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INTRODUCTION

THE EMERGENCE OF *DESH PARDESH*

Roger Ballard

Although our central concern in this book is to explore the way in which migrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have set about making themselves at home in Britain, it is well worth remembering that immigration itself is anything but an unprecedented phenomenon. Throughout its history Britain has been a recipient of immigrant inflows, as with the Celts, Anglo-Saxons and Normans in the relatively distant past, supplemented by the more recent arrival of substantial numbers of Irish, Jewish and Eastern European settlers. Thus while the most recent wave of arrivals — in which migrant workers were drawn in from the Indian subcontinent and the islands of the Caribbean to fill the yawning gaps that emerged in the British labour market during the years of the post-war boom — is in some senses nothing but the latest episode in a long chain of developments, it has nevertheless brought about a profound and indeed irreversible change in the whole character of the British social order. First, Britain is now a visibly *multi-racial* society, in the sense that its citizens now include 2.7 million people who are either wholly or partly of non-European ancestry. Secondly, and just as important, it has become a much more overtly *poly-ethnic* society. Inspired as they are by cultural, religious and linguistic traditions whose roots lie far beyond the boundaries of Europe, the new minorities have significantly expanded the range of diversities covered by local British lifestyles.

Nevertheless it seems doubtful that any of us — whether we belong to the white majority or the new visible minorities — have yet come fully to grips with the momentous implications of these developments. Although a careful reading of Britain's past history could have provided plenty of evidence that immigration tends to have a long-term impact on the local social and cultural order, and although it is now nearly half a century since the inflow from South Asia and the Caribbean began, and more than twenty years since it reached its peak, remarkably little serious thought has yet been given to considering either the extent, or indeed the irreversibility, of the changes it has wrought. Paradoxically, it was for many years regarded as thoroughly alarmist — at least in liberal circles — even to consider the possibility that any such changes might occur at all. My own view; by contrast, is that future historians may well conclude that the

impact of the arrival of South Asian and Afro-Caribbean settlers on the British social and cultural order will eventually prove almost as great as that precipitated by the arrival of William of Normandy in 1066.

Of course there are also many differences. South Asian and Afro-Caribbean migrants arrived as workers, not as rulers; hence although they also hoped to make their fortunes, their starting point was quite different. Most found they had little alternative but to accept manual employment in an industrial economy which subsequently went into rapid decline, clearly a far cry from their Norman predecessors' privileged position as victorious conquerors. And while the Normans may have taken pride in their ancestry, neither they nor any of many other European migrant groups who arrived in Britain before or since were a *visible* minority, quite unlike their South Asian and Afro-Caribbean successors.

Nevertheless there are also some striking parallels between the adaptive strategies devised by these otherwise disparate groups. Just as the newly established Norman-French elite continued to draw inspiration from their own distinctive linguistic, religious, and cultural traditions for several generations after their arrival in England, so too does the current group of South Asian and Afro-Caribbean settlers — as indeed did the Irish and Jewish migrants who arrived in even larger numbers in the late nineteenth century. And just as the religious, linguistic and cultural impact of the Norman irruption eventually had a profoundly creative impact on the local social order, so there is every reason to expect that the consequences of the arrival of the latest group of migrants will be just as far-reaching.

Even so, that process is still only at its earliest stage. As the growth of ever more dynamic ethnic colonies in most of Britain's industrial towns and cities clearly demonstrates, all the new minorities are strongly committed to cultural and religious reconstruction. Nevertheless the minority impact on mainline social and cultural institutions has so far remained largely peripheral, and confined to a few specific areas, such as popular music, professional football, small retail outlets and the fast-food trade. What their presence *has* precipitated, however, is some intense hostility among Britain's white natives.'

Right from the outset, non-European settlers found themselves subjected to racial exclusionism, and to this day skin-colour remains an inescapable social marker. Yet despite its widespread use as a trigger for exclusionary behaviour, physical appearance is of much less significance than it once was as a target of white hostility. Instead the focus has shifted to the minorities' religious and ethnic distinctiveness. Besides being regarded as wholly unreasonable, their very ethnicity is widely perceived as presenting a dangerous and indeed unacceptable challenge to the established social and cultural order.

Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Dimension

There is of course much more that could be said about the logic and dynamics of racial and ethnic polarisation, and the way in which such tensions might be resolved, let alone about parallel developments elsewhere, both today and in the past. What is clear, however, is that the United Kingdom is by definition a multi-national society, even if it is one within which the English have long enjoyed a position of almost unquestioned hegemony. Likewise the charge that a minority ethnic presence constitutes an unacceptable threat to the religious and cultural integrity of the nation is in no way novel, since the growth of Irish Catholic and Jewish ethnic colonies precipitated equally great popular hostility.[2]

Yet although we must always keep these wider issues in view —for they provide a constant backdrop to our discussion — the focus of this book is much narrower: it is restricted to those people, or rather those *communities,* who trace their ancestral roots to one part or another of the

Indian subcontinent. To that end it draws together eleven specially written ethnographic accounts exploring current processes of social, religious and cultural adaptation within a specific, and usually highly localised, British South Asian community.

As befits an ethnographic account, we pay relatively little attention to the quantitative aspects of the South Asian presence, about which a growing body of statistical data can be found elsewhere. Our aim, instead, is to highlight the *qualitative* characteristics of the new South Asian settlements, and to emphasise that however similar all "Asians" may seem to outsiders, they actually constitute a far more diverse population category than is commonly realised. Even so, the accounts presented here are far from comprehensive: as readers will soon realise, that diversity is so great that we could not hope to encompass all its dimensions within a single volume.

Nevertheless the accounts presented here are wide in range. They include an exploration of the experiences of Pakistani Muslims in both Oxford and Bradford; high-caste Punjabi Sikhs in Leeds; low-caste Valmikis in Coventry; Sylhetis in London's East End; the growing popularity of Hindu devotional movements among emigrants from Gujarat; two caste-based Gujarati communities, Prajapatis in London and Mochis in Leeds; two more religiously-based communities Jams in Leicester and Parsis in London; and last but not least the experiences of Indo-Caribbean Hindu migrants from Trinidad and Guyana who have settled in London. Though by definition far from exhaustive, these accounts nevertheless highlight the most important dimensions of the South Asian presence in Britain, while also demonstrating how vigorous — and how varied — the processes of cultural reconstruction which they have set in train.

A further consequence of our approach is that it serves to demonstrate the difficulty of making generalisations which apply with equal force to every section of Britain's "Asian" population. Nor does moving down to the next level of differentiation — such as national origins — in search of a "community" about which to generalise necessarily constitute much of an advance. Thus while most people will fairly willingly identify themselves either as "Indians", "Pakistanis" or "Bangladeshis" when asked to do so, it would be a great mistake to assume that those so identified will show any great degree of commonality among themselves, or that they will ever interact in a sufficiently coherent way to merit being described as a community.

Far from it. If one regards a community as a body of people whose feelings of mutual identification are strong enough to precipitate an active and ongoing sense of solidarity, the great majority of Britain's ethnic colonies rest on much more parochial foundations than is commonly supposed. Thus while common religious affiliation —whether to Hinduism, Sikhism or Islam — has undoubtedly proved a far more effective vehicle for large-scale mobilisation than mere nationality, such solidarities have still tended to be relatively short-lived, and linked to specific issues, such as the *Satanic Verses* affair. In contrast the networks of reciprocity which provide the framework for most settlers' everyday lives are largely grounded in much narrower loyalties of caste, sect and descent-group. Hence if we are to make sense of their preferred strategies we need to take careful note of what *jati* and *biraderi* membership entails. It is only then that one can begin to understand why these loyalties have been such an effective foundation for the networks of reciprocity which lie at the heart of any sense of community.

Yet although we have therefore sought to highlight both the detail and the increasingly varied character of British South Asian lifestyles, we are also committed to teasing out the common elements which underlie this variety. Our aim is therefore to identify the adaptive strategies

which *all* South Asian settlers, regardless of their precise affiliation, have devised as a means of coping with their new environment, for despite the dangers of reckless generalisation, it is possible to identify a number of common elements behind what might appear at first sight to be ever-burgeoning diversity. Thus even though we do indeed focus on specific communities, our aim is not just to pile up ever more detailed descriptions of one little group after another, but rather to develop an analytical perspective on the ways in which those involved have settled down and made themselves at home in Britain.

This takes us straight back into the choppy waters of the issues raised right at the outset. Contrary to the expectations of most of Britain's white natives, settling down has not taken the form of a comprehensive process of assimilation, or even an approximation to it. Thus, as every subsequent chapter shows, both the older generation of settlers and their British-born offspring are continuing to find substantial inspiration in the resources of their own particular cultural, religious and linguistic inheritance, which they are actively and creatively reinterpreting in order to rebuild their lives *on their own terms.* Hence, among other things, the title we have chosen.

