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**EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS**

**OF TEENAGE MUSLIM GIRLS IN BRITAIN:**

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY**



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**This thesis does not exceed 90,000 words. It is entirely  
the product of my own work and includes nothing which is  
the outcome of work done in collaboration.**

*Jehmina N. Basit.  
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**TO MY MOTHER  
AND  
MY LATE FATHER**

**WITH LOVE**



# **EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL AND CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF TEENAGE MUSLIM GIRLS IN BRITAIN: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY**

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation is an empirical investigation of a group of adolescent British Muslim girls. It examines the educational, social and career aspirations of these girls in the context of their present experiences by means of an ethnographic case study. It endeavours to explicate the lives of the girls in contemporary Britain by employing a qualitative methodology and in the process generate theory grounded in the data.

The empirical data were gathered over a period of twenty months, mainly by in-depth interviewing of the three types of respondents, using semi-structured interview schedules. By using triangulation, the research illuminates the same issues from three different perspectives: the pupils, the parents and the teachers.

The study portrays adolescence, as experienced by these girls, as a period of hope and expectation, rather than a time of stress, confusion and rebellion. The girls are optimistic about the future and, though largely working class, have middle class aspirations. They hope to effectuate these ambitions through the mediums of education and careers, yet they also want to get married and have children. These girls have supportive families whose values are moulded to a large extent by an Islamic ethos and who want to help these adolescent girls to realise their multiple aspirations. However, the teachers, by and large, not only perceive these aspirations as unrealistic, but they also misunderstand various religious and cultural mores of these families.

While the girls' aspirations are being shaped by the views of the parents and, to some extent, of the teachers, they are not replicating the lives of their parents and teachers. Indeed, they are active participants in shaping their own multiple identities and aspirations by means of a subtle combination of negotiation and persuasion.

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## **CONTENTS**

**page**

### **SECTION I**

#### **CHAPTER ONE**

**1**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The British Muslims

1.2 Adolescence in Perspective

1.3 The Formation of Identity

1.4 The Present Research

#### **CHAPTER TWO**

**24**

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

2.1 Methodology

2.2 Aims

2.3 Procedure

2.4 Access to Parents

2.5 Ethical Issues

2.6 Difficulties Encountered

2.7 Analysis of Data

### **SECTION II**

#### **CHAPTER THREE**

**52**

#### **THE SHAPING OF IDENTITY**

3.1 Introduction

3.2 The Reality of Ethnicity

3.3 Linguistic Repertoire

3.4 Religion as a Way of Life

3.5 Conclusion

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

**81**

### **THE DYNAMISM OF FAMILY VALUES**

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Freedom and Control

4.3 Gender Differences

4.4 Variations in Family Patterns

4.5 Conclusion

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

**111**

### **THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE**

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Arranged Marriage in Islam

5.3 Marriage Versus Career

5.4 Consanguineous Marriage

5.5 Intermarriage

5.6 Conclusion

## **SECTION III**

## **CHAPTER SIX**

**141**

### **THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SCHOOLING**

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Enthusiasm for School

6.3 Friendship Choices

6.4 Special Responsibilities and Extracurricular Activities

6.5 Relationship with Teachers

6.6 Conclusion

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

**171**

### **THE ACADEMIC DIMENSION OF SCHOOLING**

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Participation in Lessons

7.3 Accomplishing Homework

7.4 Choosing GCSE Options

7.5 Aiming for Further and Higher Education

7.6 Conclusion

## **SECTION IV**

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

**203**

### **ASPIRING TO A CAREER.**

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Ethnic Minorities and Career Choices

8.3 The Myth of Unrealistic Aspirations

8.4 The Nature of Career Advice and Guidance

8.5 Conclusion

## **CHAPTER NINE**

**235**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

9.1 Identities and Aspirations

9.2 Some Implications

9.3 Suggestions for further Research

NOTES	258
-------	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY	312
--------------	-----

APPENDICES	345
------------	-----

Letter to parents	
-------------------	--

Interview Schedules	
---------------------	--

Glossary	
----------	--

## **SECTION I**

### **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

### **CHAPTER TWO RESEARCH DESIGN**

# CHAPTER ONE

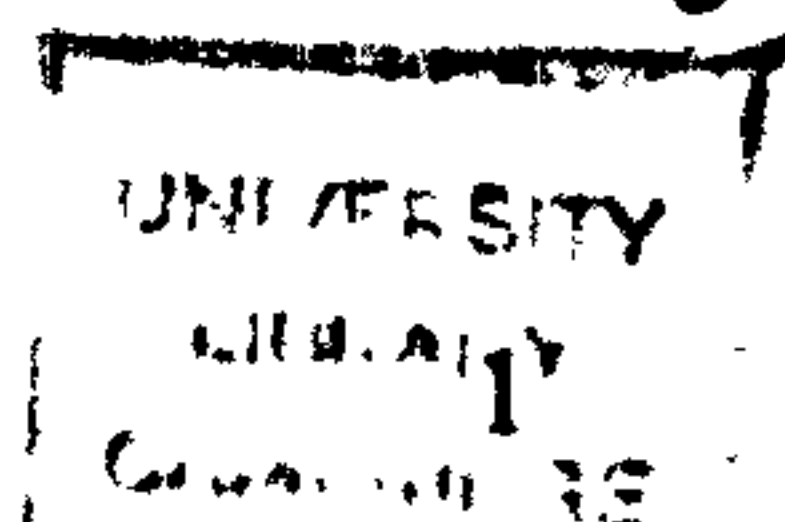
## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The British Muslims

Britain has a history of immigrant and refugee settlement over a long period. The peoples who have adopted Britain as their home country not only originate from other European countries, but also from various other parts of the globe, notably Africa and Asia. Over the years, the European immigrants have, by and large, become integrated into mainstream British society mainly due to cognate features, such as skin colour and religion, with the exception of Jews who might still adhere to certain aspects of their religion and culture. The African-Caribbeans and Asians, on the other hand, remain conspicuous because of the colour of their skin. Phinney and Rotheram (1987) observe that these groups have a caste-like status based on appearance, which means they can never be completely assimilated.

Nevertheless, appearance is only part of their predicament. Whilst African-Caribbeans share the language and religion of the indigenous group, Asian immigrants have a different heritage language and practise a different religion depending on the part of Asia they originate from. They might speak Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu amongst other languages and could be Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs: the main religions practised in South Asia. They may also retain certain features related to their cultural traditions. Consequently, British Asians, even second or third generation, who adhere to their language, religion or culture of origin, might be perceived as foreigners.

Over the years, the descendants of many of the first generation immigrants of Asian origin have gradually assimilated into British society by adapting to various British customs and traditions. However, they only adapt to a certain extent and preserve specific characteristics of their cultural heritage. This phenomenon is referred to as





pluralism, whereby the immigrants retain their structural and cultural identity, yet participate in institutions such as education and employment (cf. Verma and Bagley, 1979:8; Anwar, 1985).

Since many Asian immigrants, even second or third generation, adhere to distinct features of their culture of origin, they are, therefore, still recognisable through identifiers such as surnames, something that does not apply to other immigrants. For example, the African-Caribbeans have names similar to those of the indigenous population and some Jews change their names to facilitate integration. Asian immigrants, on the other hand, almost invariably retain their original names since these have religious and cultural significance. This is particularly true of Muslims.

The majority of the Muslim population of Britain originates from South Asia. The main Muslim Asian communities in Britain are those of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. There are also East African Asians, who emigrated from their country of origin a few decades ago to settle down in Tanzania, Kenya or Uganda and later immigrated to Britain. There are some isolated Arab and African Muslim groups too, albeit they do not make up a sizeable community in the United Kingdom. To properly understand the Muslim community in Britain, it has to be seen as part of the wider context of Islam.

Nearly one billion Muslims are dispersed throughout the world (McDermott and Ahsan, 1980). They are multiracial, multilingual and in some senses multicultural. Yet, they have an overriding unity because of their religion which transcends national and racial boundaries, as various racial cultures become subordinate to an overall Islamic culture. Whilst Muslims of different ethnic origins have independent roots, their culture is predominantly and fundamentally rooted in the same Islamic tradition (cf. Anwar, 1982; Ashraf, 1986). Thus, in spite of their differences, Muslims are, in an important way, united through the common nexus of Islam.



Muslims form the largest religious minority in Britain. However, since the 1981 and 1991 Censuses did not enquire about religion, statistical figures vary as regards the exact number of British Muslims. Halstead (1986) quoting the Central Statistical Office (1985:163) estimates the number to be 900,000. Wahhab (1989), on the basis of surveys and official figures, calculates that there are 652,000 Muslims in Britain and that 46 percent of all British Asian population is Muslim. Nevertheless, the most recent data from the Central Statistical Office (1994:145) estimates the number of British Muslims to be 200,000 (.20 million) in 1975; 310,000 (.31 million) in 1980; and 520,000 (.52 million) in 1992. Despite this disparity, the figures indicate a substantial Muslim presence in Britain.

Most Asians, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, migrated to Britain to fill the gap caused by labour shortages in the post-war years (Brah and Minhas, 1985). Initially for them coming to Britain meant a temporary stay to work, sending their income back home to their families to invest and eventually returning to enjoy a life of prosperity (cf. Anwar, 1979). For this reason, the majority of men came to Britain alone. They did not come as a consequence of spontaneous migratory fervour, but as a result of availability of jobs that offered higher rates of pay than could be obtained in the home country (Brown, 1984). Thus, it was a deliberate decision taken by the Asian migrants who aspired to improve their life-style: something that they felt could not be achieved in their country of birth.

However, the arrival of Asians in Britain is by no means a recent phenomenon. The emergence of a South Asian population in Britain has been traced back to the colonial period (see, for example, Visram, 1986). Many came as servants to the employees of the East India Company or as lascars employed on the ships that carried goods between Britain and countries in the East. Those who were discharged or deserted due to mistreatment had to fend for themselves. In time, they used their resourcefulness to find employment or take up entrepreneurial

activities. Gradually, small communities developed in Britain, especially in the East end of London and port cities such as Liverpool (Brah and Shaw, 1992). In 1889, the first Islamic mosque was opened at Woking (Fryer, 1984; Visram, 1986), thus signifying a tangible Muslim population in Britain.

Still, not all Asians who came to Britain during the colonial period were servants or sailors. There was evidence of middle class Asians, such as teachers, doctors, lawyers and businessmen. Clearly, South Asian emergence in Britain, prior to the Second World War, has been significant, albeit numerically small. It was not until the early 1960s that Asians, initially men only, arrived in large numbers (Brah and Shaw, 1992).

When the Asians first came, there were jobs available to which they were welcomed, since the indigenous work force was at that time glad to get out of certain types of jobs (Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1991:8). However, the second generation Asians, many of whom are born and brought up in Britain, seek similar jobs as their indigenous contemporaries and are thereby in competition with them. This causes problems leading to allegations of unrealistically high aspirations on one side and prejudice and racism on the other. This is particularly true of young British Muslims whose largely uneducated parents are often believed as having very high ambitions for their children and lacking understanding of what it involves to realise these goals (see pp. 195; 216-217 in the present study).

Whilst the Muslim population of Britain has increasingly become the focus of inquiry in recent years, most authors have discussed British Muslims along with other Asian or ethnic minority groups and the religious factor has so far been minimised in research. Nevertheless, Murad (1982) emphasises the decisive role of Islam in shaping the needs and aspirations of Muslims, as a result of which even when they live in a non-Muslim society, they wish to adhere to the Islamic way of life. He sees this as particularly problematic for young Muslims born and brought up in a Western

environment. He points to the dearth of empirical data needed to devise policies that would enable young British Muslims to face this challenge successfully. The present study endeavours to provide such empirical evidence, albeit regarding a limited number of adolescent Muslim girls only.

Very little, if any, research has been carried out on British Muslim girls. There are misunderstandings and ambiguities regarding the role of Muslim women in the present day milieu that sometimes lead to the stereotyping of female Muslims by British society at large. It is even claimed that Muslim girls are bound by religion and culture to the extent that they cannot lead a *normal* life and have to stay behind four walls. This gives the impression that they cannot be educated in schools and cannot have a career (see, for example, Wade and Souter, 1992).

Education in Britain is compulsory until the age of 16. Muslim parents are, therefore, legally bound to send their daughters to school. It is often thought that they do so reluctantly and in the process create numerous problems with their demands. These range from single-sex schools to segregated PE lessons, exclusion of sex education from the curriculum and the inclusion of ritually slaughtered (halal) meat on the menu. Another area of concern appears to be that some able Muslim girls are not being allowed to continue their education and are sent back to the country of origin to have an arranged marriage.<sup>1</sup>

It, therefore, seems important that research is carried out to ascertain the extent and nature of misunderstandings that prevail in this under-researched area. If a gap exists between the home and the school, it needs to be scrutinised to see if this gap is caused by the fact that the aspirations of the home are moulded by the Islamic religion and Asian culture of the parents, and the aspirations of the school are shaped by the secular Western society. Such research can pave the way for local education authorities to contrive policies to help the religious minorities in Britain, many of whom have high ambitions for their future (cf. Kallie, 1986; Afshar, 1989;



Penn and Scattergood, 1992). The present research is a step in this direction. It aims to illuminate factors that shape the aspirations of the female population of this minority group.

Nevertheless, high aspirations are not endemic to British migrants only. Glazer and Moynihan (1963) discussing American immigrant society observe the drive for educational credentials among the many migrant groups in the USA. They note the Jewish passion for education; the Italian concept of social status through the professional occupations of their children; the Puerto Rican capacity for hard work and the value they place on schooling; and the West Indian emphasis on saving, hard work, investment and education. In the British context, the various immigrant groups show a similar ardour for self-improvement, mainly through their children (see, for example, Taylor, 1981; Tomlinson, 1982; Taylor and Hegarty, 1985; Kallie, 1986; Mirza, 1992).

Whilst parents might start pondering over their children's future when the children are very young, the main steps that they can themselves take at that time are to ensure that the children receive a good education. Young children can have little or no say in the choice of schooling and related matters. However, with the onset of teenage or adolescence, when the children approach the last few years of compulsory schooling, crucial decisions are made as regards their educational and career destinations, usually through consultation with the young people themselves. Thus, adolescence or teenage is a significant phase in the life of a young person and the experiences and ambitions of this period have implications for a person's future identity.

Although this study is primarily concerned with teenage Muslim girls, we need to comprehend the process of adolescence first. In order to understand the experiences and aspirations of the Muslim girls in the sample, I shall, therefore, put them in the wider context of adolescence. Furthermore, since identity formation is

an important feature of the teenage years, I shall examine the development of identity during this period. We have already discussed the presence of Muslims in Britain. The next two sections in this chapter are placed within two existing bodies of research: first, the studies explicating the phenomenon of adolescence; and second, the literature elucidating the process of identity formation during the adolescent years. Finally, a brief introduction of the present study is given.

## **1.2 Adolescence in Perspective**

The researcher describing a research project must show how, in examining a specific setting or set of individuals, s/he is studying a case of a larger phenomenon. By linking the specific research question to larger theoretical constructs or to national policy issues, the researcher is showing that the particulars of the study serve to illuminate larger issues and, therefore, are significant (Marshall and Rossman, 1989:12).

Hence, this section provides a theoretical framework for the research project and distinguishes the area of knowledge that the study proposes to advance. It should, however, be emphasised that the present research does not commence with any preconceived ideas or hypotheses, nor does it aim to test theories developed by theoreticians. Its purpose is to illuminate a phenomenon by means of qualitative research and, in the process, generate theory grounded in the data.<sup>2</sup>

The first general theory of adolescence was proposed by the American psychologist G. Stanley Hall in his two-volume work 'Adolescence', published in 1904. He is usually credited with the 'discovery' of adolescence (Griffin, 1993:11). Adolescence is a process which is spread out over a number of years and is technically regarded as commencing with puberty (Chadwick, 1932:113). However, adolescence cannot merely be perceived as a biological event. This period also has profound sociological and psychological implications.

Hemming (1960:4-12) examines the incipient research into adolescence. He observes that adolescents do not merely react to endocrine changes within themselves; they react in ways characteristic of the society in which they live. He notes that social anthropologists discovered that social expectations about adolescence vary from culture to culture; that adolescents mirror these expectations in the attitudes they adopt and the way they behave. As early as 1896, Knapp and Childe described Alaskan culture where youth, the phase between infancy and maturity, had no place at all. The Samoan girls described by Margaret Mead appeared to pass through a happy uninhibited adolescence, while girls of their age among the Manus of New Guinea had an indulged childhood, yet on attaining puberty were precipitated into a rigorously disciplined adulthood. Thus, the experience of the adolescents was atypical as it varied depending on the society in which they were brought up.

Psychologists and psychoanalysts turned the attention back upon individual development. Freud, Adler and Jung each had a different theoretical stance, but together emphasised that adolescence was a second chance to restore distortions of personality resulting from unfortunate experiences during the highly formative first few years of life. Kurt Lewin saw the adolescent as driven out from many areas of childish activity, yet hesitant about stepping forward into the adult world, and indeed excluded from parts of it. He concluded that the adolescent was lurking uncertainly on the margins of both worlds: this caused conflict and a sense of isolation and accounted for the shyness, sensitivity, ostentation and aggressiveness of many adolescents (Hemming, 1960).

A multidisciplinary approach to the development of adolescent psychology appeared in 1948 in the form of a book by C.M. Fleming entitled 'Adolescence: its Social Psychology'. Its introduction included recent findings from the fields of anthropology, physiology, medicine, psychometrics and sociometry. This comparative approach



revealed rich fields of study, but threatened to become overwhelming with the abundance of material relevant to the study of adolescence.

The concept of developmental tasks introduced by R.G. Havinghurst also formed a basis of synthesising various fields of study of adolescence. He initially listed ten developmental tasks which face the adolescent, but later shortened this list to five. This included learning an appropriate sex role; achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults; getting along with age-mates; developing intellectual skills; and developing conscience, morality and a set of values. Similar lists were suggested by others, such as Luella Cole and R.G. Kuhlen (see, Hemming, 1960).

Thus, the early literature presents adolescence as a period of conflict, uncertainty, isolation and adjustment. Hemming (1960:13;25) points out that while adolescence itself does not generate problems, it is a period of vulnerability. He argues that much of the conflict that arises between parents and their adolescent children is the direct outcome of the attempt of parents to apply to their children the attitudes and rules which their own parents applied to them.

Anna Freud (1958) views the central characteristic of adolescence to be the renunciation of one's childhood relationships. She believes that adaptation depends on breaking ties. Peter Blos (1967) carries this line of thought further and proposes that the adolescents' shedding of familial bonds is necessary for adult involvement in society. These theorists clearly explain adolescence in terms of rebellion and separation.

Even today, turmoil and rebellion are seen as the hallmarks of adolescence in Western society and traditionally the *sine qua non* of this life stage (Stern, 1990:74). Moreover, individuation and autonomy development are still widely considered the foremost adolescent tasks (see, for example, Josselson, 1980). Rosenthal (1987:157) observes that since adolescence is a time of considerable cognitive and

physical development, as well as a time when social expectations change dramatically, this particular life stage may be especially problematic, fraught with chaos and confusion. She marvels that so many adolescents make the transition to adulthood without evidence of psychological dysfunction, when they are expected to take adult-like responsibility for some aspects of their lives, but treated as children in other areas.

Coleman (1980:11) notes that the sociological or social-psychological approach to adolescence is marked by a concern with roles and role change and with the processes of socialisation. Hence, this approach sees adolescence as being dominated by stresses and tensions, not so much because of inner emotional instability, but as a result of conflicting pressures from outside. He points out that this approach is complemented by, yet different from, the psychoanalytic approach. Still, the two theoretical views share one common belief and that is in the concept of adolescent 'storm and stress' and the teenage years as a 'problem stage in human development'.

The American psychiatrist Offer (1969:184), acknowledges that the transitional period of adolescence presents the adolescent with a special burden, a challenge and an opportunity, since adolescents have to individualise, build up confidence in themselves and their abilities, make important decisions concerning their future and free themselves of their earlier attachment to their parents. Nevertheless, the majority of teenagers in his sample coped with these tasks successfully. As this was contrary to what most theoreticians proclaimed, Offer observes that because of the low level of turmoil in his sample, someone might view his subjects as cases of arrested development, a bad prognostic sign which must necessarily prevent the adolescent from developing into a mature adult.

Similar conclusions are documented by Kandel and Lesser (1972:184). They conducted a comparative study of large samples of both Danish and American



teenagers, concentrating particularly on home and school life and the relations between the two. They conclude that American and Danish adolescents are surprisingly close to their parents; they tend not to rebel against authority; and they often share with parents goals and aspirations for their future role in society (cf. pp. 193ff.; 205ff. in the present study). The findings of Kandel and Lesser's research fail to support the concept of an extensive gap between parents and their adolescent child, as far as both the quality of family life or personal aspirations of adolescents' future role in society are concerned.

Douvan and Adelson (1966:352) also challenge the notion of the proverbial generation gap. They argue that the conflict between the parent and the adolescent, the autonomy issue and the role of the peer group have all been exaggerated in theory. They note that the normative adolescent tends to avoid overt conflict with her/his family (cf. p. 103 in the present research). While conflict is present, it is largely unconscious conflict, often based on trivia, such as clothes and make-up, rather than on serious issues.

Thus, empiricists reject the pessimistic theoretical portrayal of adolescence. They call into question the extent to which turmoil and rebellion actually form an integral part of adolescence (see, also, Coleman, 1974; Offer, Ostrov and Howard, 1981). Coleman (1980:11) observes that it is important to recognise that there is as yet no theoretical approach which embodies as its main tenet the essential normality of the adolescent process. Nevertheless, recent debate on adolescence (see, for example, Furnham and Stacey, 1991:193), does point out that essentially adolescence is a period of adaptation and adjustments.

Coleman (1978;1979;1980) notes the sharp divergence of opinion between what have been called the 'classical' and 'empirical' points of view. He contends that beliefs about adolescence which stem from theory (the classical view) do not in general correspond with the results of research (the empirical view). He notes, in

accordance with many other writers, that psychoanalysts and psychiatrists see a selected population and their experience of adolescence is primarily based on individuals they meet in clinics or hospitals. This encourages a somewhat one-sided perspective in which turmoil or disturbance is over-represented. Similarly, sociologists see youth as being in the forefront of social change and confuse radical forces in society with the beliefs of ordinary young people.

Coleman (1980:182-183) points to the serious limitations of current theories. He argues that both psychoanalytic and sociological theories, in particular, are based primarily on the development of atypical young people. Furthermore, such theories have been extremely slow to take account of empirical evidence which has become available. Although he acknowledges the value of these theories in contributing towards the understanding of teenagers with problems, he considers them inadequate as a basis for insight into the development of the great majority of young people. He maintains that adolescence needs a theory, not of abnormality, but of normality, as empirical research suggests that for most teenagers adolescence is a period of relative stability.

Nevertheless, the transition between childhood and adulthood cannot be achieved without substantial adaptation and adjustments of both a psychological and social nature. Yet most young people appear to pass through this stage without undue stress. Coleman (1980:184-186) proposes a 'focal theory' of adolescence. According to this theory, at different ages and different times, particular sorts of relationship patterns and issues come into focus, in the sense of being most prominent. Adolescents deal with one issue at a time and thereby spread the process of adaptation over a span of years. The stresses resulting from the need to adapt to new modes of behaviour are rarely concentrated all at one time. Problems are more likely to occur for those who have more than one issue to cope with.

Coleman's argument as regards a theory of normality for adolescence is apposite, since evidence from empirical research points in this direction. However, his focal theory explaining how adolescents cope with life during this stage appears to be reductionistic. Adolescence is a period of rapid development and vicissitudes and the teenager encounters several issues concurrently. These may be associated with friendships, examinations, shyness, bullying, racism and parental restrictions amongst others. It is, therefore, not always possible to deal with one problem at a time. Hence, the theory of normal adolescence would need to be constructed differently.

### 1.2.1 Female Adolescence

Despite the theoreticians' emphasis on adolescence as a period of breaking away, studies of women and girls appear to contradict any theory postulating separation and individuation to be ubiquitous. Freud (1905:93) asserts that women do not undergo the same process of separation that men do.<sup>3</sup> He implies that normal adolescence and love for the parents are mutually exclusive and female adolescents' failure to break away from their parents denotes pathology.

However, recent theories contend that females' ties are strengths and that the role of these relationships in development should be understood in this context. Chodorow (1974) observes that for women, even a task as distinctly self-oriented as identity-formation may mean defining oneself in relation and connection to other people. Gilligan (1982) refers to the fusion of identity and intimacy in women, while Striver (1984) maintains that women's need to feel related to others is a crucial aspect of their identity and allows us to understand why women are so threatened when there is a danger of alienation. Miller (1984) argues that a girl can move on to a larger and more articulated sense of self only because of her actions and feelings in the relationship.

Patterson et al. (1992:20-21) point out that Josselson's (1988) conceptualisation of women's identity as being in connection with others offers an integrative framework from which to view several previously puzzling aspects of women's identity. First, interpersonal content areas are more prominent identity concerns for women than they are for men, at least in the adolescent years. Second, although women may approach the task of identity formation during adolescence, there are other times in women's lives when they can be expected to be involved in the moratorium process, either for the first time or in a reevaluation of earlier identity choices. In general, it seems that transitions in important interpersonal relationships often precipitate a reformation of identity. This is particularly true when relationship changes result in a lessening of the woman's responsibility for others. Third, issues of identity and intimacy seem to blend and merge for women.

Stern (1990:84-85) observes that if some sort of breaking away is a central concern of adolescence, while connecting to others is a central interest of females, then for female adolescents the conflict between these opposing tendencies will create a major existential dilemma. In her study on 23 young women, who were interviewed every year for three years, she notes that while issues of separation and connection are both foremost concerns for these young women, they seldom place these two approaches to relationship in opposition by constructing conflicts where they must choose either separation or connection. Rather separation and connection are seen as two compatible aspects of a person.

Stern suggests that these aspects not only coexist, but each can also function in the service of the other. Developing independence is seen as improving the capacity to meet one's own needs, so that others can be appreciated as people rather than as instrumental providers. In reducing the preoccupation with receiving care, there is a heightened capacity to look outside oneself and attend to others. At the same time, relationships provide the support one needs to push one's own development further.



Thus females construct their identities within a context of relationships.<sup>4</sup> This process was manifest throughout the present research.

### **1.3 The Formation of Identity**

Identity has to do with the way in which people define themselves and identify with various other individuals and groups (Liebkind, 1989:51). As a social product, identity is a humanly constructed, defined and sustained meaningful object. To be recognisably human, an organism must be interpreted as a meaningful identity; that is as an object (Weigert et al., 1986:31).

A central component of identity is the sense of social status. Not only social class as such, but social-class-to-be, involving expectation, hope and dread. An identity, which for some individuals is ascribed, may for others have to be achieved, generally through upward social mobility. Boys tend to construct identity around vocational choice; in most cases girls do not. A girl's identity is bound up not so much in what she is as in what her husband will be (Douvan and Adelson, 1966:17-19). After almost three decades, this is still true to some extent.

The development of a sense of one's identity is a never-ending process (Rosenthal, 1987:157). Identity, like any socially constructed reality, is structured with internal logics of action, thought and feeling that directs behaviour, interprets experience and provides the only materials individuals have for making sense out of their lives (Weigert et al., 1986:121). Adolescence is widely acknowledged as a stage associated with substantial change in the self (Adams, 1992:1) and achieving a sense of identity is seen as one of the most important psychological tasks for the teenager (Rosenthal, 1987:156).

The widely recognised theoretical frameworks for conceptualising the transformation of the self and the formation of an identity during adolescence have been provided

by Erik Erikson (1950;1956;1968) and Peter Blos (1962;1979). Both theorists view identity formation as an evolutionary process of differentiation and integration, synthesis and resynthesis and increasing cognitive complexity (Adams, 1992:1). Erikson and Blos place the process of identity formation and development within a social context whereby society expects the adolescent to make a selection from available choices. The adolescent in turn requires confirmation of these choices and community acceptance. However, the two theoreticians disagree as regards the relationship of the generations.

Erikson emphasises the role of intergenerational socialisation. He argues that society must provide for a mutual trustworthiness to assure self-chosen values and interests and experience with ego autonomy so that the adolescent can independently select a future that ensures a sense of purpose and fulfilment. Blos, in contrast, maintains that while the individual must be supported by interactions with others, increasing separation of self and emotional disconnection from parents is critical to ego maturity and identity development. He views psychological differentiation as an important component of identity development, which is facilitated by generational differences and corresponding tension and conflict between parents and adolescents.

Thus, Blos' theory posits rebellion and separation from parents as a requisite for identity formation, the failure of which can lead to identity crisis in adolescents. Nevertheless, Coleman (1980:178) contends that empirical research provides little support for such theories and fails to substantiate much of what both psychoanalysts and sociologists appear to believe. While there is certainly some change in the self-concept, there is no evidence to show that any, but a small minority of teenagers experience a serious identity crisis. In most cases, relationships with parents are positive and constructive and young people, by and

large, do not reject adult values in favour of those espoused by the peer group (cf. p. 154 in the present research).

### 1.3.1 The Identity of a Minority

Authors have distinguished between components of identity that arise out of choices made available to individuals in their social contexts and components of identity over which individuals have no choice, but around which they must construct meaning (see, for example, Grotevant, 1992:86). Immigrants come to their adopted country with labels such as Asian, African-Caribbean or Chinese amongst others. Whether or not they want to be identified by their country of origin, these racial and ethnic identifiers stick to them and even two or three generations later, their children may still be identified by means of such labels. Therefore, the process of identity formation in ethnic minority adolescents may be a complex phenomenon.

Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1991:156;165) observe that determining identity may be difficult for people who have experience of two cultures and particularly difficult for young people who are nurtured by parents and families steeped in one tradition, but who grow up in close contact and daily interaction with another tradition. In their research on Asian young people in Britain, they note that these young adults are ambivalent about being British or Pakistani or Indian. They are one or the other or both (cf. pp. 55-56 in the present study).

Similar variations are documented by Ellis (1991) in her study on Muslims in Coventry. She observes differences within the Muslim community in identifying themselves. While some will insist on seeing themselves first as Pakistanis and then as Muslims, others identify themselves first as Muslims, then Pakistanis, then Kashmiris. Ellis observes that while the level of the family's insistence on ethnic identity will often affect that of the younger generation, very often such perceptions

of ethnic differences are giving way to an identification as British Muslim (cf. pp. 72; 78 in the present research).

Brah and Shaw (1992:49) also contend that for young Asians 'home' is the particular locality of Britain where they have grown up. Their Asianness is not that of Mirpur, Lahore, Jullundher or Nairobi, but one firmly rooted in Birmingham, Bradford, London and so on. Though these distinctive British identities are often denied by certain racialised discourses, yet they are powerful identities for the young people themselves.

In the American context, Ward (1990:218) argues that the effort to understand identity formation in black<sup>5</sup> adolescents is incomplete without an appreciation of racial identity. She sees the integration of the individual's personal identity with one's racial identity as a necessary and inevitable developmental task of growing up black in white America. Others also contend that a stable concept of self, both as an individual as well as a group member, is essential to the healthy growth and development of the black self (Comner and Poussaint, 1975; Ladner, 1978; Cross, 1980). Through racial identity, the group's way of organising experience is transmitted to and internalised by the child (Barnes, 1980).

Ward (1990:222) notes the role of the black family which, through socialisation, teaches a child about the world and the skills necessary to cope and succeed (cf. p. 168 in the present study). It helps its children to acquire the attitudes, values and appropriate patterns of interaction conducive to their social and political environment. The black family provides a sense of identity and historical continuity by instilling in its offspring a sense of racial purpose and pride, thereby preparing its children to live among white people without becoming white people (Ladner, 1978) (cf. pp. 84 ff. in the present research).



### 1.3.2 Multiple identities

A significant feature of adolescence is a growth of concern with self-identity, taking in self-image, confidence in relationships, independence, personal aspirations and freedom of choice within their own spheres of activity (DES, 1983). This growth brings out the matter of self-definition in relation to family, peers and the social world. However, for most teenagers, social class seems not to be a salient criterion for defining the self. Sex, age, nationality, race, religion, school attendance or its alternative are apparently more salient criteria (Furnham and Stacey, 1991:182-183).

Thus, as a result of participation in a variety of social situations, we are provided with means of self-definition in the social context, producing a series of social identities (Tajfel, 1981). One's sense of identity, then, is synthesised from a number of social identities, such as female, sibling, parent and student amongst others (Rosenthal, 1987:158).

Johnson (1993:8) writing about growing up in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, argues that though girls were defined first and foremost by their sex, other identities or subjectivities were also included in the educational and other discourses about young people. Official and popular rhetoric about adolescence, such as manpower needs, the wastage of talent, the need for a highly educated population in the new technological age and citizens in the making, did not necessarily exclude girls.

Hence the contemporary debate on identity suggests that an individual has not just one identity, but a multitude of identities. Skevington and Baker, (1989:186) point to the multiplicity of social identities for women that can be subsumed under the heading of womanhood. Moreover, the experience of being female varies with class, age, race and other factors (cf. Wetherell, 1986). Identity channels behaviour and

multiple identities may generate a sense of well-being (see, Stryker and Serpe, 1982; Thoits, 1983).

Literature on the identity of ethnic minorities refers to these multiple identities in a variety of ways. Verma and Ashworth (1986:22) regard them as multiple ethnic affinities, though they only see them as a consequence of intermarriage. Others view them as multiple subjectivities or multiple strategies, and consider them to be multifaceted and contextualised (Parmar, 1989:58; Knott and Khokher, 1993:595; Bhachu, 1993:108;110).

Parmar notes the diverse identities as well as shared subjectivities of black women based on economic, social and cultural oppression, racism and sexual exploitation. She contends that black women in particular have fought to assert privately and publicly their sense of self: a self that is rooted in particular histories, cultures and languages.

Bhachu argues that identities negotiated and generated by British Asians have their specificities. They are multi-faceted, contextualised and are not stable, despite a common core of key fundamental, religious and cultural values that constitute their cultural roots. They shift according to the forces that operate on them.<sup>6</sup>

Knott and Khokher point to multiple and changing identities rather than a unitary concept of identity. They do not place the young women in their sample into rigid categories, but see them at a specific point in time, as negotiating religious and ethnic factors in a particular way, perhaps giving preference to one domain over the other. Knott and Khokher do not view this process as static, but find it complex, shifting and multi-faceted. The model that they present tends to be either reductive (e.g. between two cultures) or all-embracing (e.g. cultural synthesis).

Rosenthal (1987:178) also notes that second generation immigrant adolescents adopt a variety of strategies in dealing with their dual cultural environment. For

some of these teenagers, the primary ethnic group serves as the most potent source of identification. Others adopt a more assimilatory position or view themselves as members of two cultural worlds, switching identifications according to the situation. She concludes that, whatever the strategy, research increasingly shows that adolescents from minority groups are not fated to suffer intense psychological distress because of conflicting cultural norms.

Bhachu (1993:113) questions the negative portrayal of ethnic minority women based on the powerless / passive / static model, which fails to take account of the transformative powers of Asian women in generating and in manufacturing their cultural systems. She maintains that these, often simplistic, models deny their roles as the cultural entrepreneurs they are. Part of the purpose of the present research is to examine a group of young British Muslim women of Asian origin to ascertain the model that they represent.

#### **1.4 The Present Research**

This research does not aim to scrutinise adolescence merely as a mental structure, but to investigate how the adolescents' attitudes are affected by the world around them. Every society socialises its young: British Muslim society is no exception. While adolescence is partly moulded in our society by outside agencies, such as the media, the incipient quest for identity during this period may be influenced by intrinsic features pertaining to religion, family, marriage, educational and career aspirations. The process of settling down in a country where the majority culture and religion is different is difficult. As a result, adolescents belonging to minority groups may develop multiple identities to realise their aspirations. This study aims to discover what is shaping the identities and ambitions of a group of teenagers and how they are coping with the differences in culture and religion to make sense of their lives.

British Muslim girls are chosen as the sample. They are selected because Muslims are an important group in a number of ways. They are the second largest religious group in Britain. Further, their religion has a major influence on their way of life which should not be underestimated. This group, like some other ethnic minority groups, is misunderstood, marginalised and faces racism. While there is a considerable body of research carried out on British Asians as a common group, there is still very little research undertaken on the experiences and aspirations of Muslims and even less on female Muslims.

As soon as literature search and reading on the subject was started, it became evident that there was a dearth of literature on British Muslims. Furthermore, there was very little literature specifically dealing with British Muslim girls (for example, Afshar, 1989; Shaikh and Kelly, 1989). The literature either discussed the aspirations of girls in general or dealt with the education of Muslims at large. Male Muslim authors (such as, Hussain and Ashraf, 1979; Anwar, 1982) discussed both Muslim girls and boys together. While this pointed to the essential egalitarianism in Islam, it minimised the role of gender. Books by female Muslim authors (such as, Lemu and Hereen, 1978; Minai, 1981, Hussain, 1984), though illuminating, were more of a general nature. Research that had been done on ethnic minority children by non-Muslim researchers (such as, Sharpe, 1976; Taylor and Hegarty, 1985; Smith and Tomlinson, 1989) dealt with all British Asian groups together, thus underestimating the religious dimension. Still, since the aforementioned literature was indirectly related to the chosen area of investigation, it constituted the bulk of the reading material along with other similar literature.

However, towards the end of the research, around the writing-up stage, some research studies pertaining to the experiences of British Muslim girls were published and these provided useful reference material (see, for example, Brah and Shaw, 1992). The literature constituting the theoretical framework for the research has



been discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, chapters 3-8, which deal with the data, have been put in a wider context.

Since a proper understanding of the dynamics of the Muslim religion and culture is imperative for amiable majority-minority group relations, it is important to study both the genders in depth. However, the profundity demanded by a research of this nature makes it impossible to explore the experiences of both Muslim girls and boys. Hence, this research is confined to investigating the identities and aspirations of Muslim girls.

This research illuminates the future identities and aspirations of a group of girls. It is, in this respect, a prospective study. However, future aspirations do not exist in a vacuum: they are moulded by the experiences of the present, and to some extent of the past. In order to ascertain the kind of life these girls want to have in the future, it is necessary to examine how they are living at present. Moreover, the parents' past experiences impinge on the future life of the next generation. Thus, the first section of this chapter briefly discusses the British Muslims.

The data has guided me in identifying the various themes and dimensions, of the issue under scrutiny, which are linked with one another (see p. 51). Consequently, this dissertation is divided into four parts. Part one deals with the theoretical framework and the research design for the present study. Part two elucidates issues related primarily to life at home: identity, family life and marriage. Part three illuminates life at school and the two major dimensions of education. Part four looks to the future: career hopes of the girls and conclusions and implications of the present study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **2.1 Methodology**

The present research design<sup>1</sup> employs a qualitative methodology and is concerned with an ethnographic case study of British Muslim girls. Ethnographic research lends itself well to research topics that are not easily quantified (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990). The current research project uses triangulation to look at the same issues from three different points of view and to check the validity of the data. Furthermore, this study does not aim to test hypotheses or theories, but intends to generate theory grounded in the data.

Research paradigms chosen for educational studies of this nature fall into two main categories: the statistical approach (quantitative) and the case study method (qualitative). While both these methods were considered for the present study, a qualitative method of research within the case study paradigm appeared to be a suitable method of investigation.

While a quantitative methodology may be appropriate for measuring behaviour and looking at a large number of issues superficially, it would not have been useful for ascertaining attitudes and opinions. The present research endeavours to discover the experiences and aspirations of a group of girls. This requires in-depth investigation of a limited range of issues, generating rich data, to which only a qualitative methodology can do justice. The abounding data, the essence of a qualitative study, can be presented in the form of selective quotations to the reader. This would not have been possible if the research was done within a statistical paradigm.

### 2.1.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research includes any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:17). This kind of research investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials and there is a greater emphasis on holistic description, that is, on describing in detail all of what goes on in a particular activity or situation (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990). As opposed to the quantitative researcher, the qualitative researcher uses a lens that permits a much less precise vision of a much broader strip (McCracken, 1988). However, this does not imply that qualitative research lacks profundity and substance. On the contrary, the depth required to conduct a holistic study of this nature makes it an extremely valuable research technique.

Kirk and Miller (1986) place qualitative research within a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language and on their own terms. As identified with sociology, cultural anthropology and political science, among other disciplines, qualitative research has been seen to be 'naturalistic', 'ethnographic' and 'participatory'. Fraenkel and Wallen (1990) argue that qualitative researchers want to know what the participants in a study are thinking and why they think what they do. Assumptions, motives, reasons, goals and values all are of interest and likely to be the focus of researchers' questions.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1.2 Ethnographic Case Study

Ethnography is a cultural description; it shows how people describe and structure their world (Marshall and Rossman, 1989:91). The emphasis on ethnographic research is on documenting<sup>3</sup> or portraying the everyday experiences of individuals

by observing or interviewing them and relevant others. Researchers try to capture as much of what is going on as they can (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990).

The goal of researchers engaging in ethnographic research is to 'paint a portrait' of a social setting - for example a school or a classroom - in as thorough, accurate and vivid a manner as possible, so that others can also truly 'see' that school and its participants and what they do (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990). Likewise an ethnographer studying any other culture endeavours to portray that culture in a realistic and enriching fashion in order to convey to the reader the authentic flavour of that culture. Thus the present study endeavours to paint a picture of a group of teenage Muslim girls as a single case. Cohen and Manion (1989:124) place case study in the alternative paradigm of research which can be interpretive and subjective.<sup>4</sup>

A case study examines a single instance which could be a pupil, a class, a school, a group, a community or a profession, to illuminate the wider population to which that instance belongs. In this respect, it is similar to ethnography. Although researchers are inclined to label their research as either case study or ethnography, the two are not mutually exclusive. They have cognate features and it would, therefore, be appropriate to refer to studies such as the present research as *Ethnographic Case Studies*. This study is not an ethnography in the anthropological sense as it does not involve structured observation, but relies primarily on interviewing for gathering data. Nor is it a case study of a single case, but regards the group of Muslim girls studied as a single unit. Hence it combines features of the two qualitative strategies for methodological purposes.

### 2.1.3 Triangulation

Methodological triangulation is of two types: collecting data by means of multiple methods of data collection or by gathering information from multiple respondents.



The present study uses the latter method by tackling the same issues from three different points of view: the pupils', the parents' and the teachers'. Adelman et al. (1980:55) stress the advantages of this technique for collecting witnesses' accounts. They point to the multiplicity of perspectives present in a social situation to which the case study worker intends to respond by considering all accounts in part to be expressive of the social position of each informant. They contend that the case study needs to represent fairly these differing and conflicting view-points (see also, Walker, 1985; Cohen and Manion, 1989:276; Marshall and Rossman, 1989:146).

The present study intends to determine the aspirations of adolescent Muslim girls and to ascertain how these aspirations are being shaped. Since the girls do not live in a vacuum, outside influences are thought to be instrumental in shaping their ambitions. The parents and the teachers are considered to be the two important groups who have guidance and advisory roles critical for moulding these aspirations. It is, therefore, felt necessary to construct a research design which takes into account the perceptions of not only the girls, but also their parents and teachers, as regards issues pertaining to the educational, social and career aspirations of the girls. This kind of triangulation not only illuminates the same issues from three different perspectives, but also manifests how the perceptions of the parents and the teachers encroach on the girls' aspirations. Furthermore, this strategy proves invaluable in verifying the views of the three types of respondents.

#### 2.1.4 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory pertains to theory generated during the collection, inspection and analysis of data. This kind of theory evolves from themes and concepts which emanate from qualitative data. Glaser and Strauss (1967:30) contend that a sociologist's job is not to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behaviour.

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data, related to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:23). Theory should follow from research, not precede it (Cohen and Manion, 1989:141). The present study does not set out to prove a theory, but endeavours to ascertain a theory emerging from the research (see pp. 235ff.).<sup>5</sup>

### 2.1.5 Generalisability

Each ethnography is unique. It describes and analyses aspects of a particular social setting and social world. However the author may seek to generalise, to compare and to theorise on a grand scale, the work is necessarily grounded in the local. The ethnography is bound in time and space (Atkinson, 1992:29). Generalisability is almost non-existent, since only a single situation, such as one classroom or school, is studied (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990).

Case study research involves the study of an instance in action (Adelman et al., 1980:49). The present research explores the nature of such an instance. While themes emerge which could be investigated further by future researchers, the study is area-specific and time-specific, since it illustrates a specimen of the population living at a particular time in a certain geographical region. Although an ethnographic case study, offering suggestive evidence, the present research does not make claims of generalisability.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2 Aims

This study is an empirical investigation dealing with a group of Muslim girls, their parents and some of their teachers. Its primary aims are:

1. To elucidate and evaluate the educational, social and career aspirations of a group of teenage Muslim girls in British schools, by means of an ethnographic case study. The three kinds of aspirations are thought to be interrelated and are chosen in order to present an integral picture of the girls' future expectations.
2. To understand and analyse how these aspirations fashioning the present and future identities of the girls are shaped and what salient factors influence them.
3. To investigate the extent to which the opinions, attitudes and motivation of the parents and the teachers impinge on the girls' aspirations.
4. To discover the impact of social and structural influences, such as gender expectations, ethnicity, class background and religious affiliations and practices on the girls' aspirations.
5. To identify the appropriate methods of analysing the data.

## **2.3 Procedure**

### **2.3.1 Data-collection**

The methods of data-collection have to be considered carefully, as they determine the shape of the finished product to a large extent. Questionnaires and interviews were contemplated for gathering data for the present research study. Whilst questionnaires give a researcher the opportunity to collect information from a large number of respondents in a short period, there are several disadvantages attached to their use. The nature of investigation necessitated developing a rapport with the respondents before they were asked questions about various important sensitive issues to which they were expected to answer at length. This was impossible until I had the opportunity to talk to them personally and allay their fears and reservations. Moreover, questionnaires do not give a researcher the scope to ask supplementary

questions, in response to participants' answers to certain initial questions, in order to probe deeper into certain issues. Questionnaires can also be left unanswered or only partially answered, due to lack of interest or lack of comprehension. This method of data collection was, therefore, deemed unsuitable.

Interviewing seemed to be the most appropriate method for gathering data for a qualitative ethnographic case study of this nature.<sup>7</sup> During an interview, a researcher can empower the respondents to think, deliberate and clarify points and provide opinion, even about issues they had never thought of before. This can be done by providing cues and prompts, repeating a question, wording a question differently, repeating part of the respondent's answer or even by making encouraging sounds.

This study does not endeavour to test hypotheses based on pre-existing theories. Unlike a quantitative researcher, a qualitative researcher does not have a precise or definite set of categories before the commencement of the study. Categories are hoped to be isolated and defined during the process of research (McCracken, 1988). Ethnographic researchers attempt to understand an on-going situation or set of activities that cannot be predicted in advance (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1990). Moreover, the qualitative researcher expects the nature and definition of analytic categories to change in the course of a project (Glaser & Strauss, 1965).

Thus, having pondered carefully over methodological issues, interviewing was considered to be the most suitable method of data-collection. I decided to gather data by means of in-depth interviewing, using semi-structured<sup>8</sup> interview schedules (see appendix 2, p. 346ff.). The questions initially formulated for the three interview schedules - for the pupils, the parents and the teachers - were based mainly on a literature review, my previous research experience and informal staff-room conversations with members of the staff at the three sample schools. It was



thought imperative to conduct a pilot study (see pp. 39-40) to test the questions in the three interview schedules, before proceeding with the main study.

It was envisaged that interviewing of the three types of respondents for the main study would be undertaken in two phases. A number of issues were intended to be investigated, which meant long conversations with the subjects, thereby imposing on their time for several hours. However hospitable the parents were (see p. 44), and however generous the teachers and girls in giving of their time, it was thought best to interview all the respondents once and then return to interview a reduced number of them a second time to probe deeper into issues that needed further scrutiny. Moreover, it was considered necessary to conduct an inductive analysis after the first phase interviews before proceeding with the second phase interviews.

Interviewing, as the sole method of data collection, has been criticised. Marshall and Rossman (1989:83) argue that when interviews are used alone, distortions in data are more likely, as interviewers may interject personal biases; volumes of data may be obtained through interviewing, but such data may be difficult to manipulate. Whilst interviewing was the principal method of data-collection in the present study, additional information was gathered through attendance registers; examination results; informal conversations with the pupils, parents and girls in the sample and with a number of teachers who did not constitute the sample; by studying the schools' prospectuses and by being present at some career interviews.

The volumes of data accumulated during interviews can be manipulated skillfully by a dextrous researcher to show their relevance to the study. The abundant data should not be perceived as a nuisance, but rather as an asset, the ingenious management of which could illuminate complex phenomena. As far as bias is concerned, it is not confined to interviewers. Every researcher, regardless of the methods of data-collection, brings her/his experience to bear on the study s/he

undertakes. This subjective input should be seen as an enriching resource rather than a weakness.

The fact that I was myself a Muslim, originating from Pakistan, gave me the advantage of insight into the Islamic religion and the Muslim culture as only a researcher with intrinsic knowledge of the subject can have. However, I could discern the issue from both perspectives. Since I had lived in Britain for several years, had taught at secondary schools here and now had my own children at various stages of education here, I was able to understand the other side of the debate as well. Furthermore, I recognised that I had to distance myself from my sample to stand back and examine the data from a researcher's perspective.<sup>9</sup> Thus the portrayal of the culture was not one-sided.

The present study depicts the lives of a group of girls to show how their aspirations are being shaped. In order to paint this picture as realistically as possible, the actual words spoken by the girls, the parents and the teachers frequently appear in the text in the form of selective quotations, thus giving the reader the true flavour of their sentiments. These quotations are not the result of note-taking and recall, but the words spoken by the interviewees, which were tape-recorded. I was careful not to place the tape recorder in the direct line of the interviewees' vision during the interviews. It, therefore, did not appear to affect their response in any way and they only seemed to remember its presence when I got up to change the cassette or to turn it off.

### 2.3.2 Choosing the Sample

McCracken (1988) contends that the first principle for the selection of respondents in qualitative research is *less is more*. It is more important to work longer and with greater care with a few people than more superficially with many of them. This group is not chosen to represent some part of the larger world, but offers, instead,

an opportunity to glimpse the complicated character, organisation and logic of culture. The issue is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world.

The present study is, therefore, confined to a sample of 24 Muslim girls, aged 15-16 years, in three schools. Ideally, I would have liked the opportunity to investigate the experiences and aspirations of all the Muslim girls in that year group in all the schools in that geographical area. This would have enhanced the findings and given us a clearer picture of the life of Muslim girls. Nevertheless, this was neither within the scope of a study of this nature, nor within the ability of a single researcher.

