SOUTH ASIAN FAMILIES

Roger Ballard

INTRODUCTION

The presentation of a brief and generalized account of the major features of family organization in South Asian settlements in Britain poses many problems. Although lifestyles within such groups may seem quite distinctive to outsiders, there is a great deal of internal differentiation. migrants have come from different parts of the sub-continent, and they and their children have adopted a range of strategic responses to their new social and economic environment. Yet despite these diversities, it is possible to identify a number of underlying structural continuities which run across the whole population category. The central aim of this chapter is to establish and illuminate the basic patterns and principles of family organization which are characteristic of virtually every community of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin in Britain.

The South Asian population of Britain currently numbers rather more than a million people, about half of whom were locally born. Mass migration from the sub-continent began in the 1950s when the country was suffering from an acute shortage of labour, and although the entry of adult males is now tightly restricted, some men who have long been resident in Britain have still not yet brought their wives and children to join them. Thus while some families have long been reunited, others are still in the, midst of reconstituting themselves. Demographically the South Asian population of Britain still remains unbalanced. it contains a disproportionately large number of women of child-bearing age, and a correspondingly small number of elderly people. Most migrants were of small or middle peasant background, and have come in large numbers from a few Compact areas, notably in Punjab (somewhere in the order of three-quarters come from this region), Gujarat and Bengal. The majority of East African Asians have similar origins. in the course of settlement in Britain aggregations based upon commonalities of religion, area of origin, caste and most especially kinship have grown up, and the greater part of most migrants' domestic and social interactions are now conducted within arenas ordered in these terms. Thus although the South Asian population in any particular city may be large, internally significant communal aggregations often include no more than 100 families. A substantial number of studios of such communities are now available, all of which indicate the great significance of kinship loyalties both during migration and in the subsequent processes of communal and ethnic consolidation. (1) None, however, examines the content of family organization in any detail, so this chapter can thus be seen as an attempt to remedy that deficiency.

Yet before doing so some fundamental problems of definition and vocabulary must be disposed of. it is striking, for instance, that whenever the structure of such families is being publicly discussed, the qualifiers 'joint' or 'extended' are invariably employed. Yet what precisely do these terms mean? Very often their use indicates nothing more than that, from the speaker's perspective, South Asians keep in touch with a wider range of relatives than he

would expect to do himself. If we are to achieve any analytical clarity, our terminology must be much more precise. Even the concept of family is problematic in. a similar way. In common English speech, its meaning can range over the members of a household (that is those who live together under the same roof), those who feel strong bonds of obligation to one another by virtue of close kinship (even if they do not live together), those who claim descent from a common ancestor (for instance 'of good family') and finally all those with whom a person can trace a relationship, whether by blood or marriage (as in 'a family gathering'). Each of these levels of meaning is of significance in understanding South Asian kinship, but nothing but confusion arises if they are not distinguished.

The problem of just what should be identified as constituting a family can be illustrated by considering the disjunctions which often arise during the process of migration. The most concrete kinship aggregations that can be observed in Britain are households, that is groups of people who live together and who make common domestic arrangements amongst themselves. Yet among South Asians the members of such households often regard these arrangements as a matter of temporary convenience. From their perspective the network of obligations and expectations between those who would have lived together had they still been resident in their villages of origin may be of far greater significance. Thus an empirically observable household in Britain may often be no more than a local facet of a much wider network of familial relationships which bind together similar households scattered around the world. It is these networks of binding relationships which are very often the most appropriate focus for an analysis of the family.

AN IDEAL MODEL OF THE SOUTH ASIAN FAMILY

The essential logic of South Asian migrants' families can best be understood by tracing them back to their historical and geographical roots, and the most convenient way of doing this is by setting out a model of the way they were 'traditionally' organized.(2) It should be emphasized, however, that this ideal model is no more than a convenient fiction, which can be used as a kind of template against which to set currently observable behaviour. It is not, nor is it intended to be, either an indicator of the statistical average or an accurate representation of the way in which families were actually organized in the past.

The basic pattern of family membership was very clear cut: it consisted of a man, his sons and grandsons, together with their wives and unmarried daughters (see Figure 8. 1). Only sons had full rights of inheritance and so remained family members all their lives. At marriage daughters left their natal home and became members of their husbands' family. The family was both a corporate and a multi-functional group.

Not only did its members hold land, or a business, or a right to perform some craft skill in common, but they lived and worked co-operatively together, sharing agricultural, domestic and other productive tasks among themselves. Ideologically it was assumed that obligation to the group would always be put before personal self-interest. Individual freedom was not regarded as being of great significance, for family members' social reality was seen as arising much more from their mutual interrelationships than from the intrinsic qualities of their individual personalities. As a corporate group the family had an essentially permanent existence over time. it was not necessarily dependent for its continuity on the maintenance of a relationship between any particular married couple. Rather, long-term stability was most crucially guaranteed by the birth of sons, whose eventual marriage would sustain the group

for a further generation. in sharp contrast to English families in both modern and historical times, in the South Asian context it has never been assumed that sons should establish independent households of their own at marriage.

The underlying structure of the family is most clearly highlighted by a consideration of the distribution of property rights among its members. Ownership of the patrimony was formally vested in the eldest male member, who was expected to manage the family's affairs to the benefit of all. inheritance of property most especially of the land which is so crucial in any peasant society was effectively restricted to the patriarch's sons. Daughters and grand-daughters were entitled to a dowry (usually jewellery, clothing and household utensils) at marriage, when they were transferred irrevocably to their husband's families. Since sons could only gain access to land, and indeed most other occupations, through the family, they normally stayed at home with their father. only after his death could brothers claim separate shares in their inheritance, and so establish separate families of their own. Although the ideal has long been that a man's sons should continue to live together co-operatively after their father's death, with the elder brother becoming the patriarch, in practice it seems that most families whose livelihood was drawn solely from peasant cultivation have always divided their land in such circumstances. (3)But this does not imply that at partition each brother went off as an individual, rather it was a process whereby one corporate family split along well established lines into a number of smaller but structurally identical groups.

