

# young rеbеlѕ



The Story of the Southall Youth Movement



**Cover photo:** A contingent of SYM members demonstrating against Enoch Powell's visit to Hounslow

## **Introduction**

I was born and raised in Southall, this is my town, this is where I've grown up, this is where my parents taught me everything I know and this is where I went to school. My parents told me many stories about riots that happened in Southall in the late 70s and early 80s and the atrocities that my community, the Asian community, had to face at the hands of groups like the National Front. **Aashish**

I was mainly interested in taking part in the project because I wanted to find out the history of the Southall Youth Movement. My father took part in it as a participant, he had a very active role and I wanted to see what it was like and the struggles he went through. **Maninder**

My granddad was involved in the Southall Youth Movement. He wasn't part of it but he contributed in marches and he'd been in fights with the National Front. **Arjun**

This project is more than just making a documentary, learning how to film, it was more about keeping a bit of history going. **Prabhjot**

I think one of the biggest reasons why I got involved in this project is because during the 1970s my father came from Tanzania and moved straight into Southall, so I'm aware of some of the racism he faced during that particular period of time. **Nisha**

## **A BRIEF HISTORY**

### **Southall in the 1960s**

From 1960 onwards a large influx of Asian families began to settle in Southall to join Asian men who had come to work during the 1950s and 1960s.

These first Asian children started going to local Junior schools and to Featherstone High School, Southall and later on to Dormers Wells High School.

White parents protested and campaigned against the increasing number of Asian immigrant children coming into their local primary schools. In 1965 the Government, in response to pressure from white parents, introduced a racist policy of “bussing” to deal with the problem of the “increasing numbers of children from the Commonwealth, particularly from Indian sub-continent” settling in areas such as Southall. Immigrant children of Asian and African-Caribbean parentage were “bussed” out from Southall to schools all over the London Borough of Ealing for nearly 10 years.

No Discrimination  
in Education

We Want  
MORE SCHOOLS

We want Action  
not promises

THE  
MAYO  
CLINIC  
PAPER



## **Asian Young People's Early Experiences**

This first generation to attend schools in England experienced racial abuse, racist attacks and discrimination as a daily feature of life both in the playground and on the way to and from school as well as on the streets

While their parents struggled and worked to provide for their families, Asian children and young people were learning to live with and cope in a different environment without any family or community support against this overt racism.

Their personal experiences shattered the myths and beliefs, instilled in them by their parents, that the English were tolerant, fair and just and that the police, educational and other public institutions and professionals be afforded almost unchallengeable respect.

Unlike the muted response of their elders to racial discrimination and attacks and their aspirations to “go back home one day”, Asian young people who had gone through schooling saw themselves equal to their white counterparts, viewed Britain as their new home and “were here to stay”. They were not prepared to accept nor “turn a blind eye” to the constant attacks and discrimination and they demanded equal rights and justice.

Asian young people began to organise and forge networks and alliances between different schools and within neighbourhoods to defend and protect themselves against racist attacks and to support each other on common social and cultural problems affecting them both within the Asian and the wider communities.

These networks and alliances were the embryonic infrastructure that young people would later consolidate and formalise to build The Southall Youth Movement (SYM).



## **Murder of Gurdeep Chagger: 4th June 1976**

On 4th June 1976, Gurdeep Singh Chagger, a local student was stabbed to death by racists opposite the Dominion Cinema, Featherstone Road, Southall, in the heart of the Asian community.

Word of the murder of Gurdeep Chagger spread through local youth networks triggering incidents of sporadic civil opposition and protests against the lack of response from the police and the inaction by the community “elders”, exposing the schism between Asian young people, their “elders” and the police.

Hundreds of Asian young people laid siege to and staged a mass sit-down outside Southall Police Station demanding unconditional release of all those arrested. A delegation of youth representatives along with other community “leaders” went into the police station to seek the unconditional release of their peers who had been arrested.

In an effort to diffuse the situation and disperse the Asian youth outside Southall Police Station, the youth delegation was informed that those arrested would be released unconditionally. The delegation announced this to those demonstrating and participating in the protest resulting in the action being aborted.

A few hours later it emerged that, contrary to what the community leaders and the police had indicated to the youth representatives earlier on, those arrested would in fact face criminal charges. The sense of outrage, betrayal, injustice and collusion between community leaders and police was a defining moment.

The final seed from which SYM was to emerge had been planted.