It seemed appropriate to choose the sample in those areas which had a high proportion of Muslim settlement. Two towns in the East of England were selected for this purpose. The majority of the Muslim population inhabiting these two urban, industrialised areas originates from the rural parts of Pakistan and some are from Bangladesh. The bulk of research on British Muslims has so far been undertaken in the Midlands. It was, therefore, thought beneficial to conduct a research study pertaining to the experiences of Muslims in another area of Muslim settlement in Britain.

I wrote to the two Local Education Authorities, explaining my project and asking their permission to conduct research in schools in their counties. They granted permission and suggested that I should contact the Coordinator of Multicultural Education in one county and the Director of Studies for Multicultural Education in the other. They were subsequently approached and were asked for the names of some secondary schools with a considerable number of Muslim girls in the Year 11. They sent the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of suitable schools in the area. I subsequently went to see the Director of Studies, on his invitation, to elucidate my project.

I then wrote to the headteachers of the schools asking their permission to use their schools for data-collection. After some initial difficulties, (see p. 48), three schools were chosen. Arrangements were made to see the headteachers of these schools so that I could throw some light on my project. They were amenable and each of them assigned a member of the staff to liaise with me to help me to organise the data-collection by assisting with room provision and the timetabling of interviews.

After careful deliberation, the size of the sample was determined. The sample comprised 24 pupils, 24 parents and 18 teachers. This appeared to be an appropriate number for the sample considering the limitation of time and the nature of the study.

#### 2.3.2.1 The Schools

Three secondary schools were selected for the study: two in one town and one in the other. Care was taken to choose those schools which were different in their intake, yet had a considerable number of Muslim girls in the upper school.

##### 2.3.2.1.1. Blossomdale Girls' School

This was an 11-16 single-sex school situated on the outskirts of the town. The intake of this all-girls' school was over 800 with 180 pupils in the year 11. Since this was the only girls' school in the entire county, it was very popular with those British Muslims who preferred single-sex schooling for their children. The number of Muslim pupils in the school was very high, with as many as 80 per cent in the year seven. Nevertheless, the teaching staff was predominantly from the Anglo-Saxon majority with very few ethnic minority teachers.



In the entry year, the pupils were taught in mixed ability groups. However, in the first term, they were organised into sets, according to ability, in English and Maths. Setting increased in the years eight and nine, though some subjects were still taught in mixed ability groups.

A form tutor was responsible for the pastoral care of 28 girls in a year group, under the guidance of a head of year. Careers education was introduced in the year nine. The school's career coordinator worked in collaboration with the county careers service. The girls had interviews with the careers coordinator and the county careers adviser. The pupils went for two weeks' work experience in the year 11. Extracurricular activities included a number of clubs which met in the lunch hour, after school, or at weekends. The lunch hour activities were particularly agreeable to the Muslim girls who could not stay for extracurricular activities after school.

The school's governing body included Muslim members of the LEA and the community. In compliance with the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts, parents were allowed to withdraw their children from religious instruction, worship and assembly by making a formal request to the headteacher, but none of the girls in the sample was withdrawn. The school had an ethnic minority member of staff responsible for home-school liaison.

#### 2.3.2.1.2 Springfield High School

This was an 11-16 inner-city coeducational school. Originally a girls' school, it became a comprehensive in 1966. The number of pupils was just over 900, with around 200 pupils in the year 11. A large percentage of the school population was of Asian origin, which included Hindu, Muslim and Sikh pupils. Still, the teaching staff was primarily Anglo-Saxon. The school was without a permanent headteacher at the time of the fieldwork and the deputy head was acting as the headteacher.

However, towards the end of the fieldwork, a new headteacher of Asian origin was appointed, who was to take over the following year.<sup>10</sup>

Most subjects were taught in mixed ability groups, although setting by ability occurred in some subjects at different times. The school offered various extracurricular activities held during the lunch break or after school. Many Muslim pupils in the school participated in the lunch hour activities.

On entry, each pupil was put into a tutor group which met the form tutor twice daily. The tutor groups were led by the heads of years. Careers guidance began in year nine. The pupils were interviewed individually by the county careers adviser and could also arrange to see the school's careers tutor whenever they wished. The pupils were put on a two weeks' work experience placement in the year 11.

Certain members of the staff were available to act as interpreters for Bengali and Urdu speakers and the school offered to make arrangements for other languages, particularly at the parents' evening. The pupils could withdraw from religious education if their parents made a formal request. Nevertheless, none of the girls in the sample appeared to exploit this privilege.

#### 2.3.2.1.3 Hillsvieview Comprehensive School

This was an 11-18 inner-city coeducational school. The school was established in the early 1720s and became a boys' grammar school in the mid 1900s. It became fully comprehensive and coeducational in 1976. The intake at the time of the fieldwork was just under 800, which included 160 sixth form (years 12 and 13) pupils. The number of pupils in the year 11 was 125. The school had a large proportion of ethnic minority pupils who were mainly Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The teaching staff was primarily from the majority group, with very few ethnic minority teachers.

The pupils were mostly taught in mixed ability groups, though they were put into sets for some subjects. There were five houses within the school. On entry, all pupils were assigned to a house with their form tutor. The houses competed with each other in music, drama, quizzes, sport and craftwork. The school had a variety of clubs and societies, which met during the lunch hour or after school. The lunch time activities were attended by many Muslim pupils in the school.

In theory, the pupils could withdraw from religious education lessons on parental request. However, the school preferred them not to. None of the parents in the sample had asked for their daughters to be withdrawn, but it was difficult to ascertain whether their decision was influenced by the school's reservations about this facility. Careers guidance was introduced in the year nine. A guidance evening was arranged for the parents of the year nine pupils to discuss option choices. Another guidance evening for the parents of the year 11 pupils was organised to provide information about post-16 options. All the year 11 pupils undertook three weeks of work experience.

#### 2.3.2.2 The Pupils

Year 11 female Muslim pupils were selected to participate in the study. They were thought to represent a crystallisation of the values inculcated by the school and an end product of the educative process (cf. Hargreaves, 1967: x-xi). They were chosen in the belief that being in the final year of compulsory schooling, they would have a clear notion of their post-school destination. They were also assumed to be reasonably articulate at this age.

24 Muslim girls, eight from each school, were selected. It was a selective sample in the sense that only Muslim girls were chosen. I chose the girls by perusing the lists of names of all the Year 11 female pupils and picking out all the Muslim names. The fact that all these pupils were Muslim was confirmed with their heads of year.

However, once I had compiled lists of all the Muslim girls in the year 11 of the three schools, I chose eight girls from each school at random. It would, therefore, be appropriate to call it a *randomised-selective* sample. Although, I hoped to choose Muslim girls of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Arab and African origin, it transpired that almost all the Muslim Year 11 pupils in the chosen schools were of Pakistani origin, with some from Bangladesh and a very small minority from East Africa. The sample, therefore, comprised 18 girls whose parents originated from Pakistan, five girls with parents from Bangladesh and one girl whose parents were from East Africa and were of Indian origin.

#### 2.3.2.3 The Parents

The parents of the 24 Muslim pupils were also interviewed in depth. They were given the choice to be interviewed in English, Urdu or Punjabi, all of which I spoke fluently. However, none of the parents chose to be interviewed in English. Even the fathers originating from Bangladesh chose to be interviewed in Urdu.<sup>11</sup> The majority of parents originating from Pakistan chose to be interviewed in Punjabi.

I envisaged that both the father and the mother would be interviewed. However, it became obvious during the pilot study that it was not feasible to interview both parents together. Even when both the parents were present, only one of them was an active participant, usually the father, unless the question was specifically asked to the mother afterwards. It was, therefore left to the parents to decide whether the father or the mother should be interviewed. In many cases, they preferred that the mother was interviewed. Only in a few instances, the father was interviewed or both the parents were present during the interview. However, during the second-phase interviews, some fathers, who were not interviewed for the first-phase interviews, also chose to be present. They had apparently been told by their wives about the nature of the investigation and they probably felt that they should also voice their



opinion. Consequently, these fathers were the active participants in the second-phase interviews. (For Access to Parents, see pp. 43ff.).

#### 2.3.2.4 The Teachers

18 teachers, six from each school, were selected to be interviewed. In order to have a diversity of teachers' perceptions, it was felt that a range of teachers involved in teaching Muslim pupils in the past and at the time of the fieldwork should be interviewed. I conferred with the three members of the staff, who helped me to organise the data collection at the three schools, about the possible selection of the teachers to be interviewed. They discussed the project in a staff meeting at each of the schools and asked for volunteers.

Consequently, the head of year 11 or the head of upper school, and the careers teacher at each school were interviewed. Additionally, subject teachers of science and humanities, and support teachers were chosen to participate in the study. All the teachers who were interviewed taught at least some of the girls in the sample.

#### 2.3.3 The Pilot Study

Use of a pilot study is seen as advantageous as it can lend credence to the researcher's claim, and illustrate her/his ability, to conduct and manage a qualitative study (Marshall and Rossman, 1989:51). For me, the primary objective of conducting a pilot study was to test the questions in the three interview schedules to be used to interview the pupils, the parents and the teachers. The pilot study was undertaken in two other towns, because I did not want to carry it out in areas where the main study was to be conducted. Two schools were approached for the pilot study. Four Muslim girls in the year 11 of these schools, their parents and six teachers who had recent experience of teaching Muslim girls were interviewed.

The data generated in the pilot study were of clarificatory nature and were not used in the main study. They, however, made apparent some flaws in the interview schedules. During the pilot study, the interviews with the parents, which were initially started in English, had to be rapidly substituted with interviews in Urdu or Punjabi. This effectively enhanced the response. Whilst interviewing in English generated monosyllabic or brief answers from fathers who had had some education, conducting the interviews in Urdu or Punjabi even empowered those mothers who were totally illiterate to talk at length about important issues about which they clearly felt quite strongly. Furthermore, the use of sophisticated educational terminology in the interview schedules of the pupils and the parents was found to be unsuitable.

As a result of the pilot-study, the interview schedules were modified and the vocabulary was simplified (for example Q.8 in interview schedule 2 and Q.17 in interview schedule 3. See pp. 348; 351). The interview schedule for the parents was translated in Urdu and Punjabi. Back translation was used to check the accuracy of the translation. Moreover, certain questions were added to the three interview schedules as a consequence of the issues brought up by the girls, the parents and the teachers (for example, Q.11 in interview schedule 5 and Q.4 in interview schedule 6 related to the girls' attendance. See pp. 354; 357).

#### 2.3.4 The Interviews

The most important aspect of the interviewer's approach involves conveying the idea that the participant's information is acceptable and valuable (Marshall and Rossman, 1989:82). It is better to appear slightly dim and too agreeable than to give any sign of a critical or sardonic attitude (McCracken, 1988). During the interviews, I listened objectively to the perspectives of the pupils, the parents and the teachers as regards the various issues under investigation. I accepted their views sympathetically even when I did not agree with them.

Interviewing for the present study was conducted over a period of 20 months. A short time at the beginning of each interview was spent in explaining the project to the respondents, telling them about the possibility of another interview, and assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity. The interviewees were also given the opportunity to ask questions about my background, education and experience and the reason for undertaking this project. This part was not tape-recorded. Furthermore, at the end of each interview, many girls and parents asked me about further educational and university courses, the requirement to enter these courses and their destination. I answered these questions to the best of my knowledge. This conversation was also off the record. This interactive style of interview had a positive effect on the outcome of the recorded interview.

The recorded part of the interview involved the use of semi-structured interview schedules, though these were only used as a guide. Additionally, appropriate extemporaneous supplementary questions were formulated and asked during the interview, depending on the interviewees' answers to the initial questions. The interview schedules for the first phase of interviewing started with some very general questions of biographical nature which were deemed necessary to develop a rapport and to put the interviewee at ease,<sup>12</sup> before I started to probe into the desired area of investigation. However, the interviews became progressively more focused.

At each school, the teachers were interviewed first. I envisaged that the teachers might raise issues that could be useful in formulating questions for the pupils, which turned out to be the case. Interviews with the teachers were fitted in according to their time-tables. Burgess (1984) points out that researchers need to take note of the three-term cycle and its influence upon time-tables and related activities. Most teachers were interviewed for the present study in the autumn term, when the year 11 students were away on work experience and the teachers had some free time.

Parental permission was sought for interviewing the girls (see pp. 43-44) and interviewing commenced as soon as permission was obtained. At each school, the eight girls to be interviewed were first seen together as a group. The nature of the research project was explained to them and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. They were given the chance to ask questions and clarify points. The girls appeared to be keen and welcomed the opportunity to express their opinion once their initial suspicions and fears were allayed.

All the girls were then interviewed individually in school so that they could express their views freely. The first interviews were fitted in after their work experience and before and after their mock GCSEs, usually during free lessons and the lunch break. As opposed to the parents, all the girls chose to be interviewed in English, as they considered it to be the language in which they possessed optimum eloquence. Further, perhaps the heritage language had a more meaningful role in the context of the home and they thought it appropriate to articulate their views in English at school, even when they spoke to someone who shared their heritage language.

During the interviews, the questions were not always asked in the same order. Indeed no two interviews proceeded in a similar manner. Usually, the responses of the interviewees determined the next question. However, the scheduled question was asked later, unless it had already been answered in response to another question. Care was taken to cover all the questions in the interview schedule.

I transcribed each interview verbatim. Furthermore, I simultaneously translated and transcribed the interviews with the parents. McCracken (1988) asserts that investigators who transcribe their own interviews invite not only frustration, but also a familiarity with the data. Far from being frustrating, my own experience of transcribing the tapes helped me to put the data in their proper context and the resulting familiarity with the data facilitated a better understanding of the dynamics of the culture under investigation.



Immediately after each interview, I recorded my personal thoughts as regards the interview, the interviewee and anything else which could not be tape recorded, but was important. While the bulk of this note-taking could have been carried out during the interviews, I chose not to do so as I preferred to give my total attention to the interviewee. A preliminary analysis was carried out after the first phase interviews (see p. 50) and the responses of the interviewees were used to formulate questions for the second-phase interviews.

The second phase of interviewing involved a reduced number of interviewees. 12 girls, their parents and nine teachers were interviewed for a second time. The purpose of this exercise was to probe deeper into certain issues which could not be discussed in fuller detail in the first interview or which were indeed raised during the first interview. The most articulate girls, their parents and the teachers with maximum insight into the religion and culture of the Muslim girls in the sample were chosen for the second-phase interviews. Once again, all these interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. Furthermore, I simultaneously translated and transcribed the interviews with the parents.

#### **2.4 Access to Parents**

Gaining access to parents has been considered problematic (cf. Smith and Tomlinson, 1989). I managed to overcome this problem to some extent. Previous experience of research led me to take the stance whereby I approached the parents through the schools. However, this is not an unusual strategy. Douvan and Adelson (1966:viii) also arranged sampling through schools in their research on adolescent girls.

It was decided that only those girls would be interviewed whose parents agreed to participate as well. A letter was, therefore, drafted by me and sent to the parents by the heads of the schools, asking for their permission to interview their daughters

and asking them if they were willing to participate as well (see p. 345). The letter was in simple English and was not translated in the heritage languages. I was assured by the teachers that it was not necessary since most fathers could read English. Moreover, the girls could translate for them, if required.

I believe the fact that the letter was sent by the school gave the project credibility, since Muslim parents have a high regard for educational establishments. Consequently, the majority of parents acquiesced. A few declined to be interviewed themselves due to illness or bereavement, though they allowed me to interview their daughters. However, the daughters of the parents who refused were not included in the sample and they were replaced by other girls by means of *randomised-selection*.

Parental interviews followed those of the girls. Significantly, all the families in the sample had a telephone. The girls were asked to indicate a suitable time to telephone them at home to arrange an interview with their parents at a time convenient to the parents - mother and/or father. All the girls were then telephoned at home at the time suggested by them and an appointment was made with the parents of every girl in the sample. Interviews with the parents were carried out in the absence of the girls: they were either at school or were requested to go to another part of the house so that the parents could communicate their views frankly.

All the parents were amicable, courteous and welcoming. I was never allowed to leave a house without partaking of refreshments and offers to share the meals were always forthcoming. They gave generously of their time and did not appear to be in a hurry for the interview to be over. None of the parents were hostile, lost their temper during the interview or indeed refused to answer a question. They seemed flattered by the opportunity to voice their opinion about important issues which, it appeared, they had never discussed with an outsider so extensively.

Since the entire investigation dealt with sensitive issues, the phraseology had to take into account the subtleties, values and attitudes of the respondents. Furthermore, questions of very personal nature were always asked in an apologetic tone and with a preceding statement of 'I know this is personal, and you don't have to answer it if you don't want to, but would you tell me...?' This prepared the interviewee for a question of a highly sensitive kind and always elicited a response.

When visiting the parents to interview them, I observed the etiquette in the way I dressed. This does not indicate that I dressed differently from the way I dressed for work. I did not cover my hair, because the only time I do so is when I pray. I was dressed in trousers and a jacket, which is my usual attire outside the home. I chose not to dress in shalvar, kameez and dopatta. However, I still dressed the way Muslims do, i.e. modestly. The message that I wanted to convey was that I was not merely a casual visitor from the community, who was being inquisitive.<sup>13</sup>

Agar (1986:57) points to the general axiom held by most ethnographers that the longer and better one gets to know the subjects, the richer and more complex will be the consequent understandings. He sees rapport as the quality of the relationships the ethnographer has with the participants, without which they would not let her/him into their world or talk to her/him. The fact that I was a Muslim who could communicate with them in a language that they spoke fluently was instrumental in breaking down the barriers. This applied equally to parents who were of Bangladeshi origin. A number of times, while discussing an issue, the parents said, 'You are Muslim, you will know...'

I was careful to form a similar kind of relationship with all the respondents. I was able to identify with the three groups, albeit the identifiers were different. I could identify with the parents as a Muslim living in Britain, who was of the same ethnic origin, and whose children were also being educated in Britain. I could identify with the girls as an educated female member of British Muslim society and as mother of

children, who like them, were undergoing educational experience. With the teachers, I could identify as an educator and an educationalist. Consequently, a comparable degree of rapport was developed with the three groups.

Being a woman,<sup>14</sup> I was able to reach mothers who otherwise would not have expressed their opinion so candidly to a male researcher, or to a researcher from another background. I was careful to avoid creating a hierarchical relationship between myself and the mothers (cf. Oakley, 1981) and thus turned the interview into a non-hierarchical interaction. I listened to their views in an uncondescending manner, without judging them and without giving any indication of the fact when I did not agree with them. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:84-87) discuss the gender, age and ethnicity of the researcher, all of which I was able to exploit to develop a relationship with the subjects. However, I had the additional advantage of speaking the same language as the parents and practising the same religion.

## **2.5 Ethical Issues**

I was acutely aware of the ethical issues embedded in a study of this nature. I, therefore, tried to be subtle and careful in my negotiation. Walker (1980:49) points out that to gain access to the school, you need to first approach the education authority; to gain access to the staff, you need to approach the head; to gain access to the pupils, you need to approach the staff.

As discussed above (see pp. 33-34), I approached the LEAs and then the heads of the schools to gain permission to gather data in their schools. Parental permission was obtained before the girls were interviewed. Permission was sought from the three types of subjects for tape-recording the interviews. They would not have expressed their views on tape with such candour had I not been able to establish some form of trust and credibility.



McCracken (1988) maintains that time scarcity and concern for privacy stand as important impediments to the qualitative study of modern life and it is precisely these impediments that make the long interview so valuable as a means of inquiry. This research strategy gives access to individuals without violating their privacy,<sup>15</sup> or testing their patience, and without participant observation and prolonged contact, within a manageable methodological context.

In the present study, none of the subjects were approached without their prior permission. The interviewees were assured of complete confidentiality before the interviews. However, rather than assigning a number to each respondent in a dehumanising fashion, their names have been replaced by pseudonyms, thus ensuring their anonymity, yet retaining the essence of the thesis. This code of confidentiality has been extended to the schools and pseudonyms have been given to them as well. Moreover, the towns in which these schools are situated have not been named, otherwise, because of the nature of their intake, the schools would have been easily identifiable.

Finch (1993:176), discussing research by women on women, observes that a crucial point, often overlooked in arguments on research ethics is that collective, not merely individual interests are at stake. The latter may be relatively easily secured with guarantees of confidentiality, anonymity, codes of ethics and so on. It is far more difficult to devise ways of ensuring that information given so readily in interviews will not be used ultimately against the collective interests of women.

It is indeed impossible to ensure that the data laid open for a reader's perusal would not be used in unfavourable ways. While every researcher undertakes a research study with the intention of helping, rather than damaging the subjects and their counterparts in the wider world, the researcher's accountability ends by ensuring the anonymity of individual subjects. The present study has elucidated a culture. The

ultimate responsibility lies with the readers, practitioners and policy-makers to use the data in ways that would assure the collective benefit of the wider population.

## **2.6 Difficulties Encountered**

The research suffered some set-backs at the incipient stages. Two of the schools that were first approached did not have enough female Muslim pupils in the year 11, although the overall proportion of Muslim pupils in those schools was quite high. At another school, the teachers did not want the interviews to be tape-recorded because of an unfortunate experience in the past, when a research study misquoted some of the teachers at that school and the school was named as well. The aforementioned schools were not included in the sample and alternative schools were found.

The headteacher of a third school insisted on the transcripts of interviews with the pupils and teachers to be made available to the school for scrutiny. Since this would have been contrary to the code of confidentiality, this school was also excluded.

There was also the problem of slowness of communication with the schools at the beginning. Two schools out of the three, where the data were collected, did not reply for over four weeks when I initially wrote to them. This problem was overcome by making contact with them by telephone.

It was hoped that some middle class families comprising university educated and professional parents would also be included in the sample. However, it was found that the sample schools did not have any pupils from such families and the majority of such children either lived in the suburbs, and were thus not within the catchment areas of the sample schools, or attended independent schools. The study, therefore, had to be confined, in the main, to ostensibly working class families (see, pp. 83-84; 305).

## **2.7 Analysis of Data**

The analysis of qualitative data is perhaps the most demanding and least examined aspect of the qualitative research process (Miles, 1979). Researchers (see, for example, Valli, 1986:228) have pointed to its complexity. Delamont (1992:151) warns that there are no short cuts and one must allow plenty of time and energy for the tasks. Further, the analysis of qualitative data continues throughout the research and is not a separate self-contained phase.

The object of analysing qualitative data is to determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that inform the respondents' view of the world in general and the topic in particular (McCracken, 1988). Qualitative researchers claim that only qualitative data respects the complexity, subtlety and detail of human transactions. Two strategies are common: one, to report results in terms of a relatively simple category scheme; and the other, to put before the reader by extensive, though necessarily selective, quotation the data itself, hoping thus that the essential flavour comes through (Bliss et al., 1983:3).

In the present study, a combination of the two above mentioned strategies was used to analyse the data. The analysis was a lengthy, complex and sometimes frustrating process. Several analyses were carried out in different phases, both during the field work and after its completion. This involved transcribing 99 interviews, reading the transcripts a number of times, composing six matrices, choosing categories, linking themes and selecting quotations.

The first step involved the verbatim transcribing of the tape-recorded first phase interviews. This proved to be time consuming, but rewarding. Transcripts of interviews empowered me to see at a glance an interviewee's views on a certain issue without returning to the tape every time. Further, the transcripts turned out to be extremely useful when categories were selected and quotations were chosen. It

would indeed be extremely difficult to conduct a study of this nature without fully transcribing the interviews.

Interviews with the teachers were transcribed as soon as they were completed. Some of the ideas expressed by the teachers were used to formulate questions for the pupils and the parents. The interviews with the girls and the parents were also transcribed in their entirety.

At the conclusion of the first phase interviews, I devised three matrices, one each for the pupils, the parents and the teachers. On each matrix, I vertically inscribed the interviewees' names and horizontally inscribed the condensed form of the questions asked. In some squares three or four questions were condensed as one topic. In the corresponding squares, I concisely recorded the interviewees' answers to the questions. This supplied an anatomic framework of the data permitting instantaneous inter-interviewee and intra-interviewee comparisons and contrasts. The matrix of the pupils' responses comprised 52 topics, enumerated horizontally; that of the parents consisted of 40 topics; and that of the teachers had 38 topics. Since I believed that categories for analyses should emanate from the data rather than from a theoretical framework, these topics provided the bases for the emerging categories.

At this stage, the transcripts were examined a number of times. Each transcript was summarised and the major themes recorded. During these perusals, quotations illuminating these themes were highlighted for subsequent use in the text. Moreover, issues that needed further in-depth investigation were identified. Subsequently, questions for the three interview schedules for the second phase of interviewing the girls, the parents and the teachers were formulated.

The second phase interviews were managed and interpreted in the same way as the first phase interviews. The procedure involved transcribing the interviews and



composing three matrices. The matrix interpreting the second phase interviews with the pupils had 50 topics listed horizontally; that of the parents had 32 topics; and that of the teachers had 30 topics. The transcripts of the second phase interviews were also examined a number of times. These were synopated, the emerging themes were classified and enlightening quotations were highlighted.

Then the two matrices classifying data from the pupils' interviews were examined together. Similarly, the two matrices with data generated from the parents' interviews and the two matrices with data from the teachers' interviews were studied. Together, the girls' matrices classified 102 issues; the parents' matrices listed 72 issues; and the teachers' matrices recorded 68 issues.

All six matrices were then examined together and the emerging categories were classified. A number of questions and answers were found to be connected with one another. The data guided me in detecting 67 broad categories. The transcripts were studied once again in the light of these emerging themes. These 67 themes were once again found to be linked with one another and were, therefore, consolidated to result in 23 categories:<sup>16</sup> these appear as subheadings in various chapters. These 23 categories were further condensed to culminate in six decisive themes:<sup>17</sup> these helped to compose the chapter headings for chapters 3 - 8.

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**SECTION II.**

**CHAPTER THREE.  
THE SHAPING OF IDENTITY.**

**CHAPTER FOUR.  
THE DYNAMISM OF FAMILY VALUES.**

**CHAPTER FIVE.  
THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE.**

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE SHAPING OF IDENTITY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

As discussed in the previous chapter, six major themes were detected during the analyses of data in the present study. This chapter discusses the first of these main themes emerging from the data. The shaping of identity is one of the most important tasks facing the adolescent. Through socialisation and contact with a variety of influences within the home, the school and the wider world, the teenager is constantly determining her/his identity in order to make sense of the universe. This chapter will elucidate the process of identity formation by painting a vivid and largely unknown picture of the identity of a group of adolescent Muslim girls in the light of their experiences and aspirations.

Within the last few decades, identity has become both a popular and a technical term in sociological, psychological and philosophical literature. Identity is a socially constructed definition that transforms a mere biological individual into a human person (Weigert et al., 1986). Identities are labels, names and categories through which persons address each other and themselves. They are patterned ways of speaking, thinking and performing that have as their object the interpersonal relations that constitute the identity (Scheff, 1970). Human identity is seen as a social reality that is continually produced within and by the experience and interaction of individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973).

It is argued that society is composed of social groups that interact with one another and this group structure has implications for identity formation (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This view originates from the thinking of Festinger (1954) who observes that identity formation is based on how people evaluate themselves through comparison with others. This social comparison could take place between

people within the same group or with other groups, i.e. ingroup or intergroup comparison.

The immigrant population in any country is faced with the inevitable task of redefining its identity. In most cases, people emigrate to improve their lifestyle. Once they have settled down in their adoptive country, they attempt to move upwards into the dominant indigenous group through individual effort. This process is referred to as *Upward Social Mobility* (Tajfel, 1978), a convenient belief for the dominant group as it leaves the status quo intact (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Nevertheless, if individual efforts for upward social mobility fail due to the impenetrability of boundaries between groups, the immigrant group may want to make collective efforts to create a positive social identity for itself.<sup>1</sup>

People assert their identity in different ways. Age, gender, class and occupation are some of the main social categories through which individuals identify themselves. Nevertheless, in the case of immigrants, ethnicity, language and religion are more pertinent criteria in shaping a person's identity. Minorities not only identify themselves through these classifications, but are also identified by others through them. In this chapter, I shall attempt to illustrate the dynamics of this latter group of categories in the light of my data.

### **3.2 The Reality of Ethnicity**

The significance of ancestral origins from different geographical regions has been retained in academic and popular discussion as an important discriminating variable (Williams, 1987). Immigrants in their adoptive country are labelled by their country of origin, regardless of how long ago they came to live there. This is particularly true of the Asians and African-Caribbeans who migrated to Britain. This stance of the indigenous population compels the minorities to resort to various coping strategies.



Reasserting and reinforcing their ethnicity<sup>2</sup> is one of the ways in which ethnic groups create a positive identity for themselves.<sup>3</sup>

It has been argued that neither race, nor culture is adequate for the analysis and understanding of educational issues in a plural society; the concept of ethnicity seems more appropriate. In Britain, for many people, 'ethnicity' implies only physical appearance or skin colour. This view has been a contributory factor in discrimination and prejudice against people of Asian and African-Caribbean origin. The distinctive attribute of an ethnic group is not physical appearance, but cultural values: a collected pool of values, customs, behaviours, beliefs and social norms (Verma and Ashworth, 1986:17-20). Thus, ethnicity is not only related to one's appearance and the geographical area of origin, but encompasses an individual's way of life.

The vast majority of fathers, who were interviewed for the present study, had been in Britain for over twenty years. Only two of them, who were twice migrants, had been here for less than five years. Very few fathers had initially come to Britain with their families. Most of them, typically, came here as young men with the intention to look for work, stay on for a few years and then go back to the country of origin. However, when they had found employment and had worked for some time, they went back to the home country to get married. Still, none of them brought their brides with them and the men lived here alone, only going back for annual holidays. Eventually, many years later, they began to send for their wives and any children that they had had by then.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of girls in the sample were either born in Britain or had come to live here in their infancy. At the time of the interview, two-thirds of the mothers and those children who were born in the country of origin, had been in Britain for over 11 years. This meant that these girls, who were in the year 11 at Secondary school had received all their schooling in Britain, along with those girls who were British-born. Still, it was not apparent during the interviews that the former group felt deprived of

their fathers' love and affection in any way as a result of being away from them in their childhood. They appeared to regard their fathers with the same kind of love and respect that they had for their mothers, with whom they had lived all their life. The fathers also talked of their older children with the same kind of affection and pride with which they mentioned their younger offspring who were born in Britain and had always lived with them.

The families of most of the girls (18) originated from Pakistan whereas some of them (5) were from Bangladesh. One girl was Ugandan-Asian by birth, though her family originated from India. The majority of girls perceived themselves as both British and Asian. They felt they were British due to their birth-place or nationality and Asian because of their colour, race, background, religion, culture or upbringing. A small minority, however, called themselves just 'Asian':

I'd say 'Asian'. I can't call myself 'British' because of the colour of my skin. I know it isn't supposed to matter but it does. They are white and they are British. We are brown; we are Asian.

TNB: But you were born here and have lived here all your life. Doesn't that make you British?

No, we'll always remain Asian to them.

*(Samina Hameed, origin: Pakistan)*

Samina was literally an indigenous, second-generation British and would have preferred to call herself so. She, however, felt that her brown skin made it impossible for her to be accepted as a British by the population at large. She, therefore, chose to cling to her safe, unambiguous Asian identity. It appears that the choice of identity is not the girls' prerogative; it is rather the privilege of the majority population to choose what they would want to label each minority group, as is apparent from the statement of a teacher:

I think 'Asian' in most cases. But I can think of several young girls who said they were British and if I said they were Asian, they'd tell me 'No, I'm not; I was born here.' But I would think, most of them, the way they were brought up, would think of themselves as being Asian and not British.

*(Patricia Fisher, Head of Computing, Hillsvew Comprehensive)<sup>5</sup>*

The Asianness of some girls was epitomised by their religion and culture:

Asian, because I wear Asian clothes; eat Asian food; I go according to the rules of my religion: that makes me Asian.

*(Tallat Zahid, origin: Pakistan)*

Nevertheless, colour or attire did not seem to matter that much as far as most others were concerned. The fact that they were born in Britain or had lived here most of their life was equally important:

At school, I look different because of my colour and my dress, so I am Asian. But I was born here, so I am also British.

*(Fehmida Saleem, origin: Bangladesh)<sup>6</sup>*

It is evident that the identity that each of these girls has created for herself is neither totally Asian, nor entirely British: it is unique. Furthermore, it is helical: the girls are constantly redefining their identity by looking critically at its Asian and British components and subsequently adopting and adapting aspects from both cultures to construct their identity.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, they appear to contextualise their identity and decide when and where to be British and in what circumstances to be Asian,<sup>8</sup> as can be seen from the statement of this teacher; one of the few indigenous teachers who thought so:

A bit of both, I think. It very much depends on what is being discussed or at the forefront on that particular moment in time. Sometimes, they will

very definitely say they are British, 'We were born here, we are British'. But then on another occasion, they revert to 'We are Asian'.

*(Helen Williams, Head of Careers, Blossomdale Girls')*

The girls, however, are not choosing an identity independently of their parents. Their perception of identity is very much shaped by the way their parents see themselves, though the girls are not necessarily always in total agreement with the parents. Still, in spite of some tension and ambivalence, the girls, by and large, appear to be quite comfortable with their chosen identity. They know the boundaries and, notwithstanding an occasional grumble about the lack of freedom (see p. 84ff.), respect the limits imposed by the parents. There were no signs of stress apparent during the interviews and it looks as if the identity of the girls is being shaped with their full consent.

As far as the parents in the sample were concerned, half of them saw themselves as Asian. The rest of them perceived themselves as either British or both Asian and British.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the fact that she had lived in Britain for 25 years, one parent thought that admitting to being British was tantamount to abandoning her roots:

We, of course, think of ourselves as Asian. We were born and bred there. How can we forget our roots? Having a British passport does not make us British.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother, origin: Pakistan)*

Another parent felt that being a British Muslim was a contradiction in terms:

I see myself as Asian, because that's what we are and that's what we should consider ourselves. Some people think that they have changed in some way because they have come here, but we are Muslim and we shall remain Muslim. We can't become English; we shouldn't even try.

*(Parveen Akbar's mother, origin: India, then Uganda)*



Mrs. Mahmood and Mrs. Akbar are clearly resisting and challenging the notion that permanent abode in Britain means becoming British. In this respect they, along with many other parents, believe ethnicity signifies more than merely the geographical location of your origin or abode: it is *religious ethnicity* which embodies their entire culture and way of life.

Additionally, some parents also linked their Asianness with the extended family in the country of origin:

Asian, because we were born and brought up in Bangladesh and our parents and all our relatives are there.

*(Fehmida Saleem's father, origin: Bangladesh)*

A number of parents considered themselves British simply by virtue of the fact that Britain was their adoptive country:

We consider ourselves British, but the question is whether the community in which we have entered is willing to accept us or not.

*(Raheela Noor's father, origin: Pakistan)*

Thus, despite the ostensible affectation of self-assurance, a certain degree of tension and ambiguity was manifest in the statements of the parents regarding their identity, as indeed it was in those of the girls (see above, p. 55). Those who saw themselves as British were afraid of rejection. Many parents, being more aware of racism in British society as compared with their daughters, were hesitant to call themselves British. Nevertheless, some parents did perceive themselves as both Asian and British. They were reluctant to abandon their Asian way of life altogether, yet they were happy to avail themselves of the advantages that living in Britain offered them:

Half British and half Asian: we see ourselves as British because we have lived here for such a long time and we hold British nationality. Our children are studying here, we are working hard to make a good living and to ensure a good future for our children here. But however happy and settled we are we will always feel a natural attraction for our home country too.

*(Zubaida Saeed's mother, origin: Pakistan)<sup>10</sup>*

As opposed to the views of the girls and the parents, most of the indigenous British teachers felt that Muslim girls perceived themselves as Asian because of the way they were brought up by their parents. Nevertheless, all the ethnic minority teachers who were interviewed felt that Muslim girls saw themselves as both Asian and British. It was clear that ethnic minority teachers were able to discern the subtle changes taking place in the lives of these girls and how their identity was being shaped by intrinsic and extrinsic forces, as they, themselves, had been through this experience too. Amongst these teachers were three Muslim teachers of Pakistani origin, one Hindu teacher of Indian origin and one teacher of African-Caribbean origin:

Asian or British: to be honest, I don't know. I think both statements apply. I've never asked them though. I think they will show their Muslim characteristics and traits if you challenge them in a negative way. I also find that because of the environment they are in, some of them feel embarrassed by some of the religious beliefs and customs. I think the school environment differentiates and discriminates between different pupils more than anything else.

*(Timothy Clark, Head of Year 11, Springfield High, origin: African-Caribbean)*

Mr. Clark, though aware of the discriminatory nature of the school milieu, thought that the girls would happily abandon their ethnic identity as long as religious and

cultural issues were not discussed or challenged. Other teachers felt that the girls would be happy to be British if their parents allowed them:

The majority of them, I'd say, still think of themselves as Asian, rather than British, because the parents encourage them to stay as Asian girls. We would like them to mix and take in a lot of things around them, and I think a lot of them would like to, but they are held back. The beliefs of their parents are so strong in some cases that they don't want them to be British. And a lot of them are always going *home*, if you like. They still think of home as Pakistan, not England and they go on extended visits home.

*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development Teacher, Blossomdale Girls')*

Ms. Thomas' views were inconsistent with those of the father of Raheela and some others who perceived themselves as British and did not appear to discourage their daughters to see themselves as British either. Further, Ms. Thomas was under the misapprehension that severing the ties with the country of origin would expedite the process of becoming British.

As far as visiting the country of origin was concerned, almost all the girls had visited it since their birth or taking up residence in Britain, some as recently as a year before they were interviewed. In many cases, these were prolonged visits of two to three months, since they could not go there as often as they would have liked due to their schooling and the high cost of travel. Still, all the girls saw Britain as their permanent home. They, nevertheless, enjoyed seeing their extended family and looked forward to the rare visits to their country of origin. The parents in the sample saved long and hard before such an expensive trip could be contemplated. Even then, only one or two children from a large family could accompany one parent in most cases. Furthermore, information obtained from the Year 11 attendance registers showed that none of the girls in the sample had long periods of absence during that year (see p. 150).

Still, despite their love for their country of origin, all the girls and the majority of parents rejected the idea of ever going back to live there permanently.<sup>11</sup> A few parents, though, were ambivalent: they did not want to grow old in Britain and would rather return. They, nevertheless, appreciated the fact that it would be difficult for their children, who were born and brought up in Britain, to settle down somewhere else. They, therefore, would stay in Britain, since they could not envisage living so far from their children.

Thus, the myth of return (cf. Anwar, 1979) appears to be diminishing as far as the sample is concerned. A negligible number of families wanted to return, albeit, for emotional rather than pragmatic reasons:

I would, eventually want to settle down in Pakistan. That's where my roots are. I buried my father there, I buried my husband there and when I die I want to be buried there too.

*(Samina Hameed's mother, origin: Pakistan)*

The vast majority, though, categorically ruled out ever wanting to return. Undoubtedly, they take this stance with their children's welfare in mind as they realise that the implications of returning to the country of origin will be far-reaching and perhaps detrimental to their children's future. Britain offers the prospect of a good education and career for their children, to which they will not have access in the rural parts of their country of birth:

Though they are our children, and we are Pakistani, they cannot adjust in that environment now because this country and this culture has also had an impact on them. We know of some families who had gone back to live there but had to come back because they found it difficult to settle down there.

*(Shahida Rasheed's father; origin: Pakistan)<sup>12</sup>*



However, in spite of the absence of any plans to return, the families in the sample keep in close contact with the extended family in the country of origin by means of correspondence, occasional telephone calls and visits whenever it is financially viable. Regular exchange of photographs and video cassettes, particularly those of religious festivals, family weddings and births is also quite common. Maintaining such allegiance to the country of origin could only be explained in terms of a desire to acquaint their children with its religion, history, culture and language and above all with their extended family, so that they do not lose their distinctive identity. It also indicates that geographical mobility and extended family ties are not incompatible and can survive migration (cf. Litwak, 1960:85; Janssens, 1993:162).

The visits to the country of origin, however, might not necessarily be a permanent or a lasting feature. The expense incurred by the parents on such visits is phenomenal. Still, this is the only way the children can get to know their close relatives and the grandparents who are settled there. Nevertheless, this phenomenon would inevitably dilute over a period of time. Within the next generation or two, British Muslims would have their extended family living in Britain rather than in another continent. Identities evolve. Secure in a close-knit family and a safe British Asian Muslim identity, a week's visit to their grandparents in London or Birmingham would naturally replace the long visits to Pakistan or Bangladesh.

### **3.3 Linguistic Repertoire**

Let us now look at the second important category germane to the identity of a minority, i.e. the linguistic repertoire of an individual. It has been said that a people without a language is only half a nation (Davies, 1945). Whilst immigrants learn - if they do not already know it - the language spoken in their adoptive country, they also use the language of their country of birth in various situations and indeed many

teach it to their children. Retaining the language spoken in the country of origin is one of the ways in which immigrants create a positive social identity for themselves.

Many ethnic minority groups seek to identify with the indigenous group linguistically and culturally through the process of assimilation (Fishman, 1966; Giles & Bourhis, 1976). However, this could become dissatisfying as the minority group sometimes experiences anomie and threat to its identity (Giles, 1978). This is particularly relevant when the language of the dominant group is the medium of instruction and is being acquired educationally. Consequently, in an effort to teach this language to immigrant children, the parents may be advised by the educators not to use their heritage language at home.<sup>13</sup> This practice can, however, backfire, as Edwards (1983) points out that language and identity are so closely intermeshed that any attack on a person's language is perceived as an attack on her/his values and integrity.

Ethnic minorities, who feel that their languages are being undervalued and likely to be eradicated, may make a concerted effort to teach the heritage languages to their children at home or in supplementary schools, thereby keeping these languages alive. Nevertheless, Giles et al. (1977) describe the influence of social factors on inter-ethnic communication in terms of 'ethnolinguistic vitality', which is defined by structural characteristics, such as status, demography and institutional support. They argue that in a given community, the language with the strongest ethnolinguistic vitality would be expected to predominate. Seen in a British context, heritage languages, which do not have much usability in the educational and occupational milieux, appear to have a dismal future.

Still, ethnic minorities have powerful reasons for adhering to their own language. Edwards (1986), discussing the symbolic significance of language choice in the African-Caribbean context, argues that Patois, the most common community term for Caribbean language varieties, has dual function in Britain. Firstly, it is used to

mark ethnic solidarity: on the one hand, it can serve to show the speaker's desire to identify with Caribbean culture and values; on the other, its use can indicate that the person being addressed is felt to be a member of the group. Secondly, it can be used to indicate rejection by the speaker of the accepted norms for interaction by excluding outsiders. Similar observations have been made by Milroy (1980) in her work on working class communities in Belfast. She notes that social networks, or informal and formal relationships, which make up all human societies are distinguished by their own language use. Her approach stresses social solidarity and the normative influence of the group on the language of its members. Similar models of group solidarity were discernible amongst the sample families in the present research.

A variety of languages were spoken in the homes of the girls in the sample in the present study. The heritage languages of the families were Bengali, Punjabi or Urdu; the dialects, however, varied according to the regions the families originated from. Most families from Pakistan had their origins in rural Mirpur and other rural areas of Pakistan. All the families from Bangladesh originated from rural Sylhet. The families originating from Pakistan spoke various dialects of Punjabi and those with origins in Bangladesh spoke Sylheti. Sylheti is closely related to Bengali (Husain, 1991), as rural Punjabi dialects are to the Punjabi spoken in the urban regions of Pakistan and also to some extent to Urdu.

Most of the fathers in the sample were articulate in English, but the majority of mothers spoke no English. Only one mother, who had come to live in Britain as a young child could speak fluent English; three other mothers who had been to college in Pakistan spoke it hesitantly. Some English was spoken in the homes, albeit, by the children rather than the parents. The discourse pattern varied depending on who the girls were communicating with. Many girls spoke to their parents in their heritage language. The siblings mostly talked with one another in

English and occasionally with their parents too, though the parents invariably responded in their heritage language. The following statement typifies the paradigm of discourse in the vast majority of homes:

The children speak to one another in English, which is a bone of contention between us. My husband and I speak to each other in Punjabi, but we speak to the children in Urdu. They reply in Urdu most of the time, but when they are together, they only speak English.

*(Nasreen Butt's mother).*

The girls were all able to express themselves eloquently in English and were interviewed in this language. Those with origins in Pakistan also spoke Punjabi or Urdu and in some cases both, whereas those originating from Bangladesh spoke Bengali. The girl who was born in Uganda could also speak Swahili and another who was born and had lived in Denmark could speak Danish too. About half of the girls in the sample could speak some French or German as well since they were studying these languages as their GCSE options. All the girls were able to read (albeit, without comprehension) and recite, though not speak, Arabic as they had all been taught to read the Quran. The following statement portrays the rich linguistic repertoire of the girls:

I can't speak Arabic, but I can read it. I can read and write and speak English and Urdu. I can also speak this other language - I don't think you'd know it - it is called Bari. It's a mixture of Punjabi and Urdu.

*(Rahat Basheer)<sup>14</sup>*

Almost all the parents from Pakistan regarded Punjabi as their mother tongue, without any reference to a specific regional dialect. Two parents, though, considered Urdu to be their mother tongue, since this was the language that they spoke at home. These parents also had their origins in the Punjab in Pakistan and



their first language was also Punjabi like the former group. However, these two sets of parents had received more education, albeit in Pakistan, and were more fluent in Urdu than those parents who perceived Punjabi as their mother tongue. The families originating from Bangladesh considered Bengali, rather than Sylheti as their mother tongue. The family from Uganda also considered their mother tongue to be Urdu, because of their origins in India and the use of this language at home:

I can speak several languages. I can speak Gujrati, Swahili, Urdu and Katchi. I don't speak much English. We speak and understand Urdu more than any other language. At home I speak to the children in Urdu. So that is our mother tongue.

*(Parveen Akbar's mother)*

As is apparent from the above statement, most parents were multilingual.<sup>15</sup> All the parents exercised code-switching, an important feature of bilingualism, throughout the interviews. The girls, however, spoke in English all the time during the interviews and only used those words of Bengali, Punjabi or Urdu which had no substitute in English. This has also been noted by others (see, for example, Khan, 1991), who found code-switching common amongst the first generation immigrants, but not amongst the second generation.

The vast majority of girls echoed the thoughts of their parents as regards their mother tongue. Interestingly, though the mother tongue of the majority of families from Pakistan was Punjabi and of those from Bangladesh was Sylheti, yet they chose to teach standard Urdu and standard Bengali respectively to their children because of the elite status of these languages. They, thus, opted to identify themselves through these languages rather than the local dialects, thereby equating themselves with the literate immigrant groups, thus indicating their desire for upward social mobility. Moreover, in this way they also declared solidarity with a larger group from the same ethnic background, rather than with a smaller number of people from

village communities, which shows that identities are not static. Many parents had made special arrangements to teach Urdu or Bengali to their children. Contrary to what some authors have noted (see, for example, Husain, 1991), none of them had made similar arrangements for the teaching of Punjabi or Sylheti or indeed expressed a desire for it:

My mother tongue is Bengali. When I was younger, my dad used to teach us Bengali, and we used to go to this Bengali school on Saturday. Then, for the last two years, there is this Bengali teacher who comes to us in the evenings, but I have a lot of homework to do this year, so it's just my little brother who learns.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

Two girls, however, considered English to be their mother tongue. They appeared to have acquired both the heritage language and English simultaneously and could be considered ambilingual or equilingual, at least as far as the spoken forms of both the languages were concerned. Evidently, the fact that they frequently spoke English at home prompted them to regard it as their mother tongue:

I'd say my mother tongue is English. I've been brought up with English and my parents didn't really teach me Urdu; I just sort of picked it up and they accept that I speak more English than Urdu.

*(Nasreen Butt)<sup>16</sup>*

The teachers, aware of the bilingualism of the girls, appreciated the importance the heritage language had for the girls. However, most of the teachers perceived it merely as a source of communication for, and with, monolinguals who had no English:

I think it is very important to them because their mothers don't speak English. It is *the* means of communication between mother and daughter. We always have a lot of girls wanting to choose the community language option.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls)*<sup>17</sup>

A few, though uncertain of the future of these languages, realised that they were an integral part of these girls' heritage:

They always use it in the playground. In this school, the language of communication is English, but the mother tongue is Urdu, Bengali or Punjabi. When they are discussing their work, we don't care what language they use. They shouldn't lose it. Three generations ago, my family spoke Gaelic and now it's a dead language because they stopped speaking it.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)*<sup>18</sup>

Ms. Smith obviously felt that the heritage languages had a role in the school life of the girls, as did some others:

We had a policy in school at one point that they shouldn't converse in their home language. I think that was a very divisive policy, as if the school had no respect and didn't honour the language. Now the pupils can converse in their own language and if a pupil has difficulty with English and they are more able to understand a concept by talking it over with another pupil, then fine, talk away, have a discussion, then do their translation in English and write it down on paper.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillview Comprehensive)*

Still, some teachers felt that the availability of heritage languages for GCSE offered easy options to girls with mediocre ability:

A lot of them choose to do it for GCSE. I think the parents encourage it.

And of course they can excel at it. If you have got a girl who isn't particularly bright, she can still do well in a language that she uses at home.

*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development Teacher, Blossomdale Girls')*

Moreover, the ethnic minority teachers were wary of the role of the heritage languages regarding career prospects (cf. Mirza 1992:80). Paradoxically, some of these teachers, themselves, held particular jobs because of their linguistic skills:

It's important for their own personal use. Because in this country, it is not important for a job or anything. If they get grade A in Bengali or Urdu, they can't get a job. But they want it because it's their language and they want to learn it.

*(Chitra Madan, Home-School Liaison, Blossomdale Girls')<sup>19</sup>*

Some teachers in the sample in the present study had only a negative perception of heritage languages and saw them as something strictly belonging in the home:

I think it [the heritage language] must be divisive and must make the divide between home and school worse.

*(Alison Fraser, Information Technology Teacher, Springfield High)*

Apparently, Ms. Fraser was oblivious of the fact that the girls were not under any stress because of having to speak two or three different languages. These girls have grown up with these languages and can deftly contextualise them by choosing where, when and with whom to speak which language. The girls and their parents are using their heritage language to create a positive social identity for themselves in a milieu where these languages have no status. Furthermore, as pointed out by others (See, for example, Khan, 1991), British Muslims' commitment to Bengali, Punjabi or Urdu is also a symbolic expression of their religious identity.