Relationships within each family were ordered in terms of an ideal of unrestricted interpersonal reciprocity, quite accurately summed up by the dictum, 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'. Yet it was far from being an egalitarian group, for each member was regarded as having a distinct but complementary role to play. All relationships were intrinsically hierarchical, as between the sexes, as between the generations, and as between older and younger in the same generation. Superordinates were expected to support and care for their subordinates, while subordinates were expected to respect and obey their superordinates. It was upon the maintenance of these asymmetric reciprocities that the unity and continuity of the family depended.

STRUCTURE AND PROCESS,

As stressed at the outset, this model only provides a sketch of the basic moral and legal parameters within which real families operate, and should not be taken as a statistical norm. For instance, although the ideal presumption has always been that families should be large multigenerational groups, most families were not so constituted, even in the 'traditional' past. When many mothers died in childbirth, many children failed to survive infancy and few adults reached old age, it was statistically impossible for more than a minority of families to approximate the ideal. it is only recent advances in standards of public health which have made it more widely attainable.

Similarly it is vital that the content of interpersonal relationships within the family Should be approached from a dynamic perspective. Although constructed around an ideology of co-operation and harmony, South Asian families are not therefore marked by a complete absence of conflict and tension between their members. On the contrary every participant in every family is constantly engaged in securing his or her own interests, and consequently in limiting and curbing the advances of others. it is of course impossible to give an exhaustive account of all the manoeuvres which may take place, so all that will be attempted here is to

set out some illustrative generalizations about the kinds of processes which can be observed in virtually all South Asian families.

Let us begin by considering the relationship between father and son, between whom A degree of tension is unexceptional, and explosive conflicts are by no means uncommon. These may be contained by using a variety of strategies, but amongst the most common is for the father to give his son largely autonomous responsibility for some aspect of the family's affairs. Tension may similarly be eased if a son goes to work abroad for a few years, though when he finally returns with his savings to add to the family's resources, conflict may recur in an even more acute form. As a result of his financial contribution a son may expect to have more influence within the family, but his father may still be reluctant to cede much power. Yet eventually all fathers age, and as their physical strength wanes, so does their ability to dominate their sons. In the long run patriarchs have little Alternative but to retire gradually from everyday management of their families' affairs. Those who are wise do so gracefully, retaining only symbolic authority, though reassured by the formal respect which their sons are usually prepared to offer. Sons know that it is only through their fathers that they can gain access to land and retain their good name in the community, while fathers are well aware that it is sons alone who can provide security in their old age. There are often disagreements about what the precise content of their relationship should be at any particular point in time, yet both sides are normally very conscious that a mutually satisfactory arrangement *must* be achieved. All other outcomes spell disaster for them both.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN

The adoption of a similar perspective also helps to illuminate the position of women, for their formal subordination to men does not indicate that they are necessarily devoid of power. On the contrary the very separation of women from men by the conventions of *purdah*, together with their control of the domestic economy, means that they operate in a partially autonomous world from which it is possible to bargain both individually and collectively with men. Although outcomes necessarily vary, husbands cannot afford to ignore the interests and concerns of their wives. Few heads of households and no wise ones make any important decisions without conferring extensively with every member of their families, women as well as men.

In considering the status of women the distribution of power amongst women themselves must also be considered, not least because they spend so much of their time apart from men. A newly married bride is always amongst the weakest members of the family. After an initial honeymoon period when she is on display, she is constantly at the beck and call of her mother-in-law, whose jealousy she must be careful not to arouse as she seeks to establish a relationship with her husband. In the early days of marriage husband and wife see relatively little of one another, except at night, and are not expected to show any overt affection for one another. Only after the birth of children does a woman's place within the family, and her relationship with her husband, become really secure.

Sons bring long-term continuity, and ensure that a woman will one day become a mother-in-law herself. it is then that she will be able to order the household to her own satisfaction, to have a more openly affectionate relationship with her husband, as well as having sons and daughters-in-law whom she can expect to carry out her wishes. Such a brief outline inevitably obscures the setbacks that invariably occur in a woman's hoped-for passage to a position of influence in her husband's family. She may fail to have children, her husband may fall out

with his brothers or his parents and take it out on her, or she may find herself in intense competition with her sisters-in-law. As such events occur women (and men) constantly manoeuvre in order to advance their interests, and to counter the activities of others.

There is no space here to discuss the strategies adopted, but they include passive non-cooperation, forming alliances with others, acting (or threatening to act) in such a way that the family's honour might be endangered, and dropping barbed comments about discrepancies between formal ideals and actual behaviour. Such tactics provide a very effective means whereby those with little authority can embarrass and constrain those who are behaving in an overbearing way. once such a perspective is adopted it soon becomes apparent that despite the institutionalized hierarchy within the family, formal subordinates are by no means necessarily in a position of unmitigated oppression. What ultimately counts is the skill with which each individual is able to deploy whatever bargaining strength he or she can muster. (4)

HONOUR AND SHAME

The complexity of the question of the asymmetry of the sexes is nowhere better illustrated than in the concepts of honour, *izzat*, and shame, *sharm*. In its narrower sense *izzat* is a matter of male pride. Honourable men, as in many Mediterranean cultures, are expected to present an image of fearlessness and independence to the outside world, and at the same time to keep close control over the female members of their families. For a woman to challenge her husband's or her father's authority in public shamefully punctures his honour. To sustain male *izzat* wives, sisters and daughters must be seen to behave with seemly modesty, secluding themselves from the world of men. The. ideas of honour and shame thus reinforce the formal hierarchy of relationships within the family.

But honour accrues to the family as a group, and not just to individual males within it, the advancement of their corporate *izzat* is one of the most important goals which South Asian families set themselves. The maintenance of *izzat* depends both upon the family's wealth and its members' conformity with ideal norms of behaviour; but it is advanced most effectively by arranging prestigious matches for the family's daughters, and by outshining its rivals in the gift exchanges which take place at such events. Yet it is striking that *women* play at least as great a role as men in the promotion of the family's honour. It is they who make and record all the decisions about gift giving. Very often they also handle all the private negotiations which precede their husbands' formal public confirmation of their daughters' marriages. (5) In the vigorous pursuit of an idea which intrinsically subordinates them, women gain influence not just over other women, but over men. But all would be lost if any public acknowledgement were to be made that this was indeed the case.

