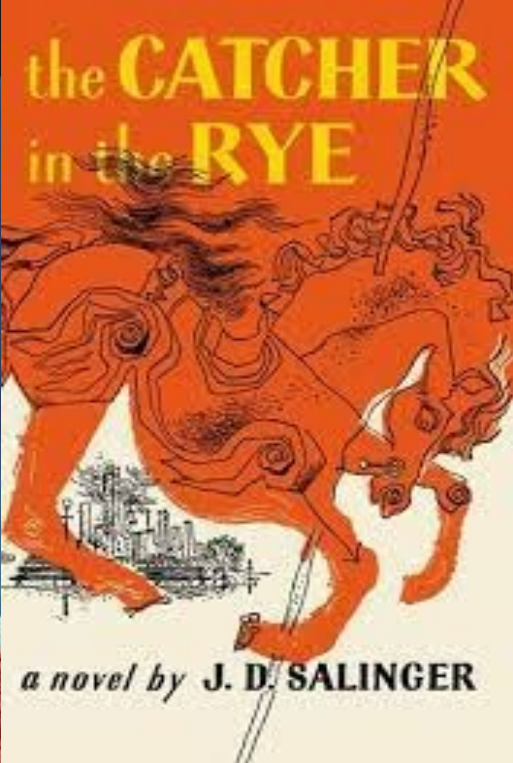
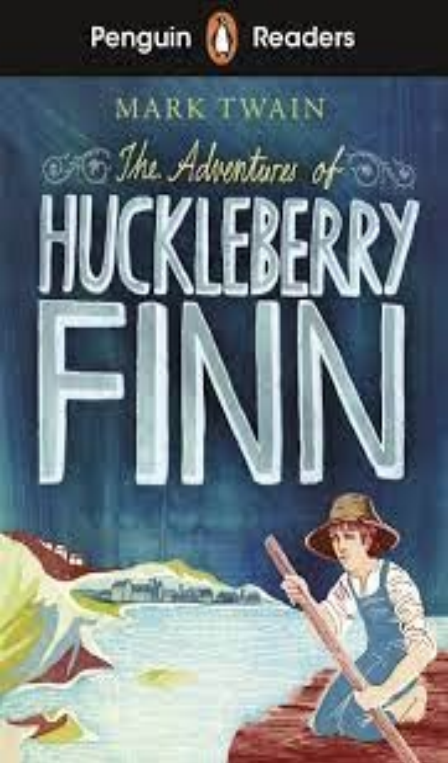


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Travelling... Football.....



**I'VE ALWAYS BELIEVED  
THAT IF YOU PUT IN THE  
WORK, THE RESULTS WILL  
COME.**

-Michael Jordan-  
[RICHANDFAMOUSQUOTES.TUMBLR.COM](http://RICHANDFAMOUSQUOTES.TUMBLR.COM)





#AskQuestions

#Travel

#BroadenYourHorizons

#Watch&ReadTheNews

#PositiveIdentity

#Confidence

#The power of networking

#Listen, be humble, reflect, learn

**Good luck.**

**All the best.**

**Stay in touch**

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# Questions?