THE VICTORY

Car

SOUTHALL WINE & SPIRITS CO.  
IMPORTERS & RETAILERS  
WINE, SPIRITS & BEERS

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PANEZA

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## **The Formation of The Southall Youth Movement**

In June 1976 galvanised by the racist murder of Gurdeep Chagger and police and community leaders' inaction and apathy, a number of older youth and activists who had experienced and taken active stands against racist attacks in schools, in the workplace and on the streets, organised a series of meetings to bring together and unite youth representatives from colleges, sports teams, factories and the unemployed as well as from local neighbourhood-based groups.

These meetings crystallised into the creation of Southall Youth Movement. The first Committee of SYM was formally established consisting of Harpal Gill, Gurmail Brard, Hari Sandhu, Balraj Purewal, Sukhdev Aujla, Gurmukh Dhillon, Gian Atwal and Jagga Thind.

SYM adopted as its insignia a torch with a burning flame rising from it, inspired by the ideals of the Olympics of 1976 and protests by black athletes against racism in the USA. SYM recognised that it had to light and hold the torch, act as the symbol of and inspire the new generation of Asians across the country to stand against racism and discrimination.

## **The Aims of The Southall Youth Movement**

- to give a voice to the aspirations and concerns of young people in Southall
- to fight and challenge racial discrimination, racism and demand justice and equality
- to ensure that Asian young people spoke for and on behalf of themselves

HAGGAR

PAINTS  
BRICKS  
TILING TILES  
WOOD TILES

CLEANERS

LONDON

ERATIVE SOCIETY



**23 April 1979:**

### **National Front Meeting in Southall & the Murder of Blair Peach**

On 23 April 1979, the National Front (NF), a party nationally known for advocating racist views and policies, was allowed by Ealing Council to hold a meeting in the heart of the Asian community at Southall Town Hall, despite mass community appeals and opposition.

The established Asian community leadership planned a peaceful “Gandhi-style” sit down in front of Southall Town Hall prior to the NF meeting at around 6:30pm.

SYM planned to set up a vigil outside Southall Police Station as early as 12 noon. The police, however, thwarted all SYM efforts by first stopping and arresting members of its first contingent heading towards the town hall, forcing them to keep walking on the side streets near the Town Hall and then arresting those wearing “steward bands”.

At around 1:30pm police arrested key SYM activists directly opposite the Town Hall provoking the first reaction of the day from SYM supporters and leading to the police sealing off The Broadway and all access to Southall Town Hall. By 3:00pm SYM had mobilised a large number of its supporters in response to these arrests and, in order to contain them, police deployed shields, batons and snatch squads, making numerous arrests and the first full scale battle between the police and Asian youth ensued.

The police, in a militaristic operation, sealed off Southall from all directions for the whole of the day restricting entry even to those residents who were trying to get home from work. Pockets of residential areas were cordoned off at all entry points into Southall until late evening.