Why *Desh Pardesh?* At first the phrase is unlikely to make much impact. Few readers, except those of South Asian origin themselves, will be familiar with either Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati or Bangla, even though these are now widely-spoken British languages. However as speakers of any of these tongues will already appreciate, the phrase *Desh Pardesh* has a double meaning, for it can equally well be translated both as "home from home" and as "at home abroad". As such it sums up the central theme of this book: despite the many obstacles they have encountered, Britain's *Desh Pardeshis* still remain strongly committed to the pursuit of their own self-determined goals.

The Growth of the South Asian Presence in Britain

Although our principal concern in this book is to explore the qualitative character of Britain's South Asian ethnic colonies, at least some mention of their quantitative dimensions is clearly also required, if only because public debate on this subject is often as ill-informed as it is heated. Although a large-scale South Asian presence is very much a post-war phenomenon, its history is very much longer, for a small number of adventurers had begun to find their way to Britain in the seventeenth century.[3] Occasional visitors continued to arrive thereafter, but once seamen began to be hired in Bombay and Calcutta to serve on British steamships, numbers increased. By the end of the nineteenth century small settlements of Indian seamen awaiting reemployment could be found in most of Britain's major ports,[4] and these in turn served as bridgeheads through which the subsequent large-scale inflow was organised.

Mass migration was dependent on plentiful employment opportunities, which only became available after the end of the Second World War. Thereafter the inflow from the subcontinent began to escalate rapidly. From the early 1 *950s* until the end of the I 970s, the British economy was acutely short of labour. The post-war boom was proceeding apace, but reservoirs from which additional workers had been recruited during previous periods of expansion — Ireland and Eastern Europe — could no longer satisfy its demands. Hence migrant workers began to be drawn in from much further afield, especially from the islands of the Caribbean and from the Indian subcontinent.

The subsequent growth of Britain's South Asian population has been affected by many factors, including the boom, and then in the 1980s the equally rapid decline in the demand for

unskilled industrial labour; the imposition of ever more draconian immigration rules, which primarily targeted people of non-European descent; the arrival of British passport-holders of South Asian origin from Britain's newly-independent colonies in East Africa; the reunion of families, as wives came with their children to join their husbands; and, most recently of all, the emergence of a burgeoning British-born second generation.

Tracing the precise growth pattern of Britain's South Asian population poses a number of problems, for it was not until 1991 that a properly posed ethnic question was included in the Census. Hence the figures in the final column of Table 1.1 can be regarded as broadly reliable, while those to the left of them are the best available estimates for the three previous decades.

Although South Asians still only make up a small proportion of the population as a whole, their total numbers have grown rapidly since the early 1950*s*. At the outset growth was largely a consequence of further immigration, but since the imposition of ever-tighter controls on settlement from the mid-1960s onwards, the South Asian inflow has steadily declined, and has now been reduced to little more than a trickle. This has not halted population growth, however, mainly because of the demographic characteristics of this section of the population. Most South Asian migrants arrived in Britain as young adults, and their inflow reached its peak in the late l960s, with the result that it is still only the early pioneers who have reached retirement age. But if South Asian pensioners are still few, the pattern is reversed at the other end of the age spectrum. Not only did most settlers first arrive as young adults, but their families tended to be relatively large, with their wives sustaining this higher rate of fertility following their arrival in Britain. All the indications are that fertility rates are now declining sharply, especially among the rising British-born generation. Even so, Britain's South Asian population is now so heavily skewed towards youth that substantial growth is inevitable, if only because births will substantially outnumber deaths for many years to come. It can therefore be predicted that Britain's South Asian population will eventually stabilise at roughly twice its present size.[5]

Table 1.1. GROWTH OF BRITAIN'S SOUTH ASIAN POPULATION

Country of birth/ethnicity[6]	*1961*	*1971*	*1981*	*1991*
India	81,400	240,730	673,704	823,821
Pakistan	24,900	127,565	295,461	449,646
Bangladesh[7]	—	—	64,562	157,881
East Africa[8]	—	44,860	181,321	—
Total South Asian population	106,300	413,155	1,215,048	1,431,348
% South Asians in U.K. population	0.23%	0.85%	2.52%	3.04%

Sources. 1961: E.J.B. Rose (ed.), ***Colour and Citizenship*** (Oxford University Press, 1969), p.97. 1971, 1981 and 1991: O.P.C.S. Census Reports, London H.M.S.O.

Yet even if that prediction proves correct, South Asians would still only make up some 6% of the total population, far short of the "swamping" level which some alarmists have predicted. Even so, the national average obscures much local variation, for the South Asian population is by no means evenly distributed. Rather its members are still heavily concentrated in those towns and cities which experienced acute labour shortages during the l960s and l970s — i.e. London, the industrial Midlands, and the textile towns on either side of the Pennines; and within each of those areas, South Asian settlers are further concentrated in particular residential localities, usually — although not always — in inner-city areas. In these contexts their presence is much more prominent. In both Birmingham and Bradford, for example, nearly a quarter of all school entrants are now of South Asian descent, and in certain neighbourhoods they form the overwhelming majority. Hence in the areas which the settlers have made their own, *Desh Pardesh* is much more than a social and cultural expression: it has also become a spatial reality.

Many of Britain's white natives undoubtedly view the rapid growth of such ethnic colonies with alarm, particularly when they emerge in or close to the neighbourhoods in which they themselves once lived. Nor are their fears assuaged by well-meaning but increasingly threadbare arguments that such developments are nothing but a temporary way-station in a more long-term process of assimilation. That thesis is no longer valid. Like it or not, Britain has been changed, and decisively so, as a consequence of post-war immigration.

Yet just what has changed? There is of course a visible difference: several million of Britain's inhabitants have the kind of skin colour which its white natives would like to acquire on expensive tropical holidays, but would be horrified to inherit. But while that difference is literally only skin-deep, the changes precipitated by the new minorities' *ethnicity* — that is their commitment to their own religious, linguistic, and cultural traditions — have been far more fundamental. Since their ethnicity is intrinsic to their very being, the resultant loyalties are a major resource in the construction of survival strategies: hence they are unlikely to be abandoned. If this is so, it follows that short of comprehensive ethnic cleansing — which one hopes is not an option — nothing can alter the fact that the new minorities have become an integral part of the British social order, and they have done soon *their own terms.* Hence the underlying challenge is simple: how — and how soon — can Britain's white natives learn to live with difference, and to respect the right of their fellow-citizens to organise their lives on their own preferred terms, whatever their historical and geographical origins?

We do not suggest that responding to this challenge will be easy: indeed, given the cultural impact of Britain's imperial past, it is likely to be exceedingly difficult. It is the aim of this book to help readers confront these issues and find some answers to them.

The Dilemmas of Migration

Nevertheless our central concern here is not with white sensitivities, but rather with the settlers' experiences, and in this context it is worth emphasising that however much alarm their arrival may have caused among Britain's white majority, they themselves found the experience yet more perplexing, confronted as they were by what seemed to be a never-ending series of puzzles, contradictions and dilemmas. These often started from the moment migrants planned their departure, sharpened with their arrival overseas, and grew more complex the longer they stayed away. Thus even the most well-settled may suddenly find themselves faced with irresolvably contradictory pressures, as when they have to balance their obligations to care for ageing parents in the subcontinent against an equally strong commitment to support their British-based

offspring. Likewise their children may face equally intractable dilemmas as they seek to balance their obligation to fulfil their parents' expectations of respect and support against the contrary imperatives arising from their involvement in a much wider British world.

Such dilemmas become more poignant when migrants find that despite all their new opportunities, they still remain aliens at their destination. No matter how bad the social and material conditions they may have left behind, and no matter how great their achievements abroad, migrants invariably feel a grievous sense of loss. They miss — and therefore long once again to experience — the familiar sights, sounds and smells of their birthplace, and the warmth and conviviality of everyday domestic life. All of them yearn for closer contact with their now-distant kin, and for closer involvement with the linguistic, cultural and religious world which once gave comprehensive meaning and purpose to their everyday lives; no wonder, therefore, that most make every effort to construct a more meaningful world in their otherwise alien destination.

A Flight from Poverty?

Yet if the social and emotional costs of migration were so great, why did so ma fly settlers come to Britain in the first place? Material inequality was undoubtedly a spur; unless the financial rewards to which they might gain access are very tempting, the counter-attraction of the known and familiar will never be overcome. Even so, long-distance migrants are rarely drawn from the poorest families, and for good reason. Migration is above all an *entrepreneurial* activity, in which success usually depends on making substantial initial investment, so that those with minimal social and financial assets cannot

hope to get very far. Overseas travel strains the resources of even the most prosperous of Indian villagers, so overseas migration is normally way beyond the means of the landless poor: for them buying a railway ticket to Dhaka, Bombay or Karachi is the only realistic way of finding employment elsewhere. Overseas migrants are therefore usually drawn from families of middling status, whose members are neither sufficiently prosperous to be wholly content with their lot, nor so poor as to be unable to afford the migrant's ticket, passport and visa.