### **3.4 Religion as a Way of Life**

Religion has a significant role in the lives of many human beings to the extent that they may want to identify themselves by their religion only. Human identity formation is a necessary and central function of religion (Bellah, 1968; Mol, 1976). Religion has been defined as a sacred cosmos that bestows the ultimate valid identity on humans: the name by which they are known to God (Berger, 1967). Authors have interpreted the relationship between identity and religion in various contemporary societies (See, for example, Mol, 1978). This line of reflection takes the identity-religion link beyond the context of modernised societies and argues that religion serves the essential function of stabilising individual identity in any society (Weigert et al. 1986). The Muslim population of Britain also exemplifies such a paradigm of religious identity.

Religion plays an important part in most British Asian communities and guides the principles around which they live. Sharpe (1976) argues that their religious beliefs and principles determine their moral ethics and form the social milieu in which they live into one centred around many stern requisites of behaviour. Such requisites include moral conformity, loyalty and cooperation, self-discipline, recognition of the dominant authority of the elders, respect for marriage and the advocacy of modesty and restraint. However, these principles are confronted by the ethos of a capitalist and largely secular British society that impinges on the beliefs of these religious minorities, thus exerting pressure on them to adapt to the majority view.

Still, there may well be an enormous gap between religious beliefs, religious behaviour and religious prejudices (Delamont, 1980). People may believe in the teachings of a certain religion, though not practise it fully in their everyday lives. This is particularly true of British Muslims, the majority of whom originate from South Asia. However, there is a unique concept of religion embedded in Islam, which

makes it a way of life. Consequently, etiquette and belief are closely connected and Muslims are required by their religion to live their life according to its teachings.

The fundamental beliefs of Muslims are based on the six precepts of Islam: i.e. they believe in Allah (God) as the Deity; all the angels; all the prophets; the four holy books; the day of judgement; and in destiny. As far as their religious behaviour is concerned, it is difficult to say whether they all pray five times a day; fast during the month of Ramadan; give alms to the poor; and perform the pilgrimage at least once during their lifetime. Furthermore, it is hard to establish if they eschew lying, cheating and dishonesty; abstain from gambling, drinking alcohol and eating pork; act like good human beings, help others, behave and dress modestly and earn a living by legitimate means.<sup>20</sup>

The religiosity of British Muslims can be seen on a continuum, on the one end of which are those who live their lives entirely according to the tenets of Islam: clearly an ideal to be attained by all Muslims. On the other end are those who call themselves Muslim due to their belief in God as the Creator and also because they were born to Muslim parents: they, however, do not practise the religion as dictated by the five pillars of Islam. The majority of British Muslims, though, fall in the middle, whereby they identify strongly with the ethos of an Islamic society but do not practise the teachings of the religion as staunchly as the first group, as far as worship is concerned.<sup>21</sup>

All the girls, who participated in the present study, were born to parents both of whom were Muslim. The girls had been brought up as Muslims too, which is the normative practice of Muslim parents who do not perceive it as indoctrination, but rather as their paramount responsibility:

Religion is up to the parents. It's their responsibility to teach it to their children and bring them up as Muslims. My husband is dead and now it is up to me to fulfil this duty.

*(Samina Hameed's mother)*

The majority of girls showed a certain pride in being Muslim and preferred to be called 'Muslim' rather than being labelled by virtue of the country or continent from which they originated. Paradoxically, most of them had also maintained earlier on in the interview that they perceived themselves as both Asian and British. This suggests that their religious identity takes precedence of their ethnic identity as the former is a less ambiguous and more positive and enduring source of identity for them:

My own religion! I'm Muslim and I'm proud to be what I am. I like it the way we follow it in my family: not too strict and not too kind-a-free.

*(Zubaida Saeed)*

When the girls were asked what they thought of religion, the vast majority of them saw it as a guide and a set of rules to live by, thus equating it with morality:

Religion is very important, because if you don't have a religion, you just follow anything; you have no morals. It tells you what you can do. It tells you who you are. It's like your name: if you don't have a name, people call you all sorts of things; you don't belong anywhere.

*(Nusrat Sharif)<sup>22</sup>*

Nusrat obviously perceived religion as something that gave her identity<sup>23</sup> and a sense of belonging. The others saw their faith as a source of comfort too:

I think religion is very important. It sort of guides you. When you are in trouble, you can always ask God for help. It gives us peace of mind.

(*Raheela Noor*)

The parents' views were also congruent with those of the girls:

We want our children to follow our religion strictly. Religion brings contentment. Our parents taught us the religion and we are contented to this day.

(*Shahida Rasheed's mother*)<sup>24</sup>

However, the religiosity of the girls was not just confined to belief. As far as religious practice was concerned, most of them prayed and read the Quran occasionally, but fasted regularly, since the entire family fasted during the month of Ramadan. A few girls in the sample prayed five times a day and read the Quran daily; some of them also taught their younger siblings to read the Quran. One girl had even been to Makkah with her parents to perform *Umrah*. On the other end were the two girls who only prayed or read the Quran when told off; though, in other ways they lived their lives according to the tenets of Islam as the ethos, culture and climate of the home were Islamic. Still, the following statement exemplifies the religious practice of many girls in the sample:

I read *Namaz* and the Quran; I fast. We celebrate *Eid* and respect the rules that the Prophet left for us like keep *dopatta* on your head, don't talk to boys, behave like a good woman, respect your parents and elders.

(*Zareena Nasir*)<sup>25</sup>

Some, however, found it difficult to practise their religion as well as do other things pertaining to their everyday life in Britain:

I am Muslim, but I am not a good Muslim. You have to pray five times a day and I don't do that because we are at school and at home my dad always



says first do your homework. Then I watch some tv and then there is no more time. There is a holy night: that's when I read the Quran. I've tried to keep fasts, but couldn't. It is difficult when you are at school and everybody is eating.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

A small minority said they were Muslim because of their parents. They felt unable to cope with worship, though they were happy to believe in Islam:

There is a lot that religion gets in the way of. I get told off when I don't do *Namaz*. I have to be honest - I say I'm Muslim, but I don't really do anything.

TNB: So when you say you are Muslim, why do you say that? What makes you feel like a Muslim?

Because everybody else in my family is Muslim. I like my own religion, but I can't do *Namaz* and all that; it's too much.

*(Alia Ashraf)<sup>26</sup>*

On the other end were those girls who, in spite of substantial religious practice, felt that they were not devout Muslims:

I wouldn't say I'm a strict Muslim. I just pray five times a day, read the Quran, read books on religion.

TNB: Do you fast?

Yes, I always fast during the month of Ramadan. I've also been to *Umrah* with my family.

*(Shahida Rasheed)<sup>27</sup>*

The majority of parents in the sample maintained that they practised Islam faithfully by praying five times a day, reading the Quran daily and fasting regularly during the month of Ramadan:

It's the month of Ramadan and we all fast ; the children too. I fast even when I am working. We all pray and read the Quran regularly. We try not to back-bite or hurt anybody.

*(Khalida Dar's father)<sup>28</sup>*

The information about parental religious practice was validated by comments from their daughters. Despite the staunch practice of most parents, all of them perceived Islam as a liberal rather than a rigorous religion:

Islam is the best of all religions. God sent four books. The Quran superseded the Torah, Psalms and Bible and is, therefore, the book to be followed. My friends, my family and I try to follow the Islamic way of life. Islam is not a strict religion; it's a very flexible religion. If you do something wrong and repent and ask Allah for forgiveness, He forgives you.

*(Shireen Kaleem's father)<sup>29</sup>*

A few, however, said that they tried to practise their religion as often as possible, but could only manage to worship occasionally:

We pray when we feel like it and we recite the Quran when we want to. All Muslims don't worship regularly. I believe in Allah, but I don't pray regularly, but since it is the month of Ramadan, I now pray, fast and recite the Quran.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother)*

The daughters of this small group also had a similar attitude to religious practice. They were happy to enjoy the festivals and the social features of the religion, but could not cope with the more serious aspects of worship:

I've read the Quran. I've tried to fast a few times but it's not me. I don't pray. But I really look forward to *Eid*. And marriage has got to do with religion, isn't it? There is a time when you should get married.

*(Arifa Mahmood)*

Almost all the girls had learnt to read the Quran before they reached their teens. Most of them either learnt it at a community-based school in a mosque or from a family friend who lived near by. A few, however, were taught by one of their parents at home. All the girls stopped going to the community school at the mosque when they reached puberty, as it was then thought improper for them to go out in the evenings and to study with boys.

Significantly, all the parents in the sample considered it necessary for their children to learn to read the Quran in Arabic, which is the normative practice of Muslims all over the world, whether or not Arabic is spoken by them. It is, therefore, quite common for a Muslim to read Arabic without understanding or speaking it, since they are all taught to read the Quran in its original script in Arabic in their childhood in order to retain the essence of the message. They, however, read the translation in a language that they can comprehend, at a slightly older age. Muslims are also taught to learn verses from the Quran in Arabic at a young age, which they, then, recite in the five daily obligatory prayers.

It is mandatory for Muslim men to perform their mid-day prayers on Friday in congregation at a mosque. It is also considered meritorious for them to perform their five daily prayers in a mosque, if possible. For this reason, there is at least one mosque in almost every town in Britain where there are some Muslim inhabitants. Female Muslims, however, do not visit the mosque very often. The majority of girls in the sample had minimal contact with the local mosque at the time of the interview, as did their mothers and older sisters. Some younger sisters and brothers, though, went to the mosque for religious tuition. Some mothers and

daughters in the sample only visited the mosque twice a year to perform the *Eid* prayers. A few others occasionally attended religious gatherings at the mosque:

We go to the mosque. All three of my daughters also go. Three or four years ago, they started to give lectures on Islam in English at the mosque; that's how the children got interested. So, by the grace of Allah, my children are very knowledgeable in religion; I find it a source of great satisfaction and pleasure.

*(Nasreen Butt's mother)*

Nevertheless, in a few families, the female members had never been to the mosque. Most male members of the families, however, performed the midday prayer on Friday in congregation. Also, some fathers, who had flexible working hours, or were unemployed, went to pray there if they were within a close vicinity of a mosque.

All the teachers who were interviewed were aware that religion was very important to Muslim girls and that the degree of religiosity varied from family to family:

I suppose like any religion, you have some girls where it matters when they choose to let it matter, if it's going to suit their purposes - whatever the religion. But on the whole - I think a good seventy, eighty per cent of them - Islam genuinely matters to them.

*(Helen Williams, Head of Careers, Blossomdale Girls')*

They also believed that regardless of the level of religiosity, Islam encompassed the lives of these girls:

Religion matters very much to them. It's their background, their belief; it's the way their family life is oriented.

*(Elizabeth Robinson, Head of Year 11, Blossomdale Girls')*



In congruence with the girls' views, some teachers also felt that religion mattered to these girls to the extent that they saw themselves first and foremost as Muslims, thereby identifying themselves by their religion:

Their religion is very important to them, which is why I think they - most of them - see themselves as Muslim first and then anything else.

*(Patricia Fisher, Head of Computing, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

Others, however, felt that the girls' identity embodied their religion and their country of residence:

I've never asked them directly. I wonder whether the answer might be that they are British Muslims more than anything else.

*(Dominic Taylor, Deputy Head, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

The teachers also recognised that the girls' culture was an extension of their religion, since Islam was not merely a religion, but rather a way of life:

I think religion matters a great deal. It's always hard for Islam to separate the religion from the culture anyway. It's when people say 'Oh! they shouldn't be allowed to wear *Shalvar Kameez* because it's a cultural thing; it's not part of their religion.' But it's actually extremely difficult to separate the two.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

Nevertheless, some others were critical of the practical side of worship, which appeared alien to life in a largely secular Britain:

They don't appear to pray, but they do fast and they fast to, what I consider, unreasonable lengths.

*(Jennifer Davis, Head of Maths, Blossomdale Girls)<sup>30</sup>*

It was manifest from the remarks of the teachers that while many appreciated the importance of Islam in the lives of these girls, others perceived it as an oppressive religion into which these children were being indoctrinated by their dictatorial parents. Nevertheless, the girls themselves, being brought up with Islam, respected it as much as their parents, though some did not practise it as devoutly. Evidently, the girls' religious identity, thus shaped, was so firmly intermeshed with their everyday life that it was inconceivable for them to be anything but Muslim.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have suggested that the social categories of ethnicity, language and religion play a significant part in shaping the identity of immigrants in their adoptive country. The parents in the sample appear to be using various strategies to create a positive social identity for themselves. This impinges on the girls who are also using these strategies, albeit in their own way. The situation of pressure and conflict, seen by the teachers, in the life of these girls is very real. Nevertheless, some teachers fail to appreciate how well the girls are coping with the pressure and the conflicting factors and how admirably they are adjusting to different situations in the two worlds, by creating multiple identities for themselves.

It is clear that parental views are shaping the ethnic, linguistic and religious identities of these adolescent girls. Moreover, the teachers' views have an impact on the formation of the girls' identities. Nevertheless, the girls, themselves, are also constantly negotiating their own identities and subsequently creating distinct identities in different contexts without compromising their ethnicity, language and religion. These adolescent Muslim girls are not passive recipients of advice, but are actively participating in creating their identities.

Thus the identities of these adolescent British Muslim girls are dynamic and helical, not static. They change according to the vicissitudes of life. Furthermore, these multiple identities are linked to the multiple aspirations of these girls in complex ways.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE DYNAMISM OF FAMILY VALUES**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

I have, so far, examined some of the main factors contributing to the identity formation of a group of adolescent Muslim girls. In this chapter I shall explicate the dynamics of Muslim family life and the role of family values in shaping the present experiences and future aspirations of these adolescent girls in the light of my data. I shall do it by exploring the notions of freedom and control, gender differences and the variations in family patterns.

Most commentators recognise that the family is still highly valued in all classes and ethnic groups in Britain. However, Leonard & Speakman (1986) maintain that certain parts of the country (for example, Wales) and certain ethnic groups (including South Asians and Cypriots) stress family relationships and recognise obligations to kin, beyond the nuclear family, more than others. Families of South Asian origin are mainly close-knit, cohesive units. Ballard (1979) notes that relationships within a South Asian family are affectionate, but hierarchical. Great emphasis is placed on respect for elders, on restraint in relations between the sexes, and on maintaining the honour of the family. The interests of the group take precedence over those of the individual members. Within the group, roles are clearly defined, goals are shared and no great emphasis is placed on the development of an exclusive personal identity.

Thus, as opposed to Western ideology, the honour and welfare of the family, which could include the extended family, are considered to be more important than the feelings or 'selfish' interests of an individual. Further, each individual member is accountable to the group because her/his actions impinge on the entire family. This,



at any rate, is the ideal as perceived by families of South Asian origin, notably Muslims, wherever they live.

English family life is perceived by many South Asian, particularly Muslim, families to be highly insecure and threatening. The stereotype that they hold presents the relationships to be remote with little concept of family solidarity. Elders appear to command little love or respect and are sent into homes instead of being looked after by the younger generation. Sexual licence is thought to be rife and there is hardly any regard for the institution of marriage. Parents seemingly divorce and remarry without any consideration for their offspring, who may have to go into care. Ballard (1979) observes that this kind of behaviour is outrageous by Asian standards. This view of English family life was also shared by the parents<sup>1</sup> and pupils in the sample in the present study.

Family life is the basis and cornerstone of Islamic society and obedience and respect for parents is constantly stressed in Islamic teachings<sup>2</sup> (Joly, 1987). Elders are rarely found to be living on their own, let alone in Old People's Homes. Free intermingling of the two sexes is frowned upon; the divorce rate seems low, albeit most marriages are arranged by the parents. Children are taken to all functions and ceremonies instead of being left behind with child-minders. Evidently, due to this kind of socialisation, the children internalise the values of the parents at an early age and, thus, learn to behave in accordance with the ethos of the family.

A traditional Muslim household is a three-generational unit that comprises grandparents; parents; married sons, their wives and children; unmarried sons and daughters; and sometimes an unmarried, widowed or divorced uncle or aunt (Khan, 1979; Anwar, 1982). However, such large joint families are very rarely found amongst British Muslims, mainly due to the housing structure in Britain. Still, sons and daughters almost invariably live with the parents until they are married and elderly parents spend their old age in the homes of their children enjoying their

grandchildren. The notion of children leaving home at 18 or elderly parents going into care is almost inconceivable.

Marriage is the usual way in which young Muslims establish their freedom from parental authority. Leonard and Speakman (1986) observe that before they are married, young adults living at home owe a certain degree of obedience and deference to their families. Nevertheless, the point which is so often missed in the literature is that Islamic teaching obligates the children to show such courteous regard to their parents even after they are married and throughout their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Although, most of the girls in the sample in the present research, lived in ostensibly nuclear families, yet several had relatives living in the same street or within walking distance from their homes. Thus, while the families had their privacy due to personal preference or smaller housing, they still had the support of the extended family nearby, if needed.<sup>4</sup> One family had the paternal grandmother living with them, whereas two had a married son, his wife and young child living in the same house. This pattern, which is quite common in the countries of origin was being perpetuated in Britain as a distinct aspect of British Muslim subculture.<sup>5</sup> One mother, who was widowed at a young age, shared her house with her unmarried brothers, who were a constant source of support for her. The parents of three girls were divorced and the girls and their siblings lived with their mothers who, despite the lack of any form of assistance from their former husbands, appeared to be totally self-reliant as they had the tacit support of their extended family.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the apparent working class status of the majority of families, it was difficult to use the Registrar General's classification of jobs, with total confidence, to categorise these families. In spite of unemployment, blue collar jobs (See p. 305) and large families,<sup>7</sup> all these families seemed to be living comfortably, though frugally. They appeared to have a simple taste in diet, dress, housing, furnishing, recreation and other such matters. Some of them had their older sons and

daughters working and contributing to the family income, another discernible feature of the British Muslim subculture. The father's unemployment - 11 out of 24 fathers were unemployed - therefore, was not a catastrophe as it would have been without this kind of assistance. A sense of optimism was manifest throughout the interviews. The girls sounded optimistic about their future and the parents appeared to have faith in their daughters' ability and their subsequent bright future. This, undoubtedly, was an indication of the strong and confident relationship within the families.

With the exception of one single parent family who lived in council housing, all the parents owned their houses. Almost all the houses were terraced and in inner-city areas. Two houses, however, were semi-detached. The houses were sparsely, but adequately and neatly furnished. A few even showed signs of affluence. Every family had a telephone. All but two families had a television and a video recorder. A few families owned a car as well, albeit mainly as a means of earning their livelihood, rather than a luxury, as the fathers were taxi-drivers. Although most families experienced low income, benefit dependence and cramped housing, it would be inappropriate to categorise them as deprived. Though large families are often poor and poor people have the largest families (Whitehead, 1977; Delamont, 1980), yet the sample families seemed to live within their means. Both the parents and the girls appeared to be happy and contented with their life and hopeful for a good future, as none of them complained of poverty or hardship at any time during the interviews.

#### **4.2 Freedom and Control**

It has often been reported by the media and the academia (see, for example, McDermott and Ahsan, 1980; Wade and Souter, 1992) that Muslim children lead a dual life and face conflict at home and in school. By the same token, the teachers in the sample were unanimous in their assertion that all Muslim girls behaved differently at home and at school:

They behave differently at home and at school. They have told me that and home-school link teachers also tell me that so and so - when she saw the girl at home with parents - was so quiet or so different from the way she had seen her at school. I mean there are taboo subjects they don't talk to their parents about. I've had them say 'I couldn't talk to my mother and father about that'.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')*

Ms. Shepherd seemed to forget that even the indigenous adolescent girls may not want to discuss specific topics with their parents. She also found it difficult to understand why an adolescent Muslim girl would be quiet or submissive at home or why she would hesitate to discuss certain subjects with her parents, or indeed anyone else who is older and, by implication, to be respected like the parents. Some indigenous teachers do not seem to comprehend the notion of respect which is deeply embedded in the British Muslim subculture. Moreover, they seem to overlook the fact that, in general, people behave differently in the presence of outsiders as opposed to when they are only with members of their family. The girls may behave in a particular manner, and appear submissive to an outsider, but in reality it is more likely that they are being respectful.

Nevertheless, the majority of teachers believed that the girls' reticence and submissiveness was the consequence of lack of freedom:

I think the families we have here - once the girls go home - they have very little freedom. They are chaperoned at all times. They only do things that their families consider fit and proper. The younger girls may have more freedom, but the older ones in our catchment area - I've certainly not seen them about after school.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)<sup>8</sup>*



Ms. Smith and the others did not understand the reason for the imposition of restrictions, which was invariably due to a concern for the girls' welfare and safety. Further, she thought that younger Muslim girls had more freedom than the older ones. Though younger girls in some families are allowed to go out to certain places, like the mosque for Quran lessons, yet they are as closely protected as the older ones in other ways. They are also chaperoned: a practice that was seen by many teachers as restrictive:

Their freedom is very restricted. Because we are a girls' school, we've got the ones whose parents are more strongly religious-minded and therefore their freedom is very restricted. They are actually brought to the school gate by car, taxi, or whatever and the same car, taxi is there a good quarter of an hour before the end of the day waiting to take them home, so that they don't mix outside that school gate.

*(Helen Williams, Head of Careers, Blossomdale Girls')<sup>9</sup>*

The assumption of Ms. Williams about the girls being picked up from school in cars, vans and taxis did not take into account the fact that only a negligible proportion of Muslim families, whose children attended the schools in the sample, had cars. The few girls who were picked up or dropped were those whose fathers were taxi-drivers and whose occupation allowed them the flexibility to take their children to school and bring them back. It is, however, important to point out that these fathers also picked and dropped their sons and not just their daughters. Evidently, these fathers are concerned about all their children's safety, regardless of gender. Further, it is perhaps a matter of convenience or economy rather than a measure to curtail the girls' freedom: bringing four or five children to school in a car or taxi would be easier than providing them with bus fare or letting them walk to school in inclement weather. Still, the majority of Muslim girls in the sample, and indeed in the three schools could be seen walking home in the afternoon as they lived in propinquity to the school.

Many teachers also found it strange that the parents did not allow the girls to go anywhere unchaperoned. The girls, nevertheless, were sensitive to the rationale behind such decisions:

If I have to go out after school, my parents always ask my big brother to go with me. They trust me, but they want somebody with me for my safety.

*(Razia Zia)*

It appears that the indigenous teachers find it hard to understand that Muslim parents who do not let their daughters go out unaccompanied are being protective and not oppressive. The teachers appear to apply the norms of the majority population to the everyday life of these girls, thus failing to appreciate the subtle distinctions between the indigenous and the British Muslim cultures. One Muslim teacher, however, believed that Muslim girls had enough freedom within the framework of their religion and culture:

I think Muslim girls get a fair degree of freedom. If the parents go out, they always take them. But the girls are not allowed to go out on their own.

Boys go around the town centre in groups at night and they bother the girls. The parents don't want their girls to be in that situation.

*(Hasan Munir, Science Teacher, Springfield High)*

Still, some of the indigenous teachers maintained that Muslim girls yearned for the kind of freedom that English girls enjoyed:

They don't have a lot of freedom out of school, which they find very, very frustrating: because they can see or listen to what the English girls do at the weekend and after school and I think that's very very difficult for them. They have to listen to all that the English girls find attractive and I think some of them would like to have a taste of some of these. Because of their

background, they can't and I think, this does cause a lot of conflict for them. The English girls have boyfriends and of course, they are not allowed to have a boyfriend. At the end of the day, they know the background they have been brought up with and the rules they have to abide by. Some of them take the risk, but then again, it's like testing the waters, the same as an English girl would, but it's much stricter really.

*(Elizabeth Robinson, Head of Year 11, Blossomdale Girls')*

There was very little evidence of the conflict, perceived by Ms. Robinson, during the interviews. If there was a conflict, the girls, surprisingly, appeared to cope with it extremely well at such a young age. They certainly showed no signs of neurosis and seemed to view their situation quite objectively. Far from wanting to have boyfriends, the girls in the sample did not even want the same amplitude of freedom that English girls had. Though many were clearly influenced by the Western notion of freedom (cf. Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1991) and admitted that they felt freer when they were in school and enjoyed themselves more in the company of their friends, yet others found no difference in their life at home and at school: they maintained that they had the freedom to do what they liked at home and enjoyed themselves as much at home as in school. Most seemed to want a little more freedom, but certainly not as much as the English girls had:

I want more freedom, but not too much. I'd like to go out with my friends without anyone thinking I was going to see a boy. Not staying out late - I don't want that.

*(Arifa Mahmood)<sup>10</sup>*

Some believed that they already had more freedom than most Muslim girls and felt that further freedom could lead to dire results:

I wouldn't like to have too much freedom, because I've seen the consequences of that, but I would like a bit more freedom. I have an older brother: he lets me do what I want, but it's my mum: she doesn't let me go out that much. But still, I've got more freedom than other people. I am allowed out a lot. Not late, but on weekends.

*(Alia Ashraf)*<sup>11</sup>

Others did not have a lot of freedom. Still, they appeared to appreciate the reasons for not being given excessive freedom by their parents:

No, I don't have much freedom. OK, there are some mature girls who can look after themselves, but there are those who are not so mature and they can get themselves into real trouble.

*(Tabassam Raza)*<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, many girls, while envious of the freedom that indigenous British girls had, attributed it to the fact that English parents did not care about their children. This stance suggests a defence mechanism in operation, by means of which they justify their own limited freedom:

I sometimes think that English parents give too much freedom to their children. Like the parents don't really care what happens to the children. My parents give me freedom - I am allowed to go out - but they like to know what time I am coming in, who I am going out with - stuff like that - and that sort of limits the freedom, but gives a nice sort of freedom where you know that they care about you.

*(Nasreen Butt)*<sup>13</sup>

All the parents in the sample also thought that Anglo-Saxon parents gave their children too much freedom. Nevertheless, some of them added that one could not criticise such parents, since giving their children that much freedom was part of their



culture. But, it was obviously not a part of the culture of British Asian Muslim parents, because most of them categorically denied the possibility of ever giving that much freedom to their children:

English girls have a lot of freedom. Their parents allow it, so why not? But I wouldn't want my daughter to have that much freedom: not at this age. She has to study, work and stand on her own feet. She can have all the freedom she wants later.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother)*

Arifa's mother, a single parent with little education, understood the value of freedom, specifically for someone in her situation. Yet she also attached a great deal of importance to women receiving education first and being able to 'stand on their own feet' lest they have a marriage break-up and, like her, have to support themselves and their children. Some other parents were also willing to give just enough freedom to their children to pursue education, hoping that the children would be able to differentiate between right and wrong:

We should give them some freedom, so that they can get education. But they should know what is right and what is wrong. Of course, they can go out and make friends and have a social life, but they shouldn't stay out late: our culture doesn't allow that. I've seen girls walking in the streets in the middle of the night. That causes corruption and crime.

*(Fehmida Saleem's father)*

However, the parents neither wanted to be too permissive, nor too oppressive as regards control of their children:

Too much freedom leads to trouble. Children should neither be given too much freedom, nor kept under too much coercion: these are equally bad. There should be a middle course.

*(Zubaida Saeed's mother)*<sup>14</sup>

The reason that many gave for not giving too much freedom to their children was that Islam forbade such permissiveness. Several others rationalised their stance further by arguing that their children were still too young to have that much freedom and it might corrupt them:

We shouldn't give our children as much freedom as the English do, or we would repent later. I know of some Muslim parents who gave their children too much freedom and the children eventually left home. I want my daughters to get a good education, stand on their own feet and get married as soon as I find a suitable match for them. They won't be my responsibility any more when they are married and they could, then, lead their lives as they would wish.

*(Parveen Akbar's mother)*<sup>15</sup>

It is important to stress that as opposed to some other religious and ethnic groups, Muslim parents do not necessarily regard their children as adults when they are 18. On the contrary, the parents feel responsible for, and protective towards, their children until they marry. Therefore, in the case of Muslims, freedom from parental authority is a consequence of marriage, rather than that of coming of age. The parents might, however, make exceptions in the case of unmarried sons who start to earn a living and thus begin to support the parents. Still, such allowances are never made for unmarried daughters, even if they are financially active. This is evident from the statement of Parveen Akbar's mother above and also from the following comment of a girl:

I'd like to have some freedom, but not that much. I realise that you can only have freedom when you are married.

*(Zareena Nasir)*

Parental guidance and control also appeared to influence and mould the leisure activities of the girls. Since none of the girls in the sample had the freedom to go out unaccompanied in the evenings, they tended to spend all or most of their free time at home. They seemed to indulge in a variety of activities in their spare time. Though some girls mentioned seeing friends at home, very few admitted going out with them. Reading fiction seemed to be a favourite pastime for most of them. Other popular recreations were watching television<sup>16</sup> and videos or listening to the music. A few girls liked to phone or write letters to friends, while others enjoyed cooking in their free time. Other activities mentioned were playing basketball or cricket with their siblings; relaxing with needlework, knitting or gardening; writing poems or stories; playing cards and computer games and solving puzzles. Hence, far from being the recluses that some teachers seemed to think they were (see pp. 85-86), the girls were able to find pleasurable exercises within the home.<sup>17</sup> All the parents in the sample were aware of their daughters' pastimes and approved of them.

Thus, there is clearly a mismatch between the perceptions of the teachers, the girls and the parents as regards the notion of freedom and control. The indigenous teachers view freedom as the girls' right to decide what to wear, where to go, stay out late at night, and have boyfriends. These aspects of freedom are seen by these teachers as the fundamental right of any adolescent girl today and obviously an ideal of growing up and, by implication, rejecting parental authority. However, Muslim teachers, who understand the British Muslim subculture because of having lived this culture, hold views that are largely congruent with those of Muslim parents.

The parents see freedom as the girls' right to receive education, make friends, go out when necessary, have a career and get married, albeit while staying within the limits set by their culture and religion. The girls themselves, while ostensibly impressed with the freedom that their Anglo-Saxon contemporaries have, reject that kind of freedom with a degree of equanimity. They recognise that their freedom is

restricted by religio-cultural ethos. This has repercussions for their future choices and aspirations. Nevertheless, these adolescent girls are able to negotiate a different kind of freedom, as a result of which they accomplish a fine balance between freedom and control in the construction of their own identities.

### **4.3 Gender Differences**

Leonard and Speakman (1986) observe that family life is an area of ambivalence for women. The family can provide women with many pleasurable experiences in their roles as daughters, wives, mothers, grandmothers and as unmarried women. On the other hand, it can also be a source of frustration for them. The work that they do for their families, for example, housework and childcare, is not seen as real work, but rather as being done from and for love. However, while working for love brings happiness and satisfaction, it can also constrain women's lives in many ways.

Housework is perennial as far as the vast majority of women are concerned. Still, as Delamont (1980:102) points out, while there are similarities between the household duties of all women of all classes, there are also considerable variations in the working conditions and the attitudes of women in different social classes.<sup>18</sup> Men and boys in most societies appear to have little responsibility for housework, whereas girls are usually required to help their mothers with housework and sometimes childcare, but once again it varies.<sup>19</sup>

All the teenage girls in the sample in the present study, with the exception of two, had some sort of responsibility for housework. The mother of one of these two did not let her do any and instructed her to spend her time in studying instead; the other admitted that her mother nagged, yet did not force her to do any housework. The rest of the girls in the sample cleaned, washed up and ironed on regular basis; they also helped with cooking and some cooked the family meals at weekends. A small minority of girls, however, were solely responsible for cooking the main family meal



at night and took it in turns with their sisters. One girl, the only unmarried girl in the family, did all the housework because of her mother's ill-health. The responsibility as regards housework was closely related to the girls' ordinal position in the family: the older the girl the more responsibility she had. A few girls, who had older sisters, were relieved from housework by them, when the girls had the pressure of academic work. This indicates a loving and caring atmosphere in the home as far as sibling relationship is concerned.

Some girls in the sample maintained that they enjoyed housework. Others believed that it was only fair that they should do their share in the evenings, when their mothers did all the housework during the day. Far from seeing themselves as the Cinderella figure that some teachers thought them to be (see pp. 147; 179-180), all the girls considered housework as part of their training which was being given by their mothers in order to enable them to become good housewives one day. They all added that their parents always relieved them from their household duties when an examination was approaching, or when they had a considerable amount of homework at night. Interestingly, some girls used this privilege to manipulate their parents at times by telling them that they had a lot of homework to do and thus escaped housework when they did not feel like doing any. One girl, the eldest in the family, however, showed some resentment and believed that she could improve on her school work considerably, if she was not over-burdened with housework. By and large, though, the girls were not forced to do housework against their will:

Some Asian parents are quite strict, but not my mum and dad. My mum just asks me once to make *chappatis* or something, but they never urge me to do anything. My parents are not one of those typical Asian parents who won't let you do anything. I can share jokes and mess about with them.

*(Mussarat Aslam)*

Like Mussarat, almost all the girls in the sample saw their own parents to be better than *typical* Asian parents, whoever they may be. Apparently, the girls were aware of the stereotype of oppressive Asian parents as propagated by the indigenous group, and were quick to point out that they did not see their own parents as oppressors. This suggests that despite the amount of housework that the girls have to do, and other limitations imposed by the parents, these adolescent girls love their parents and feel secure within their own family.

Still, although the majority of girls willingly fulfilled their household duties, many complained that their brothers did not have any responsibilities for housework. This problem, however, seems to exist in some indigenous families too. Females are expected to undertake more housework than males (Furnham and Stacey, 1991:99). The equality of the sexes in housework is limited to the boys and men doing the occasional DIY jobs around the house and the girls and women working regularly to cook, clean, wash and iron. Nevertheless, when the girls in the sample were asked if they would have preferred to be born as a boy, the majority of them replied in the negative and maintained that they were happy to be girls since they received as much love and respect from their parents as their brothers did, if not more. However, some others who wished to have been born as a boy argued that the only reason they felt that way was because boys got more freedom than girls:

Yes, I'd have liked to be a boy because I'd have more freedom and could do what I wanted. It would also have been better for my mum; I'd have been able to support her in a couple of years.

*(Samina Hameed)*<sup>20</sup>

Samina's comment about wanting to support her widowed mother is again an indicator of the loving and caring atmosphere in the homes. Due to the way she had been socialised, she realised that being a girl, she could not do that as girls are expected to leave home when they marry and boys, even when they are married,

are supposed to live with their parents and provide support. All the girls were also acutely aware that most parents gave more freedom to their sons as opposed to their daughters, even if the daughters were working. Nevertheless, gender differences in child-rearing practices appear to exist in most societies. Newson et al. (1978) note that boys are given greater physical freedom, while girls are kept closer to the home and mother from an early age.<sup>21</sup>

By this token, Muslim parents, in particular, are more protective towards their daughters as compared with their sons. This attitude emanates from a fear that permissiveness is conducive to promiscuity. According to Islamic ideology, virginity is a virtue to be preserved until marriage. Pre-marital and extra-marital sex is regarded as a sin and this applies to both women and men. Furthermore, the honour of the family is closely associated with its members and any unseemly behaviour of its young people could jeopardise its *izzet* or honour.

Literature shows that people of Asian origin prefer to bear male babies rather than female babies.<sup>22</sup> All the families in the sample in the present research had both female and male children. The parents unanimously contended that they did not prefer sons to daughters and were happy and thankful to the Almighty for what He had given them. It was difficult to imagine what their response would have been if they had only girls or only boys. Still, it appeared that they did not favour their sons more than their daughters:

No, sons and daughters are the same to me. If there were no daughters, there wouldn't have been any of us.

*(Raheela Noor's father)*<sup>23</sup>

Others observed that the reason some people preferred sons to daughters was that the parents were less worried about what fate had in store for the sons who, even

when they married, lived close to the parents in most cases, as compared to the daughters who had to leave home one day and go and live with another family:

I think daughters are more loving than sons. The only reason people want sons is because they are worried about the future of their daughters. We have four sons and one daughter and we love her more than the boys.

*(Nuzhat Kareem's mother)<sup>24</sup>*

Even though the parents claimed otherwise, most of the teachers felt that Muslim parents favoured boys more than girls and did so to the extent that they took more interest in their sons' education as compared to that of their daughters':

Favour boys more than girls! I don't even need to answer that: it is so apparent. I know fathers also take pride in their daughters, but when we tell a father what a clever daughter he has, yes, he is pleased, but there is always that look in his eyes that it's going to be a problem. If I had said, what a clever son he had, he would have been whistling. I think it is cultural.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)*

Nevertheless, others argued that it was not cultural and favouring boys was not only endemic to Muslim or Asian parents, but was found in indigenous families too:<sup>25</sup>

I am assuming this goes back to something about them being wage-earners eventually and looking after their parents. It's cultural, but the same as it would have been in this country not that long ago. They [Muslim parents], also like many English parents, think that the daughters, once they get married, don't need an education. I've even heard people of my level say 'oh! It's silly putting all that education into a girl'. So, I mean, we all suffer under this.

*(Jennifer Davis, Head of Maths, Blossomdale Girls)<sup>26</sup>*



Ms. Davis' views matched with those of the Muslim teachers in the sample who also argued that the reason Muslim parents favoured sons was that they were seen as the ones who would support the parents in their old age:

The parents favour boys more than girls because they think the boys are going to look after them; the girls get married and go away and the boys stay. Boys are also given more freedom because they are going to be the head of the family.

*(Noreen Azam, Language Support Teacher, Springfield High)<sup>27</sup>*

Notwithstanding the parents' views, one Muslim teacher observed that the rules of propriety were more relaxed in the case of boys:

I think it's tradition, isn't it? The boys can go out and do whatever they want and that is no dishonour on the family, whereas the girls are looked upon as the honour of the family and that tradition is still very much in progress. So, if a boy does anything wrong, it's OK, he'll grow out of it; but if it's a girl, it's seen as a great sin.

*(Shahid Rehman, Science Teacher, Hillview Comprehensive)*

Although Muslim parents have similar concerns and fears for their daughters and sons, yet the female gender is thought to be more vulnerable,<sup>28</sup> since the acts of violence, assault and rape are generally committed against women by men and not vice versa. For this reason girls are more sheltered than boys and only married women appear to be granted the freedom that in some societies teenage boys have. The parents are relaxed once they have passed on the responsibility of protecting their daughter to her husband who invariably thinks she is old enough to look after herself. Boys, on the other hand are allowed to grow up more quickly and are permitted more freedom, albeit with limitations. This allowance does not imply that they are the more favoured gender, but rather that they are expected to be the

breadwinner and the head of the family and support not just their wife and children, but possibly their parents too in their old age. Parents, therefore, allow the sons the freedom requisite for assuming this role as soon as is feasible.

Still, in congruence with Mr. Rehman's views above, some girls in the sample also believed that there were two different sets of rules for boys and girls. The girls even argued that women and men were not equal in Muslim society. They maintained that the two genders were equal in Islam, but were treated differently in the present day milieu, since women were considered to be inferior to men:

They are supposed to be equal, but men are treated better. They have the upper hand. It's not fair, because women can do what men can.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

However, some made an interesting distinction between religious and cultural ethos:

In Islam, it's OK the way women are treated, but people have also invented certain things. I agree with the Muslim way, but not with the Asian way.

*(Zareena Nasir)*

The vast majority of parents also held this belief. They observed that this kind of attitude was the result of ignorance, illiteracy and insufficient grasp of the religion:

Men and women are, of course, equal in Islam, but no one sees them as equals because we have moved away from religion. There would be no problems if men and women were considered equal in everything.

*(Tallat Zahid's father)<sup>29</sup>*

Nevertheless, one father believed that Islam does not grant equal status to women and men:

We are told in the Quran that the man is the ruler and the woman is the subordinate. They are not equal, you see! They are gaining equality these days. Men and women are being treated as equals, and that's the reason for all the wrong-doings in the world. The man has no value any more.

*(Shahida Rasheed's father)*

Conversely, some fathers argued that women had an elevated status in Islam and they were exalted because of motherhood:

Islam gives equal status to men and women. It doesn't stop women from receiving education like men. Motherhood gives a high status to women. Heaven is said to be under the feet of the mother; it isn't under the feet of the father. But men and women have different roles: the man is the breadwinner and the woman is the carer of the home and the children.

*(Razia Zia's father)*<sup>30</sup>

While Islam is a way of life and religion and culture are intermeshed to a large extent, it is apparent that sometimes religion is used by people to buttress their cultural mores as illustrated by the comment of Shahida Rasheed's father and also from the statement of Zareena Nasir (see above, p. 99). The beliefs held due to illiteracy, ignorance or prejudice are practised in the name of religion. Still, as the vast majority of parents in the sample maintained, Islam unequivocally grants equality to men and women. The difference between the genders pertains to roles, not status. In other words, men and women are not equal and the same, but equal and different. They are individually responsible for their actions and accountable to God and throughout the Quran, they have been addressed separately by Him.<sup>31</sup>

Like most parents, some girls also observed that inequality within a household was the consequence of ignorance. Further, social practices sometimes tended to be perpetuated across generations:

Men and women! In some families they are equal. It has a lot to do with education and you also get it from your parents. If the father treats his wife like dirt, the son thinks 'That's how I'm going to treat my wife'.

*(Nusrat Sharif)*<sup>32</sup>

Thus, there is considerable disparity in perceptions regarding gender amongst the Muslim families in the sample. The majority of parents believe that Islam gives equality to women and men, though a few feel that in practice the two genders are sometimes treated differently in Muslim society. It appears that education is conducive to gender equality. The parents who have received some education and can therefore understand the teachings of Islam argue that women and men are equal in status in the eyes of Allah and should, therefore, be treated equally.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the girls also think that there is equality in religion which is not fully practised today. The range of views on the subject denote that gender equality is an issue that these adolescent girls have thought about considerably, since it is important to their identity and subsequently to the realisation of their aspirations.

#### **4.4 Variations in Family Patterns**

Immigrants come to their adopted country with high hopes and aspirations. However, Sharpe (1976) observes that Britain makes great demands on immigrant people in terms of ideology and behaviour. She argues that the concept of integration in Britain is very one-sided. The majority group's judgement of the ethnic minority groups is too often based on how 'English' they have become and there is no appreciation of how meaningful it is for them to retain their own cultural identity. Price (1982:221) distinguishes between cultural traits intrinsic to the core of ethnic culture and those that are marginal or extrinsic to it. However, the distinction cannot be so categorical since even an apparently marginal manifestation of the culture may be a response to the intrinsic message of a religion like Islam.



Nevertheless, ethnic minorities make their own decisions about which features of their culture of origin they want to retain and which ones they want to abandon. Similarly they embrace specific characteristics of the majority culture of their adopted country and reject others. Thus, they create their own cultural identity by means of a process of analysis and synthesis, which is not always based on rational judgement. While many cultural traits are adopted or abandoned because of their relative usefulness or obsolescence, others are preserved merely because the minority groups like these customs and perceive them as an essential part of their cultural identity.

Notwithstanding their views regarding gender inequality, most girls in the sample in the present study admitted that they liked almost everything else pertaining to the Asian way of life. The likeable features mentioned by some were adherence to Islam; dress code; arranged marriage; and the way weddings and festivals were celebrated. The respect and closeness within the family was seen by almost all the girls as the best aspect of Asian culture:

I think as Asians, we are close, and we care about each other. I am not saying that the English don't, but we are just more concerned about our family. We are close as a family.

*(Raheela Noor)*<sup>34</sup>

Like many girls, most of the parents also maintained that they liked everything associated with the Asian way of life. The best Asian tradition mentioned was the adherence to religion and the Islamic way of life. Many others, like their daughters referred to the closeness within the family and respect for the parents. Other positive features were arranged marriage, dietary habits and modesty in apparel. The following statement epitomises the dynamics within British Muslim households:

I like our ways. My daughters go to school and college. They also pray, fast and recite the Quran: I want them to know their religion. I also want them to learn to cook: they have to get married one day and they will have to cook then. I cook in the mornings and my daughters cook in the evenings.

*(Parveen Akbar's mother)*<sup>35</sup>

Despite their liking for many Asian customs, when asked if there were any that they disliked, some girls argued that girls and women did not have equal rights vis-à-vis boys and men (see above, p. 99). A few girls hated gossip and interference from relatives. Some others had an aversion to wearing *dopatta*, early or forced arranged marriage<sup>36</sup> and the dowry. However, it is important to point out that these views were reported in a spirit of longing rather than as serious complaints for which they were prepared to clash with their families:

I am allowed to wear what I like at home, but if I go out, my mum says wear *shalvar, kameez and dopatta*. I don't like it, because if I am going out with my friends I like to wear trousers - not skirt or anything like that - and my dad doesn't mind but my mum doesn't let me. I don't like it, but I still do it; I don't argue.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

Similarly the parents also disliked some of the traditions followed by British Asian communities. Those mentioned were extravagance and ostentation at weddings, sticking to caste and creed, women being put down by men, too much westernisation and the interference of relatives. Nevertheless, many others contended that they did not dislike any Asian customs and they simply did not follow the traditions they did not approve of. Hence, as far as these families were concerned, those customs did not exist:

I like many Asian customs and many English customs also. We follow the ones we like and don't do what we dislike.

*(Alia Ashraf's father)*

It is clear that in spite of some irksome features that seem to have become a part of the Asian culture, the girls and their parents are proud of most other aspects of their culture. There is, however, a gap between what is acceptable to the girls and to the parents. Although certain matters, like boyfriends, are considered taboo by both the girls and the parents, yet others like attire are contentious,<sup>37</sup> albeit negotiable. Still, both groups would like to eliminate the vexing customs, but would want to retain the pleasant ones. Most teachers appeared to be sensitive to this reality:

I've never had any of them say anything derogatory about their culture. I think it's the inequality within the culture that they don't like. They want to keep their own language, their own style of dressing, their own food. I mean they are very proud of their homes and their background. I always say how much I admire it and it is something that should never be taken from them.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)<sup>38</sup>*

Many teachers felt that these adolescent girls wanted to retain certain aspects of the Asian culture, but also wished to adopt some features of the indigenous British culture. This indicates a process of negotiation whereby the girls are constructing their own identities for themselves:

I think their culture is important to them. We have seen it in the observance of dress; in terms of some of the mini-enterprise things they have got involved in, producing food very much from their cultural background. I think, though, they are attempting to adopt and adapt and find a middle way, without sacrificing and ignoring their own culture.

*(Dominic Taylor, Deputy Head, Hillsvview Comprehensive)*<sup>39</sup>

However, it was not clear to some teachers which features the girls retained from the Asian culture and which aspects they adopted from the indigenous British culture:

They want to retain parts of their culture. I think the family connections - they enjoy that part of it. But they still like to come to school, so I think they like a bit of both really.

*(Cynthia Roberts, Head of Careers, Hillsvview Comprehensive)*

Ms. Roberts appeared to believe that since schooling was a new experience for these girls, perhaps children who lived in Asian countries did not go to school. She did not understand that these families did not have the tradition of education in the previous generation because of their working class background. This would have been the case with many working class families in Britain as well, if schooling was not compulsory here. Sometimes children in working class families in South Asian countries have to go into employment at a very young age to contribute to the family income. Education, in such cases, becomes a luxury they can ill-afford. This is particularly true of Bangladesh and Pakistan where schooling may be free up to a certain level, but is not compulsory. Further, the parents are responsible for providing their children with books and stationery, which some poor parents cannot supply, however keen they may be to educate their children. Consequently, many potential scholars become farm-hands or factory-workers. Still, education is available in these countries to university level - graduate, post graduate and doctoral - for those who want it and can afford it. Hence, if schooling was not a part of the culture of these families until they came to Britain, the explanation lies in class and economics rather than ethnicity and religion.



Still, while some teachers understood the importance of cultural features, some others would want Muslim girls to start dressing like non-Muslim girls, thus assuming that this would break the barriers and eradicate prejudice:

I think, they do want to retain their culture to a certain extent. I mean, there is no reason why they shouldn't, but they also want to be accepted as being British, if you like, because then they know that the other girls would accept them totally. If we can encourage the fathers to allow these girls to mix more and integrate, I don't think we will have any prejudice at all. But because they are made to look different - they are allowed to wear their trousers in school and things like that - we have to allow the other girls to wear trousers because otherwise it is seen as prejudice the other way. I think if all the girls wore skirts, it would be a lot easier all round and we wouldn't have this 'She's wearing this, Miss, why can't we'?

*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development Teacher, Blossomdale Girls')<sup>40</sup>*

Ms. Thomas' wants the girls to assimilate<sup>41</sup> to the mainstream British culture. Her definition of 'British' appears to necessitate the wearing of skirts by Muslim girls otherwise their indigenous peers would not accept them. She does not appreciate the reason why these girls wear 'their trousers' as she is perhaps unaware of the notion of modesty in Islam and the importance Muslims attach to covering their bodies. Furthermore, she erroneously believes that of the two parents the fathers are the more authoritarian, who do not let their daughters integrate into the mainstream. Yet it is clear from the statements of some girls that mothers exercise similar control, if not more (see pp. 89; 103).

The girls, themselves, despite their grumbles, appear to appreciate the rationale behind parental control and respect most aspects of the Asian culture. However, it is manifest that the girls and their parents are ambivalent about the Asian and British aspects of their subculture. While they want to retain the pleasant features of

their Asian culture, they clearly want to relinquish those that they find tedious. Similarly, they are keen to adopt the British traditions that they find attractive, yet are loathe to embrace those that are adverse to the ethos of their religion and culture. The following extract exemplifies the kind of ambivalence felt by some of these adolescent girls:

TNB: How do you feel about Asian customs?

Don't really know. Well, I dislike arranged marriages. And religion - some people say it's a set of rules, you have to follow them - I don't believe in that; some people say you should read [pray] five times a day and stuff like that.

TNB: And you don't believe in that?

No, I just follow my parents. I do what they say.

TNB: Is there anything that you like?

This life is like a prison. You can't go out. You can't do anything. It's nice to be Asian though.

TNB: So what's nice about it?

Don't know. I've been born in this - 16 years - can't imagine how I can be different.

TNB: And still you can't think of a single thing that you like about it?

No.

TNB: Do you like English customs?

Yes. You can do what you want. You can stay out as late as you want. I don't really like that.

TNB: You don't like that?

No. That's the way English things are. You can do as you please. Your parents don't have control over you. They do, but they are not as strict as Asians.

TNB: Is it good or bad?

It is good, but it's also bad, because they [the children] might get up to something really stupid, like smoking or drugs. But they have the freedom to do what they want.

TNB: Do you think English girls have more freedom than you?

Yeah.

TNB: Would you like to have that much freedom?

If I had that much freedom, I won't do nothing. I'd just go out; I won't stay out all night and get no homework done. I want a bit of freedom, but not that much. Too much freedom and you get out of hand.

*(Khavar Raheem)*

Khavar does not like religious practice and arranged marriages and equates her life with prison. It is, nevertheless, important to stress that she is the only girl in the sample who perceives her life as oppressive. Yet she says one thing and contradicts it with another. Despite holding such negative views about the Muslim culture and praising the freedom enjoyed by the indigenous girls, she rejects that kind of freedom for herself and maintains that if she had a measure of freedom, she would not abuse it.

