

BRIEF PROFILE OF PIONEERS

LATE RAMNIKLAL SOLANKI, CBE (1931-2020)

Founder and Editor-in-Chief, Asian Media Group



Sri Ramniklal Solanki CBE pioneered the news coverage of south Asians in the UK.

Solanki realised that the British media were either ignoring or misreporting south Asian communities, who were arriving in their thousands. So, he handwrote a newspaper in Gujarati, which he typeset, and then he went up and down the country by train, knocked door-to-door selling subscriptions while distributing his publication to south Asian corner shops. From there sprang a publishing empire. He was the founder and editor-in-chief of *Garavi Gujarat* newsweekly and *Asian Media Group*.

This pioneer would go on to help the police solve a murder when detectives could not gain the trust of the victim's community.

When he passed away in March 2020, the former chancellor, Sajid Javid, the current home secretary, Priti Patel, the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, led glowing tributes.

His ethos that everyone deserves a voice, regardless of religion, politics or class, is reflected in the substantial publishing empire now run by his sons Kalpesh and Shailesh. Solanki's legacy includes titles such as *Eastern Eye*, the UK's number south Asian newspaper, *Pharmacy Business*, *Asian Hospitality*, *Asian Trader*, and *the GG2 Power List*.

LATE SARDAR HARNAM SINGH ROUDH (1923 – 1988)

Community champion, entrepreneur



Sardar Harnam Singh Roudh's contribution, prominence and respect in his chosen Southampton home led to his being called the "father" of the city's Sikh community.

With just £3 in his pocket, Singh Roudh moved to England alone in 1951. All he had with him was a holdall of clothes. Within a decade, this pioneer opened Southampton's first Indian and West Indian Continental store.

But Singh Roudh will be best remembered for his work in making sure the Sikh community was not only recognised but thrived in a growing multi-cultural country. Alongside other community leaders at the time, Singh Roudh played an instrumental role in establishing the *Gurdwara Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib*, the city's first ethnic minority place of worship. At this invaluable community resource, he served as its general secretary, president, and a voluntary priest.

When he passed away, the local newspaper, the Daily Echo, described the event in January 1988 as "the biggest funeral Southampton has witnessed". The service, said the paper, reflected "all the pomp and ceremony usually reserved for monarchs and civic leaders".

THE RIGHT HON'BLE THE LORD DHOLAKIA OBE PC JP DL

Co-Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat Peers, House of Lords



Navnit Dholakia's contribution to race relations in the UK are second to none. Born in Tanzania, he arrived in Britain to study at Brighton Technical College, now Brighton University. He joined the Liberal Party by accident – party activists were meeting at the first pub the young Dholakia had visited. They needed a quorum, and the rest is history.

Dholakia became the first south Asian Liberal councillor in Brighton. He met his wife, Ann, during his first job as a medical laboratory technician at Southlands Hospital in Shoreham-by-Sea. The young man asked her to accompany him to the mayoral ball. They faced immense racism, but they battled it to become a team which put campaigning equality at the heart of everything they did.

Dholakia was instrumental in helping introduce the 1976 Race Relations Act. Since that year, he held various roles as member of the Commission for Racial Equality, Sussex Police Authority, Police Complaints Authority and Howard League for Penal Reform. Currently, he is the chair of National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and the Race Issues Advisory Committee.

In 1997, Dholakia was appointed a life peer as Baron Dholakia of Waltham Brooks in the County of West Sussex. He sits on the Liberal Democrat benches in the House of Lords, using his position to campaign for human rights. In 2004, Dholakia was elected a joint deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords. The peer was the first and only Liberal-Democrat of colour to be appointed to this role. He toured the country shoring up support for his political home.

THE RIGHT HON'BLE SIR SAJID JAVID

Former Chancellor of the Exchequer, United Kingdom



Sir Sajid Javid is a pioneer who has held two of the highest offices of state – chancellor and home secretary. He is the rare politician who puts personal loyalty above personal gain. Javid famously resigned as Chancellor of the Exchequer when the then prime minister, Boris Johnson, ordered him to sack his team of political aides. He said, “no self-respecting minister” could accept such a condition.