Much the same is true of the particular areas in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh from which most migrants have come. While some parts of the subcontinent do indeed suffer from the grinding poverty of popular stereotypes, this is far from true in the three regions from which the vast majority of Britain's South Asian settlers have been drawn — Punjab, straddling the border between India and Pakistan in the north-west; Gujarat, on the western seacoast north of Bombay; and Sylhet District in north-eastern Bangladesh. Punjab and Gujarat are both noted for their agricultural prosperity; Sylhet might seem at first sight to conform more closely to the stereotype, given its location in poverty-stricken Bangladesh, but this does not stand up to closer examination.

First, Bengal has not always been in its present parlous economic condition. Its fabled wealth made it an early target of the East India Company, and its current penury must therefore be seen in the context of a long history of British colonial exploitation, more recently compounded by rapid population growth. Secondly, as Gardner and Shukkur show in their chapter, the marked concentration of emigration in Sylhet District was not a consequence of the Sylhetis' greater poverty, but rather of a historical anomaly which made cultivators in the District the *owners* rather than mere tenants of their land. This highlights a further major characteristic of South

Asian migration to Britain: whether Punjabi, Gujarati or Sylheti, the majority of settlers are from *peasant farming* families. Not only did this mean that they were people who had proudly and autonomously owned and cultivated the land from which they made their living, but the sense of psychological and financial independence which this status gave them has proved crucial to their success both as migrants and settlers.

Not all migrants were peasant farmers, however. Some were craftsmen, and the inflow also included a small but significant leaven of urbanites who were much more likely to have commercial skills and/or professional qualifications. Migration to Britain has therefore in no way been a means of escaping destitution. Most of the urbanites saw the move as a step towards career advancement, and although the peasants were undoubtedly attracted by the money they could earn in Britain, they did not seek access to this new source of wealth to meet their families' everyday expenses; that came from the land. Employment overseas was more usually the means of supplementing the family's *capital* resources: the migrant's savings would be invested in building a new house, buying more land or a tractor, installing a tube-well, or providing a daughter or a sister with a larger and more attractive dowry. Hence the initial objective of most migrants, especially the peasant-farmers, was to raise their family's standing in the local social hierarchy.

Migration and Kinship

In such a context migration is a far less individualistic activity than is often supposed. First, few left without the active support of their extended families, who often provided the migrant with his ticket, passport and visa. Secondly, most migrants regarded their continued membership of their extended families as axiomatic. Not only did they expect to share the fruits of their labour with the group as a whole, but their physical absence had little impact on their position in their extended family. Even if they returned penniless (which heaven forbid), it was taken for granted that they would and should immediately resume all the social roles and rights which they had enjoyed before they left.

Nor was this the only way in which kinship reciprocities had a major impact on the migratory process. As Shaw's account of the Pakistani settlement in Oxford shows, only a tiny minority of newcomers arrived in Britain as lone adventurers with no prior contacts whatsoever. Of course the very earliest pioneers must indeed have done so long ago. But this phase did not last long. Having established themselves, each of these early pioneers soon became a bridgehead through which the entry of a whole stream of kinsmen and fellow-villagers was facilitated. Hence the vast majority of migrants arrived not as unconnected individuals, but in cascading chains along increasingly well-worn paths of kinship and friendship. These processes have had a comprehensive impact on patterns of settlement. As the following chapters show in abundance, chain migration has given Britain's South Asian settlements a far more parochial character than most outsiders are aware, for specific and highly localised castes, sects and kinship groups in the subcontinent have given rise to — and are now umbilically linked with — equally tightly structured British-based ethnic colonies.

From Sojourners to Settlers

Despite the material advantages to which they gained access as a result of going to Britain, few rural migrants at first envisaged that they might become permanent settlers. Indeed since their aim was above all to earn and save as much as possible as quickly as possible before returning

home, they could at that stage best be described as *sojourners* rather than settlers. Had that initial objective remained unchanged, the South Asian presence in Britain would have developed very differently. But that was not to be. While a few sojourners did return once they had met their initial financial targets, the vast majority stayed on much longer. At first this delay could be interpreted as only a temporary deferral of their original goal, to save just a little bit more. But just as many other migrant groups in a similar position the world over have discovered — not least the native English as they built up their own vast overseas diaspora — such a habit can turn addictive. So too the South Asian sojourners: the longer they stayed, the more rooted and at ease they felt in their new British environment.

Although few ceased to dream about returning home permanently, many began to enjoy the greater personal autonomy they enjoyed in Britain, as well as the steadily increasing influence their new-found role as wealth-producers gave them within their extended families. From the 1960s onwards the cost of air travel fell sharply, so regular visits back home became much easier. This was a major boon. It allowed migrants to re-establish face-to-face contact with their families, to oversee the investment of their savings, and above all to savour some of the fruits of their labours as unskilled manual workers in a wet, dirty, and far-away world. But if cheap tickets allowed them to make much more frequent visits to the world they valued most, they also made it far easier to return for another spell on the treadmill. Little by little and almost unaware of it themselves, transient sojourners were undergoing a metamorphosis: they were gradually being transformed into more or less permanent settlers.

Yet the further along the route they went, the more their dilemmas were compounded. Years of residence abroad made them ever more aware of their alienation from the warmth and conviviality of family life, for even though visits back home were now much easier to make — and often became extended holidays of a year or more —each round-trip made them more poignantly conscious of the extent of their sacrifice, most heart-rendingly so when dearly loved and much remembered children failed even to recognise their long-absent fathers.

Meanwhile migrants' experience of Britain was also changing fast. As numbers grew rapidly during the 1950s and '60s, chain migration led to the reconstitution of large parts of many sojourners' kinship networks, so that many of those who lived nearby, and alongside whom they worked in the mill or foundry, were either kinsmen or fellow villagers. Hence rather than being a social and cultural no-man's-land, as it had been at first, Britain — or rather those parts of each industrial city into which they had been drawn by the demands of the labour market — was gradually becoming an arena for ethnic colonisation, as all the human material needed to support such an enterprise was converging within it.[9] This was welcome, for it made Britain a less alien place in which to live. But it also opened up a new dilemma: had Britain become an arena suitable for the resumption of family life? Attractive as that prospect might be, many sojourners were still sceptical.

Settlers' Perceptions of the Lifestyles of the Native English

From their perspective, Britain was a country riddled with contradictions. Materially, there was much to recommend it: living standards were substantially higher than in the subcontinent, and despite the ever-present blight of racial exclusionism, free access to health care and education was much appreciated. Even so, these obvious benefits had to be set against the sojourners~ unanimous view that local *moral* values had little to recommend them. The English might be well-off materially, but the more migrants saw of their white neighbours' lifestyles, their

standards (or lack of them) of personal hygiene, the apparent absence of any sense of personal dignity, and the individualism and hedonism of their everyday lives, the more scandalised they became.

In their own scheme of things, such values were absolutely crucial. Not to maintain a sense of *izzat* (personal honour) was to ignore an essential aspect of human dignity, while to ignore the emotional and material reciprocities due within the extended family was to pass up one's most fundamental obligations. Yet the native English appeared to have no such concerns. As the sojourners saw it — and most of those who have since settled down permanently see little need to change their opinions — people who expected that their sons and daughters should become financially self-supporting (and therefore socially autonomous) the moment they left school lacked any serious sense of family life. It also appeared that their children were never taught to behave with any sense of honour or respect — hence their tendency to behave like farmyard animals flaunting their bodies, and kissing and cuddling on the street. Nor was their treatment of elderly people any better: far from treating their elders with respect, they appeared to be figures of fun, and were bundled off into oblivion in old people's homes when they ceased to be able to look after themselves. As for *izzat*, the English seemed to lack all comprehension of what it meant. From all of this the sojourners drew the obvious inference. This was *not* a culture worthy of emulation, nor one to whose corrupting influence their nearest and dearest should be exposed.

If this was not enough, they reached similar conclusions over matters of personal hygiene. Thus while the white majority were (and are) all too ready to perceive migrants as "dirty" because of unfamiliar cooking smells and their preference for eating with their fingers instead of knives and forks, migrants' judgements of native English practices were far more scathing. For them, people who used toilet paper and not water to clean themselves, who rejected showers in favour of infrequent baths, and who even failed to wash after sexual activity were manifestly uncivilised and quite beyond the pale.