Perhaps such contradictions are going on in the minds of other teenage Muslim girls in the sample as well. Yet they appear to rationalise the ambiguous messages by

means of a process of analysis and synthesis. This ambivalence and ambiguity, distinctive of immigrant communities, compels British Muslim parents and children to tread very carefully when deciding which features of which culture they should retain or adopt and which ones they should abandon or reject and in the process create unique identities for themselves. It should, however, be remembered that immigrants from similar cultural, social, religious and educational backgrounds vary enormously in this kind of individualised decision-making, depending on the extent to which they are willing to adopt and adapt and where they want to draw the line.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that adolescent Muslim girls are getting ambiguous messages about freedom from all sources. The indigenous teachers' definition of freedom for girls means autonomy in personal matters, thereby not complying with parental authority in deciding on attire, recreation and choice of friends. The teachers do not perceive religion and culture as legitimate authorities to be imposed on the girls to stop them from enjoying what their contemporaries enjoy. The parents, on the other hand, do not see life as the teachers do. They do not believe that the girls are old enough to be autonomous and, thus, able to make rational decisions without parental guidance. This process is seen as nurturing by the parents, but interference by the teachers. The main objective of the parents, however, seems to be to enculture the girls to become useful members of society, without losing their religion. They appear to do it by means of a subtle combination of freedom and control.

Nevertheless, there also seems to be a process of negotiation in constant operation, whereby the girls are able to win more freedom in certain areas, such as education, by behaving in accordance with parental wishes in other ways, for instance by not going out with boys. Although this 'testing of waters' (see above, p. 88) may also apply to indigenous girls, Muslim girls seem to accomplish it with more



finesse and without upsetting their parents. In spite of their views on gender inequality to some extent, they feel relaxed and secure within their families.

The parents and the girls are clearly willing to adopt and adapt in order to achieve their aspirations, but they are only prepared to do it up to a certain point. This point, however, might be different for both the groups. The parents and the girls are constantly looking at different features of Asian and British cultures, adopting what they like and rejecting what they dislike, thus creating multiple identities in the process and a subculture to their liking, as most immigrants do. In this way they are able to ensure cultural continuity which is vital to the identity of ethnic minorities and which in important ways shapes their aspirations.

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## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I illuminated the role of family values in shaping and effectuating the aspirations of the Muslim girls in my sample. Since marriage is the principal way in which families ensure continuity, in this chapter, I shall illustrate how perceptions regarding marriage influence the educational, social and career aspirations of these adolescent girls. Marriage is not an affair that can be taken lightly. It affects the entire life of an individual and shapes her/his present experiences and future aspirations. This chapter investigates the importance of marriage in Islam and the tradition of arranged marriage; marriage as opposed to a career is discussed; and consanguineous marriage and intermarriage are examined.

Marriage is an institution so universal that any simple definition of it is negated by the sheer variety of its manifestations (Cerroni-Long, 1985). It is one of the most ancient social customs. Even today, it is a status highly regarded by most religious and ethnic groups in the world. It is seen as the foundation of the family and the family is perceived as the foundation of society. Marriage is, thus, a union of man and woman sanctioned by society which has biological, psychological, sociological, economic and religious implications.<sup>1</sup>

The field of marriage has been extensively researched not only by anthropologists and sociologists, but also by psychologists and educationalists. These specialists study marriage from their own perspective because, as Clark (1990:23) points out, an understanding of marriage can never be separated from that of the context in which it occurs. Marriage has undergone considerable change and in contemporary society, with the advent of living together and serial monogamy, it would appear as

if marriage as an enduring bond has lost its appeal (cf. Central Statistical Office, 1994:33; Wilkinson, 1994:33). Still, there are certain groups who aspire to marriage as the permanent destiny of every individual: Muslims are one of them.

The various facets of marriage can be seen on a continuum, on one end of which is the relationship of two people choosing to live together without any legal or religious binding and notwithstanding any family interference: on the other is the marriage arranged by parents whereby the couple does not have any say in the matter. As Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1991:28) argue, this ranges from complete personal autonomy in which no obligation is felt towards any other person or institution to a total absence of autonomy for the couple (which is not to say that their interests are not much in mind and well-cared for). Other models of marriage that fall in the middle include those in which the young people choose whom to marry with the blessings of the parents or when the parents choose whom their children should marry with the consent of the couple in question. Almost all the pupils and parents in the sample in the present study regarded the first model as a sin and the second as oppressive. They, nevertheless, appeared to subscribe to one of the two latter models.

One of the most cherished convictions shared by most contemporary Western cultures is that the major purpose of marriage is the achievement of personal happiness and that the best foundations for a happy marriage are set by using the criterion of love in marital choice (Barron, 1972:40). However, marriage can also be interpreted as an institution that ensures the perpetuation of the group and the stability of the community and as such can be given essentially a social rather than individual value. Accordingly, instead of the young couple, the responsibility for marital choice can be assigned to parents or elders, whose experience can guarantee the creation of a union that best serves the interests of the family group or society and that is thought capable of well-fulfilling their expectations (Shibutani and Kwan, 1965:487). The indigenous teachers in the sample in the present study

appeared to favour the former paradigm of marriage, whereas the girls and the parents liked the latter.

Marriage is one of the events in life that has the most far-reaching consequences, not only for the individuals concerned, but for family members already living and those yet to come (Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1991:28). Attitudes to marriage vary amongst different groups. Yet in the British context, both the indigenous and the ethnic minority groups as a whole perceive marriage as a life-long and permanent contract and its break-up as a tragedy.<sup>2</sup>

Leonard and Speakman (1986) maintain that on average nine out of ten men and women in Britain marry at least once. The partners are generally from the same class and ethnic background and the man is usually taller and around two years older than the woman. This implies that though young people may choose whom to marry, it is done within a structure and set of values given by society, so that even those who exercise autonomy do so within the framework of their culture. Viewed in this light, the Western idea of choice does not seem to be all that different from the way marriages are arranged in South Asian countries and by British Asians. Amos and Parmar (1987) challenge the notion that girls from the majority population of Britain have a great deal of choice in whom they marry. Most British girls are likely to marry someone of a similar or slightly higher educational level, who has lived near them and is of the same race and religion (Delamont 1980:73).

The British Asian Muslim paradigm of marriage is as much a contract between families as between individuals (Anwar, 1982). If it is not assumed that marriage involves a separation of the new unit from the parent unit, but rather that it is absorbed into the existing unit, then the choice of the new member becomes an important family concern (Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1991:5). However, there is an obvious contradiction between this view of marriage as a contract between two families which should be arranged by the parents on their children's behalf and the



contemporary Western ideal that an intimate personal relationship should exist between a couple before they make a decision to marry (Ballard, 1978:181). Most South Asians, particularly Muslims, consider marriage not just as a contract but rather as a religious obligation. Parents, therefore, regard it their duty to ensure that their children marry as soon as is feasible. This can be further explained in terms of the fundamental Muslim attitude to the relationship of the two sexes: a stance which has been sustained over hundreds of years.

## **5.2 Arranged Marriage in Islam**

The institution of marriage is highly regarded in Islam and the family is considered as the fundamental unit in Muslim society. The roles of men and women are seen as complementary and women as mothers, carers and educators of children are the pillars of the family. As mothers, they control, teach and guide the future generation. In Islam the man is seen as having the responsibility of being the provider. A Muslim woman can, therefore, claim the privilege to be supported by her husband. Women are freed from responsibilities outside the home so that they are not taxed doubly, as running a home and bringing up the children is an enormous responsibility and a career in itself. Nevertheless, women are not forbidden in Islam to seek a career outside the home, if they wish. They are free to decide whether they can cope with two careers simultaneously, since a married woman with children is always a housewife and mother, whether or not she is in paid employment outside the home.

Islam *allows* a limited polygamy,<sup>3</sup> provided the maximum number of wives a man has is four: it does not *advocate* it. Nevertheless, despite the concession of polygamy,<sup>4</sup> monogamy is the normative practice of the vast majority of Muslims all over the world. Marriage is regarded as one of the most important phenomena in the life of a Muslim and an event to look forward to. The break up of marriage is always seen as a catastrophe. While divorce is allowed in Islam, it is regarded as

the most hated of permissible decrees in the eyes of God. Consequently, arranged marriage is perceived by many Muslim parents as a bulwark against the trauma of divorce.

Marriage in Islam, however, does not preclude the consent of the young couple in question. McDermott and Ahsan (1980:84) stress that contrary to popular myth, but strictly according to Muslim law, Muslim girls cannot be forced to marry without their personal consent and without being consulted at an early stage in the negotiations. The parents in the sample in the present study understood the Islamic prescriptions regarding marriage and hoped to arrange the marriage of their sons and daughters accordingly, as can be seen from the following comment:

The Islamic way is that the parents should arrange the marriage with the consent of their daughter or son and if they don't agree then it should be called off. It's their life, a life-long commitment, not something that lasts a day or two.

*(Nuzhat Kareem's mother)*<sup>5</sup>

Marriage is a milestone that has significance for both Muslim parents and their children. For the parents, arranging the marriage of their children properly is one of their paramount responsibilities and is tantamount to an act of worship. As far as the young people are concerned, marriage is viewed as gaining autonomy and the status of adulthood. Young Muslims are, therefore, conscious of the fact that their parents would want to arrange their marriage. The way they are socialised from an early age and are taken to all family weddings helps to emphasise the importance of this event. Ballard (1979) observes that acceptance of an arranged marriage can be seen as symbolising an individual's loyalty and commitment to the family and community. This was obvious during interviews for the present study, as one teacher commented:

Muslim girls that I have taught are very aware and very trusting of Muslim culture with regards to [arranged] marriage and they are not worried about marriage at all.

*(Timothy Clark, Head of Year 11, Springfield High)*

By the same token, many girls in the sample felt that they could trust their parents and the rest of the family to choose whom they should marry:

I'd prefer an arranged marriage. If you choose someone yourself and you have problems, then you have nowhere to go, but if your parents choose the person, they know what they are doing and you have their support even if there are problems, because they know it's not your fault.

*(Tallat Zahid)<sup>6</sup>*

While most girls believed their parents would ask their opinion, two girls felt that they would not have much say in the matter:

I don't really have a choice, because obviously I will have an arranged marriage. But I don't mind, because when my parents arrange it, they will ask me. So that is OK. Although I feel that love marriage is better: someone you have chosen, someone you love, to be with that person. But there is no point in thinking or dreaming about something that won't come true. So you might as well go along with the facts and be happy with the facts and make the best of it.

*(Zubaida Saeed)<sup>7</sup>*

Although, Zubaida would prefer to choose whom to marry, she felt that an arranged marriage was predetermined. Still, she was secure in the knowledge that her parents would not want her to marry someone she did not like. The majority of other girls in the sample believed that too:

I used to think that arranged marriage is when the bride and groom meet on the wedding day. I've found out it is not like that. I am going to have an arranged marriage and I agree with it. You get to see the person you are going to marry and it's entirely your decision. The parents just introduce you and it is up to you if you want to marry that person or not.

*(Nasreen Butt)*<sup>8</sup>

For some the assumption that their parents would let them make the final decision was based on a precedent in the family:

I wouldn't mind an arranged marriage if I had a choice. If my dad chose somebody and I didn't like him, I could say 'No': and I think I'll have that choice, because my sister got married and she did. She was also allowed to go out with him [her fiancé] before they got married. I am not against arranged marriage at all. I don't like it if it is forced, but in my family I don't think it will be forced.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*<sup>9</sup>

Similar findings are documented by Bhachu (1981) who notes that girls and boys meet each other before marriage. However, while greater freedom was allowed to the Sikh couples in her sample to court, this was not the case in the sample families in the present study. Here, the elder sisters of the girls in the sample, who were engaged, were only allowed to go out with their fiancés after a formal engagement and the purpose of this exercise was to allow the affianced couple to get acquainted with each other, rather than court in the true sense of the word. Moreover, Bhachu interprets meeting before marriage as a shift from the traditional view of marriage as a contract between two families to the individualistic Western notion of a union between two people. Nevertheless, in the sample families in the present study, neither the girls, nor the parents appeared to perceive marriage as merely a union of two people as family involvement was still overtly intense.



The fact that the girls are being given the opportunity to meet and go out with their fiancés can be explained as a consequence of a combination of factors such as the immigration of the families, not just into a Western country, but also from a rural to an urban environment; education of the girls, which elevates them to a quasi-adult status and thus enables them to negotiate the privilege to get to know their fiancé to some extent; and enlightened parents who acknowledge change and are willing to adapt, albeit, within the framework of their religion.

The vast majority of girls in the present study have faith in their parents' ingenuity to choose the most suitable person for them to marry. Contrary to what Wade and Souter (1992:45) maintain, the girls in the sample in the present study rejected the idea that they would be asked whether they wanted to marry the person they were going to marry only on the day of the wedding. While the girls in the sample are aware of the parents' power of persuasion in making them marry someone they are not keen on, the vast majority acknowledge the fact that they would not have the wisdom to choose the right person themselves.

The minority who would much rather choose their own partner still cannot contemplate going against parental wishes and this is the general attitude as regards arranged marriage, at least as far as the adolescent girls in the sample are concerned. Similar findings have been documented by Wilson (1978:105-6) who notes that Asian girls, even as young as 12 or 13, realise the implications of a love marriage: that you alone and not your family will be responsible for its success or failure and that you are putting yourself first before your culture, your community and even your parents; that you might lose the love and support in which you have grown up.

Just how important it is for the girls in the sample in the present study to marry with their parents' blessings is apparent from the following comments of a teacher:

In the last lesson, the fifth year group that I had, had an oral assessment to do. I gave them 15 minutes to prepare an answer or a comment on any one of the five statements and they all went for number five, which was about 'People should be able to marry at 16 without the parents' consent.' All three Muslim girls in the group gave very good answers. They obviously felt very strongly about it. I wasn't surprised with their answers. They were totally against it and they gave very good reasons for it. They weren't necessarily against you getting married at 16; they were against you getting married then without your parents' consent, because if it did go wrong, you had nobody on whom you could fall back.

TNB: What do you think they would have said if you had asked them whether it was all right to marry at 21 without the parents' consent?

They possibly would have said the same. I didn't think about asking of that particular aspect. They still thought that 16 was too young to get married. They talked about actually meeting other people and wanting some freedom of time before you tied yourself down to the home and the children and the responsibilities that marriage would bring. They also thought about financial problems and things like that and gave a very balanced answer.

*(Fiona Young, English Teacher, Hillsvew Comprehensive)*

Thus, arranged marriage is not perceived by these girls as an oppressive or unreasonable custom. The fact that they were going to have an arranged marriage generated in the teenage girls in the sample in the present study a very relaxed attitude towards boys, and eliminated the need to get romantically involved with them (see p. 152). Sharpe (1976), on the basis of her research, argues that 'freer' girls from the majority population of Britain usually spend a lot of time and mental energy in the contemplation of their future love-marriages and every boyfriend is assessed as a potential husband. She notes that arranged marriage, on the other

hand, is viewed as far more complex and meaningful than that. It is not based initially or primarily on love. She points out that it is a matter much too vital to be left to boys and girls alone and has to be arranged by the parents, who use their experience and expertise to find the most suitable match for their offspring. All the parents in the sample believed so, as is evident from this comment:

The best of our Asian customs is arranged marriage. Arranged marriage doesn't mean that the boys or the girls don't even get to see the person they are going to marry: their consent comes first. But since the parents have more experience, they know better. Children are immature: they take things at face value. They are young and inexperienced: they go for looks. Parents look at everything: they see if a girl will be suitable for their son, if she is of a good character; or if a boy is responsible and hardworking and will be good for their daughter. But the consent of the children is very important.

*(Zubaida Saeed's mother)*<sup>10</sup>

While parental intervention in the choice of a marriage partner for their children may not be so explicit in the West, it is by no means unique to British Muslims. Douvan and Adelson (1966:42) writing in the American context argue that the personal tie between two young people is valued and is used as a crucial criterion for marriage. Social considerations, like the boy's family background or his prospects of inheritance are supposedly irrelevant to the marriage decision. If a girl or her family openly consider these matters, they are censured as snobbish; as lacking feeling and understanding about the really important things in marriage. However, to consider the boy's occupational future is not as strongly tabooed, as a boy's aspirations and achievements reveal his character, morality and stability, and evaluating his character traits is considered a legitimate part of the marriage decision. Such evaluation often contains and disguises an assessment of his current social status as well. Thus the desire to find a suitable partner for their daughter or son is not endemic to Muslims only.

Similarly Ballard (1978) observes that even in contexts where marriages are not prescriptively arranged, parents are normally concerned to guide their offspring in directions which they consider to be suitable and to urge them to bear in mind such unromantic factors as the material prospects and the social class and religion of a prospective spouse. Parents and relatives in almost every society are known to introduce eligible young people with the tacit expectation that they will choose each other. In Muslim culture, though, the entire family is involved in this choice and not just the couple in question. Still, despite their strong adherence to the custom of arranged marriage, all the parents in the sample in the present study firmly believed in consulting their children before arranging their marriage and did not approve of coercion:

I would like her to get married by the age of 22. I think both the parents and the children should have a say in it. We don't want to force our children. If we thought a certain person was right for our daughter, we would tell her about him - his good points and his bad points. We would go ahead if she liked him, but if she didn't then we would forget about it. Marriages should be arranged with the consent of the children. I don't believe in forcing them to marry someone.

*(Nasreen Butt's mother)*<sup>11</sup>

Despite such parental attitudes, the practice of arranged marriage has frequently been viewed as tyrannical,<sup>12</sup> and British Muslim girls, like other British Asians, are thought to have no freedom in the choice of a husband. Arranged marriage is an area which has frequently received sensational headlines in the media, most of this coverage giving a false and distorted picture of this tradition (Amos and Parmar, 1987).<sup>13</sup> Some teachers in the sample in the present study also perceived arranged marriage to be an oppressive custom and during the course of data-collection,



horror stories about potentially bright former pupils, who had to leave school because of an arranged marriage, were narrated. A typical statement was:

They desperately want to go on to further education, but they are never given the opportunity to, because the parents and the community only see them as a marriage commodity, whatever you call it; pawns, if you like - I hope you don't; I am looking again from the Western side - I know a lot of young girls who leave here are married before they reach their twentieth year.

*(Patricia Fisher, Head of Computing, Hillsvew Comprehensive)*

Yet, Sharpe (1976) argues that for those brought up with this tradition, marriage is predetermined and becoming a wife a relatively involuntary process. Their minds are conditioned to the idea that one can always fall in love by marrying and living with a person. Thus, romance need not culminate in marriage: it can also begin with a marriage. This inevitability of marriage removes for them much of the indigenous girls' emphases on boyfriends and romance, which is frowned upon in any case. Nevertheless, most parents in the sample in the present study maintained that they would let their daughter marry a young man of her choice if they considered him suitable:

I know my daughter well and do not expect her to choose someone all by herself. If she did, then I would see if he were suitable. But if I chose someone for her, I would ask her opinion and let her see him and talk to him before she decided. It would be cruel to force them.

*(Tabassam Raza's father)<sup>14</sup>*

Still, while some young Muslims choose their own spouses, they, nevertheless, seek the support of their parents and inevitably turn to them to fulfil the social custom associated with marriage. The following statement exemplifies this phenomenon:

One of my daughters chose her own partner. I chose for my other daughter and for my son, but I asked their opinion before arranging their marriage; I didn't force them. I even arranged the marriage of the daughter who chose her own partner. All of them are happy by the grace of Allah.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother)*

In spite of such flexibility in the practice of arranged marriage, some of the indigenous teachers in the sample failed to understand the rationale behind this custom. They could not envisage a marriage taking place without the romantic involvement of two supposedly autonomous adults, who did not need interfering parents and relatives. Yet, there is an obvious disparity in the views of these teachers and those of the girls and the parents as can be seen above, since the girls consider this interference as support and the parents see it as guidance.

The data in the present study show that marriage is not inflicted upon young women and men as the parents do not believe in forcing their children to marry someone to whom they object. Similar attitudes are evident in Pakistan and Bangladesh where young people have considerable say in matters of matrimony. Some may only have the power to veto, but the majority are able to select someone from a number of eligible candidates (cf. Jeffery, 1976:30). Photographs are always exchanged, chaperoned meetings are allowed and some are even able to go out with their fiancé/e. Still, this partial autonomy seems strange to the indigenous population who ostensibly maintain that young people should be allowed total freedom in whom to marry. Some of the teachers, who were interviewed, also held this opinion. It is evident that the Western ideology of marital choice does not correspond with the Muslim notion of *selection* and *consultation* as opposed to *force*. In Muslim culture, acquiescence is tantamount to choice and young adults are consulted and guided, not forced, to marry someone.

### **5.3 Marriage Versus Career**

A major dilemma facing many women in contemporary society is whether to have a career or marriage. While women are increasingly able to achieve both, it requires substantial juggling. Moreover, in order to have a proper career, women, like men, need education and/or training, which inevitably delays their marriage and decision to have children.<sup>15</sup> In the present study, the main concern of the teachers appeared to be linked with the notion that adolescent Muslim girls were forced into an arranged marriage at the cost of their career. Some believed that Muslim girls preferred marriage to a career:

I think for the majority of girls here, they wouldn't be thinking of a career. No, they think marriage is very very important and this is what I find as a head of year very very difficult. One never knows when one is going to need a career to fall back on to. I try to encourage them to study because even if they are not able to use their studies when they leave here - that they have to stay at home and have a future that has been mapped out by their family - who knows what is going to happen in several years time. If they have an arranged marriage and if their partner dies and if there isn't anybody to protect them and look after them and they have to support their family, they could do that.

*(Elizabeth Robinson, Head of Year 11, Blossomdale Girls)*<sup>16</sup>

These views were, however, inconsistent with those of the girls who wanted a marriage and also a career, though not necessarily in this order. They were also cognisant of the value of education as a contingency device:

I would opt for an arranged marriage. I don't know any boys and I'd rather leave it to my parents. But I don't want to get married when I am 16 or 17. I'd like to wait till I've finished my education and have a job. If you have a career

and then if you have a problem with your marriage, you can stand on your own feet.

*(Rahat Basheer)*<sup>17</sup>

The parents also appeared to value education and believed that attaining education and having a career was the best thing their daughter could do (see p. 220). Furthermore, they were willing to postpone their daughters' marriage until the girls had completed their education:

Parents arrange their daughters' marriage early because they don't want the anxiety of having to look after them when they are grown up. But if the girls are good and careful, then one can wait a little longer. God willing, if she studies well, we will let her complete her education and then think about her marriage.

*(Nuzhat Kareem's mother)*<sup>18</sup>

The concern expressed by Nuzhat Kareem's mother is also documented by Jeffery (1976:34) who notes that during the upbringing of a daughter, her parents must take great care that nothing occurs which might cause a proposal of marriage to be rejected. Any hint of romantic attachment on her part would probably result in such a rejection and would also reflect badly on her younger sisters and make their marriages difficult to arrange.

Despite such concerns, most parents sufficiently trusted their daughters to let them work before marriage, if they chose to do so, which showed the fallibility of some teachers' assumptions:

In our culture, a girl's marriage is arranged as soon as she finishes her education. But every parent holds a different view. I think, she should get a proper education, take up a job if she likes and then we will think about her marriage.



*(Shireen Kaleem's father)<sup>19</sup>*

However, some of the teachers, which included the Muslim teachers in the sample, were sensitive to the fact that though marriage was very important to these girls, yet they would like a career as well:

I think often, the Muslim girls themselves, like most other girls do, think that the career is the first step and then marriage will come along as well, if an arranged marriage hasn't been sorted out previously anyway. But they also know what they are expected to think, to believe, is often that marriage is the most important thing: to take care of the next generation, to keep the family tradition going. But in the meantime, maybe they can have a career and bring in money for the family.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsvie Comprehensive)<sup>20</sup>*

Nevertheless, a Muslim teacher observed that the need for a career was associated not just with a desire to work, but was a prerequisite if a girl married someone in the country of origin and wanted him to come and live in Britain:

For the last few years, more and more girls are having to get jobs because of the situation of arranged marriages and having to get husbands across from Pakistan. So, from that point of view careers are important because if they want to marry someone who is not British, they have to have a job. Also, I think, more and more parents are realising now that yes, marriage and career do mix and more and more girls are having proper careers rather than just going into a sweat shop.

*(Shahid Rehman, Science Teacher, Hillsvie Comprehensive)*

Brah and Shaw (1992:24) also point out that the immigration rules stipulate that women (or men) wishing to bring their spouses over to live in Britain must be able to support them without recourse to public funds. Thus, families are often divided

across continents due to these laws and husbands and wives are separated for quite some time before an entry certificate can be obtained.

Still, some teachers understood that the choice of a career was dependent not just on the girls, but also the parents:

It depends very much upon family background and expectations from their parents. They'll say, 'Yes, there will be a marriage for me - I expect to do that; I want to do that - but at the same time, I want a career as well'. We seem to have an increasing number of girls who want to do both.

*(Dominic Taylor, Deputy Head, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*<sup>21</sup>

It is evident that though Muslims perceive marriage to be the ideal destiny of every human being, the data show that contrary to popular belief British Muslims are amenable to their daughters' desire to combine marriage with a career. While none of the adolescent girls in the sample in the present study want an early marriage, they are not anti-marriage. They are career-oriented, but do not want a career at the expense of marriage. They want to have it all: a career, marriage and children. All the girls in the sample said that they would want to have children one day. Significantly, none of the girls wanted big families, though most came from large families themselves, which points to a clear link between women's education and the size of the family. Moreover, very few believed in starting a family soon after marriage and most maintained that they would want to wait until they had a successful career. Whether they will succeed in combining marriage, motherhood and a career is yet to be seen, but they aspire to it, however unrealistic it may seem. Other studies have also shown that young women from the ethnic minority population of Britain have positive attitudes towards work and the family (See, for example, Parmar, 1982; Bhachu, 1991; Mirza, 1992).

#### **5.4 Consanguineous Marriage**

Consanguineous marriage refers to marriage between two persons who have the same lineage. There is a cultural tradition of such marriages in certain parts of the world, i.e. in North Africa, the Middle East, the sub-continent of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and in Japan. It is, however, a social rather than a religious convention and in certain countries all religious groups prefer it: in South India, for example, it is favoured by Christians, Hindus and Muslims alike.

Consanguineous marriage arouses powerful prejudices. In some cultures it is seen as close to incest, in others as highly desirable. Our present knowledge of its genetic and social implications is extremely scanty and while acknowledging this a World Health Organisation expert group has concluded that an attempt to discourage consanguineous marriage on genetic grounds would do more harm than good. It is thought that consanguinity increases the chance that two carriers of the same recessively inherited condition will mate and so multiplies the birth rate of children with recessively inherited diseases. Yet, medical consensus on the subject has not yet been developed (Modell, 1990) and there is no conclusive evidence to support this statement.

The girls in the sample in the present study were aware of, and the vast majority respected, the tradition of consanguineous marriage. Most of them said that they would like to marry someone living in Britain and someone from their extended family, though not a first cousin. They hoped to marry a man who was only a few years older than themselves, who was socially and educationally their equal, if not superior and who had good career prospects (cf. Leonard and Speakman, 1986). Two girls were already engaged to be married.

Ballard (1978:188) notes that Muslims prefer marriage with close kin and siblings and cousins often promise their children to one another long before they reach



marriageable age and there may be a long standing obligation to bring over a fiancé/e to Britain. Yet, none of the girls in the sample in the present study fell into this category and the two who were engaged only appeared to have got engaged in the last year of their compulsory schooling, when they were 16. They may have got engaged *long before* they had reached marriageable age according to the Western notion of marriageable age where most girls seem to marry in their twenties and thirties, but according to Islamic ideology, a girl is marriageable when she reaches puberty and it is then up to her parents to decide when she should get married.

Though the parents of these two girls were not planning to arrange their marriage until they had completed their education, yet it was reassuring for them that they had found a suitable match for their daughter, and were, therefore, closer to fulfilling a religious obligation. One girl was engaged to a cousin in Pakistan, but the reason for this engagement was not as simplistic as importing a fiancé from Pakistan. The elder sister of this girl was happily married and settled in Pakistan. Like her, the younger one was engaged to someone who was considered suitable for her by her parents and the fact that he happened to be a first cousin was incidental to this consideration. This was clear from the father's statement:

Islam hasn't placed any restrictions. Muslims can marry any other Muslim. My sister has a son and she would like him to marry Raheela. He is in Pakistan and is studying for a BA. We have chosen him not because he is my nephew but because we think he is suitable for her.

*(Raheela Noor's father)*

The other girl was also engaged to a first cousin, albeit, in Britain. The match was, typically, arranged by the parents who also took into account the choice of the young people:



He is family: my sister's son. You will know, we Pakistanis get married to cousins. They both like each other.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother)*

I am engaged and will get married in a few years. I am happy with it because he is in England. I wouldn't want to marry someone living in Pakistan because he wouldn't understand someone who has lived in Britain and has grown up here. My mum chose him. He is my cousin: the son of my mum's sister. I am happy with it because he understands me and we get along.

*(Arifa Mahmood)*

Arifa was not the only one who wanted to marry someone living in Britain. Several others felt the same way:

I would like to marry someone in Britain because he'd be more like you and would understand you better. But someone in Pakistan - since they have grown up in a totally different society - maybe you'd find it difficult to get along with them.

*(Seema Tanveer)*

Some, though, were ambivalent:

If he was British-born and was brought up here, he would know how I think and would have known and done the same things as me. If it was someone from Bangladesh, you'd have to explain everything to him. But the good thing about someone from Bangladesh would be that he won't be like the men here: even some Asian men here go out with women.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

Despite such ambivalence, the notion of marrying someone living in Britain appeared to be quite popular with these girls.<sup>22</sup> A few girls in the sample in the

present study maintained that they would not want to marry a relation, whereas a few others had no objection to marrying a first cousin as they felt it would be advantageous:

We marry cousins. I think it's closer and more secure. You won't be kicked around and also the girl's parents know what the boy has been doing and if he has been going out with other girls.

*(Samina Hameed)*

As illustrated by the comment above, the perceived security of a consanguineous marriage is the main reason for choosing to have such a marriage as far as most girls in the sample are concerned. Modell (1990) argues that consanguineous marriage is protective for women in the cultures in which it is practised. In India, for example, bride burning (on account of insufficient dowry)<sup>23</sup> does not occur in areas where consanguineous marriage is common and parents-in-law have blood ties with their daughter-in-law.

Still, it made no difference to some others in the sample whether the man they married was a first cousin or no relation as long as he were suitable in every other way and they liked him:

I might marry a cousin if I liked him, but I wouldn't marry someone just because he was my cousin.

*(Nasreen Butt)*

Nevertheless, as far as the parents were concerned, the majority of them wanted their daughters to marry a cousin or at least a kin. The reasons given for this stance ranged from retaining ties with the extended family to a knowledge of the young people's background and family intervention in case of problems in the marriage:

We tend to get married to relatives. If it is not possible with a cousin, then it is to someone in the *biradari*. But getting married, particularly for girls, to someone totally unknown to the family is out of the question. However, as far as getting married to a relation is concerned, you don't arrange your daughter's marriage to a cousin - your brother's or sister's son - who is not worthy of your daughter just because he is a cousin. You only do so if a boy is suitable and if your daughter agrees to marry him.

*(Zubaida Saeed's mother)*<sup>24</sup>

The others were flexible to the extent that they were prepared to consider a young man as their prospective son-in-law as long as they knew his family well. Needless to say, they all wanted their daughters to marry a Muslim from the same country of origin as themselves, partly for religious reasons and also because it increased compatibility. Most parents wanted their daughters to marry someone in Britain. This, however, presented a dilemma for some of those parents who had few relatives in Britain, and none of them eligible, and yet they preferred their daughters to marry a relation. When the paradox of this situation was pointed out to them, most altered their earlier statement and maintained that they would not mind whether their daughters married someone in Britain or Bangladesh/Pakistan as long as he was suitable in every way. Only two parents still wanted their daughters to marry someone in Pakistan because of the absence of any relatives in Britain. The reason again appeared to be the knowledge of the background of the prospective spouse, thus indicating love and concern for their daughter:

Frankly speaking, if he were suitable in every way, then we wouldn't worry whether he were a relation or not. We would like her to marry someone in Pakistan because we are on our own here: we have no relatives here and don't know very many people.

*(Rahat Basheer's mother)*<sup>25</sup>



Some parents had a consanguineous marriage themselves and their desire to arrange such a marriage for their children was, understandably, based on this successful precedent in the family:

I'd say always [marry] in the kin. There is every advantage in it; no drawback at all. My wife is my first cousin: the daughter of my mother's sister. Her sister is married to my brother. We feel it is better and safer to marry relatives. A girl from another family cannot always adjust in your family. Also, in our old age, only a daughter-in-law from our own family would look after us.

*(Nuzhat Kareem's father)*

This expectation of the parents to be looked after by the son and daughter-in-law, which is an important feature of the Muslim culture, appeared strange to some of the indigenous British teachers. Moreover, they marvelled at the fact that the young people respected this expectation:

The father and mother like to live with the eldest son, so the wife should be of parents' choice. This does limit the choice of the boys. I've had discussions with boys. They don't want their wives to be educated; they don't want to marry girls who have been brought up in this country; they want to marry girls from their own village and family.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)*

Ballard (1978:188) writing about Sikh families also notes that some Sikh boys and their families feel that it is preferable to find as a wife and daughter-in-law a girl who has grown up in a Punjabi village uninfluenced by British ways. Such a girl will know how to behave modestly, to work hard, to be obedient and to bring up children properly. Others disagree, pointing to the problems arising due to a wide disparity in



education and outlook of the couple. Similar conflicting views were expressed by the girls and the parents in the present study.

Still, it appears that Ms. Smith was not the only teacher in the sample who had discussions with the pupils regarding consanguineous marriage. Several other teachers mentioned discussing it with the pupils and also having reservations about this tradition. This attitude of the teachers seemed to have been transmitted to some of the girls too:

I wouldn't like to marry a first cousin, but I wouldn't mind marrying a relation.

If you marry a first cousin, there are disadvantages - the genes - the children become handicapped.

*(Raheela Noor)*

Raheela, who was engaged to a cousin, could not elaborate on her assertion regarding the genetic implications of a consanguineous marriage. Evidently, these girls' beliefs stemmed from their discussions with some of their teachers and peers and what they read, saw or heard in the media about this custom. Still, it was obvious that the majority of parents and girls favoured consanguineous marriage and they had rational explanations for taking this stance, based on the desire to choose a compatible spouse and a belief in the success of such marriages.

### **5.5 Intermarriage**

All societies are, to a certain extent, both exogamous and endogamous. The exogamy rule is almost always applied in reference to one's immediate relatives, while there is always an outer limit beyond which marriage is considered improper or downright prohibited (Cerroni-Long, 1985:25). However, inter-racial and inter-religious marriage is a sensitive area and even today, in many societies, this kind of intermarriage is regarded with disfavour. Although people may be tolerant of others

marrying outside their group, yet members of one's own family are almost always dissuaded from considering such a marriage.

People consider intermarriage for a variety of reasons. Some willingly rescind or attenuate the ties with their primary group of affiliation and part with their original religious community because of conversion or loss of faith. Others, in increasingly identifying with the majority group and in accepting their values, contemplate intermarriage as a desirable strategy leading to integration. Still, others choose intermarriage to obtain specific rewards that can be social, economic or psychological. Personal deviancy is another reason whereby individuals may have an image of themselves as unusual, non-conformist, free-spirited, adventurous individuals and unconsciously try to confirm this with their actions (Cerroni-Long, 1985:36-39)

Circumstances like immigration, in which the only potential marriage partners are to be found outside one's group can easily lead to out-marriage, though immigrant groups might resist it. For example, if Japanese immigrants in the United States could not receive 'picture brides' from Japan, they went without marrying rather than intermarry (Kitano, 1969:62). The vast majority of adolescent girls and parents in the sample in the present study also disapproved of intermarriage and appeared to prefer marriage with someone in the country of origin, rather than consider out-marriage.

Only a negligible proportion of girls in the sample did not see anything wrong in marrying a non-Muslim, and felt that religious differences would not matter if an individual really wanted to marry someone. However, even these girls would not contemplate such a marriage for themselves, evidently to avoid the displeasure of their parents and the extended family:

If a boy marries a non-Muslim girl, it's OK, but if a Muslim girl marries a non-Muslim boy then it's seen differently. If you really like someone, it doesn't matter which religion they are, but most Asian people or Muslim people don't see it that way. I wouldn't want to marry a non-Muslim.

*(Raheela Noor)*

Research conducted by Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1991:47) also shows that while young Asians might be willing to marry outside their own group, most of them do not wish to do so for the very purpose of avoiding conflict.

The vast majority of Muslim girls in the sample in the present study maintained that inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriages did not work as well as intra-ethnic and intra-religious unions. The couple would have different mores and norms and the children they might have would not know which religion to follow:

You can't marry if one of you is Muslim and the other Christian: you'd have two different beliefs and you'd be arguing the whole time. You ain't much of a Muslim if you do that anyway.

*(Nuzhat Kareem)<sup>26</sup>*

Brah's (1978) research of South-Asian teenagers also reveals that interracial marriages tend to elicit greatest disapproval and are seen as deemed to fail due to cultural differences and racial prejudice. Nevertheless, some of the girls in the sample in the present study believed that such marriages could work if one of the partners converted. They, however, were thinking in terms of the non-Muslim partner converting to Islam, rather than the other way round:

My aunty is married to an English man and he has become Muslim. It is all right to marry a non-Muslim if they convert, but not if they don't.

*(Parveen Akbar)*

Still, even when a marriage is sanctioned by religious decree, it may face socio-cultural problems. The partners may experience difficulties in interpersonal communication because of differences in their emotional set-up or background. One or both spouses may also develop a sense of guilt as a consequence of their marital choice, especially when this is compounded by the feelings of isolation and alienation that such a marriage is likely to cause. The biggest stresses operating at the level of the couple are without doubt determined by cultural differences. These go from style of linguistic expression to culinary taste and from ideas of gender roles to ways of expressing affection. As a consequence, the mutual adjustment required can indeed be monumental (Kiev 1973:171-76). Many girls in the sample in the present study also believed that intermarriage would necessitate greater adjustment by the spouses:

It sometimes causes problems in the family and maybe a boy or girl has to leave home because of that. And the way you are brought up, you'd have to change yourself for the person you'd marry because he'd have totally different traditions, customs, religion: everything.

*(Seema Tanveer)*

Like Seema, others also believed that intermarriage sometimes induced social ostracism which could lead to divorce:

I don't think a Muslim girl would get on with a non- Muslim. She couldn't live with a non-Muslim as she would with a Muslim. They would get separated or divorced very soon because they'd get bad remarks from people all the time.

*(Khalida Dar)*

Cerroni-Long (1985:42) also argues that the problems encountered by the couple at interpersonal level are often compounded by the stresses inflicted on them from the outside, be it by their original or new reference groups, society at large or



disapproving in-laws. Similarly, the parents in the sample held strong views about Muslims marrying non-Muslims. The vast majority of them categorically asseverated that Islam did not permit a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man, though Muslim men could marry Christian or Jewish women. Others, however, felt that such marriages could work if one of the partners converted, but, like their daughters, they were thinking in terms of the conversion of the non-Muslim partner:

Islam forbids it. Muslim girls can only marry Muslim boys, though Muslim boys can marry Christian or Jewish girls.

*(Raheela Noor's father)<sup>27</sup>*

Like the girls, many parents stressed that intermarriages did not last long due to religious and cultural differences:

No, it's not right; our religion doesn't permit it. Also, I've never seen such a marriage to be successful. The majority of such marriages break up within a few years. It goes for both Muslim girls and Muslim boys.

*(Nasreen Butt's father)*

Still, some other parents expressed considerably powerful emotions regarding inter-religious marriage:

It is the worst thing that they can do. It's a disgrace to abandon this religion to marry someone from another religion. It is better for a boy or a girl to die rather than marry a non-Muslim.

*(Shahida Rasheed's mother)<sup>28</sup>*

While such strong views have not been reported in the literature, research conducted by Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1991:160-162) does reveal that Asian parents see no benefit in the proliferation of intermarriage, mostly due to differences between the groups in culture and tradition. These parents are anxious that

socialising with the indigenous group might open the way to intermarriage and complete separation of individuals from their culture. This partly explains why the parents in the sample in the present study insist that their children stay at home in the evenings and do not get involved in activities that keep them away from home for any length of time.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Marriage, like all other religio-socio-cultural institutions is a dynamic phenomenon, though to what extent it can change depends on different groups and the way they regard this institution. While British Muslims are willing to adopt, adapt and modify their age-old traditions, the intrinsic nature of marriage remains relatively unaltered, as it is still seen as a necessary act in the life of a human being. This was evident from the data in the present study which revealed that all the parents wanted their children to marry and all the girls were willing to marry and actually looked forward to it.<sup>29</sup> Even those with divorced parents did not reject marriage and felt it could be something worthwhile. While marriage in the West appears to be losing its appeal, it remains popular in essence with Muslims who perceive it as the only basis of family life and legitimate sexual relations.<sup>30</sup>

Arranged marriage, an area frequently propagated by the media as a tyranny, is nevertheless, highly favoured by all the parents and the vast majority of girls in the sample. These girls have faith in their parents to choose the most suitable spouse for them and the parents are clearly committed to this cause. Most teachers, however, regard the custom of arranged marriage as oppressive and cannot envisage two young adults being led by their parents into marrying someone without prior romantic involvement. Evidently, the teachers' perceptions of marriage are based on entirely different sets of rules, whereby it is seen as a private affair of two autonomous adults. They, however, fail to appreciate that in any society, marital

choice is made within the framework of that society, whereby the criteria set are still met.

These adolescent Muslim girls have multiple aspirations. They want to attain educational credentials, have a career, get married and have a family. The social change resulting in couples living together outside marriage in contemporary Western society has not affected them. Their paradigm of marriage is not the indigenous model, but a negotiated model incorporating features of Asian and British cultures. These girls are active participants in the construction of this model. Still, though they are not passive recipients of cultural legacy, they are cognisant of the extent of negotiation and are aware that the religious perimeters are absolute. Whether to have a consanguineous marriage is negotiable, but intermarriage is beyond the perimeters and might lead to ostracism.

The perennality of changing needs and circumstances induces changes in attitudes and behaviour and subsequently in values. Still, in any society, marriage and its related aspects are the last phenomena to alter, as a variation in marriage patterns brings about acute changes in group structure and identity. People in most societies, therefore, resolutely retain the traditions and customs associated with marriage: Muslims are no exception. However, the extent and nature of change in marriage patterns amongst British Muslims would largely depend on religious prescriptions on marriage and how they are interpreted, as marriage for Muslims is not just a social custom, but also a religious obligation. The choice of a marriage partner has implications for their multiple identities: their educational and career identities as well as their religious, social and cultural identities. The girls in the sample have multiple aspirations, which they neither see as quixotic, nor mutually exclusive. They are optimistic of realising these multiple aspirations to have a happy life in the future.

**SECTION III.**

**CHAPTER SIX.**

**THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SCHOOLING.**

**CHAPTER SEVEN.**

**THE ACADEMIC DIMENSION OF SCHOOLING.**



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SCHOOLING

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the last section, I examined the dynamics operating primarily within the home that affect the experiences and aspirations of adolescent Muslim girls. This section of the thesis aims to explicate the factors inside the school that are instrumental in shaping the educational, social and career ambitions of these girls. While a central aim of education is to organise the school in such a way that *all* the pupils are educated to the full extent of their potentialities, an equally important educational goal is the integration of the pupils in the social life of the school (Hargreaves, 1967:184). Yet research and league tables show that neither of these goals are achieved at some schools. This is particularly true in the case of girls' education. This chapter investigates the social dimension of schooling by illuminating some of the aspects associated with the social life of school in the light of my data. Accordingly, I shall explore the girls' enthusiasm for school, their friendship choices, special responsibilities assigned to them and their participation in extracurricular activities and their relationship with teachers. These factors constitute the major part of the pupils' social world in school and only by understanding them can we properly ascertain the nature of these girls' aspirations.

The school lives of adolescent girls have been chronically under-researched and their failure to achieve their potential had been, for a considerable period, hardly noticed, let alone studied (King, 1971; Shaw: 1976; Delamont, 1980). In most societies, role-expectations differ, but are still gender-based. Indeed, in many societies, boys are expected to be strong, competitive, successful and unemotional. Girls, on the other hand, are supposed to be docile, warm, loving, supportive and

not overtly ambitious. These stereotypical expectations can have implications for girls' education.

Gender, class and race affect the girls' experience of education in a variety of ways. Arnot (1986) observes that the development of girls' education in Britain, initially, had a different impact on middle class and working class women. Education and the increasing work opportunities it offered gave middle class women the freedom to break away from their family situation as well as access to university education and to the newly developed professions like teaching and nursing. As far as working class women were concerned, education gave them the opportunity to aspire to non-manual occupations, such as clerical and office work and to take up jobs where basic literacy was required. This shows that educational opportunities, though available to all girls, led to different experiences and aspirations depending on the social class to which they belonged. Even today, this situation is being perpetuated to some extent.

Delamont (1980:58), discussing the literature on adolescent girls, sees a widening gap between those, mainly working class in origin, who are eager to leave school at the minimum age; and the minority, mainly middle class in origin, who intend to take A'levels or continue with their education beyond the compulsory leaving age and train for careers. Nevertheless, the present research portrayed an entirely different picture: almost all the adolescent girls in the sample, who can be termed as predominantly of a working class background, did not intend to leave at the statutory age, but wanted to go into further education. In this respect, these working class girls had, what might be called, middle class aspirations.

Race is another element that influences the way children experience education. Britain is a multi-racial society. Though ethnic minority parents in Britain, as a whole, regard British education as a potentially good education (Tomlinson, 1985), yet they are concerned that, in their judgement, their children do not reach their full

potential in schools. Teachers often have lower expectations of ethnic minority pupils (Dorn, 1985; Bryan et al. 1987), hold unconscious stereotyped views about them (Verma and Ashworth, 1986) and rate them worse than indigenous pupils (Ingelby and Cooper, 1974). Ethnic minority pupils are given more attention by the teachers only in terms of discipline and punishment, particularly in the case of pupils of African-Caribbean origin (Brittan, 1976; Wright, 1986; Williams, 1987; Mac an Ghail, 1989). The opposite, however, is true of children of Asian origin, who are likely to keep a low profile in school; are seen as meek, passive and docile; and are systematically ignored (Brah and Minhas, 1985; Mac an Ghail, 1989). Policies of some LEAs also appear to disadvantage children of Asian origin (Tomlinson, 1992). Moreover, British Asian parents and children are alleged to have unrealistic educational and career aspirations (see, for example, Beetham, 1967; Rack, 1979). Similar claims were made by some teachers in the present study.

Nevertheless, most ethnic minorities in Britain attach a great deal of importance to, and show a high degree of enthusiasm for, education. It is perceived as an asset and a medium for upward social mobility.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the literature on ethnic minorities indicates that education is seen variously as a vehicle to achieve independence; a commodity which allows females to enter into relationships with males on equal terms (Riley, 1985); a way of postponing arranged marriage (Sharpe, 1976; Ladbury, 1977) and an insurance policy (Shaikh and Kelly, 1989).

In addition to gender, class and race, religion is another factor that can have a profound impact on the educational experiences of children. This is particularly applicable to those religious groups who are committed to live their life according to the tenets of their religion: the majority of British Muslims fall into this category. While religion does not impede people in the same way as biological differences and socially constructed categories, such as gender, race and class, do, it may, nevertheless, require them to live their life in a certain way. Hence, this could effectively impose taboos and preclude certain options and areas of study. For

example, some Muslim parents, while eager to educate their children, oppose sex education, mixed PE and swimming and uniform that exposes parts of the body; others are against coeducation and want segregated schooling. Some even want separate schools to be established for Muslim children,<sup>2</sup> where religious teaching can be combined with the secular.

When seen in isolation, gender, race, class and religion, each imposes some limitations on the extent to which individuals can realise their aspirations. However, their cumulative effect can, indeed, be phenomenal, particularly on the female gender. Yet despite substantial constraints and discrimination, it appears that most girls, by and large, enjoy their experience of education and like coming to school (cf. Wade and Souter, 1992:62).

## **6.2 Enthusiasm for School**

School not only constitutes the major learning milieu of the pupils, but makes up a significant part of their social world as well. However, pupils' attitude to school is dependent on a variety of factors. Literature on adolescent boys shows that the more able pupils have a greater tendency to be committed to the school values, have a more regular attendance and a deeper participation in school activities. They like school and the teachers, to whose expectations they conform, whose values they support and whose approval they seek (Hargreaves, 1967:159). However, there are others, not so able and from a working class background, who dislike school (see, for example, Willis, 1977). While the majority of adolescent girls, especially in the working class, do not dislike school as much as their male contemporaries, they still reject anything it can offer them at the earliest opportunity (Delamont, 1980:70). Nevertheless, the adolescent girls in the sample in the present study, mainly working class, and with ability ranging from high to low appeared to have a genuine liking for school. This finding was endorsed by the parents and the teachers.<sup>3</sup>



However, there were certain phenomena in school that the girls in the sample in the present study disliked. For some, racist children and racist or incapable teachers were a cause for concern. Other factors mentioned were the absence of a fifth-year common room, some of the strict rules and having to do PE with boys. Three girls in the sample, though, did not dislike anything about their school.

Still, adverse factors appeared not to mar their enthusiasm for school. The girls unanimously asserted that they liked coming to school. The reasons mentioned by some included good teachers, inspiring lessons and the friendly atmosphere in general. A few remarked about the absence of overt racism; the opportunity to swim, which they did not get elsewhere; the chance to interact with boys, in the case of the mixed schools; and better opportunities to study a diverse range of subjects, in the case of the girls' school.

Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority attributed their enthusiasm for school to the fact that they met their friends there and were able to 'muck about' with them,<sup>4</sup> though many of them considered education and learning to be an important component too:

I like it when there isn't a lot of pressure on me. I used to love it in my first and second years, but now - with all the course work and everything - I can't say I actually love school. But I like coming to school because I get to see all my friends here. When I leave, I probably won't see most of them. I also like the teachers; I enjoy their teaching.

*(Alia Ashraf)*<sup>5</sup>

Two girls also mentioned the freedom that they got in school, as compared to home, to be one of the reasons for their liking:

It's not so much the work that we do, but friends. And I get more freedom at school.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

Two others revealed that they liked coming to school because it gave them the opportunity to get out of the home:

It [school] is a change from being at home. My parents aren't strict, but when I go home, I start studying and even if I am not studying, I stick to home; I don't like going out. If my parents say, 'Let's go out', it's always with them, never with your mates. In school, you get to mix with everybody and have lots of fun.

