

## Copyright Notice

Staff and students of this University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA Licence which allows you to:

- Access and download a copy
- Print out a copy

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this module or course of study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Title of extract: **Britain**

Name of Author: **Geaves, R.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Islam Outside the Arab World.**

**Westerlund, D. and Savnberg, I. (editors)**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Curzon**

Pages scanned: **357 - 378**

-----  
Course of Study (Module name and number): **Islam Today TRDL7062**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning:

*E. L. Ham*

Date authorised: 30.08.12

Moodle/Powerpoint

## Chapter Sixteen

# Britain

Ron Geaves

The Muslim presence in Britain is at least three centuries old and can be traced to the activities of the East India Company which recruited seamen known as 'lascars' from the subcontinent. The sailors were often taken on board ship in India for the duration of a single voyage. Consequently they found themselves stranded in British ports while they searched for a passage home. Some of the lascars formed relationships with British women and opened hostels and cafés to serve the itinerant dockside communities. These shifting settlements of seamen expanded considerably after the opening of the Suez canal in 1869 when large numbers of Yemenis and Somalis were recruited in Aden. The Yemenis, in particular, began to open boarding houses in Cardiff and South Shields and the Somalis settled in Liverpool. Numerically, the population of these two communities is currently no more than 15,000, but significantly, they were certainly the first permanent settlements of Muslims in Britain. The Yemeni community is particularly significant as it focused its development around the inspiration of a *shaykh* belonging to the Alawi Sufi order who arrived in Britain in the early twentieth century. The centres or *zawiyas* of the order began in the ports and spread inland to the Yemeni communities in Sheffield and Birmingham. This is the earliest evidence of a Muslim community achieving cohesion and stability through organised religion.

In addition to the Yemeni community the principal centres of organised Islam in the early part of the twentieth century were in Liverpool, London and Woking. These small congregations of mainly subcontinent Muslims were comprised of businessmen, members of the Indian aristocracy, students and a handful of high profile converts. These centres of religious activity often depended on the efforts of these individuals and tended to disappear when they returned to their homelands or on their death. Jørgen Nielsen notes in his book, *Muslims in Western Europe*, that for a considerable period the personal physician to Queen Victoria was a Muslim. These prominent late-nineteenth-century Muslims were responsible for the foundation of the first mosques to be established in Britain. In 1887 a Liverpool solicitor named Henry William Quilliam converted to Islam whilst travelling in Morocco. Known as Shaykh Abdullah, he organised prayers, the celebration of festivals, weddings and funerals,



The mosque in Woking (photo: Pia Karlsson, 1997).

religious evening classes, and a day school in a group of converted terraced houses in Liverpool. He wrote several essays and pamphlets on Islam and claimed to have personally converted 150 members of the British public. The Ottoman sultan appointed him *Shaykh al-Islam* (the senior member of the *ulama*, religious scholars, in a country) to Britain, and the *amir* (military commander or governor) of Afghanistan provided him with the funds to purchase a building to be used as the Islamic Institute in Liverpool.

The oldest mosque in Britain is the Shahjehan mosque built in Woking in 1889. The Hungarian orientalist, Dr Leitner, persuaded the ruler of the Indian state of Bhopal to fund a complex which was envisaged to incorporate a library, hostel and eventually a Muslim university. Only the mosque and the hostel came to fruition. After Leitner's death in 1899 the mosque fell into disuse but was purchased in 1913 by the Ahmadiyya movement to be the centre of their missionary activities in Britain. The English convert Lord Headley and a Lahore barrister, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, who had come to England in order to challenge misconceptions of Islam, were responsible for the re-emergence of the Woking centre, but they were both increasingly criticised by orthodox Sunni Muslims for their connections with the Ahmadiyya movement. However, the Woking Muslim Mission sponsored the Muslim Literary Society and carried out welfare

work on behalf of widows and orphans of Indian Muslim soldiers who died in the Second World War. Marmeduke Pickthall and Abdullah Yusef Ali, who have produced two of the best-known translations of the Quran into English, were both members of the Muslim Literary Society. After the death of Lord Headley in 1932 the management committee of the mosque broke all connections with the Ahmadiyya movement.

At the end of the First World War Lord Headley and other prominent Muslims in Britain had discussed the idea of a central mosque in London. In 1928 the London Nizamiah Trust was established but progress was very slow until the Second World War. Land was donated in Regents Park by King George VI in return for a site in Cairo intended for a new Anglican cathedral. In November 1944, the Islamic Cultural Centre was opened by the King himself. In 1947, thirteen ambassadors from Muslim nations created the Central London Mosque Trust to raise the funds to begin construction. The foundation stone was laid in 1954 but funding problems and disagreements over the design delayed the project. The mosque was finally opened in 1977 and is considered to be the most prestigious mosque in the country. However, by the time of its opening the Muslim presence in Britain had been dramatically transformed.