Survival in an Alien World

While such perceptions enabled the settlers to draw a clear boundary between themselves and their white neighbours, and thus reinforced their sense of ethnic solidarity, they nevertheless generated further dilemmas. If the surrounding social order was based on values so antithetical to their own, how could they hope to survive within it —especially in the longer term?

The reactions of the early pioneers are easy to describe. Because their families were not with them, their own exposure to local values was not regarded as particularly dangerous, since they saw themselves as having fallen only temporarily among barbarians. In deed like many other expatriates — such as Europeans working on contract in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf — they took great pride in their capacity to survive despite having to let everything they really valued fall temporarily into abeyance. Saving was their only goal, since the more swiftly their bank balances grew, the sooner they could return to a world where the fruits of their labour could be sensibly enjoyed. Given this frame of mind, it is easy to see why sojourners were prepared to work long hours: twelve-hour shifts six or even seven days a week were quite normal, especially in. the early days. And if shift work on this scale maximised earnings, crowding together into all-male households where a day and a night shift worker might even share the same bed made equal sense: expenditure was minimised. While no-one regarded this as a "proper" way to live and work, it nevertheless provided the quickest way of getting back to a land where civilised behaviour could be resumed.[10]

Yet contrary developments were taking place at the same time. As the inflow continued, chain migration brought kinsmen and fellow villagers together in ever larger residential and occupational clusters. And just as their own networks of reciprocity had facilitated the initial process of migration, so they also offered sojourners an equally positive means of surviving adversity, all the more so since the outside English world was so hostile and alien. Thus even though it had been no part of their initial plan, they gradually began to reconstruct a familiar social order around themselves, complete with all its associated cultural norms. All of a sudden conformity mattered. Behaviour which had previously passed without comment — as when lonely men sought comfort and relief with local prostitutes — ceased to be regarded as reasonable. Instead a very different tendency emerged. As conventional norms were re-established, deviance invited criticism and ridicule. Those who mimicked English ways too closely began to be accused of being *be-izzat* — without honour. *Desh Pardesh* was beginning to emerge.

Family Reunion

Since each settlement had become an arena within which honour could be sustained, life within it was transformed. The maintenance of personal and familial honour was of great concern to every migrant, especially since the need to restore their family's good standing in the local social hierarchy by increasing its material resources had often been the original spur to migration itself.

From this perspective *izzat* emerges not as something fixed and permanent, but as a matter of relative standing which generates constant competition, both between individuals and even more between closely related families. It follows that as soon as competition for *izzat* takes off, there can be no escape: anyone who fails to play the game will by definition lose face. Hence the emergence of Britain as an arena for status competition soon brought about a radical transformation of sojourners' lifestyles, because an ever higher premium gradually began to be placed on moral conformity.

This changed everything, for now at long last migrants began to regard the resumption of family life in Britain as a realistic possibility. But they did so not because they had begun to take a more positive view of local cultural conventions, but rather because of a growing confidence that it was possible to recreate a fully moral social universe in Britain. Today such a conclusion might seem unexceptional, given the scale and success of Britain's many South Asian ethnic colonies; but for the early pioneers it was a major leap of faith. Moreover, given the far-reaching implications of the decision, it was not a step which every group took at the same speed. English lifestyles and moral conventions were still viewed as negatively as always, and it was precisely because of the threat which these were held to pose to their own most deeply-held values that the more cautious groups concluded that family reunion could not be justified; and had they been right, family reunion would indeed have been a disaster. Hence the more pessimistic groups — most of them Muslim — remained very doubtful about the wisdom of the whole enterprise long after the more easygoing communities had taken the decisive step."

Changing Patterns of Investment and Expenditure

Whether the move towards family reunion took place quickly or slowly, the arrival of wives and children rapidly transformed the character of each community. Almost immediately, the all-male households which had been so prominent in the earlier period broke up, as settlers bought separate houses to accommodate their families. But although real kinship replaced quasi-kinship

as the basis of domestic life, intense frugality remained the cornerstone of most families' financial strategies. Hence they preferred to buy cheap terraced houses in run-down areas, and to equip with a minimum amount of furniture, itself often secondhand. While to outside observers it often seemed that the settlers were too deprived and poverty-stricken to do any better, they themselves often saw things differently: their preferred lifestyles reflected their determination to save, despite the much greater cost of maintaining a family in Britain.

Even so, buying and furnishing a house, even on this basis, was a radical change in financial strategy, since the proportion of their income they could save dropped sharply. Moreover, as time passed, they gradually began to spend more on enhancing their local standard of living. The first step was usually to turn the front room into a comfortably and relatively expensively furnished *baithak* where guests could be entertained in style: as always, enhancing the family's izzat was a central priority. Thereafter change became ever more pervasive. Most families installed a telephone to keep in touch with kin, and a VCR to watch Hindi movies. Many then refurbished and redecorated their properties (often with the help of Local Authority improvement grants, of which they took more advantage than most), before finally buying new furniture, laying down fitted carpets, and installing central heating. Last but not least, the more affluent families began to abandon the inner-city areas, where initial settlement had invariably occurred, in favour of more expensive suburban properties.

As this went on, the rate at which they were able to put money aside dropped sharply, as did their propensity to remit — much to the alarm of kin back home. Yet although sojourners-turned-settlers were now by their own standards behaving in an increasingly profligate way, their overall financial strategies were still broadly in keeping with their original objectives, but were certainly much more frugal than those of their white neighbours. Thanks to their peasant origins, they remained strongly committed to social and financial autonomy, and refused to be seduced by the credit-driven expectations of consumer capitalism. Hence they placed a high premium on property ownership, and regarded all forms of tenancy — even if the landlord was a Local Authority — as humiliating. They took an equally negative view of indebtedness, so when terraced houses in so-called "slums" could be bought for no more than a few hundred pounds — as was possible in many industrial cities right up to the late 1960s —many seized the opportunity to do so, often cash down. Since then property prices have spiralled upwards, leaving little alternative to taking out a mortgage, but even so their commitment to capital accumulation remained intense. Anyone who paid off a loan before its due date was much admired. Everyday household finances were also just as frugally organised: not only was hire-purchase avoided like the plague, but extended families took every possible advantage of economies of scale: all but the most perishable of food was — and still is — bought by the gross, sack or box.'[12]

The Reconstruction of Social and Religious Institutions

As sojourners became settlers, so their lifestyles changed — although this was largely a matter of their revising, rather than abandoning, their initial aims and objectives. They remained almost as frugal as ever, even if Britain, rather than their home village, became the principal arena of saving and capital investment. And as settlers began to put down local roots, they made vigorous efforts to rebuild almost every aspect of their social and cultural traditions. Thus while religious observance had previously slid into abeyance, family reunion soon precipitated a resurgence in this area. Indeed, as every subsequent chapter shows, shared religious and sectarian commitments have for the most part proved to be the catalyst around which most South Asian

communities have coalesced. Hence as numbers grew, a network of mosques, *gurdwaras* and *mandirs* began to spread across the country, each attracting an ever larger and more committed congregation.

The rapid re-establishment of religious institutions, and the growing vigour of izzat-competition, had a major impact on the behaviour of settlers, who found themselves under growing pressure to conform (or at least give the appearance of conforming) to the ideal norms of their own particular group. Former pleasures — such as smoking, drinking, and occasional adventures with white women — were now perceived as shameful and dishonourable. Sikhs began to regrow their hair and readopt the turban, Muslims to forswear alcohol, and many Hindus to become more strictly vegetarian.

Another major consequence of family reunion was that life-cycle rituals, especially those associated with marriage and birth, could now be celebrated in Britain. The implications of this development were far-reaching. Large numbers of guests are invited to such celebrations, which therefore become important arenas for social interaction. And besides the fact that they are joyful events, the elaborateness with which they were celebrated had always been the central means whereby families competed to secure and advance their relative *izzat.* Thus from simple beginnings, marriage and births came to be celebrated in an ever more elaborate way: in every community rituals have grown longer and more complex, and the scale of gift-giving larger. Hence the cost of participation has steadily escalated, leading to what can only be described as conspicuous consumption among the most affluent and firmly rooted communities.'[13] Nothing more clearly confirms the settlers' commitment to ethnic colonisation than these developments.

Difference and Diversity

Yet although all the various components of Britain's South Asian population have been involved in these processes of ethnic colonisation, and thus in the construction of their own *Desh Pardesh*, their trajectories of adaptation have varied greatly. Hence while the accounts presented in this volume reveal many common features, they also highlight how much South Asian communities differ from each other, and that many of those differences were established during the process of migration itself. Thus while chain migration facilitated ethnic colonisation by bringing kinsmen together in specific neighbourhoods, it also generated differentiation, since each cascading stream brought migrants from a specific region, caste and community to an equally specific location in Britain. While all the new arrivals had to cope with similar forms of racial and ethnic exclusionism, it was above all to the specific resources of their own group that they looked for inspiration as they set about devising strategies for survival. The results of all this are now becoming obvious. Since each little group of settlers rebuilt its life around their own religious, cultural and linguistic resources, and since the precise character of these resources varied enormously from group to group, so too have the ways — and the speed — with which they have adapted to their new environment.