STRUCTURES **OF** EXTRA-FAMILIAL KINSHIP

Although our central concern here is with processes internal to the family, kinship relationships established between families must also be examined. Limitations of space mean that the discussion must be extremely compressed, but readers should at least be aware of the way in which the ideology of kinship may be utilized in the construction of wider social institutions. Although there is widespread local variation, most North Indian peasant farming families are aggregated into corporate patrilineal descent groups. The ancestor of each such local group, it is usually claimed, founded the village in which all his descendants now live. Such clan-brotherhoods (variously *biraderi, bhaichara, khandan*) are internally divided into sections and sub-sections in a segmentary fashion, and relationships between them are ordered in terms of a calculus of kinship and descent. Families with a common ancestor are expected to abandon their internal disputes to act as political allies should any one of their

nurcber come into conflict with a more distantly related fellow villager Such segmentary lineage systems. of which the family is the basic constituent unit, provides the framework for the structure **of** the village and its politics in most parts of Northern India. (6)

The idea of brotherhood on which these systems are based both unites and divides, for while common descent implies special loyalties, it also generates competition. This is latent between real brothers, but much more overt between families and groups of families which split apart in the past. The proximity of each family's land holdings provides ample opportunities for boundary disputes, while competition for *izzat* ensures that everyone takes elaborate steps that they are not outshone, most especially by their close 'brothers'. Yet despite their constant competition the fact that 'brothers' are neighbours gives them good reason to make common cause against more distant kin. Segmentary lineages are thus built up on the basis of a nesting pattern of oppositions and alliances between agnatically defined groups. Relationships between classificatory brothers' families (*serike* in Punjabi) are ordered in terms of reciprocity, but this is not of the unrestricted kind expected within the family. Amongst serike co-operation is tempered by a strongly competitive edge.

In contrast to these ties of agnatic kinship, affinal relationships are established with families from which wives have been taken, or to which daughters have been given in marriage. Such kin are known categorically as *ristedar*. Amongst Hindus and Sikhs, at least, marriage within one's own clan is forbidden, (7) although it must take place within the caste. The effect of this rule of exogamy is that at marriage women always leave their villages of origin and take up residence elsewhere. It also gives rise to a web of affinal relationships between families living in different villages. if agnatic ties are characterized by proximity and competition, affinal ties are, at least initially, formal and hierarchical. In many areas the bride's family treats the groom's with great respect, such that they may even refuse all proffered hospitality, feeling it more appropriate to give rather than to take. However, the bride's brother is expected to take a close interest in his sister's welfare, and to establish a close and affectionate relationship with her children. It is above all from one's malign, mother's brother, that disinterested backing and support can be expected in times of personal difficulty.

While Hindu and Sikh marriage rules have the effect of strictly differentiating between affines and agnates, in most Moslem groups there is a preference for marriage between close kin, so that agnatic and affinal ties become closely intertwined with one another. Moslems nevertheless still sustain the conceptual distinction between the two kinds of kinship. While it is clear that kinship does not cease at the boundary of the family, it is worth emphasizing that its quality does change sharply at this point. Familial ties are, or at least should be, unrestricted and open-ended. They are founded on a sense of commonwealth amongst participants, so that no overt calculation of an individual's contribution to, or benefit from, the whole should ever be made. Kinship which is less comprehensive than this is extra-familial. Thus two brothers who quarrel and split apart are described, pejoratively, as acting like *serike*. They have ceased to belong to a single family. (8)

THE FAMILY IN THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION

South Asian families have undergone a sea-change as some or all of their members have uprooted themselves to settle in crowded industrial cities over 5,000 miles away. Yet it should not be assumed that such upheavals have either undermined or stood In contradiction to family unity. On the contrary migration has taken place within the context of familial obligations and has if anything strengthened rather than weakened them.

Early migrants to Britain were typically drawn from peasant families with limited land-holdings, but a multiplicity of sons. Ten acres might be a fair-sized holding for one man, but split among three or four sons it would leave them all relatively poor. in such circumstances one or more sons might be sent abroad, primarily to restore and advance the family's collective fortunes. overseas earnings could be used to redeem mortgaged land as well as to buy more, to provide sisters with dowries, to build new houses and to purchase agricultural implements. More recently the migratory process has tended to fuel itself. As increasing numbers of families sent sons abroad, all except the very richest have felt the need to send someone too, in order to participate in this new-found source of wealth. Not to do so might imperil their own *izzat.*(9) on arrival in Britain few migrants expected their sojourn to last long, but most have stayed for much longer than they intended. High incomes always tempted them to stay on and save a little more, added to which migrants soon began to find themselves caught up in networks of obligation within the ethnic colonies which they rapidly established. As these social arenas began to take on a life of their own, so migrants began to consider bringing their wives and children to join them. But they did not do so without considerable misgivings, for from their perspective British society seemed materially attractive but morally bankrupt. Above all the ideas of honour and family loyalty by which they set such store seemed to be almost entirely absent. Few migrants wished their families to be affected by British cultural standards.

Nevertheless as ethnic colonies grew in size and sophistication, so did migrants' confidence that they could safely reconstitute their families despite the alien surroundings. Such decisions were taken at different speeds in different groups, but by now virtually all South Asians have set about calling their wives and children to join them. Once they arrived, migrants' lifestyles in Britain began to be transformed. In the pioneering days when saving was the overriding goal, a group of men would often rent a large dilapidated house, share household tasks and expenses between themselves, and maximize their savings by living in squalid conditions. with the arrival of women and children there was a move to smaller, sounder houses and an improvement in living standards. Households were still usually made up of several married couples, and very often several lodgers as well. Sharing made good economic sense. It lessened the cost of housing and made it easier to acquire expensive but prestigious consumer goods such as television sets, hi-fis, cars and washing machines. But as time has passed so residential units have come to have a more conventional membership in sub-continental terms. In the early days all-male households often incorporated unrelated men, who treated each other as if they were brothers. However in the longer term co-operative domestic arrangements have generally only been sustained by those connected by prior ties of familial kinship. More distantly connected agnatic and affinal kin often lived co-operatively together for a while soon after their arrival, but such households have invariably proved unstable.