### The subcontinent Muslim communities

Along with populations from various parts of the Arab world, Iran, Malaysia, Turkey, Cyprus, Morocco, East and West Africa who have arrived in Britain as a result of political upheaval or as students and businessmen, since the 1950s Britain has received tens of thousands of Muslim immigrants from the subcontinent. They came in response to the host nation's demand for cheap labour and to join their family members already living in Britain. At first, only men seeking employment on offer in manufacturing industries based in the cities and towns of the West Midlands and northern England travelled to Britain. The first communities developed around the efforts of the early settlers who had worked in the merchant navy during the Second World War. Philip Lewis, in his book *Islamic Britain*, notes that by the beginning of the war seamen recruited in the subcontinent formed 20 per cent of the merchant navy. A handful of others had come to Britain inspired by the British presence in India to better themselves economically and worked as market traders or travelling salesmen selling cheap goods out of suitcases. These pioneer settlers had often married British women and were in a position to assist the newly-arriving migrants. They had all risked leaving their country of origin to find work with higher wages, often intending to return home eventually. In the early 1960s there was concern over changes in the immigration legislation which was to tighten controls on entry to the country. Some of the migrants had begun to invest their wages into cheap terraced

properties to accommodate their compatriots, but they were also experiencing some loneliness and a sense of alienation. As a consequence of these factors, the men began to reunite their families by bringing their wives and children to Britain. Others returned to the subcontinent to visit their families and returned with new brides. Once children began to be born in Britain the reality of return became more and more unlikely and therefore most have remained to form themselves into communities established around their religion, places of origin and kin networks (*biradari*).

It is difficult to determine exactly how many Muslims there are in Britain today as the census does not have a category to distinguish people by religion. Even if one should take the trouble to sift arduously through the categories of ethnic origin in the 1991 census in search of Muslim surnames, the results are likely to be highly inaccurate. Many will have refused to identify themselves by ethnic origin as they strongly identify themselves with a common Islamic identity. Others may not reveal their presence on the census as their presence in the country is not legal. To estimate the total Muslim population in Britain it is necessary to combine information derived from the ethnic category with the country of birth information for people who originate in Muslim nations. This will not include Muslims born in non-Muslim nations such as India or the number of converts amongst the Afro-Caribbean and indigenous white population. The estimate of the total Muslim population in 1991 is shown in the table below:

| Country/Region of origin       | Population |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Pakistan                       | 477,000    |
| Bangladesh                     | 163,000    |
| India                          | 134,000    |
| East Africans of Indian origin | 80,000     |
| Arab nations                   | 150,000    |
| African Muslims                | 115,000    |
| Turkish Cypriots/Turkey        | 70,000     |
| Iran                           | 50,000     |
| Malaysia                       | 30,000     |
| Other Muslim countries         | 148,000    |
| Total                          | 1,517,000  |

These figures are calculated from those reproduced in *Muslims in Britain: 1991 Census and other Statistical Sources* by Muhammad Anwar (Birmingham, 1993) and *Muslims in Western Europe* by Jørgen Nielsen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).

It is clear from these figures that the dominant Muslim presence originates from the subcontinent. Philip Lewis notes that in addition to this numerical dominance it has to be taken into account that the subcontinent

communities are not merely resident in Britain but have formed permanent communities where most of the members possess British nationality. As with all the other subcontinent communities, the first notable Pakistani presence appeared in the 1951 census. With the arrival of dependants beginning in the 1960s, the population of subcontinent Muslim migrants increased substantially. The figures shown below, which are derived from the 1981 census calculated on the basis of the place of birth of the head of the household, demonstrate this rapid growth of the Muslim population from the subcontinent.

| Census | Population |
|--------|------------|
| 1951   | 5,000      |
| 1961   | 24,900     |
| 1971   | 170,000    |
| 1981   | 360,000    |

Source: Jørgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).

The significant figure, however, is not so much the total estimate but the ever-increasing proportion of Muslims born and educated in Britain as compared to the proportion of migrants born in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The percentages for this proportion of the population are shown below.

| Census | Total population | Proportion born in Britain |
|--------|------------------|----------------------------|
| 1951   | 5,000            | —                          |
| 1961   | 24,900           | 1.2%                       |
| 1971   | 170,000          | 23.5%                      |
| 1981   | 360,000          | 37.5%                      |
| 1991   | 640,000          | 47%                        |

Source: Muhammad Anwar, *Muslims in Britain: 1991 Census and other Statistical Sources* (Birmingham, 1993) and Jørgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).

If the immigration laws continue to make it increasingly difficult for subcontinent migrants to enter Britain, this figure will increase to almost 100 per cent within the duration of one generation's lifespan as the first generation migrants die, although parents are still seeking marriage partners in their countries of origin.

The other significant statistic amongst those born in the subcontinent is the diversity of regional place of origin. This is confined, however, to a few well-defined regions. A survey carried out in 1974 showed the following regional breakdown of subcontinent Muslims.

### Britain

|                                 |               |     |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-----|
| Pakistan                        | Punjab        | 37% |
|                                 | Kashmir       | 37% |
|                                 | Karachi       | 6%  |
|                                 | N.W. Frontier | 4%  |
|                                 | Other         | 7%  |
| Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) |               | 9%  |
| India                           | Punjab        | 49% |
|                                 | Gujarat       | 16% |
|                                 | Other         | 35% |

Source: College de France, 'Muslim Immigration and Settlement in Britain', *Colloquium on Islam in Europe Today* (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Sciences Islamique, 1983).

Even these categories are too broad. The actual patterns of migration indicate that the Kashmiris originated from the district of Mirpur and the Punjabis came from the Cambellpur district. The majority of Bangladeshis were from Sylhet and the district of Chittagong. There is also a smaller but significant population of migrants from East Africa who had been brought over from India in the nineteenth century by the British as indentured labourers. The processes of chain migration have in reality limited the actual places of origin to clusters of specific villages in the above places.

