

BRITISH BANGLADESHI BREAKTHROUGH WOMEN IN POLITICS

NUSHRAT MOSTAFA

PHOTOS: COURTESY

Over the last twelve months we have seen a major breakthrough in British politics with the rise of many female MPs as well as ethnic minority ministers in the houses of parliament and the House of Lords. Following the 2015 general election, we have seen a successful outcome in the running of the government.

Amongst the national celebrations there were also local celebrations; close to home in London. A reason to celebrate as most people would call this



Rushanara Ali

achievement a 'political breakthrough' for the British Bangladeshi community.

Rushanara Ali, has been elected twice as Member of Parliament for the Bethnal Green and Bow constituency since the 2010 general election, which in itself demonstrates great victory amongst her rivals. Her political success stems from her educational background. Rushanara was educated at Mulberry school for girls and then went onto studying at Tower Hamlets College before embarking on her Philosophy, Politics and Economics degree at the University of Oxford. She had further developed her political career by becoming part of the shadow minister team until in 2015 where she resigned as shadow minister of International Development due to the vote for military action against the so-called 'Islamic State' forces; which she heavily opposed upon.

Dr Rupa Huq was elected as Member of Parliament for Ealing Central and Acton. Her political career started early after studying Social and Political Sciences and Law at Cambridge University. She became heavily involved in campaigning for the Labour party and also was Deputy Mayor of Ealing before becoming elected as the representative of parliament. She also obtained a doctorate from the University of East London and then

became a senior lecturer for Sociology and Criminology at Kingston University London; demonstrating her versatility in other fields other than just politics.

Tulip Siddique was elected to be the Labour party representative for the Hampstead and Kilburn constituency. She had previously stood to be a member of Camden council in which she stood up



Dr Rupa Huq



Tulip Siddique

for the voices of her neighbourhood and helped with issues surrounding government cuts and saving the local libraries. She is currently involved heavily within her community with having been assigned various roles such as being a governor to many schools as well as trustees' to local organisations. Politics for Tulip is second nature as she is the niece of the current Bangladeshi Prime Minister – Sheikh Hasina.

There has been another successful British Bangladeshi woman who has sustained a good reputation in the political field. **Manzila Pola Uddin**, known as Baroness Uddin was appointed to be a member of the House of Lords in 1998 and has become the first Muslim and second Asian woman to be a part of this. She has been able to represent British Muslim women in a positive light and will undoubtedly continue to do so in her position in the House of Lords.

Throughout her political career she has been able to build up a lot of support from the local Muslim community and many see her as an ideal role model to young Muslim females in order to succeed in the professional field.

The participation of Asian people in British politics dates back to the 19th century. With Dadabhai Naoroji having been the first Asian Member of Parliament (MP) to be elected in the House of Commons which occurred in the 1892 elections. He stood to represent the Liberal Democratic Party which was the



Manzila Pola Uddin



Nadia Shah

first stepping stone into continuing the involvement of British Asians in the field of politics. From this historical achievement came the sustained success of the Asian community in British politics for the forthcoming centuries.

The newly appointed Mayor of Camden was a Bangladeshi female; the first in political history. **Nadia Shah** was given the position during the town hall ceremony which led her to becoming the new face to represent the residents of Camden. From a young age Mayor Shah has been involved within the local community, this has been demonstrated by her on-going involvement with the council. Now she can continue to help shape the local community with the added responsibility of being the new mayor.

Yet another British Bangladeshi female excel within politics having not come from a political background. **Sabina Akhtar** has become the new Deputy

Speaker for Tower Hamlets council. She had previously been part of the main Tower Hamlets council, her professional background is working as a Haematologist at St George's University London.

It is not only within politics that we have seen achievement of young British Bangladeshi women, but also within other sectors such as; media, fashion as well as entertainment. Quite recently we have seen the success of British Bangladeshi **Nadiya Hussain** who was awarded the winner of 'The Great British Bake Off' in 2015. Her success had echoed all around and has lead her onto becoming a household name nationwide. Recently she had also been privileged to bake for Her Majesty The Queen's ninetieth birthday. Nadiya has been an excellent example and role model to young British Bangladeshis' in showing that we can



Sabina Akhtar



Nadiya Hussain

make a good name for ourselves as well as be able to take part and thrive within mainstream media.