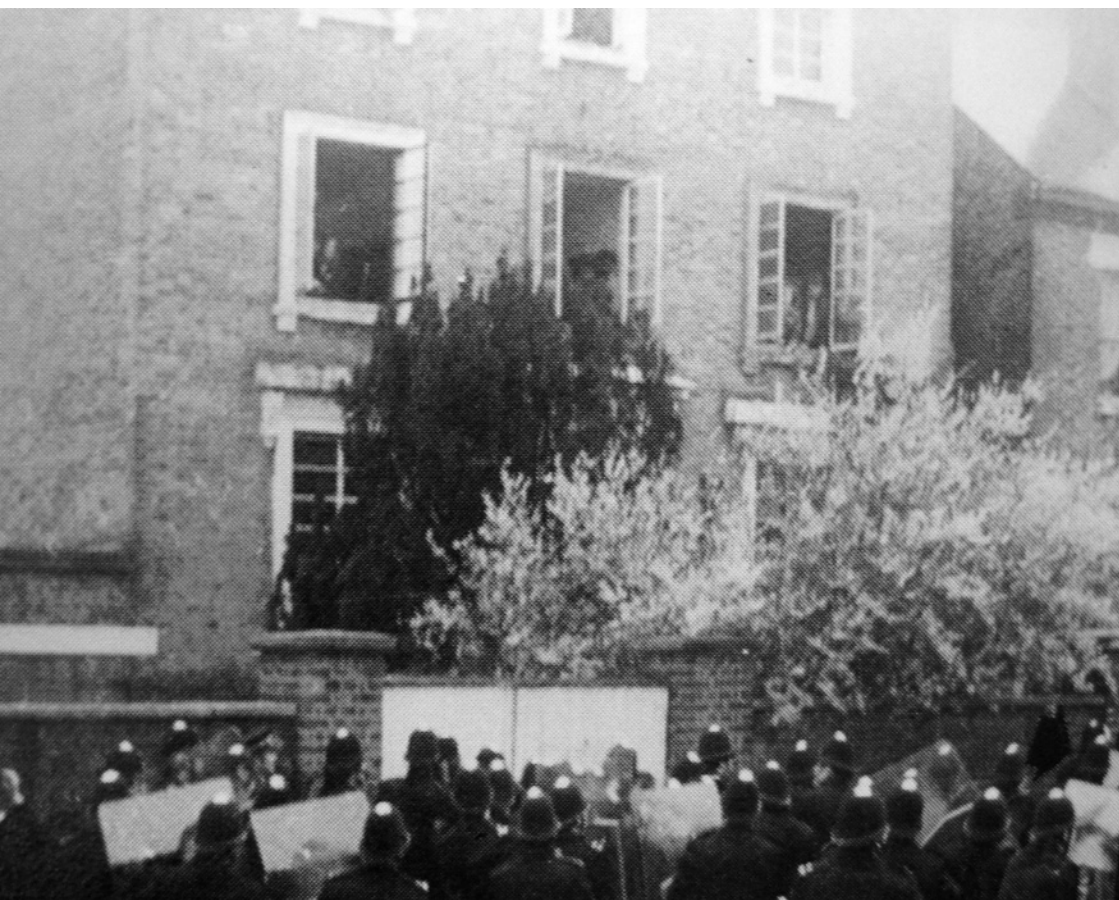


By around 5:30pm SYM regrouped and made a push to reach Southall Town Hall from the High Street end, near Southall Park and Park View Road. Police responded violently, unleashing horses and forcing protestors into Park View Road, a cul de sac, and into Southall Park. Many protestors seeking a safe refuge from the police, entered 6 Park View Road, a building run by People's Unite housing a youth centre. Police surrounded the Centre and all occupants were physically ejected and subjected to a gauntlet of police using batons, resulting in numerous severe injuries. Simultaneously, mounted police chased and attacked protestors in the park. The scene was reminiscent of a war zone with numerous protestors and members of the general public receiving serious injuries and many arrested.

By around 8:00pm SYM regrouped again on The Broadway side and launched a final push to reach the Town Hall. Once again the police, by now resembling an occupying force, reacted violently, attacking and not distinguishing between protestors and members of the general public.

Members of the Special Patrol Group attacked and murdered Blair Peach during this time. Over 750 people were arrested and 342 were charged. SYM organised a Southall Defence Fund and coordinated the legal defence of all the 342 defendants.

SYM representatives attended the special Stipendiary Magistrates Court, set up in Barnet, North London, where the trials of the 342 defendants were held over a period of 7 months on a daily basis. SYM coordinated the legal defence, provided moral support and arranged daily transport for all defendants to and from the court.



## **Burning of Hambrough Tavern Pub: Southall, July 1981**

Coachloads of “skinheads” and other supporters descended on Southall to watch the band The 4 Skins perform at the Hambrough Tavern Pub at the end of The Broadway. Some supporters abused and assaulted a number of Asian shopkeepers on The Broadway on their way to the pub.

SYM, alerted by local residents, coordinated an immediate and massive response and within a matter of an hour organised a large contingent of its activists and supporters to gather outside the Hambrough Tavern. Inside the Hambrough Tavern supporters of The 4 Skins could be seen dancing in a frenzy, making Nazi salutes and NF gestures through the pub windows in a deliberate attempt to provoke the Asian youth gathered outside.

The police’s failure to listen to appeals by SYM representatives that they should close this incendiary and provocative event and take the racists out of their community forced SYM supporters to push towards the Hambrough Tavern to physically force the skinheads out of the pub.

A pitched battle ensued between the police and Asian youth in which over 200 young Asians forced the police almost over the bridge and away from the pub and then burnt down the Hambrough Tavern.

In a remarkable show of solidarity, many residents smashed down their own front walls and passed bricks to the Asian youth and gave refuge to those injured.

Some skinheads fleeing out of the burning Hambrough Tavern hid behind the police shields while throwing bricks and stones at the Asian youth. Other skinheads went on a rampage on Delaware Road, immediately behind the



police line, terrorising Asian families and smashing their windows whilst the police were engaged in battle immediately outside the pub.

The burnt out remains of the Hambrough Tavern became a shrine of community resistance to racist attacks and a scene of jubilation within the local community.

The Burning of the Hambrough Tavern sent a signal across the country that Southall was a no-go area to racists and that the Asian community would stand up and defend itself.




## **Southall Youth Movement Legacy**

### **Inspiring Asian Youth Movements across the Country**

SYM demands for justice and equality, its determination to fight back against racist attacks and discrimination, and its ability to unite and mobilise Asian youth shattered the myth of the Asian communities as ‘passive and timid’. The resistance of SYM captured the imagination of Asian & African-Caribbean communities across the country, acting as a catalyst to other Asian youth to organise, defend their communities and to assert their rights.