Although often defined inaccurately by the receiving culture as a homogeneous minority usually labelled as Pakistani, the self-definition of the subcontinent Muslims has tended to revolve around the customs and beliefs inherited from these localised extended family groupings confined to small areas of rural Pakistan, Bangladesh and, to a lesser extent, India. It is, however, becoming increasingly difficult to pass on the values and traditions of these villages of origin to a generation born and educated in Britain who identify themselves as British Muslims. This cultural clash of values that manifests itself across the generations is central to the various dichotomies that Muslims in Britain need to resolve in order to form a communal self-identity based on religious unity.

### The growth of mosques

The strong sense of a shared faith enables individual Muslims to cope with the difficult experience of living as a minority in Britain and it could be argued that the universal symbols of Islam become even more powerful in what is perceived to be a hostile environment by many of the Muslim population. However, ethnic identity which also embraces all the symbols of religion in order to affirm itself becomes an important factor too. There can be no doubt that the Muslim migrants passed through a stage of entrenchment in which ethnic identity was reinforced. This process can be observed in the rapid increase in the number of mosques. Nielsen (in *Muslims in Western Europe*) states that the growth of mosques in Britain

can be linked to the immigration process. The arrival of wives and families brought a dramatic increase in religious practices, and a new awareness of religious life. In 1966, there were only eighteen mosques but for the next ten years they increased at the rate of around seven mosques a year. From 1975, this annual rate of mosque registration more than doubled. This certainly reflects the developing awareness of the need for religion and a new assertiveness amongst Muslims to establish Islam in Britain. There were certainly some Muslim groups who benefitted from the Arab states' oil wealth and were able to construct purpose-built mosques in Britain's major cities, and throughout the 1990s more communities are building mosques rather than converting existing buildings. By 1985 there were 338 registered mosques in Britain and in 1997 this figure must be closer to 1,000 Muslim places of worship. It must be considered that the mosques function, however, not only as places of worship, but also as centres to maintain and reinforce shared memories, values and goals located in the place of origin. This function of the mosque is likely to slowly change as a younger generation of British Muslims take over the leadership and the older first generation migrants disappear. The mosques are more likely to become centres that reflect the needs of Muslims trying to resolve the issues of reconciling Islam's beliefs and practices with British secular life rather than maintaining shared memories of the subcontinent.

At first sight the increase in mosque numbers between 1966 and 1975 appeared to be a part of a religious revival or renewal of commitment to Islam but it is more likely that these phenomena of religion manifested themselves to reinforce ethnic or group identity. Certainly it can be observed that this gathering around Islamic symbols, which was used by the first generation migrants to sanctify the customs of their culture of origin, does not always sit easy with the younger generation of British-born Muslims. Many of them have utilised religion to attack the ethnic customs of their parents as un-Islamic. These young Muslims often seek a different kind of Islam which is freed from perceived South Asian cultural accretions. Central to the problems of Muslims in Britain is the distinction between the ideals and values of Islam on the one hand and the cultural mores of particular time-space milieus on the other.

### Organising the community

It must be remembered that no single view of Islam is held by all members of the community. The process of organising the Muslim community on a national basis is as old as its presence in Britain, but the pattern of chain migration reinforced by *biradari* networks has significantly strengthened ties to extended families that originated in small locales of Pakistan and Bangladesh. This is reflected in the ways that the community has organised



Barelwi Muslims in Birmingham, followers of *shaykh* Sufi Abdullah from Zindapir in Pakistan, on the occasion of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (photo: Ron Geaves, 1997).

itself in Britain. Virtually all the religious divisions prominent in Pakistan have their localised expression in Britain: Deobandi, Barelwi, Ahl-i Hadith, Ahl-i Quran, Jamaat al-Tabligh and the variety of organisations based on the inspiration of Jamaat-i Islami have all been successfully transplanted to Britain. Neither of the two largest movements, the Deobandis and the Barelwis, have been able to organise themselves nationally in spite of the fact that they claim the widest support amongst the subcontinent Muslims. More significant to the development of the community is the fact that the key movements and traditions have a history of mutual recrimination. Indeed, even excommunication has characterised their relationship with each other in the subcontinent and this has spilled over into Britain. There have been conflicts over control of mosques and each movement proclaims its brand of Islam as the only orthodoxy. This has resulted in the division of some small communities since the different groups are intensely suspicious of each other and do very little to integrate amongst themselves, all retaining strong links with their parent organisations in the subcontinent.

Mosques and welfare organisations proliferated throughout the 1970s and 1980s, each representing small subgroups within the community. Any attempts to create umbrella organisations to represent the community on a



The tomb and shrine of Pir Wahhab Siddiqui, a Naqshbandi *shaykh* buried in Coventry (photo: Ron Geaves, 1997).

national level were relatively unsuccessful and this is reflected in the large number of Muslim organisations in Britain. In 1986 it was estimated that there were over 4,000, mostly concerned with local welfare. Tensions between the universal and the particular are ever-present. Any move towards establishing the kind of national organisation based on the universals of Islam which would represent the whole community is likely to be seen as a critique of traditional, localised values which many Muslim migrants still hold dear as expressions of a former life in the villages where they originated.

In this context Sufism has always been a major influence in the subcontinent as well as other parts of the Muslim world although strongly opposed by organisations which assert a more orthodox brand of Islam. In particular, this has been the source of the conflict between Deobandis and Barelwis. The major Sufi orders, Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya and Chishtiyya, are all influential at a local level in Britain amongst most of the Muslim communities. The Sufi orders are found not only amongst the subcontinent communities but are also influential in the Turkish, Malaysian, West African and even some Arab communities. In the subcontinent, the *pirs*, the charismatic leaders of the Sufi orders, have

always been the bearers of regional culture and language. They have taught in the vernacular, and carried the message of Islam deep into the hearts and minds of rural people who were often illiterate. There are many *pirs* teaching in Britain and some of the prominent ones are resident in the country and beginning to have large national followings.