First and foremost, the migrants were very varied in their *geographical origins.* Leaving those who arrived as "twice-migrants" from elsewhere in the diaspora to one side for a moment, the vast majority of direct migrants came from just three relatively compact geographical regions in Punjab, Gujarat, and finally from Sylhet District in Bangladesh (see maps, pp. xvi and xvii). Of the three, Punjab has provided by far the largest inflow, for around two-thirds of Britain's South Asians are of Punjabi ancestry.'[14] Even so Punjabis are not a homogeneous group. Although as regards language, behaviour and culture they have much in common, religious and caste

differentiation has increased sharply during the past century. Hence Independence in 1947 was accompanied by a vicious process of religious and ethnic polarisation. Several hundred thousand people died, and the killing only stopped after several million Hindus and Sikhs living in areas allocated to Pakistan took refuge in India, while a similar number of Muslims in east Punjab fled west to Pakistan.'[15]

Of the Punjabis in Britain, rather less than half are from the Indian side of the border, and of these the great majority are from the central and eastern parts of the Jullundur Doab. Most Indian Punjabis are Sikhs, although perhaps a quarter are Hindus; and while the great majority of the Pakistani Punjabis are Muslims, they also include a small Christian minority, most of whom are of Untouchable descent.'[6] No less than their Indian counterparts, Britain's Punjabi Muslim settlers are also predominantly of rural origin, and once again with specific regional concentrations. As many as two-thirds originate from the Potohar region south-west of Rawalpindi, especially from Mirpur District in Azad Kashmir. The remainder trace their roots either to the Chhach District (formerly known as Campbellpur), the city of Lahore, or the canal colonies of northern and central Punjab.

Gujarat has been the next most important source of immigrants, and roughly a quarter of British Asians have Gujarati connections of some kind. As in Punjab, the social order in Gujarat is deeply divided by religion, so although Hindus form the majority of Gujarati settlers in Britain, they also include a significant Muslim minority. Moreover, as Dwyer shows, Gujaratis have a long history of emigration to both Africa and the Middle East, so as many as half of Britain's Gujaratis have East African connections of some sort. Over and above all this the Gujarati social order is further fragmented by a large number of religious, sectarian and caste disjunctions, and while a comprehensive account of these is beyond our scope, the descriptions of specific Gujarati communities in Dwyer's, Warner's and Knott's chapters show how great that variation may be.

Sylhet District in north-east Bangladesh is the third-largest source of immigration from South Asia, and here Gardner and Shukur's account breaks much new ground, since few other researchers have yet paid much attention to the Sylhetis. As already noted, Sylhet may be slightly more prosperous than other parts of Bangladesh, but it is still a great deal less so than Punjab or Gujarat. Partly because of this, the Sylhetis have moved more slowly from the sojourner to the settler phase than any other group; indeed, in their case family reunion is still taking place. Hence they are currently by far the poorest component of the South Asian presence in Britain, and also have the highest rate of population growth.

Religion is also a major source of differentiation, and all of South Asia's faiths are now represented in Britain. Of these the Muslims are by far the most numerous, since all the Sylhetis, over half the Punjabis, and perhaps a fifth of the Gujaratis are followers of Islam. Yet although Islam has now become a significant vehicle for collective mobilisation, as Shaw's account of Pakistanis in Oxford, as well as Gardner and Shukur's discussion of East London Sylhetis shows, Islam in Britain is in fact far less homogeneous than outsiders commonly suppose, a point well underlined by Lewis's analysis of sectarian developments in Bradford. Nor are these contradictions unique to the Muslims. Thus while Dwyer indicates that a parallel form of neo-Hindu revivalism is attracting widespread interest in Britain, as it currently does in India itself, her focus on Hindu sectarianism also shows that Hindus are no more religiously united in Britain than they are in India itself. Caste and sectarian differentiation remains deeply entrenched, as —

even more so — does the disjunction between the Gujarati majority and Punjabi minority. Ballard's analysis of Sikh disunity takes up the same theme, while Nesbitt's account of Valmiki revivalism shows how organised resistance to upper-caste hegemony leads to what can best be regarded as the creation of a whole new religion. Over and above the sectarian fragments of which the Sikh, Hindu and Muslim presence is constituted, South Asian migrants have also brought a number a smaller and less well-known religious traditions to Britain. Of these the Jams and the Zoroastrian Parsis are discussed in latter chapters; lack of space has forced us arbitrarily to exclude the Buddhists and the Indian Christians, who themselves embrace a wide range of diversities. Punjabi Protestants, Catholics from Goa, and Syrian Christians from South India have all formed small but very active ethnic colonies of their own.

As for social class, it has already been indicated that the vast majority of migrants were of rural rather than urban origin, and that most belonged to peasant farming families, though with a significant leaven of skilled craftsmen. On arrival in Britain the industrial jobs which migrants took led some analysts to identify them uncritically as "working-class", but that term should be applied with caution. Structurally, settlers did indeed stand at the bottom of the ladder; but on the other hand their aspirations, strategies and expectations differed sharply from those of their white working-class neighbours. The social hierarchy of an Indian village cannot be mapped over that of urban industrial Britain.

Even so, it is clear that although everyone started out at the bottom of the social order, some groups have achieved much more upward mobility than others. How is this to be accounted for? In crude statistical terms there is now evidence that British Muslims have attained a much lower average level of achievement than the Hindus and Sikhs, let alone the Jams and the Parsis. Given that Islam is popularly regarded as inculcating narrow-mindedness, inflexibility and authoritarianism among its followers, the obvious conclusion is often drawn: that the correlation must be causal. However this conclusion cannot be sustained, above all because it fails to take any account of levels of economic development in the areas from which migrants have been drawn. Mirpur and Sylhet districts —from which the majority of Muslim migrants have been drawn — are relatively poverty-stricken, certainly as compared with West Punjab and Gujarat. It is this, rather than commitment to Islam *per se*, which accounts for most of those differentials.

If differential levels of rural economic development have affected patterns of upward mobility, being of urban origin has had still greater impact. As we have seen, only a small proportion of the total inflow was made up of urbanites, but since most came with educational or professional qualifications of some sort, their expectations and aspirations were much higher. Most were therefore distressed to find that despite their hopes of a professional career, they were no better placed on the labour market than the villagers, and that there was little alternative to taking unskilled manual jobs. Despite the bitter humiliation which this entailed, few allowed their hopes to be entirely dashed. Some have since established themselves in professional careers, but many more have sidestepped exclusionism in the labour market by starting their own businesses — and have thus achieved upward social mobility. In the early days some of those successes were spectacular. As Hinnells recounts, the tiny Parsi community saw no less than three Members of Parliament elected from among its ranks in the early twentieth century.

Later the situation became much tougher, and the experiences of the few people with professional qualifications who arrived in the midst of the much larger inflow of labour migrants were chequered.'[17] Some, like the doctors, made progress towards the middle ranks of their

professional hierarchies. Promotion to more senior positions largely eluded them, however, and the experience of racial exclusionism has gradually led to a change in their adaptive strategies. In the early years of settlement most professionals made great efforts to distance themselves from the mass of their fellow-countrymen and their ethnic colonies, hoping that their greater commitment to assimilation would serve to ward off exclusionism. However years of bitter experience has persuaded most of them to change their minds, so that in addition to the close ties they have long maintained among themselves, many South Asian professionals have established closer relationships with upwardly mobile labour-migrant families, especially if they are of similar regional, religious and caste origins.

Migrants and Twice Migrants

The final source of differentiation, which cuts across all the others discussed so far, is that between those who came directly to Britain from the subcontinent, and those who had previously lived elsewhere in the South Asian diaspora — a group which has been graphically dubbed by Parminder Bhachu as *"Twice Migrants"*.[18] Bhachu herself is concerned solely with those twice-migrants who arrived by way of East Africa. Besides forming by far the largest such group in Britain, they do appear to differ strikingly from their once-migrant peers. Besides being heavily involved in ethnic reconstruction long before their involuntary departure from East Africa, the circumstances of their arrival in Britain were quite different. Most entered as more or less complete family units, and they had by definition rejected the option of an immediate return to India. Hence they were settlers rather than sojourners right from the outset. In addition they were also better equipped for economic survival: most had educational qualifications of some sort, many spoke English fluently, and most men (and some women) either had experience of professional, technical or commercial employment, or had run their own businesses before leaving Africa.