Most migrants have made great efforts to sustain the unity of their families, both because this proved an excellent way of coping with their economic circumstances, and also because this was perceived as a most effective bastion against the corrosive influence of British culture. By now many migrants have gone on to assume that any deviation from the ideal norms must necessarily be the first step on the slippery slope towards wholesale Anglicization. The slightest lapse thus seems to indicate total disloyalty. Such growing conservatism should not, however, be seen simply as a negative reaction to British ways. As settlements grew in size, so each ethnic colony has become an arena for status competition in its own right. Families have begun to outbid each other in the scale and style of their performance of traditional rituals, just as they did back home . lzzat is at stake, and it has become imperative for every

family to participate in the game of status competition if they do not wish to fall behind. The consequent necessity for every family member to maintain an impeccable and honourable reputation is a thoroughgoing constraint on everyone's behaviour. (10)

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Although most migrants are strongly conservative in their attitudes and convinced that they have maintained traditional patterns in their entirety, it should not be assumed that no change has taken, place in their behaviour. Family organization, like everything else, has been radically affected by the new context in which it is set. However, the widely expected assimilation of English cultural patterns has not occurred; instead South Asians in Britain, in parallel with many other minorities, are autonomously evolving their own distinctive lifestyles. It is these changes that we must now consider.

Major changes have arisen as a result of families' removal from a world of subsistence agriculture, and their entry into an urban wage-based economy. The household hag generally ceased to be the focus of production, for most adults now leave home everyday to earn wages. At least half of all South Asian women in Britain go out to work, and many of the remainder earn money at home, usually by sewing up clothes as outworkers. The widespread availability of wage work has significantly changed the balance of power within the family, so that wives are no longer so economically dependent on their husbands, nor sons on their fathers. Even so these developments have brought their own disadvantages. Just as in English families women often have to do their wage work in addition to their regular domestic tasks, while the fact that the household has ceased to be the focus of production makes it a lonelier place for those, such as women caring for infant ,children, who spend much of their time there. For the same reason elderly people may find that with no buffaloes to milk, no cotton, to spin, and with their grandchildren learning unfamiliar skills in **a** foreign language at school, their lives seem largely stripped of meaning and purpose.

The size and qualify of housing in Britain has also had its effects on migrants' families. The large Victorian terraces which were often occupied at the outset may have been of a sufficient size to accommodate large families, but they are generally located in insalubrious areas. There has been a general tendency to seek to move up-market though different groups have moved at widely varying speeds but in general it is true to say that better housing tends to be smaller. Faced with the fact the most recently constructed houses in Britain have been designed for occupation by small families, a number of solutions have been adopted. Some migrants continue to live in large Victorian houses, despite their unattractive location. others have bought adjoining houses, both terraced and semi-detached, and knocked through a connecting door. Yet more live **in** very overcrowded conditions in houses which they acknowledge are too small. But a much larger number have now accepted that in Britain there is little alternative but to split the family into several domes tie groups. Today the majority of South Asians in Britain live in conjugal households which contain only a single married couple. (11) Yet when members of a single family live in the same city, they almost invariably buy closely adjacent houses, and can constantly be found visiting each other, eating and taking their leisure wherever seems most convenient. many families have made a virtue of this partial separation. They believe that it can reduce the impact of internal rivalries, while still allowing the maintenance of extensive co-operation. moving slightly apart in domestic terms is often the best means of ensuring the smooth operations of wider familial reciprocities.

For whatever reason it occurs, the trend towards conjugal households means that women often find themselves in sole charge of their own domestic establishment a good deal earlier' than might have occurred in a rural context. Her independence is thus enhanced, and her relationship with her husband is usually closer. Yet precisely because the other women in the family are at a distance, she may find herself saddled with unexpectedly heavy responsibilities, and very often in a strange environment as well. Greater independence may bring isolation of a kind that was never known at home. Not only were most village households larger, busier and more multifunctional, but moving between them was very easy, for it was a short step over the roof-tops to a neighbour's courtyard.

In Britain, however, a woman must go 'outside', and traverse an unknown and alien world before she can meet her friends. It is not surprising that many women feel isolated, even if most spend much more time in each others' company than do most of their English neighbours. Such feelings of isolation tend to lessen the longer women have lived in Britain, and hence the more they have been able to set up their own networks of communication and support. The speed with which these networks grow depends on a wide range of factors, including the size and scatter of the community, the way in which the rules of *purdah* are interpreted in their own particular group, and the number of kinswomen living in any particular locality. Women rely on these networks in times of marital stress and their absence may se them at a grave disadvantage.

CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE

Divorce is infrequent in most parts of the Indian sub-continent. Since marriages are invariably arranged, (12) it is the responsibility of those who brought the couple together to do all that they can to ensure that their relationship is a happy one. Marital conflict is thus by no means the concern of the two spouses alone. If a husband feels that his wife's behaviour is unsatisfactory then he may complain to her family, and similarly a woman expects her father and brother to put pressure (ultimately by threatening violence) on her husband and his family should she feel herself mistreated. Divorce is seen as a last resort, to be adopted only when other remedies fail. For a woman remarriage is not an attractive proposition. It spells dishonour, both for herself and her family, and she is unlikely to be able to obtain a well endowed groom.

When marital relationships show signs of strain in Britain, strategies similar to those employed in the sub-continent are usually brought into play. They are, however, rather less likely to be effective, especially when there are no other women in the household from whom a maltreated wife can seek assistance, and when her male kinsmen live too far away to be of much immediate help. Sanctions are certainly sometimes effectively imposed, but not without some danger. Should a group of loyal brothers be observed chastising an errant husband by a passing policeman, they are likely to be charged with assault. South Asian women in Britain thus tend to be rather more exposed in situations of marital conflict than they would have been at home.