This custom-laden version of Islam, upheld in Britain by the Barelwis, emphasises popular devotion, the intercession of saints, *baraka* (the power to bless), shrines, tombs of holy men, peculiar powers and miracles, singing and dancing and, above all, the importance of the *pir/murid* (master/disciple) relationship. Asian food, candles, incense, rosewater offerings, holy water and amulets are all used in religious worship. Any of these may be used to cure the sick, secure the birth of male children, or protect the worshipper from magical forces such as evil *jinn*s (spirits of fire and air). Obviously this form of Islam, unique as it is to the villages of the subcontinent, evokes very powerfully for many migrants the feeling of cherished places of origin. It is debatable in what form this strand of the faith will survive beyond the generation of migrants that was born in the subcontinent. Its powerful link with the villages of the migrants' past may have no association for British-born Muslims, and they may well ally themselves with the reformist critique of the Sufi tradition. Their need to distance themselves from their parents' Asian origin and to assert their British identity may leave them disenchanted with this folk form of Islam. On the other hand, the spirituality of the Sufi path may become attractive for those seeking their fulfilment away from the materialist ethos of late-twentieth-century Britain.

It must be remembered that prior to the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Muslims had always been a minority in the subcontinent. Muslims in India long regarded themselves as separate and distinct from other religious and social groupings. The various movements mentioned above all developed strategies to deal with living alongside a Hindu majority, and later to deal with being ruled by the British. Essential to these strategies was the message of return to the basics of Islam in order to revitalise the community, which had found itself in danger of being relegated to a minor position. Many of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theological/political groups such as Deobandi, Ahl-i Hadith and Ahl-i Quran emerged in the subcontinent in response to the decline of the Muslim community and the successful spread of European culture. The central tenet of their message was a return to the fundamentals of Islam based on the Quran and Sunna, and a stripping away of anything that was seen to be cultural accretion or innovation. The influence of these groups has increased as a result of the general resurgence of Islam throughout the Muslim world.

It is not surprising that these theological/political movements have become much more influential in Britain than have the locally organised welfare organisations. The apparent emphasis on the universals of Islam,

the history of Islamic revival, and the fact that many of the first generation Muslims have existing loyalties to one or other of them, has enabled them to flourish in Britain. On the other hand, the ideas of the twentieth-century ideological movements associated with Jamaat-i Islami and other revivalist organisations are more likely to be attractive to young Muslims of both sexes born in Britain. Perhaps even more attractive is the fact these groups were formed partly in opposition to British colonialism and Western values. Muhammad Anwar points out that the relationship between Muslims and the indigenous population can best be understood against the background of the colonial encounter, and the unequal economic and political power relationships generated by colonialism both in British India and now in Britain. If this is true, then the success of these groups must be attributed to the fact they have developed historical strategies to cope with Muslims being a minority ruled over by the British. The confrontation with British colonialism and Western values has been transplanted to Britain from the subcontinent by the economic processes of capitalism. The Muslim minority of the subcontinent, once ruled by a British colonial minority, now finds a part of itself to be an economically and socially deprived minority in the land of its old rulers. The major difference here in the new situation is that the old rulers are now the majority population.

It has yet to be ascertained whether any of these revivalist organisations can really fulfil the expectations of British-born Muslims. One has to examine critically their proclamation of a culturally-free emphasis on the universals of Islam. This may have been true at the time of their foundation and within the context of their creation, but they may now be too embroiled in the history of subcontinent Muslim sectarian conflict to be of any use in helping to create a unified British Muslim community. There is a strong possibility that they are in danger of imparting divisions which developed in the history of subcontinent Islam which could seriously undermine any efforts they might make towards developing a truly native version of Islam in Britain.

Very often the ideal of the *umma* (worldwide Islamic community) is seen to be betrayed by any degree of integration with the host community. Some Muslims go as far as to question whether a truly Islamic life is even possible in the West when Muslims are in a minority. Up until now the mosques have not responded positively to the challenge of modernity. This has resulted in their inability to attract young people and a neglect of a public participation of women in religious activities. It is amongst these two groups that the search for identity is most acute.

### The intergenerational conflict

Muslims in Britain are undergoing a crucial change of self-identity amongst the British-born descendants of the original settlers. The first generation

migrants had used 'the Myth of Return' to legitimise continued adherence to the values of the homeland, and to condemn any assimilation of British cultural values as irrelevant and destructive. Most of the first generation migrants come from rural areas in the subcontinent and were not educated. They have tried to maintain a world outlook which is foreign to the values of the receiving culture. Very often this has resulted in a conservatism that even in the original homeland many would find rigid and old-fashioned. The countries of origin have undergone considerable changes since the departure of the original migrants to Britain, but they often continue to hold an emotive attachment to the way things were at the time of migration. This outlook can become idealised and mythologised; the values brought over are not allowed to be challenged. Many migrants find it difficult to understand their children who were brought up and educated in Britain. Sometimes attempts to question or break away from the parents' values is seen as corruption by the host nation's un-Islamic values and as a move towards godlessness and the disintegration of the community. The children can find it equally difficult to understand the beliefs and lifestyle of their parents.