Despite these advantages, East African Asians soon met the same problems of racial exclusionism as their once-migrant peers. Few were dispirited, however, and by dint of hard work, reinforced by skill, determination and mutual co-operation, they have made rapid progress, both in paid (and often professional) employment, and by starting their own businesses. Even though many families lost most of their savings during their involuntary departure from Africa, by common consent the East Africans now form the most prosperous segment of the South Asian presence in Britain. Yet although they tend to feel themselves to be a cut above the rest, it is uncertain how long this sense of East African and twice-migrant distinctiveness will be sustained. Despite their greater affluence and more "westernised" material lifestyles, they also have a strong commitment to religious and ethnic reconstruction, and are thus much less different from the other settlers than is commonly supposed, since they belong to the very same communities and castes as do the once-migrants. Thus while the African connection remains a source of pride and not a little prestige, its distinctiveness is inevitably fading. Kinship, caste and sect are proving far more effective as unifying agents than the experience of being a twice-migrant.

This is not true of all twice-migrants, however, as Vertovec's chapter demonstrates. In sharp contrast to every other group discussed, the Indo-Caribbean population of Guyana and Trinidad did not move overseas as voluntary migrants, but were transported there as indentured labourers in conditions of near-slavery. They were part of a replacement labour force recruited after the formal abolition of slavery; many thousands of Indian "coolies" thus found themselves working

for a pittance in a whole string of tropical colonies.[t9] Given the harshness of their conditions of employment, the indentured labourers found it much more difficult to sustain a coherent sense of cultural continuity than did their free migrant counterparts, and Indo-Caribbeans therefore differ strikingly in their lifestyles from all other British South Asians. Their links with the subcontinent have become so attenuated that few retain fluency in their ancestral language, and many aspects of their speech and lifestyle have been heavily influenced by contact with their Afro-Caribbean neighbours. However in religious terms they still identify themselves as Hindus, even if their practices have been influenced by Protestant Christianity, while the significance of caste divisions — which are still salient within all other South Asian groups — is also much diminished.

On the face of it, the Indo-Caribbeans differ sharply from everyone else, not least because for them those characteristics which the others regard as the very heart of their "Asianness" are severely atrophied. Yet it would be unwise to dismiss the Indo-Caribbean experience as wholly exceptional, for their adaptive strategies may well foreshadow the shape of things to come. Certainly, material conditions in contemporary Britain are much less adverse than those experienced by Caribbean cane-cutters, and cheap travel makes it easier for settlers to keep in touch with kin in the subcontinent; but the pressures to which the second and third generation in Britain are subjected, and their sense of distance from the subcontinent, echo the Indo-Caribbean experience. Before long their response to exile may seem much less aberrant than it does at present.

Caste

There is, however, one sphere in which no other groups have yet followed Indo-Caribbean practice: that of caste. As every subsequent chapter shows, caste remains a crucial feature of social organisation in almost every settlement. Yet despite its centrality, nothing provokes more bafflement and indignation among outsiders. It is therefore vital to look briefly at both the ideological foundations and the practical consequences of this most Indian of institutions.

In ideological terms, both differentiation and the functional interdependence of the component parts so differentiated is basic to the Hindu vision of the logic of the cosmic order. Hence the social order (which is itself viewed as a microcosm of the wider universe) is conceived of not as a collection of autonomous individuals all pursuing their own independent goals, but rather as a complex system of interdependence where every component makes its own unique but necessary contribution to the operation of the whole. What this means in practice is that Hindu society is seen as arising from the interactions between a multiplicity of occupational specialists, where Brahmins perform rituals to please the gods, kings rule, merchants trade, farmers cultivate their land, and craftsmen of many kinds exercise their skills, while polluted menials serve all their superiors by removing the impurities which the latter continuously accumulate as a result of cosmic, local and personal entropy.[20]

Although this system emphasises cooperation and reciprocity, it is also explicitly hierarchical. Brahmins, as the epitome of ritual purity, stand at the top; rulers, traders, farmers and craftsmen are spread out along a steadily descending scale, down to groups right at the bottom which are often described as "Untouchable" — although "irretrievably impure" is a more exact term. Hence throughout the subcontinent the population of every village is divided between a number of hereditary, endogamous and occupationally linked groups known as zat or *jati*, or in English as castes. At least in principle, every such caste has a fixed and unchangeable rank, while its

boundaries are maintained both by the hereditary ascription of occupational specialism and by a rule of endogamy which requires that all marriages must take place within the *jati*. Yet although the tight closure and lack of flexibility which all this implies often leads Western observers to conclude that the whole system is morally objectionable, a closer examination of how it actually operates shows that it is actually much more fluid than first impressions might suggest.

First, each caste is a fully-fledged community of kin, whose members sustain horizontal links with like groups in neighbouring villages; and while individual mobility from one caste to another is unthinkable, *collective* mobility, where an entire locally-based *jati* moves upwards (or downwards) through the social scale, is indeed possible Nor is this new; there is widespread agreement that such collective mobility has always been a feature of the caste system.

Seen in this perspective, caste solidarity is much less puzzling: its core feature is no more than a closing of ranks among those with common interests. Stripped of exoticism, caste reveals itself as a highly effective form of collective bargaining, and thus akin to a system of guilds. However it gains a strongly Indian character because in this case occupational specialists use rules of endogamy and cornmensality to reinforce further the effectiveness of their closed shops. The nominal fixity of caste rank is therefore rather misleading. While change is rarely speedy, the rank ascribed to any caste ultimately depends on the effectiveness of its bargaining power within the immediate local context. Thus, as Dwyer shows for pre-British Gujarat, merchant castes took advantage of a political vacuum to engineer an improved rank for themselves; meanwhile Nesbitt provides equally clear evidence that those whose bargaining power declines can suffer exactly the opposite fate.

The Dynamics of Caste in the Diaspora

Although caste systems have always been more flexible in practice than the formal ideology suggests, it is still widely assumed that cornmercialisation, urbanisation and migration would inevitably undermine the whole system. Much has indeed changed. In urban India the formal division of labour and the resulting structures of interdependence have largely collapsed, and such patterns are even more alien to life in the diaspora. Yet in Britain as in urban India, caste disjunctions and caste loyalties are still almost as active as they ever were.

Why should this be so? While the hereditary allocation of occupational specialisation may have been swept away, the rules of endogamy are still just as strictly followed in the diaspora as in the subcontinent. As a result, all kinship networks remain firmly caste-specific. By itself this would be of little significance, were it not that kinship reciprocities still offer the most effective means of organising mutual support, especially in fiercely competitive urban environments. Thus whenever migrants have helped each other gain access to jobs, housing and other scarce resources, and whenever they have sought to protect their gains (however limited) from encroachment, they have invariably found that kinship ties provided the most effective base for collective mobilisation. So although rapid economic change may indeed have eroded the caste system's traditional foundations, it has been re-invigorated by its role as a channel for kinship reciprocities, no less in Birmingham than in Bombay.

The collapse of the traditional rank order has had a further paradoxical consequence: the intensification of inter-caste competition for status. As almost every subsequent chapter shows, many settlers are still almost obsessively concerned with issues of rank; members of "higher"

castes still go to considerable lengths to preserve and maintain their status, while those further down the scale are if anything even more concerned to catch up.

Caste, Religion and Sect

Since caste is above all a Hindu ideological construct, and since the very idea is nominally repugnant to the Muslim, Sikh, Jam, Parsi and Indian Christian traditions, it might be thought that such a generalisation would not be widely applicable amongst non-Hindu settlers. In practice, however, few if any of the subcontinent's non-Hindu communities have remained immune from its influence.

The Sikhs provide a good illustration. On a strictly theological level, the Sikhs can and do argue that their Gurus flatly rejected the ideology of caste. But despite this, neither the Gurus nor their followers seriously challenged either the hereditary ascription of occupational specialism, or the principle of *zat* endogamy. And while those who followed the Gurus' teaching may thereby have been able to discount the Brahmins' claims to ritual superiority, their ideas about ritual impurity remained largely unchanged. From the viewpoint of those at the bottom of the pile, the conversion of their patrons to Sikhism made little difference; in the face of continued upper-caste chauvinism, many felt they had no alternative but to strike out separately on their own account, as Nesbitt shows for the Valmikis.

Similar tendencies can also be observed among the Muslims, most of whom are also converts from Hinduism. In most rural communities occupational roles are still hereditarily ascribed, and give rise to *zat* divisions of a manifestly caste-like character, while the tendency towards closure is further reinforced by a widespread preference for cousin-marriage. Thus even though Muslims are much less bothered about rules of endogamy, their *biraderis* tend to be even more tightly introverted than most *jatis* — and, as Shaw demonstrates, they are just as effective as vehicles for mutual support.