To put some flesh on bare bones, let us take a case which, if not typical (there is no such thing), is at least representative. Nur Mohammed has been working in Britain for 15 years, but only brought his wife and daughters to join him three years ago. Re still sends money

back home to his father and younger brother, as he always has, brat is finding it increasingly costly to support his wife and children in Britain. He works twelve-hour night shifts in a textile mill, as he always has, but recently he has been reduced from six to five nights. One night less is a relief, for it enables him to see much more of his family, but it also means that his income has been significantly cut at a time when his responsibilities have never been heavier. He is worried that he might lose another night too, and then he really would be in financial difficulties. Since her arrival in Britain his wife Mumtaz has had another daughter, but since its birth she has done nothing but complain to Nur Mohammed. The child is ill, she doesn't know how to take it to the doctor. She doesn't think the doctor is any good. She is lonely. She is tired. She misses everyone back home. He is absent from home for too long every night, leaving her frightened that the house will be broken into. She believes he has been visiting English prostitutes that is why he has no money. in the end it is all too much for Nur Mohammed: he explodes, and beats her. In his eyes it is quite justified. Does she think he *likes* working so many hours every night? In any case she has not borne him a son, and she is now no longer young. Does she not know how much he spent on bringing her to England? Perhaps he would do much better to take another younger wife, whose parents would certainly give a large dowry for the privilege of marrying their daughter to a husband working in England. A new wife might at least have the capacity to bear him a son.

RENEGOTIATING RELATIONSHIPS

Where a family is under external stress, those of its members with the least effective bargaining power (usually, though certainly not inevitably, a woman) often have to bear the brunt of the difficulties. Situations of this kind can and do lead to great distress and very often to violence, especially in the absence of a mediator. If a woman like Mumtaz has no local support, and no kin to whom to flee she may well end up on the doorstep of her local police station or in the casualty department of the hospital with very severe bruising and her marriage apparently in tatters.

It is easy for doctors, solicitors, policemen and social workers who become involved in such cases to misinterpret what is at stake, because of their unfamiliarity with the cultural context. (13)They often assume that arranged marriages are necessarily problematic, that independence and personal freedom are goals to which everyone will unreservedly aspire, and that a woman's departure from home, especially in the context of a violent assault, necessarily means that her conjugal relationship has irretrievably broken down. Given this perspective the most appropriate course seems to be to obtain a legal separation and then a divorce, and to assist such women to establish independent households of their own. In some cases this may indeed be the only available solution, but is it *necessarily* the case that this will be so?

Let us take the case of Nur Mohammed and his wife as an example. Their problems obviously arise primarily from the pressures under which they find themselves, and from Mumtaz's inability to put sufficient pressure on her husband to take concerns seriously enough. Back home the traditional solution in the face of extreme marital difficulties was for a woman to return to her natal home, *peke,* and to refuse to return until her husband promised to treat her more considerately. TO retrieve his wife a husband would then have to run the gauntlet not only of his wife's father and brothers, but also of her assembled female kin. Their

scabrous comments on his character and behaviour were a very considerable deterrent. But Mumtaz's *peke* live 5,000 miles away. They can be of little immediate help to her.

Yet what other alternatives are available? Despite its apparent attractiveness to outsiders, divorce is likely to redouble mumtaz's difficulties. If she were to leave, she would play straight into Nur Moharnmed's hands. After a short interval he might obtain a new, hopefully more compliant and more fertile wife from Pakistan. But where would a woman like Mumtaz live? if she were to live close to other South Asians she would be likely to be branded as shameless, and to be pestered by men who believed that she was now a 'free' woman. She is also likely to live in fear that her husband and his kinsmen will seek to steal her children away from her. Perhaps they will not bother since they are girls. they would certainly do all they could to reclaim a son. Yet if she were to move away into the outside English world even greater difficulties would ensue. She would almost certainly have to cut her links with her own kin and indeed with the whole of the cultural system in which she had grown up. She would face isolation in an alien world, and she and her children would be in considerable danger not just of racist abuse, but of physical assault.

Given the enormous difficulties and disadvantages that permanent departure from the family almost invariably entails, it is obviously worthwhile making every possible effort in identifying and achieving an internal renegotiation of relationships. indeed, in the case of conjugal breakdowns in Asian families the most useful assistance that an outsider can render lies in seeking to reinforce a woman's bargaining power. To assume at the outset that relationships have irretrievably broken down may well be to sell the pass before the battle has even begun.

Though in some cases things may have gone so far that no reconciliation-is possible, it seems that for the overwhelming majority of women a temporary departure from home provides a means of drawing public attention to her plight. it may thus be a convenient tactical move whereby a husband can be backed into a corner, and more satisfactory terms for their relationship thrashed out. But while such renegotiation is going on it is vital that a woman should sustain an unimpeachably honourable reputation. It is quite clear that in Mumtaz's case the worst possible result would be for Nur Mohammed to successfully label her as a shameless whore, so giving him a legitimate excuse to obtain another wife from home.

It seems likely that apparently disastrous breakdowns in inter-personal relationships within South Asian families in Britain are much more susceptible to resolution than many outside observers commonly suppose. Most cases are much more complex than the example cited here and the scapegoats are certainly not always married women, though they usually are. Elderly parents, weak and vacillating husbands and confused adolescents they also find themselves in impossible positions, and seek help from outside. However daunting the task way initially seem, it is always worth seeking to renegotiate relationships rather than acting on the assumption that they have irretrievably broken down. Success can often be achieved, especially if the kind of support which the victim would otherwise have received from kinsmen can either be mobilized or replicated. (14)

THE SECOND GENERATION

Until recently it was widely assumed (at least amongst the English majority) that South Asian migrants' tight knit families would soon be undermined by the changes amongst their British-born children. Contact with the ethnic majority, it was thought, would soon precipitate thoroughgoing Anglicization. Personal freedom would inevitably seem more attractive than the restrictions of traditional family obligations. However, ethnographic observation, as opposed to a priori ethnocentric speculation, is now beginning to reveal a very different picture. (15) Children of South Asian origin in Britain are certainly exposed to, and participate in, two very different cultural worlds. At home parents expect conformity to the norms of co-operation, respect and familial loyalty. Most take great care to instil these values into their children, and to stress the superiority of their own cultural traditions as opposed to those of the English. At school, however, children are exposed to a wholly contrary set of values and expectations. South Asian lifestyles are generally not admired, and individual self-determination is both encouraged and presented as the most appropriate moral foundation for personal action.