*(Nuzhat Kareem)*

The comments above clearly show the importance the social environment of school has for these adolescent girls. While they feel happy and loved in their homes, they enjoy the social interaction with their contemporaries at school as they can talk freely to their friends about things they cannot discuss with their parents or siblings. However, only a few teachers appeared to recognise the significance of schooling from the socialisation perspective:

They are always glad to get back to school after a six-week holiday. In a way school can be something more interesting than home. I suppose at home they may not be doing a lot and may not have the opportunity of doing anything interesting.

*(Andrew Phillips, Section 11 Coordinator, Springfield High)<sup>6</sup>*

All the teachers acknowledged that these teenage Muslim girls liked school very much. However, in contrast to the way the girls explained their liking of school, some teachers ascribed it to the fact that, for these girls, coming to school was an escape from home where they led oppressed lives:

I think they like this school. Many of them are resentful that when they leave this building - where they are treated on an equal footing with boys - and go home, girls are told their duties and they say that their brothers do nothing.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)<sup>7</sup>*

The image of a Muslim home as an oppressive arena, where the girls lead lives of suffering because of their gender, appears to be deeply embedded in the minds of some teachers. Nevertheless, they tend to forget that girls and women in many indigenous British families also do more housework than boys and men.<sup>8</sup> Further, as we have seen above (see p. 94), the Muslim girls in the sample view their household responsibilities as part of their training and the parents, despite assigning several household chores to their daughters appear to love and care for them as much as their sons.

All the parents also categorically declared that their daughters liked school. Only one parent thought that it was due to the fact that his daughter could see her friends there; another said (jokingly) that his daughter liked going to school to avoid housework. A few felt that it was due to good teachers or the relaxed, uninhibited environment in a single-sex school that some of them attended. Most parents, however, linked it with the girls' interest in education and keenness to learn:

You like school if you are keen to study. If you didn't want to study, you would rather go on the town or sit at home watching videos. She likes school because she is interested in studies.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother)<sup>9</sup>*

It is clear that since the parents, themselves, are eager for their daughters to achieve a good education, preferably in a single-sex school, they appear to believe that the girls like school for the similar reason. Further, as the girls enjoy various

home-based pastimes and seem perfectly contented and cheerful at home, it is hardly surprising that the parents disregard the social component of schooling.

When the parents were asked what they, themselves, liked the most about their daughter's school, many were happy with the fact that their daughter could learn her heritage language, Urdu or Bengali, at school and choose it as a GCSE option. Some mentioned good teachers and a high academic standard. Others expressed their satisfaction in the fact that their daughter was allowed to wear *Shalvar Kameez* in school or that she could study in an all-girls' school. The parents were deeply concerned about their adolescent daughters' moral education and wanted the girls to retain their religion and culture. For this reason, the vast majority of parents expressed their reservations about the teaching of sex education in schools:

This thing that they started a little while ago - sex education - we are very much against it. They will naturally find out about it when they reach adulthood. Why tell them about it now? This is the root cause of crime in society. They start teaching it in the primary school. How awful it is for an 8 or 10 year old to think about these filthy things: for they are filthy to us outside marriage.

*(Razia Zia's mother)*

The parents were happy to leave the academic side to the teachers as most of them did not understand the mechanics of schooling. Nevertheless, despite their limited knowledge of the education system, all the parents appeared to have high expectations of their daughters. They motivated their daughters in a variety of ways, the most important of which was by making sure that the girls attended school regularly. Since all the girls in the sample liked school very much, and their parents encouraged them, they obviously had a high attendance rate. High attendance level is seen as a criterion of success; a behavioural indicator for enthusiasm for the school among children and parents (cf. Hargreaves, 1967; Smith and Tomlinson,



1989). Though there was a range of ability amongst the girls in the sample in the present study, yet even the less able girls had an attendance rate comparable to that of the able girls, thus connoting their ebullience for school.

The majority of the adolescent girls maintained that they only ever missed school if they were ill. One girl said that she came to school even if she had a cold, because she did not want to miss lessons. Another, though, missed school if she found a lesson boring or if she had to catch up with her course work. Only one girl in the sample had been away from school several times during the year as she frequently had to accompany her chronically ill mother to the hospital. The girls' statements were confirmed during interviews with their parents. By and large, the girls were regular in attending school. This could be explained in terms of parental pressure to attend school, thus inculcating in the girls the significance of education. The girls appeared to recognise the importance of attendance in realising their educational aspirations. Further, since the low ability girls appeared to be as keen to attend as the able girls, the social dimension of school should not be underestimated.

However, there was a great deal of inconsistency between the comments of the teachers and those of the pupils and the parents regarding the pupils' attendance. The teachers' perceptions were, apparently, based on prior stereotypes, whereby they claimed that these adolescent Muslim girls stayed away from school for long periods and went on extended holidays to the country of origin, since the Muslim parents did not recognise the importance of education:

You get attendance problems and by the fourth and fifth year, this can be a real pain. A lot of it is this constant intermittent absence. There are children who never do a complete week. They are either sick or go somewhere or the mother is sick and they have to look after the children: it's domestic. Sometimes, the girl herself is quite happy not to come into school. It's a problem trying to get the parents to realise that they have to send

their children to school. Very often you find that they have been through the entire school system here, but in fact, they have been missing for six months at a time more than once.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')<sup>10</sup>*

Smith and Tomlinson (1989) also note that pupils of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin have a poor record of attendance. They observe a clear and consistent relationship between attendance and social class: attendance of the higher groups is better than the lower groups. Nevertheless, in the present study, while the teachers thought that the Muslim girls went away on extended holidays to the country of origin, accusations regarding absence of long periods were denied by the girls and the parents. Furthermore, when I studied the Year 11 attendance registers, none of the adolescent Muslim girls in that Year group in the three schools had such long periods of absence which could be attributed to the fact that they had been out of the country. Though some of these girls were, no doubt, spasmodically absent from school, but so were a number of the indigenous girls. Still, the teachers did not mention the absence of the other girls during the interviews and did not appear to see it as a problem. They, however, presumed that all Muslim girls had a poor attendance rate. While it is impossible to substantiate their claims without studying the attendance registers of the last few years for the Years 7-11 in the three sample schools, it can, however, be pointed out that none of the girls in the sample had been to visit the country of origin more than once in her entire secondary school career. The preconceived notion of the teachers about the girls being absent was apparently based on a *different* girl, usually in the lower school, being away every time (see also p. 60).

Still, the teachers, evidently, want the girls, regardless of their ability, to attend school regularly so that they can participate fully in the school activities. Hargreaves (1967:49;30) argues that for the able pupils, there are strong pressures from the staff towards academic achievement and thus towards regular attendance, since

this supports individual and group progress; and both these values are reflected in the norms imposed by the pupils themselves. The less able pupils, however, have a higher absence rate which represents the lack of pressure exerted by the non-academic norms. However, as we have seen above, girls of varied ability seemed to attend school with the same degree of enthusiasm, mainly, if not solely, because they saw their friends there.

### **6.3 Friendship Choices**

Peers are the most important feature of a child's school experience (Lomax, 1978). Once in school, children become part of a social system and are subjected to a variety of influences. Most important of all, they become members of a group of age-mates, most often from the same stream. These groups have values, norms and status hierarchies which every member must take into account (Hargreaves, 1967:183) and their influence on behaviour in schools, inside classrooms and within the local environment should never be underestimated, especially among adolescents who are at a vulnerable age (Reid et al. 1987).

The significance of friendship groups among boys has been widely researched.<sup>11</sup> As far as girls are concerned, Furlong (1976; 1984) forwards the idea of interaction sets presenting them as a more fluid notion of friendship that changes from one context to the other. Nevertheless, others found girls' friendship groups in school operating as important aspects of their members' lives.<sup>12</sup> Similar friendship groups were discovered amongst the adolescent girls in the sample in the present study, though there was some evidence of Furlong's interaction sets as well:

I hang around with Asian girls. We understand each other's problems and we have a laugh. But in my Science lessons, I have all English children in my group and I sit with English girls, so they are also my friends.

*(Tallat Zahid)*

As can be seen from the comment above, these interaction sets only appeared to operate within the context of the classroom and peer groups remained important for their members through which they mediated their school experiences (cf. Delamont, 1990).

In the present study, an interesting pattern emerged regarding friendships in school, as far as the teenage girls in the sample were concerned. Significantly, these were predominantly friendships between pupils of the same sex. The evidence of friendship between boys and girls was negligible and if a few girls in the sample had boys as friends, as opposed to boyfriends, their friendship was confined to talking with them in the presence of a group of other friends. When the girls were asked if they talked or went out with boys, it transpired that those in the single-sex school did not even get the chance to talk with boys, other than those in their family, let alone go out with them. The girls in the mixed schools, however, maintained that they talked mainly with those boys who were in their class. Some of them added that they only talked with boys if they were spoken to or if they had to, i.e. if they were working with them. It was, therefore, hardly surprising that none of the girls in the sample had boyfriends like some of their indigenous peers. The girls' attitude to friendship with boys is clear from the following statement:

I am studying and I don't have time to go out with boys. And even if I did, my religion doesn't allow me and my parents don't approve of it, so, I've got nothing to do with boys.

*(Tabassam Raza)*<sup>13</sup>

The girls are obviously sensitive to their parents' stance regarding boyfriends. They are aware that they are expected to view school as a place where they go to study and that any close relationship with boys, even in school, is taboo. They, therefore, do not want to betray parental trust and jeopardise their education.



As far as friendship with other girls was concerned, all the girls, at first tended to declare that their friendship groups comprised all ethnic groups. Nevertheless, it transpired later that their close friends were all of Asian origin<sup>14</sup> and were Muslim in the majority of cases. Still, there was some evidence of cross-cultural and cross-religious friendships:

One fifth year group, in particular, of seven, was almost inseparable from the first year and there was a Tamil, two Muslim Pakistanis, a Pakistani Christian, an English Plymouth Brethren and two ordinary Anglican English, but it was an intellectual bond. I think they had enough in common in so many other ways and the Asian girls were from families where they were not prevented from taking part in things and one ended up being the head girl and other a senior prefect. So they took a very prominent part in school life. How much they saw each other outside school, I don't know.

*(Valerie Shepherd, 'Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')*

Similar indications were given by a few girls in the sample:

I've also got two close friends who are English and there are a couple other English girls whom I talk to quite a bit. They are not racist. The other girls in my form are. There is a sort of barrier there: all the English girls will sit around one table and the Asian girls will sit around another.

*(Samina Hameed)<sup>15</sup>*

Research (such as, Hargreaves, 1967:7; Ball, 1984:40) indicates that the majority of children select friends of roughly the same ability and only in exceptional circumstances do friendships extend beyond this. However, this was not the case as far as the majority of girls in the present study were concerned, unless living in a country as ethnic minorities is viewed as exceptional circumstances. Though some able girls, like the one quoted above had other able girls, albeit non-Muslim, as their

close friends, their friendship was limited to the boundaries of the school. Hence, these were not friendship groups, but rather interaction sets (cf. Furlong, 1976; 1984) that only operated within the classroom. The adolescent Muslim girls in the sample were not found to go out with the non-Muslim girls after school, nor indulge in the same kind of recreation, away from home, as them.

Smith and Tomlinson (1989:99) argue that friendship patterns result partly from social structures, but partly from individual personality, preferences or interests. However, in the present research, girls of varied abilities, though friendly with those of other ethnic groups still had those girls as their close friends who were Muslim, though not necessarily from the same country of origin:

They are mostly Asian because you can talk to them - about religion and lots of things that we all do at home.

TNB: Do you have any English friends?

Yeah, but I don't hang about with them.

*(Arifa Mahmood)*<sup>16</sup>

Some adolescent Muslim girls found it difficult to make friends with the indigenous Anglo-Saxon girls:<sup>17</sup>

I've got loads and loads of friends: it's not just one. I don't mix with white girls. They are always saying, 'You wanna fag, you wanna do this, you wanna do that'? And if I say 'No, my parents don't allow me', they go, 'Oh! So you are Mummy's little girl. Are you'? While if I talk to my own mates, they are like me; they understand everything I say to them. I can talk freely with them: with others I can't.

*(Nuzhat Kareem)*<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that the biggest factor influencing the friendship patterns of the adolescent Muslim girls in the sample is the similitude of circumstances, mores and values. As Hargreaves (1967:8;168) points out, a person's membership of a group indicates that s/he behaves in ways which are acceptable to other members and that the values acquired in the home and the values held by the peer group reinforce each other. Most girls in the sample have those girls as their close friends who share their way of life (cf. Afshar, 1989; Ellis, 1991; Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1991). These girls have been socialised to live their lives in a particular way. They, therefore, refrain from indulging in similar pastimes as their non-Muslim friends and their friendship with them is confined to the safe environment of the school, where the purpose of their presence is the same as any other pupil.

In the vast majority of cases, there was also a strong tendency for these adolescent Muslim girls to have those girls as their close friends whose families were known to their families. They were, therefore, free to visit these girls and vice versa, albeit, with a member of the family, usually the mother. Such friendships had parental approval and, thus, transcended the school-based interaction sets as the girls could see one another out of school as well:

I am strict: I don't let them [my daughters] go out on their own. They go out with me or sometimes with a girlfriend, but only if I know the girl.

*(Parveen Akbar's mother)*

Hargreaves (1975:89) reminds us that even if individual members do not share the group goals, they must act as if they do, for if they do not conform to the norms, they will be punished by, or expelled from, the group. This appeared to be the case as far as the adolescent girls in the sample in the present study were concerned, as can be seen from the comment of a teacher:

They [Muslim girls] tend to be very very hard on each other, very critical and very demanding of standards of each other, especially in the older groups, thinking in terms of the fourth and the fifth years. If any of the girls do anything which they consider to be morally, you know, not a good thing, then they would band together and become a very strong unit and bring the other girl back to moral, which did surprise me a little bit, because in a sense, we try to integrate them as much as we can and yet they, themselves, are restricting integration.

*(Patricia Fisher, Head of Computing, Hillview Comprehensive)*

Despite such peer pressure to conform to the group norms, it is clear that friendship groups form the structural basis of these pupils' extracurricular life in school (cf. Woods, 1983). Furthermore, these groups not only enrich the present experiences of adolescent girls, but fashion their future lives as well.

#### **6.4 Special Responsibilities and Extracurricular Activities**

Encouraging children to participate in the running of schools appears to be conducive to good attainment, attendance and behaviour (Reynolds et al. 1976; Rutter et al. 1979) as well as to their enjoyment and favourable perception of school life (Purkey and Smith, 1983). Conscientious and dutiful pupils are usually entrusted with specific responsibilities at school. As Hargreaves (1975:235) observes, a leader among pupils is, to the teacher, someone who shares essentially the same values as the teacher, who shows what the teacher defines as a sense of responsibility, who accepts the authority structure of the school, and is the kind of pupil who is appointed a prefect or given a responsible and privileged position. More than half of the adolescent Muslim girls in the sample in the present study had either held a special job in the class or school the year before or were holding such a job at the time of the interview. These were the jobs of Form Captain or Prefect. Further,



some girls had informal duties: for example, at one school, some of them helped the Deputy Head with filing during the lunch break.<sup>19</sup>

Though these adolescent girls efficiently fulfilled the specific duties assigned to them, yet they could only undertake such responsibilities during the school hours. The vast majority of Muslim girls in the three schools were seen going home as soon as the school was over. This effectively minimised their chances of taking part in extracurricular activities. Almost none of the girls in the sample took part in such activities unless they were during school hours or during the lunch break. Nevertheless, it appears that this problem is not exclusive to Muslim girls. Delamont and Galton (1986:177-79) document similar findings about pupils who live a long way from school or go home for lunch and therefore cannot participate in extracurricular activities. They also observe that the so-called clubs, organising extracurricular activities, are actually practices for the school team or preparing for the Christmas concert; some children never join, others try briefly and leave because they do not find them interesting. They conclude that for the majority of pupils, clubs are not a salient part of school life.

As far as the teenage girls in the sample in the present study were concerned, many had taken part in sports like Netball, Hockey or Rounders and had been on the year teams in junior or lower secondary school, but had later dropped out, apparently due to loss of interest or pressure of academic work. Some had even won prizes:

I won a gold medal for Discus, a silver medal for 400 meters and a bronze medal for Javelin. I used to play for my class team.

*(Rahat Basheer)*

Others organised business initiatives and events, such as cross-country running, for charity. Their efforts connoted enterprising and sensitive young women rather than nonchalant and unfeeling pupils who were only in school to receive tuition:

In our business studies lesson we had to organise our own business. We were in groups and I was the manager. We did business for six days and did quite well. We sold ready-made *samosay* in school and made £8 profit which we gave to the school. Also recently, we did 'Afghan Aid Appeal' in school. We did a sponsored silence for two hours during our lessons. We raised £100 for the appeal.

*(Seema Tanveer)*

Most of them had also acted in school plays in junior and lower secondary school and had presented sketches in the school assembly. They had all been on school trips, though these were necessarily day trips; none of them had ever been on a residential trip.

All the parents confirmed that their daughter only took part in extracurricular activities during the school hours and never after school. Some parents added that the girls used to take part in after school activities in the junior school, but stopped in the secondary school, though the parents never forbade them to participate in such activities. Apparently, the girls were aware of the tacit disapproval of the parents as regards staying back after school, once they were pubescent. They, therefore, refrained from participating in after-school activities as they seemed to agree with the parents.

The girls' failure to take part in extracurricular activities after school annoyed some teachers and they made their own deductions about the reasons for the girls' inability to participate:

Some girls, if you tell them they have a match, they just have to ask at home. But there have been some girls, if I'd ask them to play, they'd ask for a letter to say where they'd be after school and some of them can't play at

all. It's probably not the family doing it; it's the next-door neighbour saying she hasn't turned up at twenty to four.

*(Cynthia Roberts, Head of Careers, Hillsview Comprehensive)*

Still, the teachers are apparently trying to enlarge the social world of the girls. Some, while worried about the lack of initiative on the girls' part, seemed to appreciate the reasons and were prepared to do something about it:

I worry about Muslim pupils not taking part in extracurricular activities that we offer in school; the dramatic productions and the lack of involvement there is of Muslim pupils and Muslim parents in such things.

TNB: What do you think is the reason?

It's because these activities are after school and because Muslim girls are told to get home as quickly as possible; it's because some of our dramatic activities, obviously the rehearsals, take place in the evenings; the performances themselves - the content of the plays and the musicals - are white, Westernised and this is something we are looking at.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsview Comprehensive)<sup>20</sup>*

The concern expressed by some teachers in the sample has also been documented in the literature. Smith and Tomlinson (1989:60) observe that the schools are less successful with South Asians than with other ethnic minority groups as regards extracurricular activities. They, too, attribute it to the fact that a number of school activities, like plays and concerts, are not adapted to Asian cultures and therefore their style or content does not appeal to the pupils and parents of South Asian origin.

It is clear that many girls in the sample are perceived as responsible and trustworthy by the teachers as they are assigned special duties in school, which they fulfil

capably. These pupils are, thereby, playing a role in the management hierarchy of the school. They are not being marginalised in the life of the school. Nevertheless, as far as their parents are concerned, the girls are still vulnerable:

She does take part in activities during school hours, but we tell her to come straight home when the school is over. It is specially difficult in the winter as it gets dark early.

*(Zubaida Saeed's mother)*

However, we should not over-estimate parental role in this respect. There could be other explanations: the girls, themselves, may not want to participate in some of these activities due to religious, cultural or personal reasons. For instance, they may not want to swim with boys because they do not want to expose their bodies; they may not want to take part in certain school plays because of the content of the plays. They may also lose interest in extracurricular activities due to the pressure of academic work or they may not consider these activities as important in shaping their future lives, though they may be salutary for their present. Furthermore, as some teachers pointed out, some indigenous adolescent girls also become uninterested in swimming and games because these activities ruin their make-up and hairstyle. Still, as can be seen from the comments above, while some teachers criticise the home for depriving the girls from taking part in extracurricular activities, others recognise parental concern and are prepared to take positive steps to include the girls in these activities. Since fulfilling special responsibilities and participating in extracurricular activities is conducive to building up the girls' confidence in themselves, it will undoubtedly help them to realise their aspirations.

Carroll and Hollinshead (1993:66-71) note that Muslim boys as well as girls feel shy when they have to wear shorts for PE, they feel guilty about communal showers and either do not tell their parents about it or avoid coming to school on those days, thus missing other lessons as well. To avoid strenuous exercise, some parents



encourage their children to miss school on PE days in Ramadan. There are restrictions put by the parents on extracurricular activities after school as the children have to go to the mosque and also because the parents want the girls to get home straight after school. The comments of the girls and boys in their research show the context, value and relative unimportance of sport and leisure activities in the role of Muslim women. However, Carroll and Hollinshead conclude that as the number of Muslim children have increased, the PE teachers have felt it necessary to alter their policies and allow certain things.

Similarly, Hillview Comprehensive had begun to organise extracurricular activities in a manner that ensured better participation of the ethnic minority pupils (see note 20, p. 290). Similar indications were given by Springfield High and Blossomdale Girls'. This points to an improvement in the knowledge and respect shown by the schools for the culture and backgrounds of the pupils and therefore in teacher-pupil relationships (cf. Foster, 1990:40).

### **6.5 Relationship with Teachers**

Teacher-pupil relationship is an important aspect of schooling. Pupils' acceptance of teachers' authority is vital to effective teaching and learning. However, Reid et al. (1987:94-95) point out that teachers need to remember that there is a subtle difference between authority conferred by institutions and authority earned through good leadership and meaningful teacher-pupil relationships. The latter is related to respect; the former to status. The literature shows that most pupils like variety in lessons, enjoy being taught and being given plenty of encouragement and praise when they do well. Pupils are sensitive of their teachers' opinion of them and will interpret any sign as an indicator of their perceived worth. Teachers, however, are not free from bias. Hargreaves (1975:127) observes that pupils who conform to teacher expectations are seen to possess a wide range of characteristics, while those who deviate possess all the vices. Moreover, teachers, like other members of

society, can be influenced by prejudice, stereotypes, expectations<sup>21</sup> and media images (Wade and Souter, 1992:71).

Rutter (1983), in his theory of effectiveness of schools, argues that though individual teachers vary in their effectiveness, which is partly dependent on the curriculum, yet the school ethos determine whether the teachers will teach effectively. Further, the way teachers manage the classroom - by maximising the amount of time the pupils are engaged in useful learning by engaging their attention, securing orderly behaviour and managing their own behaviour - is crucial to effectiveness.

All the teachers who were interviewed for the present study had experience of teaching Muslim pupils not only in their jobs in the sample schools, but also before they came to teach in these schools. However, it was evident that some of them found it difficult to differentiate between Muslim pupils and pupils from other religious groups originating from Asia. This was particularly true of those teachers who had previously taught in schools with a high proportion of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh pupils, as they tended to lump these three groups together, totally disregarding the diversity between them. These teachers, therefore, had to be constantly reminded during the interview that we were specifically discussing Muslim pupils and not all Asian pupils.

Most of the teachers believed that the presence of Muslim pupils in a teaching group made an enormous difference as they had to be cognisant of the pupils' background, religious and cultural values, linguistic diversity, and differences in experiences:

I think we've got to let them know, let them realise that there are other ways of life, without saying that their way of life is wrong, because it's not. They have also got to be encouraged to remember that's the way of life that has

been chosen for them by their family. We want them to get the best possible education, but still within the bounds of their family units at home.

*(Elizabeth Robinson, Head of Year 11, Blossomdale Girls)<sup>22</sup>*

All the teachers perceived several advantages associated with having Muslim girls in a class. They viewed Muslim pupils as keen, dedicated and respectful and since these girls were not disruptive, they made the teachers' job easier. Muslim pupils also offered another perspective to everything and brought their different experiences to the classroom. This was seen as beneficial to the teachers, who could, then, make sure that the curriculum fitted all pupils and the school benefited from this diversity through a change in the attitude of the teachers and the pupils:

I think, the advantage within the school is the great change in attitudes on part of the school itself and on the part of the teaching profession within the school in the sense that the diversity that they have brought into school is something the school can thrive on.

*(Dominic Taylor, Deputy Head, Hillsvie Comprehensive)*

The Muslim teachers, who were interviewed saw the advantages in terms of being able to help the Muslim pupils who had language difficulties as they could understand and discuss their religion and culture since they shared the language, religion and culture of these pupils:

You can help pupils with poor English by explaining things to them in their own language. That helps enormously.

*(Hasan Munir, Science teacher, Springfield High)<sup>23</sup>*

While the teachers hesitated to use the term 'disadvantages' - and some of them felt there were no disadvantages in having Muslim pupils in the class - many others believed that they faced certain difficulties when they had Muslim pupils in the class. These ranged from the lack of parental understanding of the educational system to

the lack of information available to the teachers about the pupils and, thus, a lack of awareness on their part. Furthermore, they felt that the pupils who had language problems could not cope well in class. Also, since Muslim pupils had had different experiences in life, they could not write about certain things and hence, had to be offered a wider choice of assignments. There were also restrictions on certain aspects of schooling, which for some teachers was tantamount to denial of educational opportunities, (cf. Wade and Souter, 1992:70). These ranged from taking part in extracurricular activities (see pp.158-159) for some of the girls to out-of-school activities, which posed problems when they went on surveys:

The restrictions there seem to be on their out-of-school activities, on their general approach to various things - that to me is the biggest hurdle to overcome. For example, sometimes, we go out of school to do surveys or take them into a shop and all of this is so very difficult to organise, because some of the parents are so strict that we can't do it, so we have to continually cut back and I think this restricts the experience of other children.  
*(Jennifer Davis, Maths teacher, Blossomdale Girls)*<sup>24</sup>

The teachers appeared to associate disadvantages or difficulties with those pupils only who came from uneducated backgrounds. The parents of these pupils were seen as lacking understanding of the education system, imposing restrictions on certain activities of their children and asking for special concessions in uniform and other areas. Not surprisingly, the children of these parents were thought to create difficulties. This indicates the multiple influence of social class, background and education on attitudes:

Some girls - they come from villages and their parents are not educated. Parents' education and background and the home environment makes a difference, not religion and [home] language. If they come from educated families they are the same as other children.



*(Chitra Madan, Home-School Liaison, Blossomdale Girls)*<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, the data showed that though many parents in the sample had little or no education themselves, they encouraged their adolescent daughters to obtain information from their teachers as well as acquire information themselves by consulting educated members of the extended family (see p.187). They wanted their daughters to receive a good education. They might be wary of some aspects of schooling, but once they were reassured about the purpose of these activities and the safety of their teenage daughters, they allowed them to participate in most of them:

I am aware of girls who go home and help with the housework and the lack of opportunity to take part in after-school activities and even before-school activities. They have to be home by a certain time. They have to abide by certain religious regulations. But I've found that if you approach parents and explain to them and give them assurances, they let their daughters participate.

*(Timothy Clark, Head of Year 11, Springfield High)*

It is evident that many teachers genuinely want to help their Muslim pupils as much as any other pupil. They believed that the best way to help Muslim girls at school was to know more about the girls' religion, culture and background; help them to realise their potential; encourage and motivate them; provide them with language; and be caring and sympathetic listeners if they need help:

Some teachers are better at helping Muslim children because they are more sympathetic; they have more realisation of the children's culture and language and more interest in their cultural background.

*(Andrew Phillips, Section 11 Coordinator, Springfield High)*

However, it appears that some teachers, including some Muslim teachers, perceive themselves as the girls' saviours or rescuers. They seem to see problems where none exist. While some teachers believe in recognising diversity, yet providing the Muslim girls with similar motivation and inducements as their indigenous peers, the feeling prevalent among the others is that Muslim girls have low self-esteem and their parents have low expectations of them:

The most important thing is to give them self-esteem. If they can feel important about themselves and feel that their life means something and they are not just something to be passed on to a future husband. A lot of the problems are there because they do not believe in themselves, because they have been made to feel they are inferior.

*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development teacher, Blossomdale Girls')<sup>26</sup>*

These stereotypical notions of the teachers have implications for the teachers and the ethnic minority children whom they teach. The teachers need to face their prejudices, not just racial prejudice, but class prejudice as well, particularly in the case of the Muslim teachers.

While we know that many schools organise courses for their teaching staff to enable them to teach effectively in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious school, the nature, quality, duration and content of these courses varies enormously. Though all the teachers who were interviewed acknowledged that Inservice Education and Training was available at their school, the majority expressed their dissatisfaction with the kind of INSET offered to them, which they did not find very useful.<sup>27</sup> Further, it appeared that only senior teachers were chosen to go for INSET and some teachers in the sample complained that they could not go for INSET most of the time due to the lack of supply cover:

The only course that I went to recently was more like a meeting; we were talked at. We were given worksheets to do, but it did not bear directly to problems that we have.

*(Alison Fraser, Information Technology teacher, Springfield High)<sup>28</sup>*

Nevertheless, despite the lack of adequate multicultural INSET, the vast majority of girls felt that their teachers treated them fairly and in the same way as they treated the indigenous pupils. By and large, the teachers appeared to be kind and helpful and very few girls complained of unfair treatment, with racist overtones, from their teachers:

The teachers are all right except one who is racist. She picks on us and takes sides if there is a quarrel.

*(Shahida Rasheed)*

Still, the majority of these adolescent girls said that most of their teachers marked their work regularly and gave helpful comments to enable them to improve their work. They, however, added that some of their teachers only commented on what they had done wrong, but did not suggest how it could be improved. The teachers encouraged them to work by using various strategies to motivate their pupils. These ranged from verbal encouragement - constantly telling them to work hard as it was for their own good - to setting deadlines for the completion of assignments and refusing to mark the work which was not submitted on time. Some of the girls felt that their teachers always tried to make the work interesting so that all the pupils enjoyed it and were always willing to explain what the pupils found difficult. Others, though, believed that the teachers only pushed high ability pupils who seemed to be interested in working and did not bother with those who were apathetic or of low ability (cf. Teunissen, 1992:98; Mirza, 1992:47):

The teachers treat me differently - I've noticed - because ordinary Asian girls do not aim very high because of their parents. Because they have met my parents, and they know that my parents are broad-minded, they treat me differently. And they know that I've got a chance to go to university, so they encourage me more.

*(Nasreen Butt)<sup>29</sup>*

Despite such comments from some of the girls, all these adolescent girls appeared to like their teachers.<sup>30</sup> The majority of parents also believed that most of the teachers were helpful and treated their daughter in the same way as they treated their indigenous British pupils. Still, a few parents added that some of the teachers who taught their daughter were racist and highly critical of the ways of British Muslims. Nevertheless, all the parents in the sample expected and taught their children to hold their teachers in high esteem (cf. Afshar, 1989). The following comment exemplifies this attitude:

She [My daughter] says 'Mummy, the girls talk rudely to the teachers.' And I say, 'My child, don't pay any attention to them. You must respect your teachers and listen to them'.

*(Parveen Akbar's mother)*

Such parental approach has implications for the girls' future: if they respect and listen to the teachers, they will work hard and advance educationally. Thus the girls internalise these values, behave in class and work diligently (see pp. 173ff.).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have elucidated the social aspect of schooling as perceived by the girls, the parents and the teachers. There seems to be a great deal of incongruity in



the way the Muslim girls' enthusiasm for school is interpreted by the teachers, the parents and the girls themselves. As a consequence of their preconceived ideas regarding Muslim girls, the teachers believe that these girls like coming to school because it is an escape from home. The parents, on the other hand, due to their own high regard for education, are convinced that the girls like school because they are keen to study. Nevertheless, the girls, themselves, in the main, like school because they meet their friends there, though they do mention good education and teachers too.

Many of these adolescent girls do not get the opportunity to see their friends after school. While they would not come into school just to meet their friends, the presence of their friends in school, however, makes it more desirable. It is evident that the school milieu constitutes their social as well as their academic world. Their desire to be in the social environment of the school, in which they appear to find satisfaction has implications for their future lives: the school not only meets their social requirements, but fulfils their educational objectives as well.

The girls' enthusiasm for school, attendance, choice of friends, fulfilling responsibilities in school, stance regarding extracurricular activities and relationship with teachers shows that while they are being influenced by their parents and their teachers, they are not passive recipients of advice. On the contrary, they are actively participating in their social world in which they are learning to manage in ways that give them satisfaction by creating multiple identities for themselves to adjust in various contexts. They have to live within a social structure, so they choose their friends and their extracurricular activities accordingly. They like their teachers, but they do not have the teachers as their role models. This indicates maturity and a social distance as they know they cannot live entirely in the world of the teachers. Yet, neither do they exclusively live in the world of their parents. Instead, they are

creating their own social world and their own identities in a way that will help them to effectuate their aspirations.

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## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **THE ACADEMIC DIMENSION OF SCHOOLING**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The social aspect of school can make the lives of the pupils enjoyable and coming to school a delightful experience. However, the purpose of schooling is first and foremost the imparting of knowledge and providing education. In the previous chapter, I illuminated the social dimension of school and how it shaped the present and future lives of the adolescent girls in my sample. In this chapter, I shall explicate the academic dimension of school and the way the school is meeting the educational objectives of these girls. I shall scrutinise the girls' participation in lessons, accomplishment of homework, choice of GCSE options and desire to go into further and higher education. Looking at schooling from these perspectives will help us to understand its academic dimension and the way it is fashioning the identity and aspirations of these girls.

It has been argued that most pupils of all abilities want to work and see a good teacher to be the one who makes them work (Woods, 1983:57). A survey of more than 800 primary and secondary school children, conducted by Musgrove and Taylor (1969), concluded that above all pupils expected to be taught and to learn in school. The privileged girls in Delamont's (1976:75) private school and the low-ability West Indian girls studied by Furlong (1977:173) also expressed similar views.

The literature (for example, Smith and Tomlinson, 1989) shows that some schools are more effective in helping their pupils to progress academically than others. Furthermore, effectiveness seems to be dependent more on the schools' policies than on the individual qualities of the pupils. While the present study does not intend to investigate school effectiveness, it aims to explore the experiences and aspirations of a group of girls. Whether or not a school is effective has a profound

impact on the present and future lives of its pupils and in shaping their identities and aspirations. It would, therefore, be useful to look at factors that make a school effective.

Reid et al. (1987:24-29), on the basis of research into school effectiveness, break down the findings into 11 categories and show that the effectiveness of a school is related to successful school leadership; effective school management; favourable school ethos; good discipline; efficient teachers and teaching; a balanced curriculum; effective student learning; emphasis on reading; effective pupil care; well maintained school buildings; and a small school size. Which of these categories are crucial as compared to the others and whether a school can still be effective if it lacks some of these is, however, contentious.

Less effective schools tend to be found in areas where children from families with low socio-economic status and the ethnic minorities form the bulk of the school population and this leads to the conclusion that schools can widen the gap in educational results between different social and ethnic groups (Teunissen, 1992). African-Caribbean children are more often found in ineffective secondary (Rutter et al. 1979) and primary (Mortimore et al. 1988) schools than in effective schools.

Nevertheless, effective schools are effective for all the pupils regardless of gender, social background or ethnic origin (Willms and Cuttance, 1985; Mortimore et al., 1988; Smith and Tomlinson, 1989). Furthermore, effective schools are not only interested in enhancing academic qualifications, but they are also concerned with the social and moral development of their pupils and their participation in the day to day life of the school, both inside and outside the classroom. Thus effective schools have a profound impact on the way their pupils' aspirations and identities are shaped. In this chapter, I explore the girls' participation in lessons, accomplishing homework, choosing GCSE options and desire for further education and the data have to be understood in the wider context of school effectiveness.



## **7.2 Participation in Lessons**

Whatever the method of classroom organisation, the quality of pupil learning is always strongly affected by the nature of interaction through which that learning is mediated (Wells and Nicholls, 1985). Attentive pupil behaviour helps to promote effective interaction and subsequent learning. Evidence from research suggests that disruptive behaviour causes more concern to teachers than any other form of deviant behaviour (Dunham, 1977; Blackham, 1978). It destroys the learning process, produces threats to the teachers' established order and cannot be ignored (Reid et al. 1987:86).

When the teachers in the sample in the present study were asked about the Muslim girls' behaviour in class, they all contended that these adolescent Muslim girls were extremely well-behaved and were never impolite or disruptive. Most of the teachers said that these girls were shy, reserved and quiet and needed considerable encouragement to participate in the day to day activities of the class:

Their behaviour is always impeccable. I cannot remember a Muslim girl ever saying anything out of turn. They are perhaps less keen to throw themselves whole-heartedly into sports that they are not sure about and need a lot of encouragement and teasing out of their shells, but once they have got involved, they really take it aboard.

*(Timothy Clark, Head of Year 11, Springfield High)<sup>1</sup>*

A few others maintained that these girls were shy and reserved in coeducational schools and talkative in all-girls schools. Some, however, believed that while these girls were shy and reticent at first, they could be as boisterous and talkative as any other girls when they got to know the teacher, or when they felt safe in a group of close friends:

When there are only two or three Muslim girls in a group, then they are that much quieter, but you can get a year 11 Business Studies group, where may be there are seven or eight Muslim girls, and they will feel more confident because they are in a peer group they can trust and they feel more able to have that security with which to, say, answer questions.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsvew Comprehensive)*

However, one teacher attributed the Muslim girls' shyness to their inadequate English and limited experience of education:

They are very quiet. Sometimes they speak as if they have language problems. Sometimes, I think, they haven't had the same educational experience or they haven't been able to take advantage of this educational experience. They are the ones who won't sit next to the boys, very very shy and you don't have the faintest idea they have understood what you have said.

*(Alison Fraser, Information Technology teacher, Springfield High)*

It is important to point out that Ms. Fraser was the only teacher in the sample who related the girls' shyness with a language deficiency. However, she was not the only teacher to notice that Muslim girls avoided sitting with boys. A Muslim teacher also made this observation:

Muslim girls don't sit next to boys and [Muslim] boys don't sit next to girls; they don't even talk with Muslim girls, but they do talk to English girls. Muslim girls seldom answer questions in class: they are shy in case the boys hear their voice and make fun of them.

*(Noreen Azam, Language Support teacher, Springfield High)<sup>2</sup>*

As far as Muslim girls' attitude to learning was concerned, the majority of teachers believed that these girls were keen and eager to learn; were diligent and

hardworking; were attentive in class; and concentrated on their work, though perhaps just to please the teacher:

We have seen the vast majority of Muslim girls are very very conscientious. Sometimes, they tend to be keen to please through fear of getting things wrong or getting into trouble. I wonder whether their conscientiousness is actually about them wanting to achieve or just wanting to please the teacher.  
*(Dominic Taylor, Deputy Head, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*<sup>3</sup>

Delamont (1976:101) also observes that most pupils share a basic strategy of pleasing teacher. Still, some teachers in the sample in the present study held the view that while some girls showed enthusiasm at first, they became apathetic and lost interest by the time they approached the final years of compulsory schooling, believing it to be the end of their education. These teachers appeared to think that the girls' apathy towards education was linked with parental attitude, whereby education was considered unnecessary for girls:

We have got some very highly intelligent, motivated girls. We've also got some other girls who reach a point, probably in about second year, where they suddenly realise that it's not going to be for them and it is sometimes very hard to keep them motivated because there is obviously talk going on at home and in the family about the girls' future and it's very often seen in terms of getting married.  
*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls)*<sup>4</sup>

Despite some teachers' assumption about the girls getting married at 16, it was found later, that almost all the girls in the sample went into further education and none of them was forced to get married as soon as she left school (see p. 224). Though many were of average ability and achievement, yet they hoped to succeed

in attaining a good education and having a career and appeared to work diligently towards this goal.

The majority of teachers maintained that the Muslim girls' achievement in tests varied as much as any other ethnic or religious group and was dependent on the intellect of individual pupils: the able pupils were high achievers, whereas others showed average performance. None of them, though, showed very poor results in tests, since they consistently worked hard. A few teachers, however, maintained that Muslim girls were generally on top of the class in tests:

In my year group, there are seven Muslim girls and they are all potential A'levels, possibly university entry. They are as able as anybody else and do very well in tests. The fact that they are Muslim, makes no difference to their ability.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)<sup>5</sup>*

Nevertheless, most of the girls admitted that they sometimes got discouraged in lessons, mainly if they had not understood something and either the teacher refused to explain again or they were reluctant to ask for fear of looking stupid. Some of them also felt discouraged if they raised their hand to answer a question and someone else in the group just shouted the answer. Another reason for getting disheartened mentioned by some was when a teacher paid more attention to the bright pupils and ignored the mediocre ones. Teachers, undoubtedly, are under constant pressure to cover the syllabus and this does not leave much time for deliberation and paying attention to all the pupils. They, therefore, may interact more with those pupils who appear bright and willing to participate and ignore the pupils who look uninterested, shy, blank or confused.<sup>6</sup>

Still, unsolicited pupil comments are disruptive in most classrooms. Pupils' responses, therefore, have to be solicited in some way, mostly in the form of



answers to teachers' questions (Delamont, 1976:101). Brown and Wragg (1993:3) distinguish between the cognitive, affective and social reasons for asking questions in conversations dealing with knowledge, feelings and relationships. They, however, point out that the rules of talk in the classroom differ from those in other contexts.<sup>7</sup>

Pye (1988:191) observes that talk and discussion are not just advantageous but indispensable for intellectual growth. However, Flanders (1970) contends that the typical American classroom has 68 per cent teacher talk, 20 per cent pupil talk and 12 percent is lost in silence and confusion. Research reported from all over the world, including Britain (for example, DES, 1975) shows a similar pattern. This suggests minimal input by pupils as far as asking and answering questions, let alone discussion, are concerned.

Still, almost all the girls in the sample in the present study claimed that they actively contributed to their lessons. The majority of them said that they always asked questions in class if they wanted to know something, while some others admitted that they only asked questions if they were stuck and it became necessary. Brown and Wragg (1993:3) observe that we ask questions when we want to know something and if you know the answer than you don't need to ask. Only one girl in the sample in the present study disclosed that she never asked a question in front of the whole class even when she *had* to know something; she either went up to the teacher or waited for her/him to come round the classroom.

The girls' statements, however, were inconsistent with those of the teachers, the majority of whom maintained that Muslim girls were too shy and reticent to ask questions in front of the whole class, though they did ask questions on a one-to-one basis. Some others felt that these girls asked questions in class, albeit, needed a lot of encouragement or they asked questions in all-girls' schools<sup>8</sup> or if the class mainly comprised Muslim or Asian girls. This is evident from the following remark:

I think there is a kind of theory in class that if a girl asks questions, if she puts herself forward for attention, for approval, and it's a mixed class, then she could well be going against the ethos, the behaviour required of her. She can't altogether trust the members of the peer group to stay quiet about things that might be seen as wrong by the community and she knows that information will get home to her parents.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*<sup>9</sup>

Many girls in the sample said that they volunteered to answer the teachers' questions if they knew the answer, though the others admitted that they only answered if the teacher specifically asked them. Again this was discordant with what the teachers maintained, as almost all of them said that the Muslim girls seldom volunteered to answer the teacher's questions; they only did so if asked specifically or when the teacher offered considerable encouragement and motivation.

It is clear that for a variety of reasons girls do not participate in classroom interaction as much as they could or should.<sup>10</sup> Pye (1988:151) maintains that an empowered teacher, able to enlist the cooperation, patience and generosity of pupils in a small group, can guarantee time for hesitation. In large classes, hesitant elaboration of a thought halts momentum and can provoke scorn from the impatient.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the girls in the sample in the present study claimed that they took part in class discussions, though some of them acknowledged that they had to as their teachers made sure that everybody contributed to discussions. Nevertheless, the others said that they only took part in a discussion if they felt strongly about an issue. Still, the majority of teachers felt that most adolescent Muslim girls took part in discussions only in small group situations:

They do take part in discussion more readily if it's a small all-Asian group and they know the teacher. They feel secure in that situation. I know some girls who would never talk about the same topics in a large group, even a large all-girls' group, for a number of reasons: they feel shy; there may be dominant personalities there; some of them may be much more able; that might affect their willingness to talk.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')<sup>12</sup>*

However, one teacher appeared to believe that the reason these girls did not take part in discussions in school was associated with the fact that they led oppressed lives at home:

A lot of them find taking part in discussions very very difficult. May be they are not encouraged to have an opinion of their own. They don't know how to discuss things.

*(Elizabeth Robinson, Head of Year 11, Blossomdale Girls')*

Contrary to what Ms. Robinson thought, the girls in the sample certainly had an opinion on every issue that was discussed during their interviews with me. This phenomenon also manifests itself through the fact that they are able to negotiate privileges, concessions and preferences with their parents (see pp. 211; 221).

Still, even if the girls in the sample appeared reluctant to participate in the oral discourse in the classroom, they all said that they always handed-in written work on time, unless they were ill. Most classroom interaction culminates in a written exercise and the majority of teachers maintained that the written work presented by Muslim girls was always of a high calibre and they took a great deal of care in doing their homework and classwork:

They are very neat, very organised to the extent that their work is sometimes too good, because they spend a lot of time on it. And how they find the

time to do that I don't know, because they seem to have tremendous responsibilities at home waiting on the boys in the family.

*(Patricia Fisher, Head of Computing, Hillsvew Comprehensive)*<sup>13</sup>

Still, one teacher felt that the quality of written work was related to these girls' competence in English:

I get very little accuracy from them. They can't identify mistakes. They are better able to write a load of nonsense that I can't understand and make mistakes that I can't understand how they made. I think this is because their thought processes are different because of the structure of the language: you can't write a letter in English when you are thinking in Urdu.

*(Alison Fraser, Information Technology teacher, Springfield High)*

Once again, Ms. Fraser was the only teacher who viewed bilingualism as an impediment. All other teachers in the sample appeared to perceive the girls' knowledge of another language as an asset and none of them maintained that it had a negative effect on the girls' classwork or homework.

### **7.3 Accomplishing Homework**

Homework is never seen as a pleasure, but always as an unpleasant imposition on the pupils' time; it can be a penalty for working too slowly or forgetting things, but they can be 'let off' if they have been good (Delamont and Galton, 1986:152). However, now, with the introduction of the GCSEs in Britain and a coursework component in most subjects, pupils are required to complete projects over a given period and this makes homework a necessary extension of their classwork.

A good school curriculum is associated with coordinating the required homework with different subject curricula, enhancing the quality of homework assignments and improving parental involvement in students' learning (Levine and Stark, 1981). Pro-



school pupils learn and accept that school time is under the control of the teachers and they can overrule their own plans for spending not only the day, but some of their free time as well. They, therefore, do homework voluntarily and thus their school careers begin to follow a different pattern from those anti-school pupils for whom homework is an imposed punishment, done unwillingly or not at all (Delamont and Galton, 1986:153).

As far as the adolescent Muslim girls in the sample in the present study were concerned, only two girls had no objection to the amount of homework that they got every night. This usually involved two to three hours of work. Additionally, they all had some course work to do. The vast majority, though, considered this amount excessive, but were resigned to the fact that they had to do that much at this stage of their schooling. Most of the girls got no help from their parents in their homework in any of the academic subjects. They, however, received some help with certain subjects such as, Religious Education and considerable help in Urdu and Bengali. Many girls asked one of their older siblings to help them with other subjects, if required:

I don't think - the kind of homework that we get - they [my parents] would know anything about it. What we do in school is different from what they learnt in school. If I need help, I ask my brother.

*(Zubaida Saeed)*

This was confirmed by the statements of the parents:

I don't know very much about the work that she does. Sometimes she asks one of her sisters for help, otherwise she does it all herself. I've got a Matric from Pakistan, but I studied in Urdu. I, therefore, can't help her with her work which is in English.

*(Shahida Rasheed's mother)*

Some parents revealed that they used to help their daughters in the infants' and junior school, but could not do it any more because of the advanced stage of their daughters' education:

I used to help her when she was in the infant and primary schools, because then I could, but it has not been possible since she got into secondary school, as I am not very educated. She sometimes asks me, but I have to tell her to ask her teacher the next day.

*(Nuzhat Kareem's father)*

Newson and Newson (1984) in their longitudinal study on child rearing in East Midlands based on 700 11-16 year old school children found that 47 per cent of middle class children (rising to 53 percent in social class I and II) undertook homework in the evenings, compared with only 18 per cent in the working class. 53 per cent of working class children never did any homework, compared with only seven per cent of those in social class I and II. Nevertheless, in the present study, the data did not reveal such an influence of social class as far as homework was concerned. The girls in the sample, most of whom were seemingly from a working class background undertook homework almost every evening during the week. This suggests a combination of factors at work which include parental pressure, the desire for self-improvement, pleasing teacher and the fear of losing face in class.

Gilbert and Taylor (1991:71) note that several of the working class girls in their research did their homework while watching television, whereas the middle class girls' spare time and television viewing was subjected to more control by their parents. However, the adolescent Muslim girls in the sample in the present study were subject to parental control similar to that of the middle class girls in Gilbert and Taylor's sample: they were told to finish their homework before they could watch television. Once again this points to middle class aspirations and practices of apparently working class ethnic minorities.

Still, despite such practices, some teachers maintained that some of the Muslim girls that they taught had a problem with their homework, which was related to the atmosphere at home which was not conducive to academic work:

The brighter ones do their homework, but on the lower level, I don't think there is much pressure from home to get it done. There isn't this understanding in the home of the homework situation that it is something a child comes home and does and I think the family situation is such that many of them come from very large families and I don't think there is the room to do it. We offer the facility here for them to stay, but because they are bussed off after school straight away, they can't even use the facility here. I mean, we have other children from large families, who aren't Muslim, who will stay and do their homework before they go home because they can't get it done at home. So, you see, they are in a double trap, as it were: they can't use our facility and the home facility is poor.

*(Jennifer Davis, Maths teacher, Blossomdale Girls)*<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, others contended that these adolescent Muslim girls always did their homework which was consistent with what the girls and their parents claimed:

Homework invariably is done and is of a very high quality and I've noticed that if it has to be displayed, it seems to bring some of them out more.

*(Dominic Taylor, Deputy Head, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*<sup>15</sup>

Still, the kind of parental involvement in homework documented by Delamont and Galton (1986:153) which includes parents overseeing homework; checking homework; watching their children do all their homework and do it properly was completely absent in the present study. Nevertheless, as we have seen above (see

p. 181), some older siblings, who had been through the education system here, were involved in this way.

Due to the parents' limited knowledge of the process of education, their association with homework was, by and large, confined to ensuring that the girls did their homework before indulging in any leisure activities and by watching them doing their homework, albeit in most cases, without qualitative or quantitative cognisance of the task. However, it is clear that despite little understanding of education, all the parents in the sample wanted their children to do well at school and attain good academic qualifications.