Despite their greater contact with the values of the indigenous culture through the medium of education, the family still remains tremendously important to the majority of young subcontinent Muslims. The concept of *izzat* (family honour) acts as a powerful agent of reinforcement for the passing down and maintenance within the family of the rules and customs of the community. There are powerful emotive inhibitions against disgracing the family or letting down the family honour. The most important part of the *sharia* is family law, which insists that religious duty governs personal relations. Consequently, *izzat* is maintained and sanctified by a complicated pattern of behaviour evolved from Islam and the time-honoured customs of the family's place of origin and social status. To the older generation who find themselves struggling to maintain their ethnic/religious identity as a minority group, *izzat* becomes of great significance. Very often the particular and the universal have equal importance. Their Islam is not only based on the study of Quran and Sunna, but has been formed by the rites and ceremonies of family and village life. Religion is indistinguishable from their way of life, and these traditions are zealously guarded in the alien and often hostile environment of Britain.

There are signs that young Muslims in Britain are increasingly rejecting both assimilation into the mainstream indigenous culture and the ethnocentricity of their parents. Thus both generations are affirming the values of religion. The earlier migrants use Islam to affirm their cultural inheritance and allegiance to life in the subcontinent. Old customs and traditions are reinforced by sanctifying them as prescribed by religion. Increasingly, however, there are signs that the later generations are developing a religious awareness which has little to do with ethnic

solidarity. An attempt is taking place to discover an Islamic identity based on the universals of the faith. Some are beginning to believe that it is not enough to be born a Muslim. For them religion has to be more than an accident at birth, subservient to culture. It has to be founded on knowledge and experience. Many young Muslims in Britain are confounding their parents by their attempts to separate the essentials of the faith from cultural or historical additions. Values cherished by parents as part of their cultural and religious identity are now coming under attack, not from the expected directions of the indigenous culture, but from their children who declare them to be un-Islamic.

### The impact on women

These changes are also having an impact on Muslim women. Many Muslim women in Britain, although apparently not desiring to achieve the freedoms won by British women, are questioning traditional images of Muslim womanhood. These include gender roles, *purdah* (seclusion of women), dress-customs, the issue of work outside the home, and certain kinds of arranged marriage which are seen as typical to South Asian culture.

Initially, the arrival of Muslim women in Britain led to a consolidation of ethnic identity. Ironically, this resulted in the women themselves facing stricter rules on dress, *purdah* and employment than any other group of Asian migrant women. The fragmentation of the traditional family, the isolation created by fear of moral contamination from the receiving culture, the prestige given to *purdah* as a mark of middle-class status, and finally the climate of Britain, all had severe consequences for women. *Purdah* was not only retained but strengthened in response to insecurity and the threat perceived from 'immoral' Britain. In the process, *purdah* increasingly lost its function as protection and became a prison. Many women have not learnt to speak English, and it is not uncommon to see them using their children as interpreters when out shopping. Unlike their husbands, who come in contact with the indigenous culture through employment, or their children (both male and female) through school, many older Asian Muslim women have minimal contact with a world outside their immediate family and close relatives.

There has been a lack of encouragement for women to organise and participate fully in public religious life in Britain. In many Muslim communities there has been outright rejection of South Asian female participation in public worship and many mosques still have no facilities for women. This is particularly the case with Deobandi mosques where there is a rigid interpretation of the Hanafi school of law favoured in the subcontinent. Women often find themselves the victims of South Asian gender attitudes which are rigidly disguised as the strictures of Islam. As with the boys, although taught to recite the Quran in mosque schools, they

do not understand the Arabic and are likely to accept that everything that their parents say is according to Islamic prescriptions. The girls are often brought up to be submissive and not to confront their parents or elders. In many homes even dialogue and discussion by girls is discouraged as un-Islamic behaviour. Thus any attempt by women to challenge cultural norms concerning employment, dress, education, or marriage patterns is often attacked on the grounds that these are unalterable tenets of Islam.

South Asian men may well be afraid of the impact of Western culture on their wives and daughters, and can to some degree isolate them from contact with it. They cannot, however, isolate them from Islam and recent studies are showing that more young Muslim women are distinguishing between cultural traditions and the central tenets of Islam. Many parents and husbands have found that their religion itself is being used as an effective weapon against certain forms of ethnic oppression, as some women begin to redefine themselves and their role in society by studying the fundamentals of Islam. These women have argued that it was men, and not Islam, that had put them in a subordinate position. This new awareness has come about not only because of the need for Muslim women to redefine themselves in Britain but also because of an increased awareness of religion brought about by the resurgence of Islam worldwide. Many daughters and wives are arguing that there is no incompatibility between being British citizens and Muslim women. Dress does not have to be Asian to be in conformity with the prescriptions of the Quran. Many women are justifying the pursuit of education and careers by reference to religious ideology, arguing that their critics' understanding of Islam is outdated and narrow.

As devout Muslims, more and more young British-born women are looking to the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet for the answer to all questions. Often they find that the teachings of Islam directly contradict hallowed customs and traditions regarding the status and place of women in society. They defend both Islam and themselves from the abuses of a rigidly patriarchal society by arguing that the poor standing of women that is often associated with Islamic prescription is a cultural accretion having no basis in the Quran itself. On the contrary, they can claim that true Islam is pledged to equality of the sexes, albeit respecting the essential differences between them.

Others are discovering that the emancipation of women was apparently a matter of importance to the Prophet. They refer to his wives, particularly Khadija, who was a successful businesswoman, and Aisha, who became a stateswoman in the early years of Islam's development. They claim that 1,400 years ago women were liberated by the establishment of Islam. They were given inheritance rights, the right to keep their earnings, the right to divorce and the right to retain their own surnames. Subsequently, they argue, various cultures have superimposed their own variation of gender inequality onto Islam as it spread through Asia.

