



Shanghati Literary Society

Shanghati Literary Society was founded in 1989 to promote, enhance and expand the quantity and quality of Bengali literary activities in London. Since its inception the organisation has been organising regular arts and cultural events, including an annual poetry festival in East London, which attracts more than 1,000 participants and poets from around the world, including special guests invited from Bangladesh and West Bengal.

On 1st August 2015 Shanghati is organising the 25th Anniversary Poetry Festival at the Toynbee Hall, which will be a very special event with a larger than usual colourful street procession, more varieties of music, poetry recitations and drama performances.

Since 2012 the organisation's work expanded with support from external funding, which enabled it to run a number of unique community cohesion projects called Vision for Tolerance and Combatting Prejudice. Currently it is delivering a new project called Community Writers Festival, which includes training on poetry, drawing and short story writing and a competition.

Poetry in East End Bengali Migrant's Life 1960-1980: *Poetry the Inseparable Part of Bengali Life*

Recently, the organisation has been successful in securing funds from the Heritage Lottery Funds to deliver an amazing 18 months long project called *Poetry in East End Bengali Migrant's Life 1960-1980: Poetry the Inseparable Part of Bengali Life*. The project aims to help reveal the rich heritage of poetry in East London during 1960-80, with a particular focus on the Bengali community, covering a decade before and after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, designed to understand the impacts of the tumultuous birth of a new country on Bengali poetry writing. Poetry by non-Bengalis will help bring out the totality of the world of poetry in East London.

Poetry writing, reading and performance have been a very strong element of Bengali life for a long time. Not only professional or well-known poets participate in this art but many ordinary people in their spare time or during moments of inspiration write down verses on blank sheets of paper. Migrants who came to the UK from Bangladesh or Bengal part of East Pakistan before Bangladesh was created in 1971 resorted to and engaged in poetry in order to seek comfort, express and share thoughts and experiences, engage in cultural activities, explore romantic feelings, etc.

Many ordinary people sent their poems to Bengali newspapers and magazines to be published and some even spent money from their pockets to get their own books of short poetry printed, which they tried to sell through small shops or at community events or just gave them out free of charge. There are literally hundreds of such poets who produced works of different qualities and some of their works are probably in family archives or somewhere in their homes undisturbed for a long time and others may be found by going through old Bengali newspapers and community magazines and newsletters.

There was also a strong tradition of poetry within the mainstream communities of East London during the same period. For example, Basement Writers Group brought together many individuals and collectively spearheaded poetry activities in the area with regular performances and many publications.

From the 1960s onwards East London experienced major changes, caused by post war immigration, experiences of and fight against racism, decline of local industries, closure of docks, rising unemployment, resistance by local people, etc. The inclusion of poetry by non-Bengalis in the project will help develop an understanding of the shared and different worlds lived and experienced by the diverse communities of East London.

The project will recruit twelve volunteers and provide them with training on oral history, curatorial presentations and archival research. The volunteers will record oral history of forty community poets, collect 100 Bengali and English poems, and help produce a printed book and an illustrated exhibition, which will be showcased in the project end celebration at the Bancroft Local History Library and Archives.