Finally, if the Sikhs and Muslims are internally divided by caste, the Jams and the Parsis discussed by Banks and Hinnells offer a neat contrast. In this context both can be seen as acting as castes in their own right, for although they can and do argue that they are not concerned with issues of caste, each group has a long history of occupational specialisation, as well as a strong commitment to (religious) endogamy. Hence wherever one stands in the debate about whether it is legitimate to regard them as "castes", there can be no dispute that Jain and Parsi strategies of closure have a strongly caste-like character.

The Construction of South Asian Communities in Britain

What consequences, then, has all this diversity had for the construction of *Desh Pardesh?* Although there can be little doubt that settlers' lifestyles have changed a great deal since their arrival in Britain, in understanding this adjustment two very different sets of factors must be borne in mind. On the one hand they have all followed a broadly similar strategy of rejecting assimilation, and have instead relied to a large extent on their own resources as a means of building themselves a home from home. But even though they have all therefore been following broadly parallel trajectories, each group has drawn on its own specific set of human and cultural resources while doing so.

Given that those resources were themselves diverse, this has given rise to a wide range of outcomes. Close examination soon reveals much variation in the speed with which the switch from the sojourner to the settler mode has taken place, the kinds of housing they chose to live in and the jobs they were able and prepared to accept, and the vigour and success with which they sought to press their way upwards through the employment and housing markets and the educational system. As a result wide differences in achievement can often be observed between groups whose regional and occupational background might seem at first sight very similar. So, for example, the dual impact of differing levels of economic development back in the subcontinent, together with some arcane differences in marriage rules which might otherwise seem wholly insignificant, can help to explain the striking differences now observable between Jullunduri and Mirpun settlers, even though their homes lie little more than 100 miles apart in Punjab; if two relatively similar groups differ so much, it follows that we must expect a yet wider variation still amongst the South Asian population as a whole.

This volume yet further underlines these diversities. As subsequent chapters show, "Asian" experience now ranges all the way from Sylheti families in Spitalfields, East London, crowded together in decaying council tenements and faced by high levels of unemployment and racial harassment, to wealthy East African Gujarati Hindus who have moved into comfortable suburban neighbourhoods where they are courted by senior members of the Conservative Party, and some of whom were even invited to a special celebration dinner at 10 Downing Street by Mrs Thatcher herself. Yet while any generalisation about "Asians" must take these variations into account, we still have far to go in understanding how they have arisen, let alone how permanent they will prove to be. Since all settlers have met similar patterns of structural constraint, such differences are manifestly the outcome of cultural factors. However, it would be a mistake to regard the less successful groups as suffering from a cultural handicap of any sort, onto see their present position as fixed and immutable. What every subsequent chapter serves to emphasise is not only how much every little community *differs* from the next, but also that each is following its own distinctive dynamic. From this perspective the members of each colony are best understood as being in the midst of a vigorous process of adaptation, and thus busily engaged in deploying their own particular set of cultural, linguistic, religious and kinship resources to plot a better future for themselves. The result is both steady progress and ever-growing diversity.

Those in search of simple generalisations will undoubtedly be disappointed by our approach, for we offer no instant nostrums and no simple and easily measurable variables. What we ourselves would argue is that if one adopts this kind of perspective, there is no simple way of understanding either the quality of South Asian lifestyles in Britain or the scale and character of the active solidarities which form the basis of any sense of community. Indeed once it is accepted that meaningful solidarities must be grounded in active networks, it follows that to talk of an "Asian" community — or even of "Indian", "Pakistani" or "Bangladeshi" ones — is often to reinforce a fiction. Real communities are much more parochially organised, and have been generated from the specific skills, understandings and loyalties which each little network makes available to its members. *Desh Pardesh* — the embodiment of the self-created worlds of Britain's South Asian settlers — is therefore anything but homogeneous; it is precisely the rich and diverse nature of its many faces which we seek to highlight here.

Between Two Cultures?

Before closing, this Introduction must also review the developments associated with the emergence of a British-born generation. While its members are certainly major contributors to the process of ethnic colonisation, they are also much more deeply involved in transactions across the ethnic boundary than their parents ever were. Almost all the significant social interactions of older settlers take place within the local ethnic colony; to be sure, it is hard to avoid any relationships at all with members of the indigenous majority, but when such transactions do occur they are usually strongly instrumental in character, and are invested with little moral or emotional force.

Their offspring, and more specifically those who have spent the greater part of their childhood in Britain, usually participate much more actively in the wider social order — at school and college, at work, and in a wide range of leisure activities. Hence in contrast to their parents they are constantly on the move between a wide variety of social arenas, which are often organised around differing, and sometimes radically contradictory, moral and cultural conventions.

How do they cope with this? To many outside observers, the answer seems obvious enough. Given that majority and minority value-systems differ so sharply, those young people who are expected to conform to both must constantly be struggling with the resulting contradictions, or so it is believed. Thus, for example, teachers, social workers and youth workers who regularly encounter South Asians among their clientele can often be heard discussing the insufferable contradictions which these young people are thought to face through being trapped "between two cultures".[21] Indeed this vocabulary has become so widespread that young Asians have themselves adopted it; instant sympathy can certainly be expected if they ascribe all their personal difficulties to their condition of "culture conflict".

Real though the dilemmas of the rising British-born generation may be, does this terminology enable their experiences to be adequately grasped? Does active participation in two or more social and cultural arenas necessarily cause psychological confusion? If not, what kind of analytical perspective should we use instead?

Code Switching and Cultural Navigation

Perhaps the best way in which we can make some progress here is by drawing an analogy between bilingualism and bi- and multi-culturalism, not just as attributes of the wider social order, but also in terms of the degree of linguistic and cultural competence which individuals may or may not possess. For most members of Britain's monolingual majority, bilingualism remains an unusual and mysterious skill, of which they have little or no first-hand experience. Had their experience been more cosmopolitan, they might have been more aware that in global terms bilingualism is a far less unusual phenomenon than they suppose. More important still, the capacity to switch from one linguistic and conceptual code to another is not a recipe for psychological confusion. Quite the contrary: the ability to express oneself with equal fluency in two or more languages is a wholly normal human capacity, with which our brains can cope with ease.

As with language, so with culture. Just as individuals can be bilingual, so they can also be multicultural, with the competence to behave appropriately in a number of different arenas, and to switch codes as appropriate. If this is so, the popular view that young people of South Asian parentage will inevitably suffer from "culture conflict" as a result of their participation in a number of differently structured worlds can be dismissed. Rather they are much better perceived

as skilled cultural navigators, with a sophisticated capacity to manoeuvre their way to their own advantage both inside and outside the ethnic colony. While such a perspective radically transforms the conventional understanding of the experience of young British Asians, it would nevertheless be idle to suggest that code-switching is a means by which they can short-circuit all their problems and dilemmas. Far from it. Just because they do not follow a single given set of conventions, all cultural navigators must constantly decide how best to behave in any given context, while also finding some means of switching smoothly from one to the next.

While such strategic decisions can indeed be difficult, to call them "*culture* conflict" is surely mistaken. If that culture were in some way a comprehensive determinant of behaviour, an individual's participation in two different arenas might indeed give rise to irresolvable contradictions. But multiculturalism freezes behaviour no more than bilingualism inhibits speech. Cultures, like languages, are *codes*, which actors use to express themselves in a given context; and as the context changes, so those with the requisite competence simply switch code.

In this perspective a switch of arena, along with an associated switch of linguistic and cultural codes, can be quite straightforward. But problems may arise when one is *known* to have switched codes, and where behaviour in the second arena takes a form which is regarded as unacceptable from the perspective of the first. For example, if many Asian parents knew exactly how their daughters behaved once safely out of sight at school or college, they would be horrified — just as those same young women would be equally embarrassed if their English school-friends were more aware of how they behaved once they re-entered the ethnic colony. Thus, codeswitching is much more a problem for the beholders than for the actors themselves. Hence if one can keep all the arenas in which one is an actor apart, so that information does not flow inappropriately and unexpectedly from one to the next, no problems will arise. When difficulties do occur, they are more likely to be a result of unexpected information leakage than of code-switching in itself.

Such code-switching is of course not unique to South Asians, or even to immigrants, for one can expect to encounter such activities in all contexts of cultural plurality, no matter how lightly marked. But although code switch is best regarded as a universal phenomenon — for few people live in such a homogeneous world that they have no experience whatsoever of stepping back and forth across such boundaries — such navigational skills are far from uniformly distributed. Because a central privilege of dominance is the power to insist that all one's interactions should be ordered on one's own terms, it is members of excluded and devalued groups who have a far greater need to develop and use such skills.

Yet although most young Britons of South Asian descent have therefore become very skilled in moving back and forth between all manner of "English" and "Asian" arenas, they still face all sorts of dilemmas. These arise not so much because the underlying value-premises of the arenas in which they participate are different, but rather because each side has such a markedly negative perception of the other — as we saw at the outset.