The whole issue of the rights of Muslim women born in Britain is beginning to centre upon the challenge Islam is posing both to ethnicity and Westernisation. The opposition to uncritical acceptance of Western values is central to the ideology of Islamic resurgence throughout the world. By incorporating this into their view of British life, many young Muslim women are able to feel both solidarity with the Islamic movement globally and to develop a critique towards the dominant culture's attitude towards them. At the same time they can utilise the revivalists' stance against cultural accretion entering into Islam to defend themselves against attitudes which often belong more to the traditions of the village than the teachings of the Quran. This strategy enables young Muslim women born and educated in Britain neither to feel torn between two cultures or to switch back and forth between two opposed worlds, but to find a way forward utilising their religion.

#### The dilemma of education

Having looked briefly at young people and women, it becomes apparent that the issue of education is very important amongst Muslims in Britain. Many Muslims feel uneasy about the presence of their children in British state schools since it is the place where Muslim society and British society most deeply interact. It is this interaction between values that leads Muhammad Anwar to state that young Muslims are 'caught between two cultures'.

If education is viewed as a means of cultural engineering, then it will sometimes clash with an equally powerful form of socialisation that takes place within the family. Parents themselves are often torn between their loyalty to traditional value systems incorporating religious and social authority on the one hand, and a desire to see their children succeed in the educational system on the other. Distrustful of a Western secular society which is popularly viewed as corrupt and blatantly sexually promiscuous, they attempt to counteract this influence of school by nurturing their children into the overarching belief system of Islam. This last will include views of European culture, perceptions of education, the right behaviour between the sexes and between the generations, as well as codes of moral behaviour and appearance. All of these will be reinforced by the code of *izzat*, which is likely to be imposed more on the girls than the boys. Women are put under stricter surveillance after the onset of puberty as it is considered that too much freedom will ruin a girl's reputation. Even British teaching methods based on enquiry and the development of freedom of thought is highly suspect.

The Quran or mosque school is used to support this framework of the family and its values. Several nights a week the children will attend two-hour sessions. They will be taught by rote the Arabic of the Quran, basic

religious instruction, and sometimes the mother-tongue of their parents. Usually the instruction is by the *imam* (prayer leader or qualified religious scholar), who is normally imported from the country of origin. Often he will be suspicious not only of the influence of British secular education on the children but also of the influence of their parents, whose knowledge of Islam he may not trust.

The main purpose of the mosque school is to inculcate into the children the awareness that they belong to a Muslim community. In fact, the children's education at mosque schools will ultimately depend on the calibre of the *imam* and the brand of Islam that he himself follows. Part-time religious schools run alongside the English system of education was the pattern under the British administration in colonial India. At the time it considerably disadvantaged Muslim youth, and it will continue to do so. At best it gives a very elementary knowledge of the faith; at worst it defeats its own object by turning the children against their own religion. The extra studying hours placed upon small children could well be to the detriment of their education at school. It could also create a clash of values as described by Anwar.

Some Muslims believe the solution to be the establishment of Muslim schools which teach academic subjects alongside religious instruction in Islam, and consequently there has been a proliferation of private schools in British cities. Many Muslims are campaigning for these schools to be state funded on the same lines as Jewish, Anglican and Roman Catholic schools, and it can only be a matter of time before this right is conceded by the British government.

The major religious movements are increasingly establishing *dar al-ulums* (higher institutions of Islamic religious education) which provide full-time religious education combined with a few core subjects from the British curriculum. Essentially these schools are based on the subcontinent Islamic curriculum which was established to train the *ulama*. The demand for places in the *dar al-ulums* is growing rapidly especially amongst Muslim parents with Deobandi sympathies. The major problem here is that there is hardly any agreement on which 'Islam' should be taught. Muslims with loyalties to Deobandi, Barelwi, Jamaat al-Tabligh and Jamaat-i-Islami brands of Islam each want to teach their children according to their own ideology, and consequently consolidate divisions within the community. Many Muslims in Britain originate from the rural areas of the subcontinent and received little informal education themselves. The education of girls was not considered important as marriage was thought to be their destiny and training in running a home is regarded as more important than formal education. As a consequence the parents often expect girls to concentrate on housework, cooking and looking after children, rather than schoolwork. Many of the girls are sent to single sex schools to protect them from the perceived sexual promiscuity of British culture. Despite this difference in

attitude and closer control of girls, many find that the school provides them with opportunities to be more critical in their thinking, and to develop the ability to differ with their parents. Many parents are not able to sympathise or even be aware of the ethos of individual fulfilment and development offered to both sexes in school since it is not a part of their cultural background. This conflict of values has led many parents in Britain to become more repressive. Higher education by girls is rarely achieved without struggle although there are recent indications that more Muslim girls are attending British universities. On the other hand, many religious parents see that the solution is to provide girls with a *dar al-ulum* education only. In the meantime there is considerable evidence that Muslim children of subcontinent origin are not doing as well in school as they should be. Young Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have a much higher unemployment rate than either the indigenous population, or indeed any other minority group.

#### Status within British society

Any analysis of class in the Muslim community must take place on two levels. Within British society Muslims are likely to be perceived as working-class or even as an underclass. Their economic position has changed very little in the last thirty years; the majority are still concentrated in the semi-skilled and unskilled sectors of industry. Subcontinent Muslims, in particular, suffer disproportionately from unemployment due to their concentration in manufacturing industries and the continuation of racist attitudes in job allocation.