He supported the former England and Yorkshire cricketer, Azeem Rafiq, posting on X (formerly Twitter) “‘P***’ is not banter. Heads should roll at Yorkshire CCC.”

Javid was born in Rochdale but raised in Bristol. At 18, he joined the Conservative Party, under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. After graduating from university, he became a banker. By the time he was 25, he was appointed to be a vice president at Chase Manhattan Bank. Javid later moved to Deutsche Bank in London to help build its business in emerging market countries. But he left behind a lucrative career in the City in the summer of 2009 for public service.

Famously, when Sadiq Khan beat the then Tory, Zac Goldsmith, to become mayor of London, Javid posted, “[F]rom one son of a Pakistani bus driver to another, congratulations.”

In December 2022, he announced "after much reflection" that he would not be contesting his Worcestershire seat of Bromsgrove in the next general election.

MEERA SYAL, CBE

Actress, Comedian, Writer



Meera Syal CBE is a national treasure who has pioneered the acceptability of south Asians to enter the world of arts and entertainment.

Syal's debut novel, *Anita and Me*, a semi-autobiography about her life growing up in a mining village in the Midlands in the late 1960s, was made into a film. It is now a GCSE set text for several exam boards. She came to prominence in the 1990s where she not only wrote *Bhaji on the Beach*, but was one of the creators of the comedy series, *Goodness Gracious Me*. That was followed by the international Emmy-award winning comedy *The Kumars at No 42*. The polymath has appeared in *Dr Who*, *Holby City* and reached number one with Gareth Gates and her co-stars from *The Kumars* with *Spirit in the Sky*, the Comic Relief single.

Syal loves the theatre. On stage she starred in the West End in *Annie* and *Shirley Valentine*. She also wrote the script for the AR Rahman and Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Bombay Dreams*. Syal played a central role in the Disney movie, *Spin*, the first time the organisation has featured a south Asian family as its central characters.

DR. CHAAND NAGPAUL CBE

General Practitioner, Former Chair Council of British Medical Association



In 2017, Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE was the first chair of colour for the doctors' union, the British Medical Association (BMA). Even though he stood down in 2022, he remains a vocal and prominent campaigner for patients' rights, especially when it comes to racial disparities in the health sector.

Nagpaul continues to campaign for better health by being a board member of the NHS Race and Health Observatory, an independent body which identifies and tackles health inequalities among patients, communities, and workforces of colour.

For decades this family doctor has been taking on governments to recognise and reward the work of GPs. But his impact has never been in doubt. As early as 2013, the influential *Health Service Journal* listed him as the 25th most powerful person in the English NHS and included him in its list of 100 top clinical leaders in 2014. The following year the north London doctor was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for services to primary care.

Nagpaul's tenure marked the global pandemic, and he led the way in holding the government to account. It was he who highlighted that people of colour were disproportionately contracting and dying from Covid. From the very beginning of the first lockdown, he urged ministers and NHS leaders to protect health workers on the frontline. Nagpaul also criticised them for "not having the backs" of black Asian minority ethnic (BAME) staff.

NEIL BASU QPM

Former Assistant Commissioner (Specialist Operations), Metropolitan Police



In the world of policing, Neil Basu stood out. He was Britain's top south Asian cop, and Basu became a pioneer when he was appointed as the national police lead on counter terrorism – the first person of colour to do that role. As an assistant commissioner in the Metropolitan Police, he held the rank of chief constable.

He argued passionately among his fellow police chiefs that the profession should admit it was institutionally racist. But, as Basu revealed, he was bitterly disappointed when they did not agree, and that hastened his retirement after 30 years as an officer. Even today, he has not given up the fight to persuade those in his former profession to open their eyes to racial bias affecting minority communities.