With the progression of British Bangladeshi women becoming elected to represent their constituencies, it can only be said that this is just the start of a political revolution. A bigger lesson can be learnt from the successes of the three newly elected MPs, with the political turmoil in Bangladesh that is currently happening, maybe the powerful parliamentary figures can learn that leading a democratic and free-willed country does not need violence and unrest amongst civilians. Bangladesh as a country can move forward by understanding how the British House of Commons work, maybe this may create a more equal and peaceful nation who will continue to provide good for their country.

The writer is a third year Pharmacy student at the Kingston University London.

PROFILE

NATURE

PLEASURES OF ROOF TOP GARDENING

NILIMA JAHAN

To make the capital a greener city, Dhaka City Corporation (both Dhaka North City Corporation- DNCC and Dhaka South City Corporation- DSCC) has recently taken a number of environment-friendly initiatives. Of the many projects regarding massive plantation, one of the lucrative projects for its citizens is encouraging more people into rooftop gardening. The person, who will make a garden in his /her roof, will get a 10 percent holding tax rebate, and it is promised by Sayeed Khokon, Mayor, DSCC. (Source: A report by BBC Bangla)

"The rate at which our temperature is rising day by day, a garden on the roof of every house can help cool the air, by absorbing excessive carbon dioxide", believes MD Faruk Hossain, Assistant Professor, Department of Geography and Environment, University of Dhaka. "Not just that, rooftop gardens create biodiversity in nature, through the presence of different kinds of birds and the rarest species of insects", he adds.

Besides the environmental advantages, a rooftop garden can help a family to a great extent by creating a number of opportunities. If we plant several types of vegetables and fruits, it can significantly reduce our daily food costs. Furthermore, a planned and properly maintained garden on the roof can easily be a great source of earning and employment opportunities.

"If a person grows only vegetables in a 600-700 square feet roof, it is enough to meet the yearly demand of a family having 6-7 members", believes Ehteshamul Haque Mallik, President, Urban Roof Gardeners Society (URGS), and Deputy Director, Bangladesh Bank. Mallik has a 1500 square feet garden on his roof, where he has been growing a number of vegetables and local fruits for the past 15 years. After his amazing success, he founded the organisation URGS, two and a half years ago and through this, he is helping more than 500 registered members.

"We give them consultation or sometimes direct help about how we can make gardens on our roofs-- like get the soil, plant trees, or sometimes, suggest the best varieties of vegetables or fruits", he adds. This way, people who have no prior knowledge about rooftop gardening are getting involved with this and being the beneficiaries of the project, they are encouraging people around them as well.

The vegetables and fruits we grow in our garden are totally fresh and of highest nutritional value. "The size may be smaller, but I know it's totally pure as I don't use any harmful chemical in the soil", says Nabila Basher, Creative Supervisor at Grey Advertising. Nabila is also a recipe columnist at Star Lifestyle.

In big cities like Dhaka, opportunities for doing manual labour out of our routine work, are very less. But if anyone works in the garden, like- weeding the garden, watering the plants, taking care of the fruits, collecting them etc, it can help him/her live healthy and free from all kinds of stress.

Many of us have a common misconception that gardening on the rooftop may damage the roof by reducing the stability. But it is proved by many experienced rooftop gardeners that a proper and planned garden can protect the roof from all sorts of harms – like direct solar heat in summer, heat loss in winter, direct storm water and many more! If you keep your garden clean on a regular basis, and use a thick layer to keep the tubs or drums, it will no longer do any harm to your roof.

Also, a research published by the National Research Council of Canada shows that an extensive green roof reduces the daily energy demand for air conditioning in the summer by over 75 percent (Liu 2003).

A rooftop garden can be the primary way of our urban agriculture. Keeping the environment calm and cool, it can be a great source of our local food system, employment, and daily engagement with nature. Even with a small space, one can start the garden of his/her dreams. ■



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



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