As a result of the very fundamental contradictions between these two worlds, many young Asians feel themselves to be faced with acute dilemmas as to how they should organize their lives. However, most have long since learned to cope with these contradictions by switching their modes of behaviour depending on the context in which they find themselves. it is often forgotten that just as one can be bilingual, so one can be multi-cultural. In other words a person can acquire the skill to act and react appropriately in a range of different cultural settings. Provided that the arenas within which a person participates can be kept apart no problems need arise. in fact it is clear that most young Asians are very skilled at doing just this, as well as playing both sides against the middle.

Even so acute problems often do arise when Asian adolescents are in the midst of establishing themselves as beings independent of their parents. But in any society teenagers' rebellious attitudes very often expressed as a threat to leave home and never return provide a very poor guide to their likely future behaviour as adults. In fact it is striking that the overwhelming majority of young Asians return to the family fold (if they ever left) in their late teens and early twenties. Although they may continue to present themselves in a very 'English' way at work, most choose to organize their domestic and personal lives on the basis of strong continuity with the established values of the communities into which they were born. Although they may eventually adopt considerably modified versions of their parents' lifestyles, their behaviour generally remains quite distinct from that of their 'English' peers. (16)

Such cultural and ethnic distinctiveness is being sustained for a variety of reasons. Most parents put a great deal of, effort into ensuring that they transmit the basic tenets of family morality to their children. The need to put group loyalty before self-interest is constantly stressed, above all because this creates warmer, more secure and more human relationships than anything available in the outside world. in cases of possible deviance parents also emphasize sometimes to the point of blackmail the extent to which they would be personally distressed, and the loss of *izzat* that the family would suffer if any one of their children should depart too seriously from established norms. While the English world certainly offers the attractions of personal freedom, of having one's hair cut and of wearing jeans, many young people are sceptical as to whether these could possibly recompense the loss of familial

security. They are also far more aware than their parents of their ultimate unacceptability in majority circles because of the colour of their skins. Despite parents' constant worries that their children might slip away and 'become English', most young people have long since decided that a strategy of comprehensive assimilation is futile. (17)

Yet this does not mean that they are no different from their parents. They are in fact generating a range of new lifestyles as they seek to reform, modify and rework their parents' cultural heritage, such that many long-established conventions are now the subject of close critical scrutiny. While most young people are still usually prepared to pay formal respect to their elders, they also insist on playing a much more active part in decision making. Husbands and wives expect to have closer and more autonomous relationships, and young people are demanding that they should be consulted more fully before the arrangement of their marriages. Although everyone accepts that familial loyalties should be sustained, the value of participation in more far-flung networks of extra-familial kinship is looked upon with increasing scepticism, especially since they tend to generate a suffocating traffic of gossip and scandal.

The distinction between agnatic and affinal kill is also beginning to wane in significance, especially since the patterns and landownership and village residence from which these distinctions sprang are of much less importance in Britain. In the great majority of families change is taking place relatively smoothly, following well-worn tracks of bargaining and negotiation. Yet it would be facile to assert that this is always the case. Things may go wrong, and sometimes disastrously so. Parents may be so strict in their attitudes, and so unbending in their exercise of authority that their children explode under the constraints put upon them. Others may be so tied up in making a success of a fledgling business, or so hard pressed to meet their financial obligations both in Britain and at home that they fail to pay enough attention to their children, letting them run wild. Children way successfully conceal a good deal from their parents, but the scandalous exposure of a secret romance can easily force the most tolerant parents into hasty and ill-advised action. Parents from rural backgrounds, even with the best of intentions, may find it exceedingly difficult to make adequate decisions about their children's marriages. Some parents are frankly bewildered by their children's behaviour and attitudes, and assume that all change necessarily indicates a weakening of loyalty to the family. As a result they may so pester their children about their alleged Anglicization that their concern becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Nevertheless in only a small minority of cases have such difficulties led to cataclysmic breakdowns. Despite the apparent rigidity of their formal structure most South Asian families have shown considerable flexibility in practice. To those within them the benefits of membership invariably seem to outweigh the inevitable costs.

SOURCES OF UNITY IN UPBAN ENVIRONMENTS

Perhaps the clearest examples of the benefits of family membership, and of the utilization of familial loyalties as a resource, can be found in the innumerable small businesses which have been established by South Asians in Britain. Typically these are corner shops, restaurants, market stalls and small clothing workshops, all of which require only a limited initial investment of cash, and depend for their success upon a massive input of labour. In so far as they depend upon long hours of work, long-term forward planning and close co-operation between a small number of people, they are founded on skills which are nothing new to peasant farmers. It is thus small wonder that South Asians (along with members of almost

every other migrant group of peasant origins) have set up so many businesses, at least some of which have now grown quite large. There is nothing like participation in a profitable enterprise to hold a family together.

Although only a minority of South Asian families in Britain are ordered around such enterprises, the cohesion of all arises in a similar way. Many families are now best understood as miniature multi-national corporations, each of which includes a number of partially autonomous sub-divisions drawn together by their mutual interdependence. Each branch can offer access to resources which the others value, while the very diversity of members' activities provides an excellent insurance against misfortune.