His brief was one of the toughest in the police, Basu told *Pioneers* that even though the intelligence service and forces thwarted many terrorist attacks, it haunts him that he was not able to prevent atrocities on his watch. The former head of counter terrorism joined the Met in 1992, and he stayed there, under various roles, until his retirement. Basu was a police liaison during Stephen Lawrence, which found his force institutionally racist over its handling of the investigation into the murder of the black teenager.

Basu said he faced more racism outside the force than inside it. As the son of a mixed-race couple – his Bengali doctor father met his Welsh nurse mother in the early 1960s – he recalled that they would be stoned when they held hands walking through the streets. In 2019, he told MPs he had spent his life dealing with racism. He made his comments while giving evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee which was examining a controversial proposal from a cross-party group of MPs, that wanted to define Islamophobia as a "type of racism".

Basu remains in great demand as an expert on UK policing.

POPPY JAMAN OBE

Mental Health Advocate, Social Entrepreneur, Global CEO of MindForward Alliance



Poppy Jaman OBE is a third generation Briton of Bangladeshi origin who has made no secret of her struggles with depression from an early age.

Poppy left school at 16, was married at 17 and developed postnatal anxiety and depression at 20. She described it as a forced marriage. Jaman worked for the NHS, and her bosses realised her talent. So, she resumed her education and graduated with an MBA, becoming an inspirational advocate for mental health and wellbeing of people from diverse communities.

Jaman is committed to making "mental health first aid" a global priority, on a par with physical first aid.

She founded the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England in 2009, which evolved from a small social enterprise to a fast growing, commercially successful Community Interest Company providing skills training, workplace wellbeing and mental health awareness promotion programmes.

In 2017, the Financial Times recognised MHFA as "one of the fastest growing SMEs in Europe".

She was awarded an OBE in 2018, in recognition of her outstanding services to people with mental health issues. She featured in the 2019 FT list of Game Changers, and the same year Jaman was the Woman of the Year at the GG2 Culture and Diversity Leadership awards.

AZEEM RAFIQ

English cricketer, formerly at Yorkshire County Cricket Club



Azeem Rafiq's story shocked the cricketing world. The racism he faced, and the appalling behaviour of his former club, Yorkshire, was the subject of several sport select committee hearings. The former professional cricketer is an inspiring and pioneering anti-racism campaigner who had led the way in changing the face of England and Wales cricket.

Rafiq's brave actions forced an overhaul of the toxic culture and behaviour both present at Yorkshire and in the sport more widely. As a result of his whistle blowing, other cricketers found the courage to stand up and recount their experiences of racism in the sport.

As a cricketer, Rafiq was known as a shrewd tactician and performed particularly well in the shorter formats of the game. From 2009-10, he was captain of the England under-19 cricket team, playing alongside numerous players that went on to be part of the 2019 World Cup Winning team. He played as a spinning all-rounder during his two spells at Yorkshire County Cricket Club, between 2008-14 and 2016-18.

Rafiq is a passionate speaker on equality, diversity and inclusion, and shares his story of fighting racism in the workplace to help identify and root out institutional racism. His book, *"It's Not Banter, It's Racism: What Cricket's Dirty Secret Reveals About Our Society"*, is due to be published in June.

SOUTHALL BLACK SISTERS

Women's Rights Activists



In the history in the UK, the Southall Black Sisters (SBS) symbolises the continued struggle of south Asian and black women's rights. Over the past four decades, this third-sector body has challenged all forms of abuse perpetrated against women.

SBS has pioneered the empowerment of women to gain more control over their lives and live without fear, as well as asserting their rights to justice, equality and freedom.

Pragna Patel, Meena Patel and Hannana Siddiqui are the pioneers of this campaign group.

Throughout its existence, SBS has been brave in tackling unpalatable truths in the south Asian communities. For example, it highlighted the then hidden issues of domestic violence, forced marriage and so-called honour-based killings when others failed to do so.

In 1980, SBS successfully campaigned to stop "virginity tests" being carried out on Asian women arriving in Britain to marry their husbands. The organisation also stopped the "one-year rule", where a husband and wife had to live together for at least one year before the immigrant spouse was allowed to apply for residency in Britain.