The most noticeable change is in the growing number of self-employed Muslims. This may reflect a shift away from focusing on the country of origin and an acknowledgement that the future is in Britain. Money that was once sent home to relatives in the subcontinent may now be used to establish small businesses. Essentially these enterprises are set up to serve the requirements of the growing communities. This is facilitated by the way in which various migrant groups gathered together in relatively small areas of particular towns and cities. These entrepreneurs concentrated on providing goods and services that reinforced the ethnic identity of their customers and this has resulted in a further closing of ranks amongst the Muslim populations. As the community becomes more autonomous, Muslim men and women can define their status within their own group. Thus the class position thrust upon them by the indigenous community becomes largely irrelevant in terms of self-esteem.

Amongst fellow-Muslims class status can be derived from several sources. Community leaders are provided with considerable prestige based on their education, their economic status, the length of time their family has been in Britain (original settlers are well-respected as community elders), the status of their family in the country of origin, Islamic

scholarship, and membership of voluntary organisations such as welfare organisations and mosque committees. The membership of the latter is likely to be dominated by those with high status in the community. The committee which runs each mosque in Britain is usually controlled by businessmen and the professional middle class. Very often these are also the original settlers in the area. This control of the mosque will have important consequences for the development of Islam in Britain. The firm grip of the older generation is often resented by the generation born in Britain as the latter feel that the issues which are important to the old people are not relevant to them.

It is often in the interests of local Muslim entrepreneurs to maintain ethnic identity and this has sometimes resulted in conflict with the *imam* if he represents a movement attempting to promote Islam as a universal faith. This conflict, however, can also happen in reverse. Sometimes the *imam* will be entrenched in a more tradition-based form of Islam that is influenced by Sufi beliefs and village practices. This may not please all the members of the mosque committee. The bulk of the migrants were small landholders in their place of origin, people who considered themselves a class above landless labourers. In migrating to Britain they have not hesitated to take on work as labourers in mills, factories and foundries. Despite this apparent loss of status and their low position *vis-à-vis* the receiving culture, it can be argued that all migrants improve their class position by the actual process of migration to cities. This, in turn, has a radical effect on the kind of Islam they practise, since religion can be used to improve standing in the Muslim community. Thus British Muslim communities are likely to be in considerable flux with regard to their religious position. These changes are unequal in different parts of the community, and can generate considerable tension and intercommunal rivalry.

### The pull towards Islamic militancy

One of the options open to disenchanted British-born Muslims is to join one of the numerous movements often described as 'fundamentalist'. Many of these organisations are addressing the problems discussed above. Islamic 'fundamentalism' has to be seen as a protest movement promulgating an ideology which evokes a response from those groups which are the most acutely aware of the tensions presented by the contemporary world. Although British, many Muslims still feel exploited by Western colonialism. They also face unequal opportunities even though promised success if they achieve the academic goals of education. Some of them can feel let down by both the culture of their birth and the culture of their parents. 'Fundamentalism' attracts them because it is quintessentially modern; that is to say, it constitutes a response to events and conditions in the present. In Britain, the values of modernity call for increasing assimilation into the

cultural mainstream of the society into which the Muslims have settled. At the same time, opportunities to do this on an equal footing are denied. On the other hand the emergence of migrant communities which preserve group solidarity by defining identity ethnically cannot offer very much to young Muslims who firmly feel themselves to be British. Islamic revivalist movements, in their affirmation of religious authority as absolute and holistic, offer one solution to this dilemma. Although the establishment of an Islamic state is clearly an unrealistic goal in a British inner city where Muslims are a small minority, it should be apparent why it still remains the ideal for some. In this context a variety of organisations have developed in Britain but none has been able to provide a unified umbrella for this kind of Islamic commitment. After the extensive publicity at the time of the Rushdie affair several individuals were prepared to exploit the media's tendency to sensationalise and stereotype the Muslim presence in Britain. Foremost among these was Kalim Siddiqui who had been a journalist himself. He had been a member of the little-known Muslim Institute in London who throughout the 1980s identified with the cause of the Islamic revolution in Iran. He had supported Ayotollah Khomeini's *fatwa* (an opinion concerning Islamic law given by a member of the learned scholars) calling for a death sentence on Rushdie, and in 1990 issued the Muslim Manifesto which called for a parliament run on the lines of the Board of Deputies which represents the needs of the Jewish community in Britain. However, in spite of achieving considerable publicity and presenting himself as a leader of the 'Islamic Movement' in Britain, Kalim Siddiqui did not succeed in uniting even those Muslims who agreed with his ideology.

This ideology presents religion as not merely an individual commitment entailing personal piety nor a group loyalty which requires the formal ecclesiastical membership implicit in the arguments of secularisation theorists but a complete way of life. The phenomenon of 'fundamentalism' indicates that religion can be the corporate public action of religiously motivated individuals to change the social system on behalf of what they perceive to be their deepest spiritual loyalties. Thus for some Muslims in Britain the concept of the *umma* becomes of central importance in their religious ideology. It is able to provide some British-born Muslims with an identity which transcends both their allegiance to nationality and the culture of their parents. The indigenous culture which is so often unaccepting of the Muslim presence can be opposed by the concept of the *umma* used as a challenge to the overriding secular view of the world dominant in Britain.