#### **7.4 Choosing GCSE Options**

Qualifications are extremely important for an individual's future and good examination results can lead to the realisation of a person's educational and career aspirations. In Britain, the successful completion of 11 years of compulsory schooling is marked by passing a certain number of subjects at GCSE level. The higher the ability of the pupils, the more GCSEs they attain with higher grades. Nevertheless, while the GCSEs give the able children a written qualification with which to approach institutions of further education or prospective employers, the less able pupils may not even be allowed to sit for these examinations. The reputation of the school and its place in the 'league table' (cf. Hargreaves, 1967:185) are considered so sacrosanct that pupils with minimal chances of success in the examination can be refused entry. In this way the school can maintain an ostensibly good academic record by depriving the less able pupils of the opportunity of possible academic success.

The school portrays itself as a meritocratic and democratic institution (cf. Woods, 1984) by offering a vast range of subjects as GCSE options. Nevertheless, it is argued that option 'choice' is heavily circumscribed by factors such as streaming,



banding or setting, the perceived ability and motivation of the pupils and their general behaviour (Smith and Tomlinson, 1989; Foster, 1990; Mirza, 1992). Similar criteria were used for determining the pupils' potential for various subjects in the three sample schools in the present study.<sup>16</sup>

The literature over the past decade shows that ethnic minority children often tend to leave school earlier and more often drop out altogether from the education system. Low educational attainment becomes apparent early in their school career and the problem often gets worse during the final years of their compulsory schooling (Steinberg et al. 1984; DES, 1985; Glumpler, 1985; Verma and Ashworth, 1986; Jong, 1987; Boulot and Boyzon Fradet, 1988; Smith and Tomlinson, 1989). Yet the present study portrayed a different picture (see, p. 224).

All the adolescent Muslim girls in the sample in the present study, who were of varied abilities, hoped to take some GCSEs. Significantly, none of them was planning to leave school at the statutory age without any qualifications. The majority of them intended to take between 7-9 GCSEs, though a small minority contemplated taking only 4-6 GCSEs. In addition to the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, they were all studying at least four other subjects.<sup>17</sup>

It was found that at both the coeducational schools these adolescent girls went for options considered suitable for their gender: at one of them many chose subjects such as home economics and child development; at the other, several opted for business studies. The sciences were not a problem any more since the core curriculum required all of them to pursue at least a combined science curriculum. All three schools in the sample offered an integrated or modular science which was being studied by all the pupils. It is difficult to say how many girls would have chosen a science if they had a choice. It appears that very few mixed schools make a conscious effort to motivate girls to choose the so-called 'boys subjects'.<sup>18</sup> The teachers in the present study identified the problem, and while some felt it was

difficult to stop the pupils from making gender-based subject choices at GCSE level,<sup>19</sup> others believed that the difficulty could be overcome through strategic measures:

I would think that they go for the obvious options. They certainly would not be opting for mechanical, male-oriented options. But I've known that to be different in schools where the head of CDT and science departments have said, 'Right! we are going to get some of these girls involved.' And they get as many girls as boys. But this is the result of deliberate manipulation or persuasion by the staff.

*(Timothy Clark, Head of Year 11, Springfield High)*

However, at the all-girls' school, the pupils even chose the so-called boys' subjects:

Because it's a girls' school, they choose options like technology, which many girls don't in mixed schools, which is good for equal opportunities.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')*

Nevertheless, the teachers observed that Muslim girls did not go for options such as PE, drama and other expressive subjects. This was manifest in the fact that in the sample only one girl out of 24 had chosen Performing Arts. Still, at all three schools, the heritage languages and RE were quite popular.

It is argued that generally academic subjects enjoy higher status than practical ones (Woods 1983:70): a difference which reflects the mental/manual distinction in society at large (Braverman, 1974). English, mathematics and science are high status subjects. While the advent of the core curriculum requires all the pupils to study these three subjects, the level at which they may be entered for GCSE, if at all, is dependent on the perceived ability of the pupil. Modern languages and the humanities come next in the subject hierarchy. Religious education; business studies; practical subjects such as home economics, textiles and childcare; and

heritage languages such as Urdu and Bengali appear to be chosen by pupils who are thought to be of low ability and hence incapable of coping with the more demanding subjects. The GCSE options of many girls in the sample in the present study included subjects from this last group (see, note 17, pp. 296-297).

Still, only a few parents in the sample expressed their dissatisfaction with their daughter's chosen options:

I've been against one thing as far as her choice of subjects was concerned. She knows English, which is good, and Urdu is our mother tongue and she knows it too. I wanted her to do either French or German, so that she knew a foreign language, but she couldn't do any of them and was given Urdu.

*(Seema Tanveer's mother)*

The parents who expressed such views were either themselves educated, or had educated and professional members of the immediate extended family whom they regularly consulted as regards their children's education. Woods (1984) points out that parental definitions of the situation differ along class lines and thus parental influences brought to bear on children in making their choices are both quantitatively and qualitatively different in accordance with these broad groupings. He concludes that there is a strong connection between social class and the development of group perspectives.<sup>20</sup> However, in the case of the parents in the sample in the present study, social class was a rather ambiguous category and the development of such group perspectives was contingent on their own education and/or the knowledge that they gleaned from other educated people around them.

As far as the pupils were concerned, the majority appeared to have chosen their options because they were interested in those subjects and enjoyed studying them (cf. Mirza, 1992:101). Several others maintained that they chose certain subjects since they were good at them or because they led to their chosen career:

I chose textiles because I want to do fashion designing. It was basically my own choice and encouragement from my dad and advice from my big brother. I didn't ask my teachers.

*(Zubaida Saeed)*

Another reason given by a few of them was that they liked a particular teacher, who had taught them in the lower school, and decided to choose her/his subject (cf. Woods, 1984:47; Mirza, 1992:101), believing that the same teacher would teach them. Paradoxically, in most cases, that subject was taught to them by a different teacher in the upper school. Some girls chose certain subjects at their parents' or siblings' suggestion. Rutter et al. (1979) point to the importance of peers for pupils as they make educational choices, such as subject options. However, in the present study, few girls found it helpful to discuss their subject choices with their friends and very few based their option choices on this criterion. Again, they faced disappointment as they were put in different study groups, thereby separating them from their friends. It was incidental that some others ended up with their friends because they had shared a common interest in some subjects or had been persuaded by their parents, siblings or teachers to choose those subjects.

In most cases, the parents and siblings assisted the girls in choosing their options, though in a few cases, members of the extended family were also helpful:

My parents had a say in it. I chose my options and asked them, 'What do you think'? and they said, 'Why do you want to do this'? and I said, 'Because of such and such reasons'. They didn't object to anything. My elder sisters had a lot to do with it. They had chosen their options the year before and they knew what each subject exactly was like from the students' perspective. They told me a lot.

*(Nasreen Butt)<sup>21</sup>*



At school, the form teacher appeared to have helped the most, with the subject teachers a close second. Very few girls found the careers teacher helpful at that stage, though they knew that s/he was available and they could go to her/him if they required help:

I asked some of the teachers if I'd be good enough to do GCSE in their subjects and most of them said, 'Yes, you enjoy it and you are good at it, so you should do it'. They actually gave me a lot of support. I didn't see my careers teacher until the fourth year and I had already chosen my options before that. But my form teacher gave me a lot of help. She understood what sort of career I was looking for and what sort of subjects I should take.

*(Khalida Dar)*

The subject teachers seemed to have considerable say in whether and at what level the girls should be entered for different subjects (cf. Smith and Tomlinson, 1989). While some girls and their parents disagreed with the teachers, they did not have the confidence to question openly the judgement of the teachers and if they did, they were seen as having unrealistic aspirations. So, by and large, they followed the teachers' advice.<sup>22</sup>

The parents, in the majority of cases, maintained that their daughter discussed her option choices with them and they told her to choose the options that she was interested in, that she found easy or which were going to be useful for her in the future. Most parents in the sample made helpful suggestions according to their knowledge and ability:

One has to take into account what the child likes. She should choose the sciences if she is science-oriented, but she shouldn't be forced to take them if she can't do them. But we do tell her which subjects will be better for her future life and which will not be useful.

Woods (1984) identifies five types of parental influence on children's choice of subjects: compulsion; strong guidance; mutual resolution; reassurance; little or nil. In the present study, while there was a compulsion for almost all the girls to stay in education and not to drop out as far as the parents were concerned, none of the parents could provide strong guidance. The influence exerted, in all the cases would fall into the categories of mutual resolution and reassurance whereby the parents discussed the girls' options with them as much as their limited understanding of the option system would allow, though in many cases they left the final decision to the girls. There was no evidence that any of the parents refused to discuss the options with the girls or the girls did not ask their opinion.

Very few girls thought that there was a wide enough choice of subjects that they were offered. The majority, however, felt that either the options on offer lacked variety or their choice was limited due to the fact that they had to choose from a certain number of blocks of subjects. Only some of the girls expressed total satisfaction with the options that they chose in the end. Most, though, felt unhappy about at least one of the subjects that they had chosen, either due to the wrong reasons, i.e. their friends chose it, or they liked the teacher, or to please their parents; or because a particular subject was not offered that year due to fewer number of pupils who opted for that subject; or the group that had opted for that subject was already large and no more pupils could be accommodated; or two subjects chosen could not be studied due to blocking and time-tabling problems and one of them had to be dropped:

I wasn't happy at all with the options that I had chosen. The compulsory subjects were OK, but, I mean, when I chose child development, there was drama, art, history and geography in that block. So, my only option really was child development. I didn't like drama; I wasn't good at art; and I had

already chosen one humanities from another block and I didn't want to do two, so I had to choose child development.

*(Shahida Rasheed)*<sup>24</sup>

The rhetoric of *option choice* is evident from the above comment. Though, ostensibly a vast range of subjects are offered, yet the choice is restricted by factors such as blocks, time tabling, availability of teaching staff and the number of pupils who opt for a certain subject (cf. Smith and Tomlinson, 1989).

Additionally, some girls had reservations about certain simplified subjects:

Modular science and modular humanities - I don't really agree with that. My sister is doing science at college and she has found it very difficult. She had to have extra lessons and found that she was much behind, even though she got A in her GCSE science.

*(Nasreen Butt)*

Nasreen, an able pupil, was against combined subjects which, while easy enough to be studied by pupils of different abilities, caused problems for those who wanted to pursue them in further and higher education. Because of her sister's experience, she decided not to study the sciences for her A'levels.

Still, the majority of girls in the sample were satisfied that they were given enough information before they chose their options. This ranged from careers conventions and meetings to discuss different subject areas and careers and being provided with booklets and leaflets to cover those areas. They were also aware that they could get advice from the careers teacher and peruse the books available in the school's careers library. The subject teachers also told them a little about the subjects, though these teacher did not always inform the pupils about the content of the subject or the standard they would be expected to attain for GCSE:

I am happy with all my options except history. I don't enjoy it at all.

TNB: Yet you said earlier that your teacher thought you'd be good at it.

I *am* good: I got 88 per cent, but I find it boring.

TNB: Why is that?

They didn't exactly tell us what the course would involve. What we used to do in history in the third year was Henry the Eighth and that kind of things, and they were really interesting. But now what we are doing in history is agriculture and farming. I didn't know that and it's pretty boring. They did tell us a little about the subjects, but didn't go into detail about them.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

Furthermore, some girls complained that they had insufficient information about the kind of subjects they were required to study for certain careers:

I wanted to be a fashion designer, but I chose the wrong textiles. There was one for the house and one for fashion. No one told me which one I should choose. And then, when I wanted to change, I couldn't because there were too many girls in the one that I wanted to go into, so I had to stay in the one I had chosen by mistake.

*(Parveen Akbar)*

Apparently, Parveen did not ask her textiles or careers teachers whether she was choosing the right option, assuming that both the options in textiles led to a career in fashion design. The teachers did not recognise the need to explain the difference either, believing that she had merely chosen textiles as an easy option.<sup>25</sup> It is evident that the pupils' reticence and the teachers' oversight in probing into the reasons for choosing a certain optional subject can have repercussions for the pupils' future: not only their post 16 education, but also their ultimate career.



## **7.5 Aiming for Further and Higher Education**

A person's educational aspirations are affected by several variables: ability, motivation and achievement are the most significant. Research (such as, Whitehead, 1989) shows that girls who stay on at school are more intrinsically motivated to perform well academically, whereas those who leave school at sixteen have low intrinsic motivation and a fairly high level of extrinsic motivation for money. However, there can be other variables, like the style of teaching, the type of school and the introversion and extroversion of the student. Social class variables such as the home background, parental attitudes, and the education and occupation of the father and the mother also impinge on a girl's aspirations.

Staying on at school after 16 may seem a small difference between one girl and another. However, the decision to stay or leave has far-reaching consequences: it is likely to affect their age of marriage, earning power and their relationships with men (Delamont, 1980:71). Additionally, it can have an impact on the way they perceive themselves and interact with other people around them.

Girls from ethnic minority families in Britain are thought to be at a disadvantage regarding further education (Sharpe, 1976; Ladbury, 1977; Ballard, 1979; Joly, 1987; Wade and Souter, 1992). Some authors even assert that parents withdraw their daughters from school as soon as it is legally possible and in some cases the daughters are kept at home. Others (for example, Wade and Souter) document the disappointment and anger expressed by the pupils for not being allowed to go further and their supposed plea for help: 'Why doesn't anyone do anything about us'? These girls are also believed to be forced into an arranged marriage at the expense of their education, thus making them resort to various strategies to postpone it.<sup>26</sup> Many teachers in the sample in the present study also believed that some of their pupils wanted to go into further education, but would not be allowed:

They want to go to sixth form college. Most of them want to continue for whatever reason. Sometimes it's a refuge that puts off the prospect of marriage a little bit longer.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')<sup>27</sup>*

However, some teachers in the sample believed that very few adolescent Muslim girls would go into further education:

A very small proportion of them will go into the sixth form. Quite a lot of them will go to YTS.

*(Alison Fraser, Information Technology teacher, Springfield High)<sup>28</sup>*

Yet a different picture emerged when the girls in the sample in the present study, who were predominantly from a working class background, were asked about their plans subsequent to leaving school. It transpired that *all* of them wanted to go into further education. Most of them wished to study for A'levels, though some hoped to attend a course at a vocational college. Three of them were not sure, at this stage, about the educational qualifications that they wanted to attain eventually, while two expected to start working after their A'levels. The majority of them appeared to have taken into consideration the demands of education and their own shortcomings and had also weighed other options objectively:

I want to go to college. I think I'll be there for three years. The first year, I'll do retakes and one A'level. The second year another A'level and another one in the third year. Then there is this course that I want to do - I want to be an accountant - I'm going to do that and after that I want to work.

*(Nuzhat Kareem)<sup>29</sup>*

Nuzhat knew and was perhaps told by her teachers that she would not be able to get very good grades in her GCSEs and would not manage to do three A'levels in two years. She was therefore prepared to do retakes and spend an additional year

to achieve her goal of three A'levels in order to study Accountancy, thus showing remarkable assiduity in pursuing her objectives.<sup>30</sup>

Many adolescent girls in the sample in the present study hoped to study for a degree. A degree in Law appeared to be quite popular, for which one-quarter of the girls wished to enrol. In a few cases their choice seemed to be influenced by videos of Indian movies that they watched or television programmes like LA Law, that glamorised Law as a profession, thus illustrating the relative impotence of career guidance that they received from other sources (cf. Mirza, 1992). Two girls hoped to study for a degree in Pharmacy and one for a degree in Medicine. Other qualifications mentioned were Secretarial courses, Certified Accountancy, Teaching, Nursing and Fashion Designing. Thus the girls in the sample opted for a wide range of subject areas (cf. Kallie, 1986) rather than invariably wanting to study subjects leading to specific high status professions.

However, some of the teachers in the sample in the present study appeared to believe to the contrary:

If you ask them, they would often say 'Doctor', and you know jolly well they are not going to become a doctor because of their ability, no matter what they like or what their parents have said to them. The parents have got high ideas, but in most cases, there is no chance at all. This is only the ones who are going to allow the girls to go on to further education at all. Either the parents want them to get married very young or they have very high ideas about what they can do.

*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development teacher, Blossomdale Girls')*

Like Ms. Thomas, there was a perception of polarisation as regards parental interest and support in the minds of many other teachers too. They saw the parents as either over-ambitious or not at all concerned about their daughters' education.

Nevertheless, some ethnic minority teachers thought that British Asians, regardless of which religious group or social class they belonged to, wanted to succeed academically. This can be seen from the statement of a teacher of African-Caribbean origin:

Looking at it from a holistic point of view, Asians tend to be more geared towards success. Some parents perhaps push too much, but yes, A and A+ are what they are after, getting to Oxford and Cambridge is what they are after.

*(Timothy Clark, Head of Year 11, Springfield High)*<sup>31</sup>

In congruence with Mr. Clark's views above, almost all the parents in the sample wanted their daughters to go into further education after the completion of compulsory schooling. Their decision, however, did not appear to be influenced by the availability of free and compulsory education in Britain. The majority of parents asserted that they would have let their daughters go into further education, even in the country of origin, because they were cognisant of the value of education. Some others, though, maintained that they would have allowed their daughters to continue, in the country of origin, if they did as well in school as they were doing in Britain. Most parents were willing to let their daughter study for whatever educational qualifications she wanted and was capable of attaining:

She can receive as much education as she wants: there isn't going to be any hindrance from me. It will be unfortunate if our children do not get education even when we are living in this country with all the facilities for a good education.

*(Seema Tanveer's mother)*<sup>32</sup>

The others, though, were more specific and hoped that their daughter would go to university and attain professional qualifications for careers such as Medicine, Law,



Accountancy or Teaching. Two parents, however, wanted their daughter to go to a vocational college. Only one parent in the sample wanted her daughter to work for a couple of years after attaining her GCSEs and then get married.

Still, many parents, while wanting their daughters to receive education were worried about the corruptive influence of a largely secular society:

We want our daughters to study further, but the atmosphere here discourages you. One feels that they should stop as soon as they finish school. Then when you think of their future, you don't want to make a 16 year old sit at home. What sort of life would she have? She would only cook and clean.

*(Zubaida Saeed's mother)*<sup>33</sup>

A Muslim teacher in the sample, while insisting that Muslim girls were discouraged from continuing, appeared to comprehend the reason:

[Muslim] girls are not pushed at all. I mean, girls are actively dissuaded from having a career. There have been examples of very very bright girls who have not gone on. The biggest problem is that if they go on, they've got to go to university, which can be away from home, where the parents can't keep an eye on them. Further education in a local college is OK, but as soon as they are ready to go to university, the line is drawn.

*(Shahid Rehman, Science teacher, Hillside Comprehensive)*

Some parents permitted their daughters to go into further education only with certain preconditions:

We want our daughters to study, but in *purdah*. They should be covered, because we are accountable to Allah. If they lost their *izzet*, He would ask us, the parents - not the schools - what we had taught our children. My elder

daughters have gone to college for four years. I told them to wear a coat coming down to their feet - I had them specially made for them - and that they should wear a scarf and go straight to college and then come straight back home.

*(Shahida Rasheed's mother)*

Nevertheless, one mother believed in keeping her daughter home after the girl finished school:

I don't want her to study any more after finishing school. The biggest problem that we face here is that we have to let our daughters go out. Our religion Islam and our Prophet say that girls shouldn't go out. The mother, who brings up her daughter, should teach her what is right and what is wrong. In this country, we are forced to let our daughters go to school until they are 16. If it was up to us, we would never let them go to school and would teach them instead about Islam.

*(Zareena Nasir's mother)*

The daughter, while as keen to go into further education as the other girls in the sample, appeared to be sensitive to her parents' reservations:

I want to go to college, but I know my parents wouldn't let me. So, I am planning to do it when I am married. There is no point in going to college when I am living with my parents because people gossip, 'Oh! So and so's daughter is going to college'. If you are married and then go to college, nobody says anything. That way I can make my career.

*(Zareena Nasir)*

It should, however, be stressed that Zareena was the only girl in the sample whose family did not want her to go to college. Further, this was the only family that appeared to be worried about the opinion of other people. No other parent or girl

seemed to care about what other people or the *biradiri* would say. While there is no doubt regarding the importance of the *biradiri* as a source of support in time of need, it appears that its role as an interfering body has been over-emphasised. Almost all the parents in the sample cared about the opinion of their kin, as far as their children's education was concerned, only to the extent of consulting some educated members of the extended family about matters like subject choices. Thus their aspirations for their children transcended regard for the opinion of other people, however close:

We used to live in Blackburn. Over there, people from six or seven villages in Pakistan, about 90-100 families were our kin. A few years ago, talking of educating girls in that community was tantamount to a criminal offence. So, when we had our children, we decided to move. We wanted to educate our daughters and we didn't want any interference from the *biradiri*.

*(Nasreen Butt's father)*

Nasreen's parents moved because they did not want the community to dictate how they should bring up their children. The reason Zareena's family paid heed to other people could be attributed to a number of factors. There was very little education in the family, but there were several other parents in the sample with no education. Zareena's parents were also deeply religious, but a similar degree of religiosity was evident amongst many other families in the sample. Zareena's father had been unemployed for a number of years, yet some other fathers in the sample had been unemployed for several years too. While Zareena's elder brother was in further education, she was the first girl in the family to reach this crucial stage in education. However, a few other girls in the sample were also the eldest in their family.

It would, therefore, appear that a combination of all the above-mentioned factors influenced the decision of Zareena's parents as regards her continuation in education. The fact that they were religious, but uneducated meant that they

misinterpreted the Quran and the *Hadith* regarding the education of girls. Moreover, since the father had been unemployed for many years, the family was more dependent on the relatives, as compared to other families in the sample, for moral and perhaps financial support too. Hence they seemed to care more about the opinion of the extended family. Furthermore, since Zareena was the first girl in the family about to finish school, the parents were more wary of sending their adolescent daughter out than those parents who had at least one other daughter who had been through further education (cf. pp. 197-198 above). They were therefore not cognisant of how sensitive and complying girls could be.

Significantly, the parents in the sample had had very little formal education themselves.<sup>34</sup> This explained why most of them valued education. Though they, themselves, had not been able to attain education due to economic or social reasons, yet they recognised its importance for a successful life and career. Because of their own lack of education, many had spent their lives in low-paid, menial occupations. They had not come so far from their home country to carry on like that for generations. They could not realise all their aspirations, but they wanted their children to have a better status and be successful economically.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, financial expedience did not appear to be the only consideration as far as the parents in the sample in the present study were concerned; the importance of education was rationalised in other ways as well. It was also seen as a means of security and respect:

We feel that she should get as much education as she could. She can go to college or university if circumstances are favourable. Because if a girl could stand on her own feet, she won't be a burden on anyone if times were hard.

*(Rahat Basheer's mother)*<sup>36</sup>



Wade and Souter ( 1992:66) observe that strong feelings are held and voiced repeatedly by a number of girls in their sample about their lack of freedom to pursue higher education and careers. They assert that whether or not these girls are correct in their views about their future lives, the fact that they hold such views must influence their attitude to school work. Some make it clear that they see no purpose in learning as they are destined to marry or take up a manual occupation upon leaving school. Yet as can be seen above, the parents of only one girl out of a sample of 24 did not want her to go into further education. Moreover, even this girl did not express feelings of frustration, nor were her enthusiasm for education or her career hopes blighted. The only feelings obvious in the interviews were those of hope, resignation and acceptance.

All these adolescent Muslim girls are hopeful of a good future and of achieving their multiple aspirations. At the same time, they know that they are being allowed to go into further education on the tacit, sometimes explicit, understanding that they will not do anything against the ethos of their religion and culture. They accept this and are resigned to the fact that the supposedly 'free choice' open to the indigenous girls to live their life the way they want is not available to Muslim girls.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

This chapter shows the high regard for education as far as all the pupils and most parents in the sample are concerned. The adolescent Muslim girls appear to work well in class and, despite what some of the teachers say, do their homework. They do this for a variety of reasons. They do not go out in the evenings and, though they help with the housework, can have a longer input into school work than those pupils who regularly go out. They are also pushed by their parents to finish their school work before indulging in recreational activities. Moreover, they want to please their

teachers and perhaps do not want to lose their esteem in the eyes of their peers by being told off in class. Most importantly, though, they want to succeed educationally. All these girls, regardless of their ability, want to go into further education. While the teachers are used to able pupils continuing in education beyond the statutory school-leaving age, their experience of low ability pupils suggests opting out of education at 16. Hence the teachers, no doubt, find this whole phenomenon of perseverance quite remarkable and not a little perplexing. Contrary to what some teachers believe, the girls are staying on for self-improvement, good career prospects and perhaps better marriage chances, but not to postpone marriage.

The most consistent finding here appears to be hope, positive attitude and faith in hard work. While the academic life of these adolescents in school is being shaped mainly by their teachers, their parents' views, opinions and aspirations also have an impact, despite the fact that these parents have minimal knowledge of school procedures. The girls are acquiring appropriate skills to operate in the social world of the teachers and the parents. The way these adolescent girls are participating in lessons, doing homework, choosing GCSE options and hoping to go into further and higher education shows that they are, themselves, active participants in fashioning their present and future identities and aspirations.

While the effectiveness of the three schools in the sample cannot be ascertained in depth, it can be suggested that the educational, social and career aspirations of the adolescent Muslim girls in the sample do not differ in the different schools. All these girls aspire to a good education, a successful career, marriage and a family. However, it is difficult to establish the respective degree of effectiveness of the three schools in shaping these aspirations and the extent to which parental motivation is able to counteract the negative influence of a less effective school.

**SECTION IV.**

**CHAPTER EIGHT.**  
**ASPIRING TO A CAREER.**

**CHAPTER NINE.**  
**CONCLUSIONS.**

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **ASPIRING TO A CAREER**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

In the last section, I have discussed the adolescent Muslim girls' experience of schooling and their subsequent educational plans. This section looks further into the future and this chapter elucidates the girls' ultimate career hopes by investigating the career choices of ethnic minorities, the myth of unrealistic aspirations and the nature of career guidance offered to the girls. However, in order to fully cognise the occupational ambitions of the Muslim girls in the sample, we have to set them in the wider context of the career aspirations of women. The traditional opinion regarding the roles of men and women is that the conventional man goes out to work and the conventional woman gets married and stays at home (cf. Delamont, 1980). A professional woman, therefore, assumes two burdens: brought up to view housework as a feminine domain and a career as a privilege, she is ill-equipped to escape the stereotyped sex role (Minai 1981). Thus, the major conflict for women, as it has been constructed in society, is between marriage, child-rearing, family and career (cf. Marshall and Wetherell, 1989:123).

The narrow home-based view of the female role assumes that once married, a woman and a man will adopt fundamentally different roles: the woman will forfeit her right to financial independence and a job and will always subsume her interests to those of her husband and children (Beale, 1986). However, technology and the subsequent access to labour-saving devices have eroded the need for full-time home-based housewives and have allowed women to pursue hobbies and careers outside the home. Still, Leonard and Speakman, (1986) argue that career choices are made within a situation which is not of women's own choosing; these are made within a sexist, racist, class-based and age-based society. Moreover, material



circumstances of a family can influence a woman's decision to work. A woman belonging to an affluent family may choose not to work since there is no financial necessity for her to contribute to the family income. Nevertheless, if disposable family income is low, social norms against women's employment may come under severe strain (Brah and Shaw, 1992:49).

In most societies, detached women are not constrained in any way regarding the choice of a career, if they have the aptitude and the impetus. Many married women today also make their own decisions about whether or not to take a job. However, Leonard and Speakman (1986) point out that this has to be seen against the background that if wives take employment, or return to education and training, it is done with the tacit assumption that it will minimally inconvenience their husbands. Consequently, working wives have much less free time than their husbands and these women spend far more time on essentials such as looking after the children, cleaning, cooking and shopping (Central Statistical Office, 1993). This implies that a woman's career outside the home is only acceptable if she continues to perform her role in the home as if she was not in employment.<sup>1</sup>

Still, despite all the constraints, many married women with children choose to resume their careers, not to have a career break at all, or to switch to part-time work.<sup>2</sup> The employment of mothers outside the home is thought to have repercussions for their families. Thus, the women concerned not only work harder than men, since they work at their place of employment and at home, they are also made to feel guilty. Leonard and Speakman (1986) note that while concern has mainly been about the effects on children and on the marital relationship, there is no evidence to suggest that an employed wife repudiates her femininity by not complying with the domestic role. Moreover, recent research (for example, Wilkinson, 1994) points to a historic shift away from the old division of labour: between domestic work undertaken by women and predominantly full-time paid work undertaken by men.

Women's career aspirations are shaped early. Research shows that child-rearing practices vary considerably and are gender-based.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, cultural artefacts discriminate between the sexes from a young age.<sup>4</sup> Later on, literature, television, peer group and other cultural influences also reinforce the differences of concepts of femininity and masculinity. Arnot (1986) argues that girls are presented with a definition of femininity that is closely connected with a subordinate position in a male-centred world. Even in school, before the advent of the National Curriculum, options were often intentionally or unintentionally segregated for boys and girls in coeducational secondary schools.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, girls clustered primarily in the arts and boys in the sciences.<sup>6</sup> It has also been found that teachers pay more attention to boys as compared to girls.<sup>7</sup> Such disparity in female and male role performance, expectation and treatment can only have a negative impact on the aspirations of girls.

Nevertheless, research also indicates that girls are almost never downwardly mobile in aspiration (Douvan and Adelson, 1966:72). It is often assumed that girls choose the traditional caring professions because they are an extension of their socialisation as carers for their families and communities (Fogelman, 1983; Wallace, 1987). However, girls' occupational aspirations have been found to express a general desire for upward mobility and a middle-class way of life rather than a specific desire to achieve eminence or outstanding skill in a profession: that is, the status rewards of the job are more crucial than intrinsic work satisfactions, as far as both majority and minority women are concerned (Douvan and Adelson, 1966:39; Mirza, 1992:122; Siann and Knox, 1992:203).

## **8.2 Ethnic Minorities and Career Choices**

Immigrants in general are more ambitious than their counterparts from similar social and cultural backgrounds in the country of origin. In most cases, this is the fundamental reason for people to emigrate. Once in their adopted country, they

strive for upward social mobility, but many face disappointment, partly due to the lack of appropriate qualifications and training. Consequently, they endeavour to attain this goal by means of high educational and career aspirations for their children. The 'migrant effect' (Mirza, 1992:174) refers to this phenomenon of internal cultural dynamics of immigrants. This is manifest in the comment of an adolescent Muslim girl in the sample in the present study:

My parents want me to be a doctor. They think a doctor is the thing to be.

*(Nasreen Butt)*

However, whatever hopes and aspirations ethnic minority parents may have for their children, research shows that the future facing young British people of Asian and African-Caribbean origin, the largest ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom, does not appear to be much brighter than the one their parents had to contend with. This even applies to those born and brought up in Britain. There is extensive discrimination against them, such that even when they have equivalent or better qualifications than their indigenous counterparts, their search for jobs is less successful.<sup>8</sup> The Labour Force Survey (Department of Employment, 1991) shows that unemployment rates for ethnic minority groups are substantially higher than the majority group. The highest unemployment rates are among the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and West Indian communities and among 16-24 year olds in each of the main ethnic minority groups. Even ethnic minority people with professional qualifications face difficulties in finding jobs.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of young women, discrimination is compounded by the dual effect of race and gender inequality. Thus while there are sectors of labour market from which women are virtually excluded, evidence shows that even in fields of predominantly female employment, women of Asian and African-Caribbean origin are found to be concentrated in the lowest level jobs (Brooks and Singh, 1978; Beechey, 1986; Brah and Shaw, 1992:1).

Despite this depressing scenario, ethnic minority women have particularly high expectations of the labour market (Fuller, 1982; Dex, 1983; Eggleston et al. 1986; Mirza, 1992). They have faith in educational qualifications. Further, research (such as, Ullah, 1985) shows that young ethnic minority women are least aware of the racism they will encounter in the work place. This was very much the case with the adolescent girls in the sample in the present study. They appeared to be totally incognisant of the discrimination they were likely to face in the labour market. None of them even mentioned it during the interviews.

Similarly, ethnic minority parents appear to have a firm belief in upward social mobility by means of education and careers. However, the parents seem to be more conscious of prejudice. Tomlinson (1982:34) observes that the parents place great faith in the acquisition of educational qualifications to overcome the discrimination their children could face in seeking employment after school. Once in employment, young adults become acutely aware of racism.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, due to their own experience of the labour market and the fact that some of their older children were in employment, the parents in the sample in the present study were aware of discrimination in the work place. They, therefore, encouraged their younger children to achieve a good education in the belief that it would help them to evade prejudice in the labour market.<sup>11</sup>

Young ethnic minority people in Britain are also disproportionately found in low level jobs or in Youth Training Schemes (Bryan et al. 1987).<sup>12</sup> In the present study, the girls and parents in the sample were particularly averse to manual and factory work and YTS. None of the girls envisaged going into YTS or working in a factory. The parents, too, were amenable to their daughters' desire to work only if they were able to attain a good education and go into a career perceived as safe and respectable; one which would not jeopardise the safety and reputation of the girls in any way:



She wants to be a doctor. And of course she would work if she was a doctor. I wouldn't mind if she couldn't become a doctor, but then she need not work. We can easily support her until she gets married.

*(Tabassam Raza's father)*<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, many parents perceived a good education and the ability to work in a respectable occupation as an insurance against hard times:

They can do any respectable job; women are doing such jobs even in Pakistan, but it is important that they have a good education. Who knows what life has in store for them - good or bad. If they have education, they can stand on their own feet, if the need arises, by finding some decent work.

*(Nusrat Sharif's mother)*

Most girls believed the same:

I know I'll enjoy it [work]. I know I'll have learnt something. I can always have it with me and can always fall back on it.

*(Arifa Mahmood)*

Many teachers also perceived education as a security device for the future:

I think in Muslim culture it is inbred in them - if you like - that man is the head of the household and therefore it is more important that he has a good education; a good career: he's got to look after the family. I think some of the families are just beginning to think that a career might be just as important for the woman because she may well have to support the family should any emergencies arise.

*(Helen Williams, Head of Careers, Blossomdale Girls').*

The parents had doubtless been through hard times<sup>14</sup> and, therefore, the girls also seemed to have some inkling of what it was like to be without a job or to be in a low-

paid job. At the time of the fieldwork, almost half of the fathers in the sample were unemployed due to ill-health or non-availability of jobs.<sup>15</sup> The majority of mothers in the sample were full-time housewives.<sup>16</sup> Still, regardless of the occupational status of the parents and despite the apparently working class background of the families, almost all the girls in the sample in the present study had high career ambitions (cf. Miles, 1984; Kallie, 1986; Mirza, 1992:169-70). They aspired to occupations which were unambiguously middle class. It appears that they do not want to go through the struggles their parents have experienced. Furthermore, they seem to have internalised this ethos of their parents that education and career is the key to upward social mobility.

However, attitudes to women's employment not only vary from one social group to another, but also from family to family and even within families. In the present study, the mother and the father in some families appeared to disagree on the issue of women seeking work. This is evident from the following discourse:

We are not educating our daughters in order to make them go out and work.  
*(Shahida Rasheed's mother)*

But sometimes it is important that women work. For example, it is better for women to have female doctors and nurses. If our daughters can find good jobs, if they have the capability to do such jobs, it will be beneficial for their future too.

*(Shahida Rasheed's father)*

Well, there is no harm in working, but it should be done in *pardah*.  
*(Shahida Rasheed's mother)<sup>17</sup>*

As is clear from the comments above, not all parents feel the same way about allowing their daughters to go into employment. Moreover, not all mothers are in favour of letting their daughters work and not all fathers are against it. However, it

appears that the spouse favouring the employment of women is usually able to convince her/his husband/wife as regards the merits of a career. This presents further evidence of the important function of negotiation and persuasion within these families (see, also, pp. 211; 221) and warns against stereotyping.

The vast majority of adolescent girls in the sample hoped to work after completing their education and to continue working after their marriage. None of the parents wanted their daughters to have the same job as themselves (cf. Kallie, 1986), thus expressing their desire for a better future for their children. Correspondingly, no girl wanted to do the same job as her father or mother (cf. Taylor and Hegarty, 1985; Mirza, 1992:187). This, however, does not imply that they do not respect their parents for working in those occupations, or are ashamed of them, but rather that they aspire to a better life as compared to their parents:

I don't want to do the same job as my parents. My mum is a housewife and my dad is a taxi-driver. I think a housewife is like a slave, because she is always working, looking after the children and the home. And I think taxi-driving is hard work and you don't make such a good living. There are other better jobs that you can do.

*(Rahat Basheer)*<sup>18</sup>

As is clear from the above statement, the ideology of the male breadwinner and the supposedly non-working housewife has undermined the status of housework as work and has placed a negative value on being 'just a housewife' (cf. Maynard, 1985; Leonard and Speakman, 1986; Wetherell et al. 1986; Marshall and Wetherell, 1989).

The adolescent Muslim girls in the sample in the present study aspired to a wide range of lucrative careers with high status. Some mentioned the jobs of doctors, lawyers, accountants and pharmacists; others named the caring professions, such

as teaching and nursing. Still others referred to white-collar occupations, such as working in a bank or as a secretary. A few girls wanted to start their own business and one girl wished to be a pilot. However, some parents, while keen for their daughter to have a career, had reservations about certain fields of study:

When I decided that I wanted to do nursing, my dad didn't like it at all. He said, 'You know, you'll have to be really patient'. But he is really happy now that I want to be a teacher. He says that he'll support me all the way through. My mum also doesn't like the idea of nursing, neither does my brother.

*(Khalida Dar)*

Apparently, this family perceived nursing as an occupation of low status and low emolument, in which one had to work hard in predominantly male company. Conversely though, another parent easily acquiesced to her daughter's choice of this career. Once again, this diversity in views cautions against assumptions and stereotypes regarding ethnic minority parents' attitudes to career choices:

I would like her to be a teacher, but she wants to be a nurse. So, I have left it to her to decide what she likes and what she wants to do.

*(Parveen Akbar's mother)*

Others were apprehensive about sending their daughter to a place away from home to train for an occupation. This can be seen from the statement of a teacher:

There is this girl who wants to become a dentist. She is very bright, but her parents don't want her to be a dentist, because she'll have to go to another place to study. They say, 'We cannot let her go so far. Why can't she do something else'?

*(Chitra Madan, Home-School Liaison, Blossomdale Girls')*



The parents, while eager to educate their daughter, are clearly anxious about her safety and do not want her to go far from home lest she may come to harm. This, undoubtedly is the outcome of the love, concern and sense of protectiveness the parents have for their children. Their adolescent daughters appeared to understand the anxiety of their parents. Many wanted to go to a university away from home and hoped they would be able to persuade their parents to allow them to go. At the same time, they were willing to modify their career choices if their parents were not amenable to their wishes (see p. 222).

A variety of reasons were given by the girls for their choice of careers. The commonest reason was the enjoyment and satisfaction that they would get out of working in that particular job: working with people, children, figures and so on. A few girls though chose the occupation because of someone in the extended family holding a similar job or because they wanted to work in the family business. Other girls mentioned factors such as working in the background because of religion or the job being suitable for British Asian girls. Two girls, however, said that they would want to work in an office not a factory:

People who work in factories get headaches: it's so noisy there. I can't stand noise. In a bank or an office, there are only a few people and you can work quietly.

*(Zareena Nasir)*

The majority of teachers in the sample in the present study also thought that ethnic minority girls generally preferred careers that all girls were traditionally known to go for, such as office work and secretarial jobs, so that they could work in a clean and tidy environment; boys, on the other hand, went for mechanical and engineering-related jobs:

Girls go for secretarial, banking, office jobs. They are isolated jobs. Banks and offices have nice, tidy environments. That agrees with the parents too.  
*(Shahid Rehman, Science teacher, Hillsvview Comprehensive)*<sup>19</sup>

Some teachers felt that ethnic minority girls preferred to go into the caring professions, such as nursing:

The girls would like to get involved in more caring professions and boys are likely to go for high profile jobs that must include a big flash car and lots of money and all the glitz and razzmatazz that goes with it.  
*(Timothy Clark, Head of Year 11, Springfield High)*<sup>20</sup>

While some teachers thought the choice of a caring profession was an extension of the girls' role in the family, others attributed this to gender-based expectations:

It's the old idea of boys' and girls' subjects and their careers and roles in life. The idea of the core curriculum in school whereby all experience and stereotypes are effectively outlawed - if it can work - is one way of overcoming those barriers. But it is still there, no matter what we do, no matter how we guide them, there are still very different expectations for girls and boys.  
*(Dominic Taylor, Deputy Head, Hillsvview Comprehensive)*<sup>21</sup>

While most parents were eager for the girls to attain educational qualifications in anticipation of a career, some of them were reluctant to allow the girls to work before their marriage. It transpired that a few parents hoped to arrange their daughter's marriage with a kin in the country of origin. As noted above (see, pp. 126-127), due to immigration regulations, young British people wanting to bring spouses from abroad are required to support them financially. Thus, some of the parents, who otherwise would prefer their daughter not to work until after she was

married envisaged that their daughter would work for some time and then get married:

She will work. We want her to marry someone back home and she will have to work for this reason.

*(Mussarat Aslam's mother)*

It is clear that while many parents are amenable to their daughter's desire to work, others will have to allow the girls to work against their better judgement and under duress, thus undermining the ethos pertaining to *purdah* (cf. Khan, 1976) and *izzet*. Further, although having a career may be socially and financially beneficial for the girls, the fact that they must work could mean taking up any job regardless of income and working conditions, thus making them vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers (cf. Brah and Shaw, 1992:24).

Still, whatever careers they choose, ethnic minority young people encounter racism<sup>22</sup> in the labour market as well as sexism. Brown (1984) contends that the expectations of ethnic minority workers must be affected by the fact that some types of jobs are more open to them than the others. They are, therefore, likely to apply for those posts for which minority candidates are accepted and avoid those which are supposed to be for the majority population of Britain. Seeing their relatives, friends and other members of their ethnic group working in jobs that are quite different from those done by the members of the majority group also affects their perception of their own place in the economy.

Thus, ethnic minority workers are, by and large, marginalised in the labour market for a variety of reasons. However, when they want to improve this situation by motivating their children to attain education and go into high status careers, they are perceived as aiming too high and having unrealistic ambitions.

### **8.3 The Myth of Unrealistic Aspirations**

The notion that ethnic minorities hold unrealistic aspirations has been widely discussed in literature.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, studies of young Asians in the labour market show that these young men and women have high, albeit not unrealistic, aspirations. They tend to stay on longer in full-time further education compared to their peers from the majority population. Moreover, they find it much more difficult to find jobs than other young indigenous people and the unemployment levels among young British Asians are almost twice as high as amongst the Anglo-Saxon indigenous group<sup>24</sup> (see, also, p. 206). Still, it appears that such disadvantage has not abated the career aspirations of ethnic minority adolescents.

The development of career choices is a complex event. Roberts (1971;1977) argues that neither school leavers nor adults typically choose occupations in a meaningful sense. They simply take what is available. He explains the experience of the majority of workers in terms of a process of socialisation into the acceptance of a well-defined and generally acceptable occupational structure, which at all stages circumscribes what is available to individuals within narrowly-spaced, horizontal social class barriers.

Nevertheless, Gottfredson's (1981) developmental paradigm of occupational aspirations encompasses both structural and individual factors.<sup>25</sup> It implies that occupational choices are gender/sex-based, class/status-based and ability/aptitude-based. These phenomena were manifest in the career choices of the adolescent girls in the sample in the present study. Nevertheless, there was evidence of additional dynamics of career preferences which were religion/culture-based, as can be seen from the following comment:

In fact she wants to be an engineer or a pilot, but I tell her to forget it: her father wouldn't allow her to have a job in which she had to work with men.



Her father drives a taxi and I wouldn't want her to do that either, because she is a girl: all sorts of people hire taxis; what if they are drunk and misbehave? I am a housewife, but she wouldn't like to be just a housewife; she wants to work.

*(Rahat Basheer's mother)*

And a similar remark from a girl:

Religion is a big factor. I want to be independent. I want to stand on my own feet even when I am married. And if I became a pharmacist, I'd be working inside [in the background] and no one would see me and there would be a good pay too.

*(Samina Hameed)*

Thus, career choice is not a straightforward process.<sup>26</sup> Ethnic minority young people appear to consider a variety of factors when making occupational choices, but Brooks (1983) notes that despite ample evidence to the contrary, the debate over the job aspirations of young Asians continues to be dominated by the 'unrealistic aspirations' thesis. This can be seen in the remarks of a teacher in the present study (see, also, p. 195):

Some of them are dictated to quite strongly from home. There is a tremendous drive for them all to be doctors and, you know, very very high class professions, which are way beyond their capabilities and even amongst the boys it's the same. The aspirations of the parents are phenomenal. They don't seem to have any idea of what the children can actually do. There seems to be this idea that they have to do certain types of jobs. I can understand the desire to be there in terms of, perhaps, financial reward and also to establish themselves, but the parents don't

seem to be aware of the capabilities of their own children and they almost bully them into it.

*(Patricia Fisher, Head of Computing, Hillsvew Comprehensive)<sup>27</sup>*

Far from bullying their children into working towards narrowly-defined educational and career goals, the interviews with the parents and girls showed that the parents were a constant source of motivation and encouragement. Further, contrary to what some teachers implied, many parents appreciated the significance of ability and qualifications:

If she got a good education, as she intends to, then she would have a good job. But if she didn't have education, then she'd probably have to do something like factory-work or packing or sewing. She aims to study law and it would be excellent if she could succeed.

*(Seema Tanveer's mother)<sup>28</sup>*

The parents unequivocally want their daughters to succeed in securing a decent career and are cognisant of the role of education in realising this aim. Kallie (1986) points out that the parents might expressly forbid their children to opt for unskilled or semi-skilled jobs as they do not want their children to undergo the experiences that they underwent. Ethnic minorities do not leave their countries to take up low-status unskilled and semi-skilled jobs; such jobs offer little job security and do not raise the status or *izzet* of the family.

Brah and Shaw (1992:45) observe that while the extent to which the young Muslim women in their study are actually able to achieve their ambitions is dependent on a variety of factors, they do not seem to have unrealistic aspirations in relation to their abilities. At the very least their aspirations are an indicator of their as yet unrealised talent and potential. As far as the adolescent Muslim girls in the sample in the

present study were concerned, a remarkable degree of perseverance was evident in their endeavour to realise their potential:

I want to be an accountant. I love maths and I'd love to sit at a desk and do mathematical stuff all day. My uncle is an accountant and my brother and I both want to be accountants too. But I am not very good at maths, and I'll probably get an E in my GCSE maths because I am entered for a lower paper. But I am going to do it; I am going to retake it until I get a really good grade.

*(Nuzhat Kareem)*<sup>29</sup>

Despite such sentiments from girls of average ability, some teachers appeared to believe that only the bright Muslim girls were interested in a career while the others only looked forward to marriage:

I would say the majority thinks marriage is the most important thing. It's a minority - the bright ones - that would think a career is important, and they would be allowed to have a career. But if you talk to Muslim girls, maybe of average ability, they still think marriage is very important, no matter what we say. They want to be married and have children: they want to be accepted in their own culture and they think that's the thing to aim for.

*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development Teacher, Blossomdale Girls)*<sup>30</sup>

It seems that some teachers view marriage and a career to be mutually exclusive, yet the majority of teachers whom I interviewed were themselves married. Further, as we have seen above (see, pp. 124-125), Muslim girls of varied abilities aspired to a career as well as marriage. It seems that the overt importance given to marriage by the girls and parents appears strange to the teachers and they interpret it as if a career does not have a significant role in the lives of these girls.

Research evidence regarding ethnic minority women suggests that women of West Indian origin have the highest economic activity rate (76 per cent) and those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin have the lowest (21 per cent). Nevertheless there is a substantial proportion of Muslim women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin working in a range of manual and white-collar as well as professional jobs in Britain. (Brown, 1984; Department of Employment, 1991). Moreover, a number of them, especially amongst the younger age groups, are actively seeking, but not able to gain, employment (Brah and Shaw, 1992:29). Their career aspirations appear to be on a par with other ethnic minority groups. There is little evidence to suggest that Muslim girls have any lower aspirations than other groups of British Asian girls.<sup>31</sup>

As far as religious decree is concerned, Islam obligates the husband to provide for his wife and gives the wife the right to be financially dependent on her husband. It allows women equal access to education and careers, provided they fulfil their primary role as mothers and homemakers. It is, therefore, up to the women to decide whether they can cope with two careers simultaneously. However, the prospect of dual income, leading to an enhanced standard of living, and economic independence seemed attractive to the adolescent girls in the sample and a career appeared to pave the route to attaining these goals:

I'd hate to be just a housewife. They just stay at home and do nothing. Well, they obviously work, but they don't get paid for it and I don't think it's right. You always have to ask your husband for money.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

Nevertheless, it does not indicate that the girls want to go against the teachings of their religion. All of them want to combine a career with marriage and family life. Recent research (such as, Pascall, 1994:27) shows that increasingly girls are deciding to take higher educational qualifications; with these in hand young women are reluctant to give up the advantages attached to the labour market. The majority



of adolescent Muslim girls in the present study even believed that realising their career ambitions would be the best thing they could do:

Get my GCSEs and A'levels, get my degree and become a pharmacist.

That's my main aim and that's the best thing I can do.

*(Shahida Rasheed)*<sup>32</sup>

Most parents believed the same:

The best thing she could do would be to get a good education and to have a vocation. These are the things that would be useful for her in the future.

*(Rahat Basheer's mother)*

Many of these adolescent Muslim girls were impressed with people around them whose lives were instrumental in helping them contrive their career plans. The majority of the girls had role models who were invariably career-oriented male or female members of the extended family:

My cousin's wife - she lives in London - she's got a really good job. She and her husband - my cousin - are both financial advisers. They had a daughter recently. They got married and went to live in America for five years. They worked there and saw everything and then settled in England and started a family. They are really happy. I'd like to be like her.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

None of the girls mentioned their father, mother or siblings as their role models. This, however, does not imply that they disparage them, but rather shows their determination to accomplish more in the future than anyone else in their nuclear family has managed. Neither did any of the girls have any of their teachers as their role models. While they respect their teachers and seek their guidance in matters

pertaining to education, they do not want to emulate them as they know they cannot lead their lives entirely like the teachers.

When asked which occupations they liked the most, many girls cited the same jobs that they aspired to have themselves. Others mentioned careers that they liked, but knew they could not choose due to parental opposition emanating from religious, cultural, status or security reasons.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, contrary to the stereotype, the girls hoped to go into a diverse range of occupations:

I want to go to college and do this two years course. After two years, I'll know how to cut, design and sew. Then I'll start my own business. My dad has got this place on top of his shop. All I've got to do is to work hard.