Let us consider what might currently be regarded as the ideal disposition for four brothers in a Punjabi peasant family. The family's base and ultimate security lies in its land, which can best be safeguarded by ensuring that one brother remains at home to cultivate it. Yet successful cultivation depends upon a secure supply of electricity, fertilizer and diesel oil. This and much else can be obtained by placing another brother in local government service. if the remaining two brothers go to work abroad, one in the Gulf States, the other in Britain, further advantages accrue. Those abroad can generate a considerable cash income, and have access to consumer products such as tape-recorders, televisions and cars, which are scarce and expensive in Punjab. They can also provide access to well-paid jobs, to advanced educational facilities and to advantageous marriages for the next generation. Finally the very diversity of the family's activities means that should the going get tough for any particular branch, personnel and resources can be redeployed. The greater the diversity of activities, the greater are the advantages that accrue from maintaining links of reciprocity.

Yet families organized on this basis are clearly institutions of a rather different kind from those set out in the ideal model with which we began. Land may continue to be of symbolic importance, but it is no longer the main source of subsistence. Some families, especially those which settled in East Africa, have now gone 'off-share', and no longer even maintain a foothold in the sub-continent. Common residence in a single household has ceased to be the norm and a series of more clearly conjugal units have been established. An aged patriarch, if he survives, will certainly be treated with great respect, but his power is likely to be minimal. In families of the kind just described elderly parents are likely to spend most of their time rotating between their children's various households. Nevertheless it should be clear that there is still a remarkable degree of continuity in the basic principles of family organization, even if the way in which they are worked out in practice has changed a great deal.

SOUPCES OF DISUNITY

Despite the highly successful adaptation to new opportunities achieved by many South Asian families, it would be idle to ignore the forces working in the opposite direction, and the fact that some families, perhaps an increasing number, will succumb to these pressures. South Asian migrants came to Britain to take jobs in labour intensive under-capitalized industries such as iron foundries and textiles. In the current technological revolution it is precisely jobs in these industries which are disappearing. By the early 1980s there will be large-scale structural unemployment in Britain, and many of the unskilled jobs traditionally performed by migrant labour will simply no longer exist. South Asian families and especially those

whose members have more recently come to Britain will thus stand disproportionately exposed.

As presaged in the case of Nur Mohammed and his wife, economic recession, and above all unemployment will put enormous strain on relationships within the family. Although reciprocity may provide a cushion against adversity, there is a limit to the fatigue it can absorb. moreover, in the subcontinent itself it is families with at least minimal resources which have most effectively sustained their unity. if family members are in such desperate straights that they have nothing left over to offer each other, reciprocity itself disintegrates. It is too early yet to know just where breakdowns will occur in the face of unemployment, but a number of points of tension can certainly be identified. many migrants have particularly heavy responsibilities, for they may also be helping to support the remainder of their family back home in Pakistan or Bangladesh. Will they halt their remittances? And since they came to Britain to work, will they go home when work disappears? They will certainly be tempted to do so and may even be encouraged in this direction by formal government policy. Yet a migrant who does return in such circumstances may not be accorded the honour to which he aspires and his children may see little future in what is to them a foreign country.

To all this must be added the implications of increasingly stringent immigration controls, which have themselves been precipitated by popular demands from the majority population, whose members are also fearful of the implications of recession. All families which have gone multi-national stand in grave danger of having their members arbitrarily separated as a result of vagaries in the operation of immigration legislation. Sensible planning is often difficult since the rules are frequently revised, and informal obstacles (such as excessively detailed scrutiny of applications stemming from the sub-continent combined with an insufficiency of officials to process them) can make a nonsense of formal legal rights. Families which get trapped in this legal and administrative maze – and there are many – may find that it is the immigration Department of the Home office which represents the greatest obstacle to their consolidation.

CONCLUSION

Although it has not been possible to pay much attention to the question, there are great variations both within and between different South Asian communities in Britain. In some, such as families whose members have only recently arrived from the remoter parts of Mirpur or Sylhet, strict adherence to the rules of *purdah* may be the unquestioned norm. In others, such as Gujerati Vohra families whose members have long been resident in East Africa and most have professional occupations, daughters may even be allowed out unchaperoned once parents have carefully vetted their boyfriends. (18) There are also major variations in personality and style between families, some parents are strict and others more lax, some skilled at holding their families together, while others are much less successful. Finally it is clear that there are major variations in the economic success which different families have achieved, and that the divergencies between them will become more striking as the recession deepens, and there is less and less of a demand for unskilled labour.

Yet despite these major variations it is still useful – at least for the purposes of an introductory-discussion – to regard all South Asian families in Britain as being organized along similar principles. Although migration and relocation in urban industrial Britain has certainly precipitated change, it has not resulted in breakdown. On the contrary co-operation and corporate loyalty has generally been sustained. Such continuities would seem to stand *in*

contradiction to much established sociological theory – and indeed to popular pre-supposition – but they should not really be regarded as anything very novel. Essentially similar developments have occurred in families of the same origins whose members have moved to urban areas in the sub-continent, (19) and indeed amongst peasant migrants almost everywhere.

Of course there have been changes, such that expectations about roles and relationships are being revised, often in quite fundamental ways. But these developments have by no means necessarily led to an erosion of family loyalties and reciprocities. Although the proponents of 'modern' philosophies of freedom and self-determination have often expected that tradition would crumble in the face of 'progress', most members of most South Asian families are very sceptical about the benefits to be gained from the wholesale adoption of such ideas. They perceive that complete personal freedom can eliminate the advantages to be gained from familial reciprocity. indeed there is good reason to suppose that if any- thing which may undermine Asian family unity, it is not these ideological influences, but the corrosive effects of poverty and unemployment. But even so it seems likely that those who are so economically disadvantaged will develop their own distinctive lifestyles, rather than merge into the generality of those in the same structural position as themselves.

Development and change in migrants' families has thus been much less straightforward than many ethnocentric commentators had expected. South Asians of all kinds in Britain have experienced, and are still experiencing, massive changes in their social, economic and moral environment, but they have made the best of the uncertain world into which they have been plunged by the adaptive utilization of their kinship resources. They are likely to continue to do so, in their various ways, for the foreseeable future.