SYM mobilised to defend Asian communities subjected to racist attacks across London and actively supported other Asian youth groups in other regions. SYM mobilised its members to defend Brick Lane in London’s East End and the Bangladeshi community from the weekly attacks on their area, where skinheads and racists would descend in large numbers and rampage down Brick Lane, attacking Bangladeshi people and smashing up their businesses. Bangladeshi Youth Movement was born as a direct result of SYM members physically going to Brick Lane to defend the Bangladeshi community to repel racist attacks.

Inspired by SYM, a new generation of Asian young people and leaders were empowered, stood up and began to assert their rights as equal citizens and Asian Youth Movements emerged throughout the country, in London, Bradford, Birmingham, Manchester, East London and other regions. The torch with burning flame was now firmly in the hands of Asian youth and it shone the light of justice, equal rights, the right to respect and dignity. Asian young people were here to stay and here to fight.



**SOUTHALL YOUTH MOVEMENT  
REMEMBERS  
BLAIR PEACH  
AND  
GURDID SINGH CHAGGA**

## **SYM Youth Centre: Activities & Services**

SYM squatted a derelict building at 12 Featherstone Road, Southall in late 1977 and began turning the building into a youth centre.

Balraj Purewal, General Secretary of SYM, became its first full-time worker in mid 1978 and SYM embarked on a programme to address the social, educational, economic and cultural issues affecting Asian and African-Caribbean young people alienated from society.

From 1978 SYM offered and coordinated a range of activities including:

- Drop-in centre 7 days a week at its youth centre at 12 Featherstone Road
- advice and information
- legal advice and representation to those facing problems with police
- running sports teams including football and kabaadi teams
- a weightlifting club (which moved and currently still operates from the old Sikh temple building at The Green, Southall)
- space for local bands, music rehearsal including for Misty in Roots (later to set up People's Unite and which moved into 6 Park View Road, Southall)
- running of the Indian Youth Club at Tudor Road Middle school three evenings a week
- employment based support
- youth leadership training and mentoring for young people
- a campaign for the establishment of a youth centre resulting in the redevelopment of Dominion Cinema into a Community Centre

SYM mobilised for countless anti-racism demonstrations against pubs, private and political organisations espousing racist views or practices across London. It organised marches to commemorate the anniversaries of the death of Gurdeep Chagger and Blair Peach in Southall. It led a national demonstration in Southall with the Anti Nazi League and SYM members publicly burnt, near the place where Gurdeep Chager was murdered, a racist sign “For sale to an English family only” displayed by an individual outside his house in Coventry.

Throughout its existence and particularly during the period 1976 to 1983, SYM relentlessly mobilised huge numbers of Asian youth, supported victims, communities and groups against racist attacks, discrimination and racism. Its role and achievements will go in the annals of the history of Southall, of Asian communities responses and in anti-racist struggles.

**Balraj Purewal,**  
**founder member of Southall Youth Movement**



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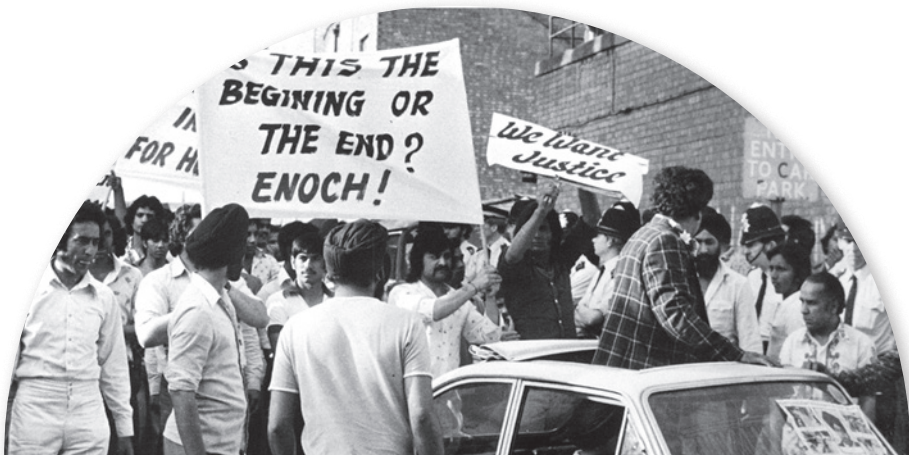
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For more information and to view the film online: **[www.southall-inspired.com](http://www.southall-inspired.com)**



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The Story of the Southall Youth Movement

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*The Asian Health Agency in partnership with digital:works and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.*

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