*(Zubaida Saeed)*

As regards the notion of Muslim parents wanting their children to become doctors, the present research showed that out of a sample of 24, the parents of only three girls wanted their daughters to study medicine. However, two of these girls had successfully persuaded their parents to let them choose to pursue other courses of study:

I did want to be a doctor once, but that does not attract me any more. There is so much work involved when you are a junior doctor and the medical school is so hard. I'd like to do something like politics, economics or international relations and work at the UN. That would be interesting.

*(Nasreen Butt)*

Nasreen's parents, who initially encouraged their daughter to go into medicine, were soon able to see things from her perspective. It appears that the parents want their children to become doctors primarily because they perceive medicine as the ultimate profession, offering quintessential respectability. Furthermore, they have limited knowledge of other options with similar social status and monetary gain.

However, many parents encouraged their daughters to choose diverse careers, albeit of high status, such as, law, accountancy, teaching and so on and were also amenable to the girls' perspective. This points to the vital role of negotiation in the interaction between these adolescent girls and their parents (cf. Brah and Shaw, 1992: 24).

Still, the girls in the sample were unmistakably sensitive to their parents' reservations, and comprehended the extent of negotiation, as is evident from the comment below:

I've always wanted to be a policewoman, but I don't think my mum would agree, so I am going to be a nurse.

*(Parveen Akbar)*<sup>34</sup>

Far from being bitter about not being able to pursue their desired career, the girls were willing to choose alternative careers which would meet their parents' approval. The girls were optimistic of their chances of working and all of them, with the exception of Zareena Nasir (see p. 198) expected to have a career before they were married. However, even Zareena's mother envisaged that her daughter would work before she got married:

How can she get married? She is only 16. She'll work for a while, may be two years, and then get married.

*(Zareena Nasir's mother)*

This scenario is in sharp contrast with what some other research studies appear to suggest. Wade and Souter, (1992:10;54) maintain that the British Asian girls in their study perceive their chances of working either before or after marriage as very slim. Their ambitions express what they would *like* to do, but a number of them do not expect to realise their ambitions.

Paradoxically, when the girls in the sample in the present study were asked about jobs that they disliked the most,<sup>35</sup> being a doctor was by far the most unpopular occupation mainly because of the girls' squeamishness. Other jobs disliked by these girls were being a housewife, working in an office or as a sales assistant, because of monotony; working as a teacher or nurse, because of hard work and low emolument; and working as a cleaner, refuse collector or coal-miner, because of the unclean nature of the job. This illustrates that while these adolescent girls are influenced by their teachers and their parents in making career choices, they are also able to analyse the benefits and drawbacks of an occupation according to personal preferences and interests, as well as economic gain (cf. Gambetta, 1988).

All these adolescent girls hoped for a happy and contented life in the future. Their hopes and desires were hierarchical: the vast majority of girls aspired to have a career before they got married and started a family. All the girls foresaw their future life to be very different from that of their parents:

I think it's going to be very different, because, firstly, I'll not be home, I'll be working. And I'll not have children straight away and I'll not have lots of children: maximum two. First, I want a career and then I want to get married. I want to be happy. I want my own house. I want to travel, go to America.  
(*Fehmida Saleem*)

In short, these girls want to have a full life, but are they being unrealistic? Recent research into the aspirations of Muslim girls (for example, Siann and Knox, 1992:203) indicates that compared to their peers their choices are not over-aspirational. Moreover, Brah and Shaw's (1992:52) research shows no evidence of unrealistic aspirations amongst the young Muslim women in their sample. The jobs they had aspired to whilst at school are predominantly those for which they have either already secured the relevant qualifications or are in the process of doing so. Overall their aspirations seem to be influenced by the ideologies that result in the



gendered division of the labour market in that the overwhelming majority wants jobs in those sectors of the economy where women predominate.

Similarly, the aspirations of the adolescent Muslim girls in the sample in the present study are high, but not unrealistic. When they were contacted one year after the fieldwork, remarkably, 23 out of 24 girls had gone into further education. The qualifications that they pursued ranged from GCSE retakes to A'levels and vocational courses. Only one girl, Zareena Nasir, stayed at home and was looking for a job, without any success. None of the girls in the sample had got married by then.

#### **8.4 The Nature of Career Advice and Guidance**

Career guidance is an attempt to mediate between individual aspirations, talents and values on the one hand and social structures, demands and opportunities on the other (Watts et al., 1981:380). The standard of careers education provision in schools varies greatly in quality and quantity (Van Dyke, 1985; Mirza, 1992:86). Caught up in the contradictions of a career programme, which suggests that advice should be based on individual choice, and placed within institutions that 'have few pretensions toward an academic education' (Tomlinson, 1987:98) are well-meaning teachers and career officers (Mirza, 1992:86).

Ethnic minority girls often complain that the career advice given to ethnic minorities in British schools is not the same as is given to pupils from the majority population. Research shows that girls of Asian and African-Caribbean origin feel that less is expected of them because of their race.<sup>36</sup> They are discouraged from pursuing more academic careers with the cautionary advice that their aspirations are too high and unrealistic and that they are probably going to be married off soon (see also pp. 215ff.). They are channelled to do a range of 'practical' subjects such as child-care,

needle-craft, home economics, typing and so on and the information offered to them regarding jobs mainly comprises stereotypical female occupations.

In the present study, each of the three schools in the sample had a careers department managed by a careers coordinator. The department had a careers library which contained books, brochures, and audio and video tapes about various occupations. The pupils were at liberty to visit the library and peruse the material in their free time. Information from various employers and colleges was pinned on notice boards displayed at various locations in the schools, such as the careers library, the careers coordinator's office and/or the year 11 form rooms.

During the years 10 and 11, a number of outside speakers from colleges and industry came to talk to the pupils. However, the choice of speakers and representative occupations appeared to be gender stereotyped (cf. Riley, 1985), at least in the case of the all-girls' school and largely dependent on the careers coordinators' perception of the pupils' ability and inclination:

We always have nursery nurses and secretaries and all these women coming in to tell us about their jobs, but no one comes from male-dominated jobs, like engineers or pilots.

*(Rahat Basheer)*

However, most teachers were satisfied with the careers service at their school:

I think a career is important to Muslim girls. The careers service that is offered to them is very good. Obviously from the guidance we are giving, we want them to develop their potential as much as they can.

*(Cynthia Roberts, Head of Careers, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

Only time will tell whether these girls are able to reach their full potential. However, recent research on young Muslim women and the labour market (such as, Brah and

Shaw, 1992:50) suggests that the overall ethos of schools hinders them from achieving their full potential. Furthermore, the careers service is thought to play a significant role in the reproduction of sexual and racial divisions in the labour market (Eggleston et al. 1986).

As part of careers guidance, the three sample schools in the present study arranged two to three weeks of work experience in the first term of year 11. Ostensibly, the pupils were allowed to choose where to go. However, not all pupils managed to acquire work experience at their chosen place. Moreover, every year disproportionate numbers of pupils failed to go on work experience for various reasons: a placement could not be found for them; or they were not allowed by their parents to work in the place assigned to them by the school. Previously, such pupils used to revise in the school library. However, in recent years, the careers department at Blossomdale Girls' School had introduced work simulation in school, whereby speakers from industry came and talked to these pupils about various occupational opportunities and their own experiences. The school's careers department appeared to believe that work simulation compensated for the lack of work experience. However, the adolescent girls in the sample in the present study who underwent work simulation found it unstimulating and a poor substitute for actual work experience. To them, it was merely more speeches about occupations they were not interested in.

The girls who went on work experience found it enjoyable and enlightening. Nevertheless, work experience appeared to have the effect of excluding career options rather than selecting them. Only two girls in the sample chose jobs relevant to their work experience. It seems that they had chosen, or had been assigned, a limited range of placements, without much thought to the kind of work they actually wanted to experience. Still, the parents and the girls were largely blamed for this narrow experience, as can be seen from the remarks of a Muslim teacher:

When they go into the work environment for three weeks for work experience, that is the first time for the Muslim girls to get the taste of what it is like going into the outside world. But they tend to pick Asian shops or schools with lots of Asians. I think the parents want them to stay in a safe environment and not to go too far from home.

*(Shahid Rehman, Science teacher, Hillsvew Comprehensive)*

The girls, however, maintained that they never specifically asked to go to these places. It appears that these adolescent Muslim girls were given these placements because the careers teachers believed that they would be happier working in a predominantly Asian environment, the parents would not object to such a placement and the employers would not be biased.<sup>37</sup> This stance effectively limited the girls' experience of the world of work as they were unable to attain first hand information about occupations they aspired to go into. Consequently, very few chose to go into careers pertaining to their work experience.

Although, a few girls believed that they got gender-stereotyped career advice, (see above, p. 225) the majority of them did not feel that they received specific career advice because of their gender, race or religion. The only time some of the girls got the impression that they got particular advice because of their race or religion was when they were notified about the kind of attire they would be required to wear if they went to work in a certain store:

They tell you the same things that they tell the others, but the careers teacher does warn you. Like there was this Saturday job at Cobblers - the shoe shop you know - and I was thinking of applying, but when I talked to the careers teacher, she said, 'You'll have to wear a skirt'. Well, you drop it straight away; you can't do anything about it.

*(Nusrat Sharif)*



Each school also had a county careers officer at their disposal who visited the schools regularly to interview the year 11 pupils individually. Contrary to what many girls in Mirza's (1992:90) research reported, the majority of adolescent girls in the sample in the present study did not find the county careers officer of any help. I was present during some of these individual career interviews conducted in the schools by the county careers officers. It was manifest during all such interviews that the primary role of the careers officer was to depress the aspirations of the adolescent Muslim girls they interviewed by channelling them towards more *realistic* careers. They appeared to do so without giving any concrete advice as to how these girls could realise their existent aspirations and without explaining to them why they could not do so.

The career officers seemed to believe that it was not their job to encourage the girls or offer them advice regarding jobs they were interested in. Furthermore, as Watts and Herr (1976) note, career guidance was apparently operating as an agency of social control, adapting individuals to the manpower requirements of the economy. This required restricting the range of occupations presented to each individual and emphasising 'realism'.<sup>38</sup>

The schools in the sample in the present study also had access to specialist careers officers having expertise in multicultural education, who specialised in dealing collectively with Asian pupils, though not exclusively Muslim girls. While some teachers found the specialist county careers officer's service helpful, others had reservations about it:

We have called in expert help at times to advise some of the Asian girls. But we had a great clash last year when the officer who was coming in was actually saying to the girls who wanted to go on to the sixth form, 'Should you really do that? What do your parents think about that? What ideas do

your parents have about that and shouldn't you be listening to them'? And to our way of thinking, that was advice that was going beyond the mark.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

The specialist career officer's appreciation of the importance of the parents' perspective was apparently seen by the school as a weakness, though the girls found it helpful to discuss their career aspirations with her/him.

The majority of girls were also offered some career guidance by their teachers. Form teachers and career teachers were perceived to be the most obliging in this respect, but some of the girls added that advice was only given when the girls asked for it. Since very few girls had the confidence to initiate a meeting with the careers teacher, they consulted their form teachers who appeared to offer informal advice during the form period. Only the careers tutor at Blossomdale Girls' School interviewed every Year 11 girl individually, thus eliminating the need for these adolescent girls to approach her. Still, the careers teachers appeared to have their own preconceived ideas about the kind of guidance the girls required:

The careers teacher splits us up into groups. Like the clever girls - the ones she thinks are going to need career advice - she separates them from the girls who are just going to go home and cook dinner.

*(Nasreen Butt)*

Furthermore, the quality and quantity of career advice in the three schools can be determined by the fact that, during the interviews, a number of girls and parents asked me about college courses and the subjects which should be studied to go into certain occupations (see, p. 41) (cf. Mirza, 1992:89): questions that they were hesitant to ask the teachers for fear of being perceived as ignorant, or those that were left unanswered.

Still, the parents seemed grateful for whatever information the school transmitted to them. As a result, almost all the parents were convinced that their daughter's school provided adequate career guidance. In most cases, though, career advice was dependent on the teachers' expectations of the pupil and comprised informing the girls and the parents what subjects the girls could study and what careers they could go into:

They asked me to come in and told me that if she studied such and such subjects, she could go into such and such occupations.

*(Shabnam Majeed's father)*

As far as parental advice was concerned, the majority of girls maintained that their parents wanted them to attain qualifications; and allowed them to choose any career, within reason, that they were interested in. This does not necessarily imply apathy or a lack of interest on the part of the parents, but rather shows that though the parents were not able to offer tangible guidance to their daughters, they nevertheless discussed the educational and career options with the girls and encouraged them to choose occupations that interested them provided they did not clash with their religious and cultural mores:

Islam doesn't prohibit or restrict unnecessarily: it only tells us to abstain from wrongdoing. I tell them [my children] they can do any kind of work as long as it is not against the religion.

*(Raheela Noor's father)*

However, some of the girls disclosed that their parents and siblings and members of the extended family offered useful advice and help on the choice of a career. On the whole, it seemed that the girls were offered as much advice by their families as could be potentially given. Furthermore, the effect of limited advice was

counterpoised by motivation, high expectations and faith in the benefits of education:

My mother went to college, but she got married at 18 and couldn't get much further. I wouldn't want to do that. I want to get educated first and then get married and carry on with my work. I think my life will be very different from that of my parents.

TNB: And what will make the difference?

Actually my parents, themselves, will make the difference. Their parents didn't think education was such a big thing, whereas my parents do. They are quite broad-minded and they want us to succeed and that makes quite a lot of difference.

*(Nasreen Butt)*

The parents' experience of education, if they had had education, was very different from that of their children as can be seen from the statement above. Similarly, their own experience of the labour market was, in most cases, confined to manual or semi-skilled jobs, which they could not envisage for their children. Consequently, the advice regarding various occupations that they offered their children comprised what they had gleaned from different sources, such as relatives, friends and the media. Still, even mothers who had never worked themselves encouraged their daughters to receive education and find work. It appeared that the parents' own experience of education and work, or lack of it, had made them more appreciative of the value of educational credentials and their consequent help in finding a respectable job. This is manifest from the following comments of a girl and her father:

My mum never worked; my dad used to be a bus driver. I think my life is going to be very different. My mum goes, 'When you get married, what are



you going to do? Sit around like me all day! Mum has always been at home and she gets fed up, while I am educated and I can easily go out and find a job or stay at home. I've got two choices.

*(Nuzhat Kareem)*

My brother is an accountant; my son also wants to be an accountant and so does my daughter. They think my brother, who has his own firm in Sheffield, will be able to guide them. I personally supported my brother during his period of study. I worked as a bus driver. My father used to tell me to study, but I never listened to him. Now I am in tears when I pass a college or university. I wouldn't have been a bus driver, if I had listened to my father, but would have had a better job. With this thing in mind, I helped my brother to receive education and want my children to receive education too.

*(Nuzhat Kareem's father)*

It is clear that the schools' and the county's careers services are fulfilling their role of imparting information.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the careers advice and guidance provided by them omits the essential ingredient of motivation. On the other hand, as is apparent from the statements above, parental attitude, despite reservations regarding the suitability of certain fields of study and careers, provides encouragement, and is instrumental in helping the girls in realising their aspirations.<sup>40</sup>

The support and encouragement provided by these Muslim parents indicates their interest in their children's future; their adolescent daughters appear to be receptive to their parents' concern. The schools could exploit parental interest in order to help the girls to attain their full potential. Kelly (1989) argues that for girls, their perception of their parents' wishes is important. She suggests that guidance from responsible adults can be effective in shaping pupils' occupational horizons and that parents should be involved as fully as possible in their children's career education.

## **8.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the career aspirations of adolescent Muslim girls in the light of my data. Contrary to what some other researchers (see, for example, Afshar, 1989:271) contend, the present research points to British Muslims' phenomenal aspirations to upward social mobility through the route of education and careers. However, career aspirations are contingent on religious and cultural values too, into which the girls have been socialised from an early age. Thus while the chosen job has to be of a high socio-economic status, it should be respectable and not involve them in unIslamic activities. This indicates British Muslims' desire to better themselves, but not at the detriment of their religious identity.

The parents and the girls, many of whom can be loosely termed as belonging to the working class, have middle class aspirations. These aspirations seem unrealistic to the teachers and do not fit their stereotype of children of minimally educated, working class and unemployed parents. The teachers belong to a different ethnic group and/or social class. They tend to perceive people's ability through the lens of their own educational experiences, which in most cases are Anglo-Saxon and/or middle class. However, assertions regarding unrealistic aspirations fail to take into account the fact that ability and achievement are not static and can be enhanced with motivation: not only the intrinsic motivation of the pupils, but also the way they are motivated by their parents and teachers.

Nevertheless, the girls are not unthinkingly following their parents. They have been socialised to hold certain occupations in high esteem. At the same time, they have developed their own aptitudes and interests. If any of them have chosen the traditionally female or caring occupations, it is because they perceive these careers as a pragmatic route to upward mobility, not only in accordance with their religio-cultural norms, but also in a racist and sexist labour market. While there are certain jobs about which the parents have serious reservations, there are others which they

can be persuaded into allowing the girls to go into. This points to the role of negotiation and persuasion in the career development of these adolescent girls, by means of which they are shaping their identities and aspirations.

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## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **9.1 Identities and Aspirations**

In the last few chapters, I have elucidated the disparate themes emerging from the data. While each of the previous chapters has concentrated on a single dimension of the lives of adolescent British Muslim girls, all these perspectives have emanated from the data and are, therefore, inextricably linked. In this chapter these various strands are tied together to portray a complete picture that explains the underlying factors shaping the identity and aspirations of these Muslim girls. As pointed out before, in order to ascertain their hopes for the future, it is essential to investigate the life they are living at present. Consequently, this research is as much a study of the present experiences of these teenage Muslim girls as their future ambitions.

At times, it has been necessary to include lengthy quotations in order to communicate to the reader the unembellished rationale behind the interviewees' sentiments. Furthermore, some interviewees have been quoted more than the others, not because the others did not have anything interesting to say on the subject, but because the quotations included in the text were more profound and illuminating. The views of the teachers and the parents have been examined as closely as those of the girls, since these two groups have a crucial role in shaping the educational, social and career aspirations of these adolescent Muslim girls.

The teachers' views indicate that Muslims are perhaps the most misunderstood religious group in Britain. The presence of Muslim pupils in school has made the teachers consider issues they had never thought of before. The teachers emerge as hard working professionals who are concerned about all their pupils and are doing their best to help these pupils attain a good education, regardless of ethnic origin or religion. Nevertheless, there is evidence of polarity in the teachers' perceptions



regarding Muslims, who are seen as either not having any aspirations or holding unrealistically high ambitions (see p. 195). The teachers' comments seem innocuous on the surface, but they sometimes give the impression that they are guilty of prejudice and inadvertent racism. Yet they are struggling to make sense of the life of these girls. In their endeavour to do so, they understand some aspects of the Muslim girls' religion and culture and misunderstand the others. If one teacher comprehends something that the other teachers cannot understand, s/he totally misunderstands something else. As a result of this inconsistency in understanding, different teachers produce different misconceptions.

This misinterpretation of religio/cultural values is not uncommon. Many teachers seem to view these adolescent Muslim girls with the same lens with which they see the Anglo-Saxon adolescent girls without taking into account the subtle differences in the way of life of the two groups. Muslim ethos is misunderstood to the extent that respectfulness is seen as shyness or submissiveness, protectiveness is viewed as oppression and modesty is construed as traditionalism. Patriarchy is only perceived in negative terms as despotism and its loving, supportive and guiding role is underestimated. A Muslim father is erroneously perceived as an authoritarian figure and a Muslim mother as a passive model. Westernisation is conceived as progress by the teachers and they label their Muslim pupils and their families accordingly.

Nevertheless, the teachers' job is to impart knowledge, not to Anglicise the girls. The teachers are effective when they understand the dynamics of the Muslim religion and culture to some extent and teach within that framework without exerting implicit pressure on the girls to conform to the majority norm (see pp. 162-163; 165). Muslim and other ethnic minority teachers understand the issues better but some appear to have a class bias. However, it is almost impossible to prove class bias and covert racism. It is also difficult to differentiate between racially motivated prejudice based on resentment and prejudice emanating from misunderstanding and lack of knowledge. Teachers are effective where they have been trained to

teach in multiethnic schools and are, therefore, sensitive to the issues involved. In the present research, these are mainly senior teachers with several years of teaching experience who are part of the power hierarchy of the school and are offered the opportunity to attend multicultural and racism-awareness courses. Such courses appear to be indispensable for a better understanding of the pupils and making them available to all teachers, regardless of their hierarchical standing, can be advantageous.

The teachers in the present study perceive the Muslim girls, whom they teach, both as an asset and a difficulty. Though they believe that these girls bring diversity into the school which is beneficial for all the pupils, yet some accuse Muslim parents of causing problems, either through ignorance or obstinacy. Interestingly, many teachers are convinced that Muslim girls need sympathetic listeners with whom they can discuss their so-called problems. Again, many teachers appear to apply the norms of the indigenous, middle class society to Muslim girls, whereby they feel that adolescent girls should have the autonomy to decide what to do with their life, how to shape their identities and how to realise their aspirations and if teenagers lack such autonomy, they must be miserable and need help.

Even some Muslim teachers have internalised this notion, at least in the sense that they also think that some Muslim parents do not allow their daughters to participate fully in the day to day activities of the school and thus suppress their aspirations. Most teachers in the sample find it strange that, by and large, these girls live their lives according to the way they have been socialised by their parents from a young age. They are also not aware that these adolescents have supportive families (see p. 277) with whom they are able to discuss most of their problems and therefore do not need, what they might see as, the interference of outsiders.

The Muslim girls in the sample do not fit many teachers' mould of working class adolescents who are supposed to have minimal aspirations. Many teachers find it

puzzling that these adolescent girls and their parents have aspirations which are endemic to the middle class only. While able pupils are no doubt keen to work, the low ability Muslim girls appear to have a similar inclination to comply, which is extraordinary. Their behaviour in school is impeccable; they are not disrespectful to the teachers and show a willingness to work, regardless of their ability. They have been brought up to respect their elders. For the teachers, however, the respect is twofold. Muslim children are taught to hold the teachers in high esteem: not only as people older than themselves, but also as learned members of society who are imparting something useful to them, i.e. knowledge. Further, girls, in any case, tend to be more compliant and behave better in class (cf. Stanley, 1993).

However, the fact that the teachers have such profound misunderstandings about the girls does not mean that the school has no influence in shaping the lives of these girls. The girls cannot help but know that some aspects of their life are misinterpreted. Yet they do not seem to care. They are encouraged by their parents to accept the teachers' views on education, but the majority rejects the teachers' opinion about matters pertaining to marriage and the family. This indicates maturity whereby these girls are able to analyse and synthesise the ambiguous messages and determine the aspects in which they have to distance themselves socially from the teachers. Their hopes and aspirations are positive as they are engendered by strong, secure and loving bonds within their families. Consequently, they can disregard the negative messages transmitted by some teachers. Evidently, the influence of the family is much stronger than any other influence.

The Muslim parents in the sample want their children to succeed. Some, though not all, hope to see their children train to become doctors or lawyers. This can be attributed, on the one hand, to their lack of knowledge of how ability and achievement relate to university entrance and subsequent careers; on the other hand, it emanates from a desire for their children to prosper. The parents have little understanding of different professions and out of those about which they know



something, doctors and other such professionals are, in their eyes, paragons of respectability, status, success, wealth: in fact everything these parents want for their children. Still, their aspirations are not so quixotic that they cannot be realised. They encourage their children to work diligently towards these goals. Further, though the parents have very high expectations initially, they are willing to modify them in the light of the children's ability, effort and inclination (see pp. 211; 221).

However, these Muslim parents think of work for their daughters in terms of professions or white-collar jobs. They cannot envisage their daughters working in factories. This not only points to the ubiquitous high aspirations of ethnic minorities, but also suggests that because of their love and concern for their daughters, the parents are only willing to allow them to work if they can find a job in, what the parents perceive as, a safe and decent environment. The parents do not want the girls to work just anywhere for the sake of money and face exploitation. They are also prepared to revert to the conventional image of woman as only housewife and mother if their daughter cannot go into a *respectable* career. However, education is considered important, not only to have a career, but also to have a good marriage. A young man who is a university graduate would not marry a young woman who is a high school drop-out and vice versa.

In the present research, there is clear evidence of strong and confident relationships in the family. The atmosphere in the homes is happy, contented, loving, caring and secure (see pp. 83-84; 94; 95; 132). The girls' bond to their family is unambiguously powerful and the family structure gives the girls immense support in their endeavour to realise their aspirations. The family is the vehicle for conveying the group norms to ensure group perpetuation. Yet these norms are not merely based on socio-cultural perceptions: they are sustained by a religious ethos and the religious element give these norms a strength which needs to be given sufficient weight.



An ardent desire for upward social mobility is constantly manifest (see pp. 66; 142; 209). The parents could not achieve what they had hoped for, yet they have faith in the future through their children. They want their children to move into the middle class through the mediums of education and careers. They even identify themselves through the elite language in their country of origin by teaching it to their children and thus equating themselves with the literate immigrant group and hoping their children will have similar careers as this literate group. Being Muslims they want jobs for their children which are compatible with the values of their religion. They are not merely interested in wealth: they do not want their children to be actors or pop singers. They want their children to live in Britain as Muslims and their religious ethnicity is that of British Muslims.

The girls' identity, as regards ethnicity, is being shaped by the perceptions of the parents to a large extent. The daughters of the parents who think of themselves as British opt for a British identity too, whereas the daughters of those who feel they are Asian, choose to call themselves Asian. The views of the teachers, regarding the girls' ethnicity, also have an impact on the girls as some of the British-born girls are reluctant to call themselves British because of the attitude of the indigenous society, which insists on seeing them as Asian, rather than British. School is the girls' main contact with the indigenous society and the teachers, though ostensibly keen for the girls to become British, want them to do so on their terms. They find it difficult to perceive the girls as British while they adhere to various aspects of their Asian culture.

The teachers also see the parents as the biggest barrier to assimilation. They feel that the girls are keen to assimilate, but the parents do not let them. Yet, many girls and parents would be happy to call themselves British, but are afraid of non-acceptance and rejection by the indigenous population. Hence, they choose to stick to their Asian identity, as that cannot be questioned. Still, they undoubtedly perceive Britain as their permanent home and want to succeed here.

Due to the negative perception of some of the teachers as regards the heritage language (see p. 69), very few adolescent Muslim girls speak it in school during their free time, though they are comfortable and even proud to use it in situations out of school. Parental views on the heritage language are instrumental in shaping the girls' perceptions of the language. It is spoken and valued in the homes, though some girls speak more English than the heritage language. The girls GCSE results showed that many attained grade A in Urdu or Bengali, yet C or D in other GCSE subjects. There could be several explanations for this: they are motivated to learn this language because it is close to the language spoken in their homes; the parents are able to help them with this language at home; the girls see the language as part of their identity and heritage, like the religion.

The parents appear to perceive Islamic belief and practice as a living legacy that has to be passed on to their children. The girls have internalised the religious values inculcated in them from an early age, albeit to a varied extent depending on their family's religiosity. Consequently, these girls see Islam as a means of identity, a source of comfort and a set of rules to abide by. As opposed to the teachers, the parents and most girls see Islam as a liberal religion. While the teachers respect the faith of their Muslim pupils, they are incredulous of the practical aspects of worship, which they find alien to life in Britain. It is clear that the girls' religious identity is being shaped by the way religion is perceived by the parents. Further, their everyday life in Britain has an impact too, at least on religious practice if not on belief, as some of them find it hard to pray and fast during a school day, despite the provision of facilities such as a room to pray in school.

Religious practice does not seem to present immediate temporal benefit. Its spiritual value is not understood by these adolescent girls because they are influenced by the secular environment of their adopted country. Still, while all these girls are not necessarily pious, they want to retain their religion to a greater or lesser degree. While living in a secular country may have influenced their religious practice to

some extent, their religious belief is intact (cf. Afshar, 1994). Thus their religious identity is permanent like gender identity: they are Muslim wherever they are and the parents and the girls want to remain Muslim.

For this reason, inter-religious marriage induces strong feelings of antipathy amongst the parents. No parents want their daughter to marry a non-Muslim mainly due to religious restrictions. Interestingly, though Islam allows Muslim men to marry women of the scriptures, none of the parents want their sons to marry a non-Muslim woman either, as they are afraid that such marriages result in loss of faith and cannot succeed due to religious and cultural differences. The parents are, thus, using religion to buttress their cultural mores too, as religious and cultural practices are closely intermeshed.

Although most girls are also against intermarriage, yet they do not mention religious restriction like their parents. While they try to rationalise their stance in the same way as their parents, as they also believe these marriages fail due to differences in religion and culture, they are obviously influenced by the indigenous population to a certain degree in not propounding religion as a valid entity to explain people's actions. Still, the small minority not against intermarriage, do not want to have such a marriage themselves as they are aware of the consequences of such an action which will doubtless lead to friction, if not total alienation from their families. Consequently, they favour arranged marriage.

Arranged marriage is clearly not as rigid as it is seen by many indigenous teachers. The vast majority of adolescent Muslim girls convey feelings of warmth and security related to this custom and faith in their parents ingenuity. It appears that the teachers are misinterpreting the information that they obtain from the girls during discussions regarding the custom of arranged marriage. The teachers have their own set of community values in which they are just as entrenched as the parents and girls are in theirs. The immigrant population, however, is expected to abandon



its mores and embrace those of the indigenous group and the obstinacy with which these parents adhere to the custom of arranged marriage and the respect that the vast majority of girls have for this tradition surprises many teachers (see pp. 122; 124).

While the girls' own views on arranged marriage are being shaped by the way they have been socialised about this custom by their parents and the Muslim community, they have also been influenced by the views of their teachers, peers, the media and the world around them. They are aware of other girls' supposedly free choice in whom to marry and while many may secretly want to have this option themselves, they are wary of the repercussions of such an action, which may be the loss of love and support of their family. They have been socialised to view marriage as a contract between two families. In the social world that they inhabit, it cannot be a contract merely between two individuals; it would be too superficial and would lack the commitment intrinsic to the permanence of such a relationship (see pp. 116ff.). Furthermore, as we have seen, the girls do not have the opportunity to meet people of the opposite sex and even when they do, they feel they might lack the wisdom or the experience to choose the right person themselves.

However, even in an ostensibly autonomous society, individuals do not have the freedom to marry just anybody. They may not be accountable to their family, but they still have to abide by the rules of the society they live in. All marriages, whether they are amongst the indigenous population or the minority groups, are based on dreams, hopes and expectations: a Muslim marriage is no exception. It differs from marriage amongst the indigenous population merely in the extent of involvement of the young couple's family. While Muslim parents openly and proudly arrange their children's marriage, parents from the majority group, who are just as concerned about their children's welfare and happiness, may want to do so in a more covert manner. Hence arranged marriage amongst Muslims is indeed marriage



orchestrated by caring parents with the consent of the young people involved, rather than marriage inflicted on two young people by insensitive parents (see pp. 120ff.).

Still, the teachers want the girls to have freedom from such restraints and decide for themselves what is good for them and what is not. Paradoxically, the teachers themselves will obviously put limitations on the extent of freedom allowed to the girls. For instance, they will not want the girls to have the freedom to miss lessons, hit other pupils or try out drugs. In other words, their definition of freedom encapsulates what is socially acceptable for the indigenous population, yet does not take into account what is normative for other religious and ethnic groups. Only some Asian teachers, who are themselves a part of the British Asian subculture appear to appreciate the subtle distinctions between the two cultures.

The notion of freedom is polemic. The girls' perceptions regarding freedom are shaped by analysing and synthesising the views of the parents and teachers, and also the way the girls perceive the world themselves, as there is a clash of values between the teachers and the parents. The reason these girls do not want as much freedom as their Anglo-Saxon contemporaries could be explained as a sign of maturity whereby they are able to weigh the pros and cons of excessive freedom in the light of present day violence against women and, to some extent, ethnic minorities. A few may consider themselves old enough and sensible enough to decide what is good for them, but this attitude is clearly the consequence of being constantly persuaded by the media that they lead oppressive and restricted lives.

The concept of family honour (cf. Afshar, 1994) is deeply embedded in Islamic ideology and individual members of the family are socialised from a young age to sustain this honour by refraining from actions that could jeopardise it. The parents want to nurture their children because Islam obligates them to bring up their children properly. Another reason could be a desire for self-satisfaction and to impress others that they have produced paragons of excellence. The main reason, however,

appears to be a concern for the well-being of their children. Despite their love for their daughters, Muslim parents perceive a son as a somewhat permanent asset, whereas a daughter is considered to be a temporary resident in the parental home, who inevitably has to go away. Nevertheless, far from neglecting them, the parents feel acutely responsible for their adolescent daughters' welfare and it is their paramount concern to assure that the girls do not come to any harm or do anything that goes against the ethos of the religion and culture.

In theory, the parents have similar concern for their sons, but in practice boys sometimes get away with behaviour that girls seldom attempt for fear of dishonour and notoriety. The girls, though aware of the fact that they have less freedom than their brothers, seem to respect the rationale behind their parents' protectiveness. Although the indigenous teachers feel that these girls ought to complain about parental restrictions, the girls are loathe to go against the mores of the family. They feel happy and safe within their family and, contrary to popular belief, the vast majority are being offered the same educational opportunities as their brothers.

While the parents cannot help the girls very much as regards academic matters, such as homework and option choices, they encourage the girls to seek help from siblings, relatives and teachers. Yet, the parents willingly discuss the option choices with the girls to the extent their limited knowledge of the subject would allow, connoting their interest and concern. Similarly, the girls show respect and regard for parental opinion by consulting their parents despite the knowledge that the parents can offer minimal advice. The adolescent Muslim girls' GCSE options are mainly influenced by vocational, cultural, religious and gender considerations. The majority favour subjects that are going to help them achieve their preferred career. They choose community languages because of cultural affiliation and refrain from studying expressive subjects due to religious reasons. Additionally, like their indigenous peers, Muslim girls choose traditional girls' subjects in coeducational schools and happily go for the so-called boys' subjects in single-sex schools,

suggesting that such gender issues influence all ethnic and religious groups in a similar way.

All the adolescent girls in the present research aspire to further education and many to higher education. Even the girl whose parents did not allow her to go into further education is hopeful of continuing her education after marriage with the belief that her husband will let her pursue her ambition. Furthermore, the vast majority of parents are willing to provide as much support as possible. The girls are not expected to look for work when they finish school, but are allowed to carry on and the parents, despite meagre finances, are willing to see them through further and higher education, thus indicating their love for them.

Distinct friendship patterns are apparent in the friendship choices of these adolescent Muslim girls. There is a tendency to have as close friends girls from similar religious and cultural backgrounds as themselves, and those known to their families. Though some able Muslim girls have able non-Muslim girls as their friends, yet their friendship is confined to the school milieu. The average Muslim girl, though, in the main, has friends who are either Muslim or non-Muslim, albeit, of Asian origin. While the parents do not stop the girls from seeking the friendship of non-Muslim girls, Muslim girls are wary of such contact because of racism. Additionally, since Muslim girls have been socialised to live their lives in a certain way, they are reluctant to get too close to their non-Muslim peers. While some of them might be mentally consentaneous with other able non-Muslim girls in the school, they cannot spend their free time after school like the non-Muslim girls, i.e. they are not allowed to go out in the evenings, go to discos and so on: the leisure pursuits of many indigenous adolescent girls. Hence, their friendship is limited to the school where they can enjoy the same leisure activities. Similar maturity is evident in the Muslim girls' attitude to boyfriends. While some might secretly want to have a boyfriend like their indigenous peers, they are aware of the stance of their religion and culture regarding such a relationship. Consequently, they eschew such friendships.



Another area in which restrictions may be imposed on Muslim girls is staying on after school to take part in extracurricular activities. Many girls are seen as responsible persons by the teachers and are, therefore assigned certain formal and informal duties in school, which undoubtedly build up their confidence in themselves. However, to the parents the girls are still young and need to be protected. Consequently, Muslim girls' participation in activities is affected by factors which may not affect a non-Muslim girl. Though Muslim parents do not explicitly stop the girls from taking part in extracurricular activities at school, they, nevertheless, prefer them to come straight home after school. The girls understand their parents' concern and, therefore, avoid taking part in after-school activities. This worries the teachers and while some merely blame the parents, others take strategic steps to involve the girls in extracurricular activities in a manner which agrees with the parents (see p. 290).

There is cogent evidence of these adolescent girls' optimism and high expectations of the labour market. Moreover, there is a general naiveté and unawareness about structural and institutional racism. While these families perceive racism as ineluctable, they appear to evade overt racism by keeping a low profile. Significantly, the fear of racism has not blighted their aspirations for the future. Education is seen as a device that will deliver them from their present circumstances and improve their lives. If the parents have any inkling of discrimination in employment, they do not communicate their fears to their children lest they are disheartened. Nevertheless, such anxieties can only strengthen their resolve to encourage the young people to receive education.

The manifestation of tremendous parental motivation is a continuous theme. The parents are keen and supportive and, despite limited knowledge of the type of careers they want their daughters to choose, encourage them consistently. Even mothers who have no experience of work and fathers who are unemployed offer encouragement and some guidance based on information gathered from various



people. The biggest source of advice, though, are older siblings and career-oriented members of the extended family. Thus the families collectively offer guidance and what they lack in advice is compensated by motivation (see pp. 231-232).

Conversely, the career teachers' and county career officers' role does not appear to involve encouragement. Their job description seems to comprise liaising with institutions of further education and industry, passing on information to the pupils and parents and channelling the pupils towards ostensibly realistic careers. The career guidance offered in the three sample schools is highly formal and appears inaccessible. This hinders the girls from exploring a wide range of options and effectively restricts their choice. While some form teachers and career teachers are inclined to advise these adolescent girls individually and encourage them accordingly, their teaching commitments leave them little time to do anything beyond the bare minimum. This may demoralise, discourage and disappoint adolescent girls and subsequently prevent them from reaching their potential.

Adolescence, as pointed out earlier (see pp. 7ff.), is largely viewed as a period of storm and stress and a problem stage in human development. The characteristic features of this life stage as seen by theoreticians are chaos, confusion, conflict, uncertainty, tension, sense of isolation, vulnerability, turmoil and rebellion. Even those who do not perceive it as a negative phase, at least observe teenage as a time of adaptation, adjustment, challenge, opportunity, individuation, autonomy development and breaking ties. Nevertheless, empirical research challenges the depressing portrayal of adolescence.

Coleman (1980) points to the conspicuous absence of a theoretical approach propounding the normality of the adolescence process. He, nevertheless, observes that the transition from childhood to adulthood requires considerable adaptation and adjustment, which many achieve without facing problems. He explains the

successful development from teenage to maturity in terms of a focal theory (see p. 12).

The present study portrays an interesting picture and refutes the theoretical interpretations of adolescence, like other empirical research (see pp. 10-11.). Far from being a period of storm and stress, it depicts adolescence as a period of hope, optimism and looking to the future: a positive stage in the life of an individual. The teenagers are not expected to sever ties, grow up and become independent, but childhood dependence is gradually and gently complemented and then superseded by quasi-adult responsibility. If conflict exists, it is present because of living in a country where many practices are incongruous with their religio/cultural ethos and being influenced by the media and some peers and teachers that they lead oppressed lives.

Yet the majority of teenage girls investigated in this study appear to deal with conflict and contradiction without undue stress. Adolescents who cope successfully with this phase do so with the support of their family. The power of the family structure is enormous. With the help of their family, these girls are being eased and nurtured into adulthood, not left floundering to trace the route themselves. They do not feel isolated at this stage of life, but define their identity in relation to others. Autonomy is completely absent from the agenda of becoming an adult. These adolescent girls want to remain connected with their family and aspire to high social, educational and career goals with the support of the family. They are not being pushed into a precipitate premature adulthood, but have a guided and supported adolescence, where important decisions for the future are made by their parents with their consent. Contradiction and conflict is resolved by analysis and synthesis or by defence mechanism.

Indeed this research does not depict adolescence as a remarkable stage. It appears to be as normal a phase of life as any other phase. Storm, stress, adaptation and

adjustment can be features of any other life stage too if the individual lacks support of the family. Similarly, adolescence can only be a difficult period if the teenager faces rejection from the family or the family is rigid and unyielding.

The experience of adolescence is contextualised. It is different in various situations and cultures. The data generated by the present study cannot be put into the strait-jacket of rebellion, but neither does it fit entirely the mould of compliance and submission. The girls are aiming to realise their aspirations by means of negotiation. These adolescent Muslim girls are not passive recipients of cultural legacy, but are active participants in shaping their own identities. They do so with the help of their parents and, to some extent, of their teachers, albeit encouraged by the parents to seek the advice of the teachers in matters in which the family cannot guide them. Significantly, they are neither emulating the parents, nor the teachers, but are shaping their own aspirations and identities which are being negotiated not ascribed.

The present research indicates a complex and subtle link between identities and aspirations. The multiple identities that the girls are negotiating for themselves have an impact on their aspirations. Their identities as females, Muslims and family members, combined with their identities as educated and career-oriented British Asians are setting the parameters of their future lives. Concurrently, their multiple aspirations are shaping their present and future identities. Hence their identities and aspirations reciprocally influence and mould each other.

## **9.2 Some Implications**

The study manifests a kaleidoscope of attitudes as regards how people perceive and structure their social world. Even families from the same geographical area or social class are not homogeneous, which cautions against stereotyping ethnic minorities. However, the reader might see this thesis as a rather celebratory account

of adolescence. The stereotypical models of oppressive Muslim parents, tense and distressed adolescents, forced arranged marriages, discontinued schooling, absence of further education, unrealistic career aspirations are caricatures unsubstantiated by this research.

British Muslims are willing to adapt to those aspects of the indigenous culture which do not clash with their religio/cultural ethos. Culture is dynamic, not static. Immigrants retain the likeable features of their culture of origin and abandon the ones they dislike. They also adopt what they are impressed with from the culture of their adopted country and reject what they find unimpressive. However, it should not be assumed that once the ethnic minorities have gone through the processes of retention, adoption, abandonment and rejection, thereby creating a remarkable subculture and identity, this culture and this identity becomes sacrosanct to them. They go through such processes throughout their life and features which had previously been retained might be abandoned; similarly, aspects that were once rejected might be adopted as their expedience is recognised in realising their aspirations. Furthermore, though society perpetuates itself in many ways, yet the children may want to create their own identity by combining aspects of their parents' culture with that of the indigenous culture again. Thus, the metamorphoses continue. This does not necessarily mean that the second generation abandons the parental culture entirely to embrace the indigenous culture: sometimes the younger generation, disenchanted with the indigenous culture and its own status as a marginalised minority, reverts to the culture of origin with more fervour than the parents.

It is too easily assumed that ability and potential are static and permanent. Pupils may be encouraged to work, but if they are not motivated to work harder, they are unlikely to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. It is dangerous to place them into set categories two years before the public examination and not offered a chance to improve themselves. In the light of the present research, it will be



advantageous if it is constantly pointed out to the pupils right from Year 7 what subjects have to be studied at what level and what kinds of grades are required to go into certain professions. The correlation between present effort and ultimate career needs to be constantly emphasised. Career teachers appear to need more time out of their teaching commitments for career guidance so that they can guide the pupils even before they choose their options.

Effective home-school liaison is also crucial not only for ethnic minority families, but also for those indigenous parents who do not come into school. More resources need be put into this service. It will be beneficial for the schools if they pay greater attention to the Muslim community and exploit whatever resources it can offer. Some of the younger members of the community who had formerly studied at their school can come in and talk about their experience of option choices, the problems they faced and the satisfaction or disenchantment they felt with their chosen options. This can benefit the pupils, because for so many of them the biggest source of help were older siblings who had had the experience of choosing options. Moreover, since the girls have people of their own background as role models, successful role models from the community can be provided in the shape of teachers, school governors, and other professionals who can be invited to talk to the pupils about their careers.

The fact that adolescent Muslim girls do not appear to be as emancipated as other British girls might suggest that they are less mature. But what is the definition of maturity and why should it be applied to both the groups in the same way if they have different norms of behaviour? Should respect for the parents and reluctance to break ties indeed be viewed as inhibited development? Ego / Personal / individual identity is a myth. Individuals do not exist in a vacuum. They identify themselves in relation to others around them and have different identities in different contexts which they manipulate to effectuate their aspirations. The adolescent Muslim girl is a student and friend at school, a daughter and sibling at home, and hopes to be a

career woman, wife and mother in the future. However, her religion, like her gender is an enduring source of identity and is pertinent in all contexts.

However, many practices propagated as Islamic have no foundation in Islamic ideology, but have been adopted by Muslims through their contact with other religious groups or imposed by androcentric societies. While Islam emphasises women's primary role as mothers and carers and lays stress on modesty, it does not prevent them from seeking education and pursuing careers outside the home. Thus it is the women's prerogative to decide whether they can successfully combine the domestic role with a career outside the home.

Adolescent Muslim girls are shaping their own identities through a process of negotiation and persuasion. They want education, a career, marriage and a family. How attainable are these goals is yet to be seen. Many career oriented women are not happy with a successful career only. They also find a great deal of satisfaction in other things such as a happy marriage, the husband's career, motherhood, family ties and so on. Nevertheless, to ascend the career ladder they may have to forgo many things in which they find enjoyment. While it is assumed for a man to have a successful career *and* everything else, many women can only manage to attain an eminent career if they never marry and/or have children (cf. Wilkinson, 1994).

However, women's careers outside the home have repercussions for the family, especially young children and elderly parents. If the country is to benefit economically and socially from its potential female work force, like the Muslim girls investigated in this research, greater help will be needed to reconcile the demands of the family and career in the form of better child care facilities, work place crèches, facilities for caring for the elderly in the form of day clubs and facilities for women (and men) to work from home. Moreover, women should not be penalised if they want to resume their career after a career break taken to raise a family after marriage.

Recent research (such as, Berrington, 1994) notes striking differences in marriage and family formation patterns among the majority and minority population in Britain. Nevertheless, as we have seen, while the custom of marriage amongst British Muslims is strongly adhered to, there are subtle changes taking place within its framework. For example, Muslim girls and their parents recognise changing times and circumstances, the importance of education and a career and are willing to combine a career with marriage. Further, consanguineous marriage, frequently criticised by the indigenous population is still favoured by the parents, though not so much by the girls. Though, the girls' perception of consanguineous marriage is shaped by the parents to the extent that most are willing to marry someone in the kin, yet it has been influenced by the teachers' views and those of other people around them too as many do not want to marry a first cousin. Still, the girls appreciate the advantages of a consanguineous marriage. As far as the parents are concerned, there is a slight shift from favouring marriage with first cousins to marriage with someone known to the family, albeit within limits.

Though, in theory, many parents and girls have no objection to inter-racial and inter-ethnic marriages, yet the vast majority prefers marriage with someone from a similar racial and ethnic background. These reservations are not based merely on prejudice, but emanate from rational explanations of social, cultural and religious mores sustained over several hundred years, as a result of which Muslims still retain their group identity. However, marrying someone living in Britain is increasingly being viewed with favour to a large extent by the girls and to a certain extent by the parents also, thus indicating the acceptance of changing circumstances and perceiving Britain as their permanent home.

Thus, the myth of return is diminishing. British Muslims are here to stay and are a potential work force of the future. This subculture is a permanent part of the British culture now and it should neither be marginalised, nor its importance minimised. This group retains its identity through family values and marriage practice and

strongly adheres to raising children within the context of marriage, chastity before marriage and faithfulness within. Practices which may seem alien to the indigenous culture, such as the prohibition of the free intermingling of the sexes and the rejection of alcohol continue to shape the cultural mores of the British Muslim community.

Islam dictates morality and obligates its followers to lead their lives in a manner which is conducive to a moral existence. The followers of this religion should not be ridiculed for adhering to ostensibly traditional Eastern values in a Western milieu. These are Islamic values, which are as true in the West as in the East, and the reason for holding on to these values should be properly understood. Young Muslims aspire to high educational, social and career goals, but wish to do so within the context of their own religion.

British Muslims exemplify an alternative life-style from which the West can learn. Is it time for mutual exchange of ideas and experiences? Is it time for *reciprocal assimilation*? The minorities are usually blamed for not adapting to the majority culture. Is it time for the majority to appreciate and even adopt some features of the minorities' culture? Yet many of these values are inherent in the teachings of all great religions, but the West is losing its religion and its teachings. Surely education and progress can be achieved without sacrificing the religion.



### **9.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

1. This study is area-specific. A different scenario may be evident in other areas, such as Tower Hamlets, Bradford, Birmingham, Manchester or Glasgow. If this methodology was replicated in other areas, it would be possible to find out if the aspirations of adolescent Muslim girls differed to a large extent in such geographical areas.
2. The research raises in an interesting way the influence of an ideological and cultural stance of the researchers themselves on the shape of their evidence and the conclusions they draw. For example, a non-Muslim researcher might portray the Muslim culture in an entirely different manner. This could be an important area of investigation.
3. The methodology employed in this research could be used to investigate the aspirations of adolescents belonging to the indigenous group or any other ethnic or religious groups.
4. It would be interesting and informative to conduct in a few years time a follow-up study of the girls in the sample in order to ascertain the extent to which they were able to realise their aspirations.
5. The present study represents a snapshot of a group of adolescent girls at a certain time. It would be illuminating to engage in a longitudinal study of a similar group of adolescents on entrance to secondary school and followed through to their first permanent job.
6. This study has raised many questions about the structure of Muslim family life. The process of adaptation and change amongst Muslims or any other religious or ethnic group could be investigated to ascertain the nature of their family life in their adopted country.

7. Most teachers of Muslim children belong to the Anglo-Saxon indigenous group. It would be of interest to study a situation where this imbalance was corrected. For example, research could be conducted to establish if significant changes took place in a school, with a predominantly Asian intake such as Springfield High, after the appointment of a headteacher of Asian origin.

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**NOTES.**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.**

**APPENDICES.**

## NOTES

### Chapter 1 - Introduction

1. All these concerns were expressed by various teachers during the interviews in the pilot study and also during my informal talks with some others in the main study before interviewing commenced (cf. Wade and Souter, 1992).
2. Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally used the term *Grounded Theory* to refer to theory that is generated in the course of the close inspection and analysis of qualitative data, an idea which is now a central tenet of naturalistic research (Hammersley, 1993).
3. Freud (1905:93) claims that at every stage in the course of development through which all human beings ought by rights to pass, a certain number are held back. They never get over their parents' authority and withdraw their affection from them either very incompletely or not at all. They are mostly girls who, to the delight of their parents, have persisted in all their childish love far beyond puberty.
4. Baker (1989:87) regards women as a heterogeneous social group, whose identities are developed in relation to both work and domestic roles and who may define their identities by comparison with women in other groups rather than with men.
5. I have avoided the use of 'black' as far as possible as I feel that the term can have negative and reductionistic connotations. The only time the word appears in the text is when I refer to literature or quote an interviewee.
6. Similar observations have been made by Stanley and Wise (1983:117;120) regarding the identity of women. They use the flexible term 'consciousness' rather than 'identity' and see feminist consciousness not as a linear progression, but as a circle or a spiral.