This contradiction has far-reaching consequences, Because most aspects of their domestic lifestyles are viewed so negatively by the native English, most young Asians find themselves under constant pressure to distance themselves from their parents' and their communities' linguistic, religious and cultural conventions. It is therefore hardly surprising that many go out of their way to present themselves as if majority lifestyles were also their own preferred option whenever they feel themselves to be in sight of a white audience. Yet few feel wholly relaxed in such a role. First, presenting oneself in this way is always in a sense a living lie, since it entails a

constant denial of the legitimacy and validity of one's heritage, and of the warm emotional support offered by one's family and kin. Secondly skin colour remains an inescapable barrier. No matter how well-practised one's navigational skills, the prospect of being written off as a "Paid" can never be eliminated. Total acceptance is therefore out of the question.

Yet if participation in majority arenas is beset by contradictions, most young people are involved in battles of the very opposite kind on their own home territory. These are much more complex than most outsiders imagine. Contrary to pessimistic external assumptions, few young people experience any difficulty in conforming to their parents' styles and expectations within the four walls of their home: besides the large debt of gratitude they feel they owe to their elders, the values with which they are expected to conform are those into which they have been socialised since childhood. By contrast, difficulties are far more likely to arise over young people's extra-domestic activities, as when worried and over-authoritarian parents take the view that even the smallest infiltration of English norms will result in a swift and comprehensive slide into anglicisation, especially where daughters are concerned. The resulting conflicts are played out in a wide variety of ways, but the results are rarely as disastrous as external observers predict; if parents are prepared not to ask too searching questions, and their offspring are prepared to do their code-switching well out of sight of their elders, some wide contradictions can be bridged with surprising ease.

Yet although similar "blind-eye" strategies can also be observed on the other side of the ethnic boundary, it would be wrong to conclude that cultural navigators will always conform to the norms expected in their immediate environment, or even that they are faced with a straight choice between majority and minority codes. On the contrary, strategic advantages can often be gained by those who deliberately code their behaviour inappropriately. For example, young men or women who begin to act in an over-anglicised way at home may well simply be seeking to assert themselves: efforts to resist parental hegemony should not be misread as "culture conflict". Exactly the reverse of this process occurs when young people set out to make space for themselves in majority contexts. Hence to switch "inappropriately" into Urdu or Punjabi speech, to wear a turban or *shalwar kamiz,* to condemn the publication of *The Satanic Verses,* to praise arranged marriages — or indeed to reject any other aspect of Western orthodoxy — is a particularly effective way of re-establishing personal dignity in the face of racial and ethnic denigration. To interpret such behaviour as psycho-pathological, as a vocabulary of "culture conflict" and "identity crisis" inevitably suggests, is seriously misleading, for the essentially political dimension of these interactions is thereby obscured.

Desh Pardesh Renews Itself: The Younger Generation

Exploring the behavioural strategies of the rising British-born generation takes us into a world of considerably greater complexity than that inhabited by its parents. As we have seen — and as every subsequent chapter further emphasises — the older generation of migrants' commitment to ethnic colonisation largely reflected an intense concern to insulate domestic and personal life from the perceived corrosive impact of the social and cultural mores of the host society. Yet even though the surrounding environment may have had far more influence on settlers' lifestyles than they themselves are aware of, the boundaries around their own domestic worlds are still sharply drawn. In these circumstances a descriptive account which regards life within such internal "Asian" arenas as being grounded in cultural premises which are entirely separate from those of

the surrounding white majority may cut some analytical corners, but it does so without too much injustice to empirical reality.

Once we turn to the rising generation of young adults, however, such an approach ceases to be sustainable. First, the internal/external distinction almost disappears: those who have grown up in Britain are as much at ease in many majority environments as they are within the ethnic colony, and their everyday lives involve constant movement between a wide variety of differently structured arenas. But such manoeuvres give rise to much more than a simple either/or choice. Young British Asians may indeed be just as much at home in their parents' world as they are among their white peers, but at the same time they are actively and creatively engaged in carving out *new* styles of interaction among themselves. Thus it is also apparent that members of the rising generation are best understood as extremely mobile in linguistic, religious and cultural terms, and often taking delight in drawing eclectically on every tradition available to them. In this respect the musical inventiveness of Apache Indian, the Birmingham-born pop star whose ironic lyrics seamlessly mixing English with Punjabi are declaimed rap-style against a beat which itself weaves *bhangra* with reggae, may well be a pointer to the future.

With the younger generation bringing further layers of differentiation over and above those introduced by the first generation of migrants, any attempt to present a general overview of current developments is hazardous. Yet there is one point on which we can be clear. Most of the rising generation are acutely aware of how much they differ from both their parents *and* from the surrounding white majority, and as a result they are strongly committed to ordering their own lives on their own terms. Just what those terms will be, and how they will rejig and reinterpret and reinvent the premises on which they choose to organise their lives, is yet to be seen. But the vigour with which young people insist that "We're British and we're here to stay" makes it clear that the commitment to building *Desh Pardesh* is in no way limited to the first generation.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Mohammed Anwar, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1979)*

[2] See Cohn Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?: immigrants, refugees and minorities in Britain* (London: Faber, 1991).

[3] Rosina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes* (London: Pluto. 1986).

[4] Salter, *The Asiatic in London* (London: Seely, 1873) provides many illuminating details of seamen in the late nineteenth century. Paul Fryer, *Staying Power: the history of black people in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984) offers a masterly overview.

[5] Roger Ballard and Virinder Singh Kalra, *The Ethnic Dimensions of the 1991 Census* (Manchester University: Manchester Census Group, 1994).

[6] The figures in the final column are the most reliable, since they are based on responses to a genuine ethnic question. The figures in the preceding columns are "best estimates", based either on country of birth data (1961 and 1971), or data on residents in households headed by persons born in the countries specified (1981).

[7] Bangladesh only broke away from Pakistan after the 1971 civil war, so separate figures for Bangladeshis are only available from 1981 onwards.

[8] No reliable figures for East African Asians are available for 1961. By 1991, when an ethnic question was posed, the majority of East African Asians appear to have identified themselves as Indian.

[9] Excellent accounts of this early period can be found in Gurdip Aurora, *The New Frontiersmen* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1967), and in Reshmi Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1963).

[10] Badr Dahya's account of "The nature of Pakistani ethnicity in Industrial cities in Britain", in Abner Cohen (ed.), *Urban Ethnicity* (London: Tavistock, 1974)) gives an excellent portrait of lifestyles during this period.

[11] A more detailed exploration of the factors underlying differential rates of family reunion can be found in Roger Ballard, "Emigration in a wider context", *New Community*, 1983, and in Roger Ballard "Migration and Kinship" in Cohn Clarke (ed.), *South Asians Overseas* (Cambridge University Press, I 990).

[12] This has confused many sociological commentators, for in "objective" terms the new minorities have given and often still give every appearance of suffering from severe deprivation. But appearances can be deceptive. Because most South Asian settlers have studiously avoided the values of consumer capitalism, they have survived adversity far more successfully than their white working-class peers.

[13] Both Parminder Bhachu, *The Twice Migrants* (London: Tavistock, 1986), and Pnina Werbner, *The Migration Process* (London: Berg, 1989) provide detailed accounts of well-established South Asian communities, with a particular emphasis on the elaborate processes of gift exchange which now accompany marriage among East African Ramgarhia Sikhs on the one hand, and affluent Pakistani businessmen on the other.

[14] While the 1991 Census figures quoted earlier give a much more accurate estimate than ever before of the total size of Britain's South Asian population, the numbers are of little help when it comes to making a more precise regional and religious breakdown.

[15] A useful introduction to the events of this period can be found in Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

[16] Patricia Jeffery, *Migrants and Refugees* (Cambridge University Press, 1976) provides an excellent account of Pakistani Christians and some of their dilemmas.

[17] So much research has been devoted to charting the experiences of the labour-migrant majority that those of the professional minority have been largely overlooked. In the United States this

pattern is reversed, and the experiences of its mostly professional settlers is ably charted in Arthur itnd Usha Helweg, *An Immigrant Succe.cs Story* (London: Hurst, 1991)

[18] Parminder Bhachu, *ibid.*

[19] A detailed account of the itdenture system can be found in Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery* (Oxford University Press, 1974).

[20] Excellent accounts of the formal logic of the caste system can be found in Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), and in Declan Quigley, *The Interpretation of Caste* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

[21] It is also most unfortunate that an earlier and extremely influential compendium on the minority presence in Britain, James Watson's *Between Two Cultures* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), used this phrase in its title. The term therefore appeared to have been given academic and analytical credence, even though none of the contributors to that volume made any further use of it.