Before a clear direction for a uniquely British Muslim community can be ascertained, it will be necessary to resolve the issues which have been the subject of this analysis. The form that the community takes will be forged out of the process of resolving these thorny problems. For most Muslims in Britain, this is not a simple transformation. It is extremely hard for them to

find, in the midst of ethnic differences, a religious/cultural consensus which is simultaneously based on Islamic principles and capable of encompassing full participation in the cultural resources of the receiving culture. It is a balancing act which, if not successful, could divide the community on religious as well as ethnic grounds. Failure could lead either to extreme forms of Islam with the community alienated from both the indigenous and the migrant cultures; or else to assimilation into Britain's secular society, thus reducing Islamic belief and practice to the private sphere.

In spite of the problems involved in dealing not only with major ethnic and geographical divisions but also with the important regional, linguistic, social and political differences within the major groupings, there are signs that Islam is becoming the dominant mark of identity for the Muslim population. This is not only the product of the shift from the villages of the subcontinent to major urban/industrial centres of Britain but is also influenced by the worldwide resurgence of Islam. Certainly there is evidence that religious identity in the British Muslim community is becoming the sharpest focus for establishing a sense of selfhood. The early migrants experienced a sense of loss but the second generation often voice a protest at a feeling of denial of self or confusion of identity.

Islam is, in one form or another, the heritage of all Muslims who have come to live in Britain. Initially, the society they joined was virtually devoid of all symbols of Islam. Many of these symbols have now appeared in Britain and Muslims can observe the familiar outlines of mosques complete with dome and minarets on the skylines of British industrial cities and take pride in their achievements. Islam is now the second largest religion practised in Britain and is there to stay. Along with the symbols have come the controversies. The Islamic world is involved in the process of rediscovering what it means to be Muslim; this too is the focus for British Muslims. It is imperative to evolve and generate a new pattern of life which is in harmony with the values and norms of Islam but which, in the context of life chances, is based firmly in Britain. Many have already discovered that minorities need distinctive or alternative systems of resources to give them a greater degree of resistance. They are finding this in their common Islamic identity, but the process will involve continuous bargaining and negotiating between

- (a) the British social, economic and cultural environment;
- (b) the ideals and expectations of various components derived from the countries of origin; and
- (c) the ideational forces of orthodox Islam in its several forms.

There is clearly no one group or grouping which on its own has the strength to impress itself on the majority of the Muslim population.

So far, there are no real indications that Muslims in Britain are following that path towards complete assimilation that has already been trodden by

the majority of Britain's Catholics and to a lesser extent British Jews. Many young Muslims claim that assimilation is not a genuine choice since the indigenous white culture will always discriminate against them on the grounds of colour. Integration is criticised by many in the receiving culture as remaining separate. It is seen as a critique of the British 'way of life', and very often it is. Some young Muslims see three choices being presented to them by the receiving culture:

- (i) to develop individuality and avoid group identity which would leave them even more isolated than they are now;
- (ii) to adopt the cultural norms of the indigenous culture; or
- (iii) to be more subservient and obedient which is perceived to be a form of internal colonialism.

Embracing Islam as a religious experience rather than a cultural heritage is providing increasing numbers of young Muslims with an alternative to the pressure to assimilate into British culture on the one hand, and on the other to respond to parental persuasion to conform to various strands of imported ethnic culture. Thus it can be seen that the situation is not a straight choice between assimilation and integration. The indigenous culture will have to come to terms with two major groups demanding the right to integrate: one on ethnic/racial grounds, the other on purely religious grounds. This can create considerable confusion. Both will call on Islam to support their case, and it will not always be easy for the receiving culture to distinguish between the two.

### Literature

For an introduction to the development and growth of the Muslim community in Britain see the relevant chapters in Jørgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) and Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994). The former shows the origins, present-day ethnic composition, distribution and organisation of the community along with the political, legal and cultural contexts in which the British Muslims exist. The latter explores some of the problems facing the Muslim community after the Rushdie affair and the Gulf War by focusing on the situation in the city of Bradford. A Muslim perspective of the situation can be found in Mohammad Raza, *Islam in Britain* (Leicester: Volcano Press, 1991).

A discussion of the choices of assimilation, integration and isolation facing the Muslim communities is in the chapter by John Wolfe, 'Fragmented Universality: Islam and Muslims', in *The Growth of Religious Diversity*, I, ed. Gerald Parsons (London: Routledge, 1993). The Rushdie Affair and its impact on British Muslims are discussed in Malise Ruthwen, *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Rage of Islam* (London: Chatto

and Windus, 1990). An exploration of the relationship between Muslims and the British state is found in Steven Vertovec, 'Muslims, the State, and the Public Sphere in Britain', in *Muslim Communities in the New Europe*, eds. Gerd Nonneman, Tim Niblock and Bogdan Szajkowski (Reading: Ithaca, 1996). A similar area is covered at local government level by Jørgen Nielsen, 'Muslims in Britain and Local Authority Responses', pp. 53-77 in *The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe*, eds. Tomas Gerholm and Yngve Georg Lithman (London: Mansell, 1988).

The history of the various subcontinent Islamic movements at work in Britain and an exploration of their possible impact on the development of the community can be found in Ron Geaves, *Sectarian Influences within Islam in Britain* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1996). An excellent history of the early Yemeni communities is explored in Fred Halliday, *Arabs in Exile: Yemeni Migrants in Urban Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1992). The incidence, motivations and impact of conversion to Islam in Britain is explored in Ali Köse, *Conversion to Islam: A Study of Native British Converts* (London: Kegan Paul, 1996). The importance of Sufism in the development of the Muslim community is explored in a forthcoming book by Ron Geaves, *Sufis in Britain* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1999). Finally, a statistical analysis of the Muslim populations can be found in Muhammad Anwar, *Muslims in Britain: 1991 Census and Other Statistical Sources* (Birmingham, 1993).