NOTES

1. Ethnographic descriptions of various aspects of life within a range of South Asian communities in Britain can be found in the work of Anwar, the Ballards, Dahya, James, Jeffery, Saifullah-Khan, Sharma, Taylor and Wilson. The arguments presented in this chapter are based partly on these sources, supplemented by information directly acquired during the course of the author's ethnographic fieldwork. This was carried out mainly in Leeds and mostly with Sikhs between 1971 and 1979, though at varying levels of intensity during that period.

2. Perhaps the best account of 'traditional' family structure can be found in Madan (1965). Although. this book is about the Pandits of Kashmir (few of whom have migrated to Britain) peasant families throughout Northern India are ordered along essentially similar lines. The best sources on family organization in areas from which migrants have come to Britain are Eglar (1980) for Pakistani Punjab, Kessinger (1975) for Indian Punjab and Pocock (1972) for Gujerat.

3. See for example Kessinger (1975:187) and Madan (1965:165).

4. Such processes are graphically illustrated by Jhabvala (1955, 1956) in her novels about Punjabi family life in Delhi. in the same vein Rogers (1975) argues that peasant women generally can often use informal strategies to acquire considerable power over men, despite their apparent subordination to them in public.

5. Such processes are very clearly described by Jhabvala (1955, 1956). in her discussion of *Vartan bhanji* Eglar (1960) makes much the same point.

6. More detailed accounts of extra-familial kinship, and of the form and structural significance of unilineal descent groups in Northern India, can be found in Alavi (1972), Barth (1959), Kessinger (1975) and Pocock (1972).

7. Marriage is also very often forbidden with members of the spouse's mothers', fathers' mothers', and mothers' mothers' clans as well. Moreover, if a girl has been given to another family, then in that generation addition- al brides may be sent there, but none may be taken back. The effect of these rules is to ensure that every family has a very wide spread of affinal kin.

8. 8 Dry academic prose is not the best vehicle for representing the vigour, vitality and complexity of family life in South Asia. Jhabvalala's novels have already been referred to, but readers insterested in getting a feel for the quality of rural life in 'traditional' India can do no better than to turn to Waris Shah's rendition of the Punjabi folk epic *Hir Ranjah* in it can be found vivid accounts of family and clanship, of friendly alliances and vicious feuds, and of uproarious celebrations and jealous double-crossing, all in the context of a moving tale of romantic love.

9. 9 The best detailed account of a village from which large numbers of people have emigrated is Kessinger (1975).

10. An overview of the development of South Asian colonies in Britain can be found in Ballard and Ballard (1977). Saifullah-Khan (1976) shows how many Mirpuri women's lives may become more constrained by the rules of *purdah* due to their families' changing status in Britain.

11. 11 There are however considerable variations both by region and by precise communal affiliation. Hence households in London seem to be larger than in Leeds, due primarily to higher housing costs in the south. Within Leeds Sikhs have moved much more rapidly towards residence in smaller conjugal households than have the Moslems. Household size and composition is also affected by the stage in their developmental cycle which families have reached.

12. As yet there are few elderly South Asians in Britain, but those that have come have invariably taken up residence in one or other of their children's households or circulate between them. As the number of elderly people who have long been resident in Britain grows, there is every likelihood that they too will be reincorporated into their children's households.

13. A detailed discussion of arranged marriages can be found in Ballard (1978).

14. Examples and analyses of such misunderstandings can be found in C. Ballard (1979) and in Ahmed (1978).

15. The importance of using culturally appropriate strategies in dealing with cases of interpersonal conflict in South Asian families is only just coming to be more widely recognized (see R. Ballard, 1979). Some specialist case-workers have now been appointed in a number of different cities, and although a wide range of strategies is being tried out, those of the kind outlined here seem often to be the most successful. It is striking that most English social workers, solicitors and other professionals who may become involved in cases of matrimonial breakdown rarely consider renegotiations as a serious possibility. Indeed some are even hostile to doing so. one reason why this may be so emerges very clearly from Hoggett's chapter (21) in this volume. Despite widespread

formal commitment to the value of family unity, contemporary English law is much more concerned with allocating rights and responsibilities subsequent to marital breakdown than with enabling plaintiffs to seek restitution within the context of an ongoing relationship. Many of the 'old-fashioned' remedies which have now been abandoned might be much more relevant to many South Asian families in Britain.

16. 15 Ethnographic accounts of the lifestyles adopted by the children of South Asian migrants to Britain can be found in C. Ballard (1978, 1979), Brah (1979), Crishna (1975), Taylor (1976) and Wilson (1978), while Dhondy (1976, 1978), through the medium of his short stories, is emerging as quite as subtle a chronicler of the British scene as ihabvala is of Delhi. Meanwhile Shamsher (1972) provides many poignant insights into the pleasures and heart- aches of Jat Sikh workers and their families in Britain.

17. These processes are examined in detail in C. Ballard (1978, 1979) and Brah (1979). On the face of it Wilson (1978) predicts much more revolutionary breakdowns in family organization, but her opinions seem often to stand in contradiction to her informants' views, especially as reported in Chapter 6 of her book.

18. Brah (1979) makes this very clear.

19. A feeling for the extent of such variation can be gained by comparing Saifullah-Khan's descriptions of Mirpuri women in Bradford with that of Westwood and Hoffman (1979) who write about East African Gujarati women in Leicester.

20. 19 In her study of urban families in Meerut, Vatuk (1972: 200) concludes: Although the middle-class urban neighbourhood in India has become the setting for considerable social change, urbanization has not had a radical impact on the family or kinship system. The degree of social stability is as noteworthy as that of change. The urbanite still operates within a familiar social framework, and voices familiar values, although he is becoming gradually aware that his behaviour, or at least that of his neighbours, is gradually beginning to deviate from those values. Although the changes described in this chapter are the outcome of residence in a specifically British context, there is a strong case for arguing that they are better understood as being primarily the consequence of a move from a rural to an urban environment, rather than from East to West.