## **Chapter 2 - Research Design**

1. Marshall and Rossman (1989:31) contend that a research proposal must demonstrate that the research will be useful in three broad ways. First: it must contribute to knowledge. Second: the relevant policy arenas should find usefulness and meaning in the study. Third: the study should be useful for practitioners. However, they point out that the relative emphasis given to each aspect of the study's significance depends on the study itself. For instance, a holistic ethnography may seek to describe a particular culture and may be relatively unconcerned with policy and practice.

2. Kirk and Miller (1986) perceive qualitative research as a four-phase affair, like other science. Accordingly, the full qualitative effort depends upon the ordered sequence of invention, discovery, interpretation and explanation. Importantly, the bundles of research activities performed in each of these phases or modes differ qualitatively from one another, so too are the research products generated in each phase. Invention denotes a phase of preparation, or research design; this phase produces a plan of action. Discovery refers to a phase of observation and measurement, or data collection, producing information. Interpretation points to a phase of evaluation or analysis, producing understanding. Explanation indicates a phase of communication, or packaging, producing a message. The present research was also conducted in four phases in the aforementioned sequence.

3. Atkinson (1992:5) emphasises the importance of language in an ethnographic study as ethnography is especially dependent on the resources of natural language. The very term captures the sense of it: ethno-graphy, the writing of culture. Nevertheless, undertaking an ethnographic project not only commits a researcher to major efforts of writing (Richardson, 1990; Wolcott, 1990), but also of reading (Hammersley, 1991). Ethnography generates descriptive accounts that are

valuable in their own right and it also greatly facilitates the process of theory construction (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:237).

4. Adelman et al. (1980:59) point to the numerous advantages of a case study. They maintain that though case study data is difficult to organise, it is strong in reality. The strength in reality is due to the fact that case studies are down-to-earth, attention holding and in harmony with the reader's own experience. Thus, they provide a natural basis for generalisation. However, their strength also lies in their attention to the subtlety and complexity of the case in its own right. Case studies recognise the embeddedness of social truths. By careful attention to social situations, they can represent the discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants.

5. Glaser and Strauss (1967:4) themselves argue that theory based on data can usually not be refuted by more data or replaced by another theory. Since it is too intimately linked to data, it is destined to last despite its inevitable modification and reformulation.

6. Nevertheless, Adelman et al. (1980:48-49) point out that the generalisations produced in case study are no less legitimate when about the *instance*, rather than about the *class* from which the instance is drawn, i.e. generalising *about* the case, rather than *from* it. Moreover, they observe that lying behind the concept *instance* lurk problems concerning the relationship of the *instance* to the *class* from which it is drawn. Stake (1980:64;69) argues that a case study may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalisation. He sees knowledge as a form of generalisation too: not scientific induction, but naturalistic generalisation, arrived at by recognising the similarities of objects and issues in and out of context and by sensing the natural covariations of happenings. He maintains that to generalise this way is to be both intuitive and

empirical. I would, therefore, leave it to the reader to decide whether s/he wants to generalise *about* or *from* the present study.

7. An interview is seen as an interaction involving the interviewer and the interviewee (Marshall and Rossman, 1989:82). It is a conversation of a different sort from the conversations we are used to in everyday life: it is both private and public, informal and formal, lived in the present, but preserved for the future (Brown and Gilligan, 1992:25). The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person to see and experience the world as they do themselves (McCracken, 1988)

8. Cohen and Manion (1989:313) observe the advantages of open-ended or semi-structured questions in terms of their flexibility. They maintain that such questions allow the interviewer to probe deeper or clear up misunderstandings, test the limits of the respondent's knowledge, encourage cooperation and help establish rapport. They also allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes. Furthermore, they can result in unexpected or unanticipated answers which may suggest unthought-of relationships or hypotheses.

9. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:98) point to the notion of overrapport which they see as problematic. McCracken (1988) maintains that unambiguous social distance between researcher and respondent is especially necessary when 'tough' questions must be asked and 'delicate' analyses undertaken.

10. It would be interesting to investigate whether this appointment generated significant changes in the school. However, this was beyond the scope of the present study (see p. 257).

11. They had learnt to speak Urdu as young children, before the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan, when Urdu was the national language.

12. Woods (1986) notes the three important attributes of ethnographers as interviewers in terms of trust, curiosity and naturalness. Trust refers to the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee that transcends the research, promotes a bond of friendship, a feeling of togetherness and joint pursuit of a common mission rising above personal egos. Curiosity points to a desire to know, to learn people's views and perceptions of the facts, to hear their stories and discover their feelings. Naturalness denotes the ability to secure what is within the minds of interviewees, uncoloured and unaffected by the interviewer.

13. McCracken (1988) points to the importance of a certain formality in dress, demeanour and speech which helps the respondent cast the investigator in the role of a scientist: someone who asks very personal questions out of not personal, but professional curiosity. This formality also helps to reassure the interviewee that the interviewer can be trusted to maintain the confidentiality that has been promised.

14. Finch (1993:171) observes that the ease with which one can get a woman to talk depends not so much upon one's skill as an interviewer, nor upon one's expertise as a sociologist, but upon one's identity as a woman.

15. Sieber (1992:44-5) distinguishes between the concepts of 'privacy', 'confidentiality' and 'anonymity'. 'Privacy' refers to persons and their interest in controlling the access of others to themselves. 'Confidentiality', an extension of the concept of 'privacy', pertains to data, i.e. some record about the person, such as notes, videotapes and audiotapes, and how these data are to be handled in keeping with subjects' interest in controlling the access of others to information about themselves. 'Anonymity' denotes that names and other unique identifiers, for example, social security number and address, of subjects are never attached to the data.



16. These 23 categories were: ethnicity; language; religion; freedom; control; gender; family patterns; marriage in Islam; arranged marriage; marriage and career; consanguineous marriage; intermarriage; enthusiasm for school; friends; responsibilities and extracurricular activities; relationship with teachers; participation in lessons; homework; GCSE options; further education; career choices; unrealistic aspirations; and career advice.

17. These 6 themes were: identity; family life; marriage; social side of schooling; academic role of schooling; career aspirations.

### **Chapter 3 - The Shaping of Identity**

1. Tajfel (1978) refers to this phenomenon as *Social Change*. As perceived by Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel and Turner (1979) this could involve one of the three main strategies. The first is *Assimilation or Merger*, whereby positive features of the high-status (or indigenous) group are adopted by the low-status (or immigrant) group who want to identify with them. The second option is *Social Creativity* in which the low-status group attempts to create a new positive identity for itself by means of new characteristics, thereby making itself so different from the group it is comparing itself with that comparison becomes unnecessary. The third strategy is *Social Competition*, as a result of which the status hierarchy of the dominant group is challenged by the subordinate group by means of active or passive resistance.

2. An ethnic group has been defined by Shibutani and Kwan (1965) as those who conceive of themselves as alike by virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious and who are so regarded by others. However, ethnicity is more than ancestry, race, religion or national origin. It patterns our thinking, feelings and behaviour in both obvious and subtle ways (McGoldrick et al. 1982). Ethnicity includes group patterns of values, social customs, perceptions, behavioural roles, language usage and rules of social interactions that group members share (Bartha,

1969; Ogbu, 1981). These group patterns occur with or without awareness (Kochman, 1987).

3. This phenomenon of ethnic identity has been widely discussed in literature. (See, for example, Glazer & Moynihan, 1975; Dashefsky, 1976; Gleason, 1983). Broadly speaking, ethnic identity refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership. Ethnic identity is distinguished from ethnicity in that ethnicity refers to group patterns and ethnic identity refers to the individual's acquisition of group patterns. Ethnic identity is conceptually and functionally separate from one's personal identity as an individual, even though the two may reciprocally influence each other (Rotheram and Phinney, 1987:13).

4. Sharpe (1976), writing about Asian men, maintains that many men asked their wives and children to join them quickly because of rumours of impending restrictions on immigration. Yet the men in the sample in the present study only sent for their families when they had saved enough money to support them and also to buy or rent suitable accommodation. It took some men only a couple of years to do that, though the others were not joined by their families for over a decade. The time span varied according to the men's income, the size of the family and also the kind of facilities the men wanted to make available to their families on their arrival.

5. Many other teachers also thought that the girls perceived themselves as Asian:

Asian, absolutely. In fact, I have done a little test on this. 'What are you? They'll say 'Pakistani'. I'll say 'Where were you born? They'll say 'Britain. But they are still Pakistani, still Bangladeshi: they think of themselves in those terms and that bothers me.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')*

6. Many others felt the same way:

Both: I was born in an Asian country but I've lived here most of my life.

*(Alia Ashraf, origin: Bangladesh)*

7. Miller (1983) argues that ethnic minority children are 'poised, not stranded' between two cultural worlds: their position is a mobile one in which they are able to make critical judgements about the cultural divide, choosing what they like and rejecting what they dislike from both cultures.

8. Research shows that Greek Australian adolescents also alternate between Greek and Australian roles according to situational requirements, i.e. with family, with immigrant friends and with Australian friends (Callan and Gallois, 1982; 1983; Rosenthal and Hrynevich, 1985).

9. Verma and Ashworth (1986:20) observe that one individual can be more 'ethnic' than another in that various individuals draw on their cultural identity to differing degrees when determining their own identity.

10. Similar views were expressed by some other parents who felt that they could only realise their aspirations in Britain:

In our heart of hearts, we see ourselves as Asian. We have everything here, yet we miss our country. But we are also British because we live here and we cannot achieve in Pakistan what we are achieving here.

*(Kulsoom Omer's mother, origin: Pakistan)*

11. Most of the parents had no land or property in the country of origin. Some of the families had inherited land from their parents while others shared the ancestral home, left to them by their parents, with their siblings. Five of the 24 families in the sample, however, had invested in real estate by buying land or building a house in their country of origin. These, though, were not necessarily families who intended to return to the country of origin one day. Their intention was to have a base there,

whereby their children could visit whenever possible to familiarise themselves with their extended family and ancestral culture.

12. Some other parents also felt that way, but had conflicting loyalties:

It is not possible to go back permanently. What will we do there when our children are here? When we do go, we stay there for a little while and then rush back here to our children. We have to keep going back while our elders and close relatives are alive. But it would be too unsettling for our children if we took them back permanently.

*(Tallat Zahid's mother, origin: Pakistan)*

13. Smith and Tomlinson (1989) argue that minority languages in Britain have long been regarded, along with their speakers, as being of low status. They seldom appear on the modern language curriculum for all pupils and are thereby implicitly devalued. Thus, the low status accorded to these languages encourages attitude shift against them and their use.

14. This linguistic diversity was illustrated in other girls' comments as well:

I can speak two languages, English and Punjabi; three if you include French. And Urdu is like Punjabi; I understand it when people speak Urdu, but I can't speak it.

*(Samina Hameed)*

15. However, their multilingualism was largely confined to the knowledge of Asian languages. While the fathers could express themselves in English, very few mothers could speak it.

16. The other girl made a similar remark:

I'd say my mother tongue is English, because we mostly speak in English with my mum and also my dad when he was alive.

*(Samina Hameed)*



17. A number of teachers attributed the use of home language in school to low ability:

The girls in my class speak in English to each other. I think it tends to be low ability girls who continue to speak in their home language, whereas the above average pupils speak in English.

*(Cynthia Roberts, Head of Careers, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

18. Some other teachers recognised it too:

Our present intake - I believe it's very important to them, because some of their parents don't speak English. Whether it'll be quite so important to the next generation, in 20 or 30 years time, I don't know. But I think they ought to keep it up, if not from the usage point of view then because of their actual connections with it.

*(Helen Williams, Head of Careers, Blossomdale Girls')*

19. Liebkind (1989:48) distinguishes between an instrumental attitude towards a language which implies that its usefulness is emphasised above its symbolic or emotional value, and an integrative attitude which indicates identification with speakers of that language.

20. For detailed Muslim and non-Muslim perspectives on Islam, see Nasr (1985); Said (1985); Raza (1991); Esposito (1991).

21. However, it is very rare for a Muslim to become a non-believer or even non-practising. S/he might become semi-practising due to laziness, but since Islam is not just a religion, rather a way of life, every good act in life is an act of worship.

22. Many other girls expressed similar views about religion:

I am not a strict follower of religion, but I think religion is like a guide that tells you what to do and if you don't have a religion, you don't know anything.

*(Zareena Nasir)*

23. cf. Berger, 1967.

24. The parents had faith in their religion which they had obviously transmitted to their children:

If I have a problem, I feel it is because I have been neglectful of my religion. I ask Allah for forgiveness and ask Him to solve my problem. I feel very light and relieved after that. Praying to God helps enormously when one is worried.

*(Kulsoom Omer's mother)*

25. Many other girls practised their religion in the same way:

In the morning, I read my *Namaz* and read the Quran. Then in the afternoon, when I come back from school, I pray again and I teach my brothers and sisters to read the Quran.

*(Rahat Basheer)*

26. Another girl expressed similar sentiments:

Religion! I don't know. I just follow my parents. I always fast in Ramadan. I sometimes pray, but I don't cover my head. I used to read the Quran every weekend but I've stopped now; I've got to do all my coursework this year.

*(Khavar Raheem)*

27. A few others felt the same way:

Yeah, I am a practising Muslim. I pray, fast, read the Quran. But I'm not a strict Muslim like those who have a veil over their face.

*(Mussarat Aslam)*

28. A similar degree of practice was reported by many others:

We practise regularly, but the children don't. We all fast in Ramadan though. The children have all finished learning to read the Quran. They pray and

read the Quran on Saturday and Sunday when they are at home. On other days, they do it if you nag, otherwise they don't.

*(Mussarat Aslam's mother)*

29. Other parents expressed similar views about their religion:

Our religion is Islam. It is not a closed or rigid religion, the way some *maulvis* interpret it. I have travelled a lot and have studied the religion really well. It gives you a lot of freedom and doesn't force you to do anything wrong. We should read the Quran and understand it properly. It tells us how men, women and children should lead their lives.

*(Khalida Dar's father)*

30. A few others appeared to perceive the religious practice of their Muslim pupils in the same way:

A lot of them seem to be pressurised into fasting, going to mosque: whether all of them want to do it, I wouldn't like to say. They wouldn't like to upset their parents.

*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development Teacher, Blossomdale Girls')*

## **Chapter 4 - The Dynamism of Family Values**

1. Most parents found certain phenomena disturbing:

I feel very bad when I see an old man or an old woman in this country living on their own. Old age is tough and the children should look after elderly parents.

*(Kulsoom Omer's mother)*

I don't like the permissiveness here and also when they get drunk and don't know what they are doing.

*(Samina Hameed's mother)*

2. The Quran and the Hadith repeatedly emphasise the rights of the parents and relatives. See for example, 2:83; 2:215; 46:15 concerning parents and 2:215; 47:22; regarding relatives. The following verses exemplify the message about parents:

Thy Lord has decreed that you worship none save Him and [that you show] kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age with thee, say not 'Fie' unto them, but speak unto them a gracious word.

And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy and say 'My Lord! Have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little'.

(The Quran, Children of Israel, 17:23-24).

3. The kind of respect that Muslim parents are ideally given is extended to the community nexus as well. Beyond the nuclear and extended family, the community, kin or *Biradari* also plays an important part in structuring a Muslim individual's life. *Biradiri* includes all those who claim and can trace their relationship to a common ancestor (Khan, 1991). The members of such a community may not see one another except on occasions such as religious festivals, weddings, births and deaths. Still, this social network can be relied upon for support in time of need.

4. There was evidence of a quasi-joint family system, whereby the families did not share accommodation with relations, but saw them frequently and provided support at all times. Barkat-e-Khuda (1985) observes that such nuclear families are more like units of a decentralised extended family, each economically independent, yet maintaining social ties with one another. The non-residential extended family has also been found amongst other ethnic minorities (see, for example, Wong, 1985).

5. Although sharing accommodation with the extended family, by and large, remains a distinct feature of the British Asian culture, kinship ties amongst the indigenous British population and the related advantages of joint families have also



been documented in the literature (see, for example, Young and Wilmott, 1957; Rosser and Harris, 1965; Barker, 1972; Oakley, 1974a).

6. Harris (1983:86) argues that the existence of extended family groups inhibits differential mobility and adversely affects the assimilation of immigrants. Nevertheless, the constant support of the extended family appeared to be more important than such assimilation as far as the families in the sample in the present study were concerned.

7. The majority of girls came from large families. None of the girls was an only child or one of two children, which seems to be the usual pattern amongst the indigenous families. The smallest families had three children and out of a sample of 24 families, only three were such small families. On the other hand, two girls belonged to families with 10 children. The ordinal position of the girls varied enormously. Six girls were the eldest amongst their siblings, three were the youngest and the rest were somewhere in between.

8. Many other teachers believed the same:

The demands of the home make it difficult for them to be as free as English girls.

*(Timothy Clark, Head of Year 11, Springfield High)*

9. Most indigenous teachers commented on the Muslim girls' lack of freedom in a similar way:

Unfortunately, they don't have an awful lot of freedom. As far as we can see, they come to school in the vans or the cars, brought by dad or uncle or any male member of the family. They are in school all day. Luckily they are allowed out in the field at lunch time, which gives them a bit of fresh air. They are picked up at the end of the day and then as far as we can work out, they are in the home all evening, either helping mum or whatever or

going to the mosque and that's it; and then on the weekend they are not allowed out on their own, unaccompanied.

*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development Teacher, Blossomdale Girls')*

10. Most others felt that way:

I'd like more freedom, but not too much. I also enjoy what I do at home.

*(Shameem Akram)*

11. Some others also made similar remarks about excessive freedom:

I have quite a lot of freedom. I am allowed to visit my friends and they are allowed to visit me. I am allowed to phone them whenever I like. I don't want too much freedom. Some of the girls I know had a lot of freedom and it caused problems. They have been put in bad situations and I don't want to be in such a situation.

*(Seema Tanveer)*

12. A few others believed the same:

Sometimes I think it's not fair: you are not allowed to do anything. But when I think about it, if I were allowed out, I probably would want to do something that my mum didn't know about. In the end, I think if you are not allowed out, you don't know about things that are not worth knowing about.

*(Samina Hameed)*

13. Many others rationalised their own lack of freedom in the same way:

I like the way English girls are able to move freely. They really get more freedom, but their parents are not bothered. In our culture, we can't do that.

I'd like a bit more freedom, but not that much.

*(Rahat Basheer)*

14. Many other parents also wanted to achieve a balance between freedom and control:

English girls have a lot of freedom. We should also allow our daughters a certain degree of freedom, but not that much. Too much oppression makes the children rebel. Our daughters go out, but not at night or for the weekend with their friends: I don't like that sort of thing.

*(Nasreen Butt's mother)*

15. A number of other parents gave similar reasons:

We should give our children freedom, but not as much as the English do.

We have a different religion, different customs. An English girl can go out with a boy - any boy she likes, as many different boys as she likes - but an Asian girl, a Muslim girl can't do that. If our daughters started to go out with boys, their lives would be ruined. We shouldn't give them too much freedom till they are more sensible. They are still young and don't know very much about the world. They need education first. They have to learn English.

They also have to learn Bengali, because it's their mother tongue. They also have to learn Arabic and learn about religion. So where are they going to find the time and what are they going to do with the freedom, when they have so much to do.

*(Tabassam Raza's father)*

16. Almost all the parents seemed to have a considerable say in the kind of television programmes that the girls could watch. Very few girls said that their parents allowed them to watch all kinds of programmes, though even these girls, themselves, were careful in their choice of viewing. Apparently, there was a tacit ban on the viewing of certain programmes in such cases. Although, all the girls in the sample were in their mid-teens, yet the vast majority of them were not allowed to watch television after nine o'clock at night or to watch television programmes and videos that their parents regarded as unsuitable for them. The favourite television programmes, watched regularly by most of them were soap operas such as 'Neighbours' and 'Home and Away', - which also seem to be popular with the

indigenous British girls of the same age - cartoons and comedies. One single-parent family did not have a television set, as the mother considered watching television a waste of time. She, nevertheless, allowed her children to watch it occasionally at her sister's place. In this way, she was able to monitor the television viewing of her children even more than those parents who had television sets at home. Another family did not have a television set because the parents wanted their children to spend their time studying or in some other useful activity at home. The underlying implication appeared to be that these parents saw television programmes as morally corruptive and a waste of time.

17. Thus, most girls in the sample appeared to have leisure activities that have been described in the literature as 'Bedroom Culture' (McRobbie and Garber, 1975).

18. Oakley (1974a;b), on the basis of her research, argues that both middle and working class women find little pleasure in housework and even though the working class women seem to find satisfaction in it, the overall reaction to the tasks involved is negative.

19. While McRobbie (1978) reports several hours of housework per week among girls in Birmingham, Barker (1972) finds little domestic work being done by girls in her sample.

20. Some other girls also felt that boys got away with things girls could not:  
You get to do more things and you can do things, but you don't have to worry about the problems and the consequences.

*(Arifa Mahmood)*

21. Hart (1979) also observes that not only boys are allowed a much larger territory than girls, but parents also tacitly allow boys to leave their territories to range further afield, while girls are kept inside theirs. Furnham and Stacey (1991:99)



argue that males are encouraged to be independent, physically active, adventurous, mobile and exploratory.

22. A number of authors have noted this phenomenon. See, for example Jeffery (1976); Sharpe (1976).

23. Many others made similar remarks. For them, the physical and moral well-being of their children was more important than their sex:

No, daughters or sons, as long as they are healthy and not misguided, are the same to me.

*(Nasreen Butt's mother)*

24. Some other parents also thought so:

Daughters are a blessing of Allah. Sons and daughters are the same to the parents; but the parents worry more for the daughters, lest they get married to someone who makes them suffer all their life.

*(Rahat Basheer's mother)*

25. It has been argued that contemporary Western societies value boy babies more than girls (Walum, 1977; Delamont, 1980).

26. Some other teachers made similar comments about the female gender being at a disadvantage even in indigenous society:

I feel that they are willing to push their boys more. They have higher expectations of them. Men are important; women aren't. It's not just in Asian culture: there are similarities with my mother-in-law (laughter). Why should a woman work? Man is the breadwinner and this should be impressed upon the neighbours and others around us. A woman should stay at home and raise the family.

*(Alison Fraser, Information Technology Teacher, Springfield High)*

27. Another Muslim teacher also believed so:

Asian parents, in general, favour boys more than girls because boys live with the parents and look after them in their old age.

*(Hasan Munir, Science Teacher, Springfield High)*

28. Furnham and Stacey (1991:99) maintain that from birth females, in general, are perceived as physically more vulnerable than males and tend to be treated with more physical care.

29. Most parents were aware of the egalitarianism in Islam, but agreed that it was not practised:

Men and women are equal in the eyes of Allah. They should be treated equally, but they aren't. The atmosphere in every household is different. Some people are sensible: the husband treats the wife properly and the wife treats the husband properly. Some others don't: they think the man is better, but the sensible ones know that the woman is the one who keeps the family together.

*(Zubaida Saeed's mother)*

30. Some other fathers also expressed similar views:

Of course men and women are equal in Islam. The rights that have been given to women by Islam have no precedent in any other religion or culture. But the presentation is wrong: we misinterpret it. Men and women both have their rights. The husband has rights over the wife and the wife over the husband; the children have rights over the parents and the parents over the children. And the mother has more rights than the father.

*(Raheela Noor's father)*

31. This is exemplified by the following verse:

Lo! men who surrender unto Allah and women who surrender,

And men who believe and women who believe,  
And men who obey and women who obey,  
And men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth,  
And men who persevere [in righteousness] and women who persevere,  
And men who are humble and women who are humble,  
And men who give alms and women who give alms,  
And men who fast and women who fast,  
And men who guard their modesty and women who guard their modesty,  
And men who remember Allah much and women who remember,  
Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward.  
( The Quran, The Clans, 33:35)

32. Some other girls also commented on this, but believed education helped women to gain equal rights:

Women are sort of expected to stay at home and look after the home and the children. Most women who have education like to get equal opportunities and I think most of them are getting them now.

*(Raheela Noor)*

33. For a detailed critique of women and gender in Islam, see, Ahmed (1992).

34. Many other girls held similar views:

I like the family sticking together. It means something to be a family. You can always talk to your family: that's what I like.

*(Nasreen Butt)*

35. Most other parents also made such comments:

We love our siblings, respect our parents, make time for our relatives, deal with each other affectionately. We are blessed if we get a chance to care for our parents. They say 'Heaven is under the feet of the mother'.

*(Seema Tanveer's mother)*

36. See chapter five, 'The Institution of Marriage', pp. 114ff. for a fuller exposition of this.
37. Douvan and Adelson (1966) observe that conflict between the normative adolescent and the parents is often based on trivia, such as clothes, make up and other such things.

38. Many other teachers also thought so:

I can understand that perhaps they might, on occasions, have some kind of conflict when they see some of the other girls and the kind of freedom that they might have in comparison. But bearing in mind some of the girls that I have talked to about it, they still hold very fast to their cultural background and they adhere to traditions and things they have been brought up with and they are very open about it.

*(Fiona Young, English Teacher, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

39. Most other teachers made similar remarks and recognised that these families were not homogeneous:

They want to retain their culture, but I wonder how consciously they do it. Their culture is there all the time, although it will vary from family to family how much they want to adapt; depends how settled they are.

*(Andrew Phillips, Section 11 Coordinator, Springfield High)*

40. Some other teachers were also surprised at the extent to which the girls wanted to retain their culture:

Muslim girls, who are very able and very Anglicised in many ways still have restrictions. In fact, we were talking about it this morning. One such girl was talking about getting a job and I said, 'Williams are taking people'. She said, 'Oh! But they are very strict and we would have to wear skirts and I



won't be allowed'. For a second, I was quite shocked to hear that from her, because she is so Anglicised.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')*

41. Mullard (1985) points out that at the base of the assimilation model rests the belief that a nation is a unitary whole, politically and culturally indivisible. Immigrant groups should, therefore, be absorbed into the indigenous and ostensibly homogeneous culture so that they can take an informed and equal part in the maintenance of British society. See, also, Price, 1982; Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1987, for a commentary on assimilation.

## **Chapter 5 - The Institution of Marriage**

1. Berger and Kellner, in a famous essay written in 1964, described marriage as a 'dramatic act in which two strangers come together and redefine themselves.' Its dominant themes were romantic love, sexual fulfilment, self-discovery and self-realisation through love and sexuality (Cited in Clark, 1990:27).

2. However, recent research, such as Wilkinson (1994:33) shows that economic enfranchisement has sharply reduced women's willingness to remain in a subordinate or dependent role in the family. The result has been a steady rise in divorce rates with Britain having the second highest number of divorces in Europe and rapidly closing the gap with the USA where half of all marriages end in divorce. Since this research does not mention any ethnic or religious groups, it is assumed that it is referring to the majority groups in these countries.

3. Nowhere in the Quran or the Hadith are Muslim men told that they must have more than one wife or that it is better to have more than one wife. Polygamy was widely practised in pre-Islamic times and continues to be practised to some extent in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies, whether in the legal form or in the form of

prostitution, mistresses and common-law wives. Still, it is very much a matter of personal autonomy, as polygamy is permitted in Islam, not mandatory. Only a negligible percentage of Muslim men exploit this privilege as Islam has made it difficult for men to have more than one wife. It allows polygamy only on the condition that a man treats all his wives equally in every way. However, Muslim men have been warned in the Quran:

You will not be able to deal equally between (your) wives however much you wish ( *Nisa* - Women, 4:129).

And they have been further warned by the Prophet *pbuh* in one of his Hadith that a man who has two wives and does not treat them equally will appear before Allah on the day of judgement with one side of his body missing (because he kept only one of his wives happy).

4. Ahmed (1992:63) argues that some Quranic verses regarding marriage and women appear to qualify and undercut others that seemingly establish marriage as a hierarchical institution, unequivocally privileging men. Amongst the former are the verses that read 'Wives have rights corresponding to those which husbands have, in equitable reciprocity (Surah 2:228). Similarly verses such as those that admonish men if polygamous, to treat their wives equally and then go on to declare that husbands would not be able to do so - using a form of the Arabic negative connoting permanent impossibility - are open to being read that men should not be polygamous.

5. All the parents in the sample expressed similar views which indicated that marriage was not forced on Muslim young women and men:

Our religion dictates that the children should be consulted before their marriage is arranged. They should be told what their parents are doing, why they are doing it and what the advantages are. The parents should only go ahead if the children say so. But if they say that they want to marry someone else, then the parents should find out about the boy, his character,

his family background. If the boy is suitable, they should arrange the marriage of their daughter with him.

*(Razia Zia's father)*

6. Many other girls also expressed such views:

I would opt for an arranged marriage. I will marry someone in Britain. He will have to be a Pakistani, a Muslim, somebody my mother and my uncles approve of, as my dad is dead.

*(Samina Hameed)*

7. The young British Asian women interviewed by Westwood and Hoffman (1979) were also drawn to Western notions of romance, yet they deferred to their parents and brothers on the choice of marriage partners.

8. Many other girls said they would opt for an arranged marriage:

There are arranged marriages that work out quite well and some that don't. If I were given the choice, I might choose, but I think I'd go for an arranged marriage: it's safer.

*(Seema Tanveer)*

9. Some other girls expressed similar views:

I'd like to get married when I am 21 or 22. It's not compulsory but it is something worthwhile. You don't want to live alone all your life and who will look after you when you are old. We marry relations. My two sisters are engaged, but they had a choice. It was not like my parents told them to go out and choose whom to marry, but they were asked to choose from five or six boys. In Islam, the girl has a right to say yes or no.

*(Shahida Rasheed)*

10. All the parents appeared to have similar concerns:

People tell lies: someone who is already married or even has children may want to marry a second time. It is the duty of the parents to ascertain if a boy or girl will be suitable for their child. Parents have lived longer and have seen the world: they are experienced in these matters.

*(Razia Zia's mother)*

11. All the parents firmly believed in consulting the young people:

The children's choice should be taken into consideration. According to custom, the parents arrange the marriage, having asked the opinion of their son or daughter who is getting married.

*(Fehmida Saleem's father)*

12. Even authors of Asian origin, such as Wilson (1978:106;117), consider arranged marriage as an essential part of the gigantic and oppressive framework, joint family, which has for so many generations kept women in subjugation. She makes this assertion even though most Asian girls that she spoke to stressed that arranged marriage was not the tyrannical system it was made out to be, but was much less traumatic, much more semi-arranged.

13. Similar partisan presentations could be seen in *East: Reluctant Rebels*, shown on BBC 2 on 21.8.92 at 8.00 pm.

14. Most parents made such comments:

If the children make a wise choice, which is suitable in the eyes of the parents, then there is no harm in letting them choose. But if the parents don't consider a match suitable, then forcing them to abandon the idea is not wise either: this could have disastrous consequences. Ideally, the parents and the children should have a discussion and reach a compromise.

*(Seema Tanveer's mother)*



15. Wilkinson (1994:31) argues that the price of success for women at work can be high: the average female manager is less likely to be married and more likely to be childless than her male counterpart; half of all women managers are childless and they are twice as likely to have been divorced or separated as their male colleagues.

16. Some other teachers also believed so:

I've never understood why they find marriage so important. They want a wedding - let's put it that way. Whether it's the last time they're ever going to be important; after that it seems they are chained. They certainly have no aspirations - well, some of them have - but very few seem to have any aspirations for a career as an independent person. I mean, they would find what we are doing totally strange.

*(Jennifer Davis, Head of Maths, Blossomdale Girls')*

17. Many other girls also wanted to receive education, have a career and then get married:

I would like to get married one day, but not for another five or ten years. I want to get educated first, get a degree and sort out my career.

*(Khalida Dar)*

18. Most other parents also expressed views which indicated that they valued education:

There is no specific age when girls should get married. They should get a good education first. Some of those who want to study continue their education even after they are married.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother)*

19. Many parents showed their willingness to allow their daughter to have a career before her marriage:

If she wanted to work after completing her education, then of course I'd let her. In the meantime, if we were approached by a suitable match, then I'd consult my daughter about it and let her meet the young man in question. You cannot force your children to marry someone these days, the way it was done in the past.

*(Parveen Akbar's mother)*

20. Some other teachers also appreciated the importance of a career before marriage:

I think Muslim girls nowadays find a career very important, especially if they want to live and raise a family in this country. They must have a means of support if things go wrong. Most of them want to have a career first and then think about marriage.

*(Hasan Munir, Science Teacher, Springfield High)*

21. A few other teachers also recognised that:

The girls want a career and they also want to get married. But they want to finish their education before they get married, but it depends on their parents if they will let them.

*(Chitra Madan, Home-School Liaison, Blossomdale Girls')*

22. Ballard (1978:195) observes that some Asian girls are becoming adamant in their refusal to consider marriage to boys who have not lived in Britain for some time. Research conducted by Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1991:138;140) shows that in their sample no parent opts for a son-in-law from Asia and no daughter wants to marry an Asian.

23. Dowry comprises property, money and other material possessions given to a girl at the time of her marriage by her parents. Though there is a tradition of dowry in Islam, dowry in its present extravagant form amongst Muslims can be attributed

to their contact with Hindus in India over a long period. Dowry generates ambivalent feelings amongst British Muslims. The girls and parents in the sample recognise its benefit, but oppose it due to economic reasons and the tyrannical nature of the custom. Yet the parents maintain the status quo by passively accepting it and it has become a necessary evil. Still, the girls say they would rather forgo it because of the financial pressure on the parents, thus indicating the warmth of relationships within the families. (For an investigation into dowry amongst British Sikhs, see Bhachu, 1981).

24. Many parents appeared to favour consanguineous marriage:

Maybe someone in the kin; a first cousin only if he is good enough. You retain links if your children marry someone in the family.

*(Nasreen Butt's father)*

25. Another parent also felt that way:

To someone in Pakistan, because all our relatives are in Pakistan: a close relation; perhaps a cousin. It is better: you know them well and the boy and girl come from the same background, so they find it easy to adjust. If you let your child marry an outsider, you don't know who they are and what sort of family they come from. Also, if they have problems in marriage and they are related, they solve the problems with the help of their families.

*(Zubaida Saeed's mother)*

26. Many other girls were also worried about the effect of intermarriage on the future generation of the couple:

There would be trouble if they had children. They would argue about the children's religion. I don't think it would work out; would probably end up in divorce.

*(Fehmida Saleem)*

27. Most other parents made similar comments:

No, our religion doesn't allow that. It might work in the case of boys if the girl converts, but Muslim girls shouldn't marry out.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother)*

28. Some other parents expressed similar feelings of antipathy:

It's very wrong: it's a sin; Islam doesn't allow it. It's better to marry a poor Muslim than a rich non-Muslim: this goes for both boys and girls.

*(Rahat Basheer's mother)*

29. Cf. Chadwick (1932:179); Douvan and Adelson (1966:42); Westwood and Hoffman (1979); Afshar (1989); AbdulRahim (1993:73).

30. This is in sharp contrast with the scenario in the West, envisaged by Cerroni-Long (1985:44), who sees a return to preferential endogamy, based on free choice of both partners which, thanks to the increasing freedom of sexual experimentation, will probably be entered in later years, and will be unions between mature and responsible individuals and therefore extremely stable and durable. There are, however, weaknesses in this argument. For example, these ostensibly mature and responsible individuals may be too set in their ways to be able to live with each other; they may not feel accountable to anyone but themselves and therefore not feel committed to make a success of their marriage; they may be too old to have children if they wish; and finally sex without marriage may be a way of life in certain advanced societies, it is still considered immoral by certain religious groups.

## **Chapter 6 - The Social Dimension of Schooling**

1. This has been pointed out by a number of recent empirical research studies. See, for example, Shaikh and Kelly (1989); Afshar (1989); Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1991); Wade and Souter (1992).



2. For a discussion on separate Muslim schools, see DES (1985); Halstead (1986); CRE (1990); Haw (1994).
3. Similar findings have been documented by Sharpe (1976), who notes that Asian girls express more enjoyment and enthusiasm for school than English or West Indian girls.
4. Other research studies also point to laughter or 'mucking' or 'messaging about' as the central feature for girls and boys: the means by which they make their school lives enjoyable. See, for example, Willis (1977); Furlong (1977); Woods (1979); Davies (1980), Denscombe (1980).
5. Many other girls liked the presence of their friends in school:  
I like school: I've got all my friends here; we can have a laugh together.  
*(Shameem Akram)*
6. Another teacher also commented on this aspect of schooling:  
They like it. I think it is a change from home. If they stay at home, they are only going to do one or two activities. School is a change in the sense that they can do quite a lot here. Even if they are not academic and are not learning a lot, they like it from the socialisation point.  
*(Shahid Rehman, Science teacher, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*
7. Some other teachers also appeared to believe so:  
They like school, because, I think, in a lot of cases here, it's an escape from home. A lot of them here, when they go home, have duties in the house; they go to the mosque for several hours may be and they are exhausted.  
*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development teacher, Blossomdale Girls')*
8. Wilkinson (1994:35) observes that as more women go out to work, autonomy clashes with the traditional duty to act as carers. She points to an

emerging care deficit within the family, since women's move out of the home has not been matched by men's preparedness to share responsibilities.

9. Many other parents also ascribed it to their daughter's interest in studies and what they perceived as the uninhibited environment of a single-sex school:

She is very interested in studies. I believe she also feels relaxed and independent because she is in a single-sex school. She may not have done so well in another school. She is keen to go to school, she is doing well, the teachers like her and she likes them.

*(Nasreen Butt's mother)*

10. Many other teachers also reported attendance problems:

If parents have arranged a holiday for a visit to Pakistan, that could extend over quite a time. We have got a pupil in year ten at the moment, who hasn't returned this year and is in Pakistan. We've got another one who came for a few weeks and then missed four months of school.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

11. See, for example, Hargreaves (1967); Lacey (1970); Willis (1977); Beynon (1985).

12. See, for example, Lambert (1977; 1980); Meyenn (1980); Llewellyn (1980); Fuller (1980); Delamont (1984).

13. The majority of girls made similar comments regarding their attitude to boys: We just talk with boys during school time if we are working with them. Some girls say, 'We can't talk to boys because our parents don't allow that'. But my parents say, 'If it is part of your education, then do so'. But they wouldn't like to see me out of school, going out with them [boys].

*(Seema Tanveer)*

14. Furnham and Stacey (1991:149) point to an age-related trend of own-race choice for companions and friends in day-to-day situations. They maintain that a majority of children, at pre-school stage accept children of other races as companions and playmates, but then there is a rapid decline in cross-race acceptance, until there is a marked cleavage along racial lines in later childhood and the teen years.

15. Some other girls also made such statements regarding cross-cultural friendships:

My friends - the group - they are the prefects, the head girl; they do their work and they have some fun; they're white and Asian: a mixture.

*(Nasreen Butt)*

16. The majority of girls appeared to have close friends who were Muslim and/or Asian:

My friends are Asian: Pakistani. English girls! they talk to us, but I've no close friends who are English.

*(Shireen Kaleem)*

17. Similar ethnocentrism in the friendship choices of ethnic minority children has been documented by other researchers. See, for example, Durojaye (1969); Bhatnagar (1970); Troyna (1978); Fuller (1980).

18. Some other girls also felt that way:

Most of my friends are Asian. I don't really get on with white girls - well, most of them. It's the way they talk. They are always boasting about themselves. I mean, we are also British and we have a right to live here, no matter what they say.

*(Zareena Nasir)*

19. Observations regarding informal responsibilities have also been made by Meyenn (1980), who writes about the 'science lab girls' who were seen as mature by the teachers and thus allotted the task of caring for animals.

20. Some other teachers were also worried about the lack of involvement of Muslim pupils, and were trying to rectify the situation:

I think, sometimes, they would like to get a bit more involved. We have found that there is very very limited involvement from Muslim girls in any sports or drama activities. They don't get involved if we put on a production or anything like that. But this year, since we have opened up clubs at lunch time, they are taking advantage of them because they are within the confines of the school.

*(Fiona Young, English teacher, Hillsvview Comprehensive)*

21. It is argued that teachers' expectations of pupils are powerful determinants of pupils' performance (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). Moreover, teachers give preferential treatment to gifted pupils and the pattern of treatment depends to some extent on the race of the pupil (Rubovitz and Maehr, 1973).

22. Many teachers were sensitive to religious and cultural differences:

I think one must be aware at all times of their cultural background, so that, for starters, you may not give offence without meaning to give offence.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)*

23. Other Muslim teachers also thought so:

You can speak to them in their own language and find out if they have a language difficulty or a learning difficulty. You explain something in class and they can't understand it. Then you go up to them and say a word in Punjabi or Urdu; immediately, you get a reaction.

*(Shahid Rehman, Science teacher, Hillsvview Comprehensive)*



24. Other teachers mentioned difficulties which they had managed to overcome:  
A few years ago, we allowed Muslim girls, and Sikh girls as well, to wear trousers in school. This caused a few difficulties, because although the non-Muslim girls did not particularly want to wear trousers, they saw it as a special privilege and I think some of the parents did as well. So this year we have said that they can all wear trousers if they so wish.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsvew Comprehensive)*

25. Many other teachers also made similar comments:

In this particular school's case, many of the Muslim children we see are the first generation of their family to have education in this country, so that the parents don't often understand what is happening in school and the opportunities that are available to them through school. We often have children who have never been to school at all and have no English.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)*

26. Despite lack of evidence, some other teachers also assumed so:

There should be someone approachable who the children can confide in if they have a problem and who can understand the nature of problems that they may face, although so far, I haven't come across anything serious.

*(Hasan Munir, Science teacher, Springfield High)*

27. Reid et al. (1987:163) argue that INSET characteristically, has been individualistic, competitive, acquisitive, instrumental, careeristic and elitist; it is sometimes seen as the passport to a 'better life' out of the classroom. However, they contend that it has seldom led to systematic school improvement and point to the importance of matching INSET provision to the needs of teachers and schools.

28. Most teachers expressed similar views about INSET:

We did have an INSET on a Baker day about two or three years ago, but I can't remember what it was. We do have odd INSET programmes after school. They tend to be more general really.

*(Elizabeth Robinson, Head of Year 11, Blossomdale Girls')*

29. Other able girls also found that the teachers treated them differently:

The teachers treat you the way they treat the white girls. I mean, if you are bright, then they treat you with more respect, but if you are not so good or you don't want to study, then they will not treat you the same way.

*(Tabassam Raza)*

30. Reid et al. (1987:60) observe that pupils prefer teachers who are strict, but fair, have a sense of humour, are approachable and are empathetic in manner. They dislike teachers who are soft, ineffective, rigid, harsh, uncaring; whose demeanour provokes classroom confrontation; and who fail to learn pupils' names.

## **Chapter 7 - The Academic Dimension of Schooling**

1. Many other teachers also commented on these girls' behaviour in a similar way:

They [Muslim girls] are better behaved than the others - much better behaved - and they are not rude. They wouldn't dream of swearing or doing practical jokes. Yes, they chat a lot, but they are not malicious.

*(Shahid Rehman, Science teacher, Hillview Comprehensive)*

2. Nevertheless, it appears that adolescent Muslim girls, as a group, are not alone in not wanting to sit next to boys. Delamont and Galton (1986:90) observe that the biggest danger most pupils face is being forced to sit next to a pupil of the opposite sex. Moreover, Wade and Souter (1992:46) note that adolescent girls and

boys sit in single-sex groups in class and spend their break-time and lunch-time in a similar way.

3. Many other teachers also thought so:

They seem eager and enjoy most of the work that is put in front of them.

They are anxious to please and anxious to get on.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)*

4. Some other teachers also appeared to be worried about what they saw as the parents wanting to arrange their daughters' marriage at the detriment of the girls' education:

I would say the majority, they are very keen to learn, in their quiet way, but they get problems from home because their fathers have this idea in their head about getting them married as soon as they leave at 16. Then the girls often have to fight their parents to further their education and that's what we try to encourage.

*(Joanna Thomas, Child Development teacher, Blossomdale Girls')*

5. A few other teachers also made such remarks about the girls' performance in tests:

They want to do well in tests; they don't like it when tests are sprung on them. They like to have preparation time; they like to have something that is very clear-cut and they know what is expected of them.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillview Comprehensive)*

6. However, Pye (1988:17) argues that demeanour in adolescence should not be seen as the expression of established personality; nor should performance educationally be seen as the expression of established gifts: both should be seen as experiments to test hypotheses.

7. Brown and Wragg (1993:3) maintain that in conversations people seek information or the solution to problems, want to satisfy their curiosity or allay anxiety, want to make contact with or deepen their understanding of another person. Nevertheless, in classroom talk, teachers often ask questions of children not to obtain new knowledge, but to find out what children already know. Other cognitive and cognate reasons for asking questions are to stimulate recall, to deepen understanding, to develop imagination and to encourage problem solving.

8. This is congruent with evidence from research over the past two decades which shows that school girls in mixed classrooms - and indeed women in any mixed institution - do not talk in lessons as much as boys do (Sears and Feldman (1974); French and French (1984); Gilbert and Taylor (1991)).

9. Some teachers felt that the uninhibited milieu of an all-girls' classroom was conducive to better participation of these girls (cf. note 9, p. 288):

They are in a very free and easy atmosphere in the way that there are no boys there, so some of them are downright loud and they have always got plenty to say - not necessarily by invitation - and others are very quiet and, I mean, it's a personality thing too. But I don't think they behave in this environment as they'd behave in any other school environment.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')*

10. Martin (1980:163) documents the most common reasons that students give for not participating in discussions as not having anything to say; afraid of looking foolish; or inability to think of anything profound or impressive. In other words, they feel self-conscious. Yet these same students would have to admit that not having anything to say seldom stops them from talking with their friends. This seemed to be the case with the girls in the sample in the present study.



11. Literature shows that a small group can be a safe setting for the articulation of half-formed, hesitant thoughts (Martin, 1980; Pye, 1988). Moreover, pupils who work in small discussion groups without the teacher present generate more exploratory questions, hypotheses and explanations than when teachers are present (Barnes and Todd, 1977).

12. Many teachers made such observations:

It would depend what the discussion was about and how secure they felt about it. I have noticed a great deal of reluctance in the Asian girls to speak up in a discussion on, say, race relations, because they feel they are being judged. They don't want to be seen taking a stance. I think it is part of the generalisation stereotype - keeping a low profile as far as possible, or maybe they have been told at home, not to respond to any racist taunts and therefore they don't participate in such discussions either.

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

13. Many other teachers also expressed their satisfaction with these girls' written work:

I've got three Muslim girls in my Year 11 group, two of them are the best in the class. All three of them, their actual written work and the effort they put into it, is very good. They take time, care and pride in what they are doing. Actual presentation doesn't always look very good, but they are certainly more accurate in technical aspects than a lot of other girls in the group.

*(Fiona Young, English teacher, Hillsvieview Comprehensive)*

14. Some other teachers also held this view:

Some of them have a real problem here because in some families, there is not a great deal of regard for the importance of homework - something that is outside the scope of some parents to understand the importance of - but the other thing is that a lot of girls come from large families where there are

small children and they suffer from problems of time and space. They often have quite a lot to do at home and they very often don't have a suitable place to work. So they are not terribly successful at getting work done at home.

*(Valerie Shepherd, Section 11 Coordinator, Blossomdale Girls')*

15. A few other teachers also reported that these girls invariably did their homework:

Their homework, even if they can't do all of it, is very good and neat. They make the *effort* to do it.

*(Shahid Rehman, Science teacher, Hillview Comprehensive)*

16. Whatever criteria schools use, teacher bias is known to impinge on the subject options of the pupils. Research (such as, Smith and Tomlinson, 1989; Tomlinson, 1990) shows that there is a tendency for teachers to allocate middle class children to higher level exam courses even when their attainments do not seem to warrant this. Further, children belonging to ethnic minority groups are allocated on the whole to lower course levels than white pupils. However, Smith and Tomlinson conclude that it is not because ethnic group is itself being used as a criterion in the allocation of course levels, but rather because ethnic minority children tend to have lower assessed attainment and to belong to lower social classes. Similar findings are reported by Foster (1990:144) who sees no evidence to suggest that teacher assessment or subject allocation is based on racially prejudiced views.

17. A variety of other subjects were being studied by these girls. By far the most popular choice was Urdu, which was chosen by most girls of Pakistani origin, either on their own initiative or after being persuaded by their parents or teachers. Similarly, Bengali was chosen by most girls originating from Bangladesh. Other modern languages that were being studied by a few girls in the sample were

French, German and Spanish. Another favourite subject appeared to be business studies, which was being studied by more than half of the girls in the sample. Textiles, child development, and history were chosen by more than one-third of them. A few girls were studying geography, sociology, art, food studies, religious education, technology, and integrated humanities. The subjects chosen by only one or two girls in the sample were government politics, statistics, performing arts, extra English, economics, and computer studies. The last one was not a GCSE option, but was being studied due to personal interest.

18. Smith and Tomlinson (1989) note that only four schools in their sample of 20 schools had made positive efforts to encourage girls away from traditional domestic and commercial subjects. While the others had given the issue some thought, they felt that gender divisions were so strongly entrenched in the school curriculum that little change was possible.

19. Some teachers believed that girls would inevitably choose gender-based options:

Girls choose options that are considered suitable for their sex. We have only two girls who have opted for CDT this year and five girls in the year coming up. But you can't say that Muslim girls or any girls choose *boys' subjects*, even after twenty years of equal opportunities.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)*

20. Group perspectives, as used by Becker et al. (1961), are modes of thought and action developed by a group which faces the same problematic situation. They are the customary ways members of the group think about such situations and act in them and which appear to group members as the natural and legitimate ones to use in such situations.

21. Many other girls also got help from members of their immediate or extended family:

My elder daughter went to sixth form college. After doing her A'levels, she is now working in a bank. She suggested some subjects that Fehmida has chosen. We also made some suggestions and her teachers also helped her.

*(Fehmida Saleem's father)*

22. Foster (1990) also notes that the majority of students in his study had made sensible choices in the option system and 'streamed themselves'. Woods (1984) attributes it to the fact that pupils and parents internalise the teachers' definitions of success and failure, accept the consequences and choose realistically.

23. Many other parents offered this kind of advice:

I suggested that it would be useful if she did something to do with business, as we have our own business. But she chose all the subjects herself. She asked me and I said that she should do what she wanted to do. I thought it would be better if she did what she was interested in, because then she would do well.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother)*

24. Many other girls indicated their dissatisfaction with their chosen subjects for various reasons:

I wasn't happy with my options because I did French for three years in school and I wanted to do it for GCSE. But the French class was at the same time as Urdu. The Urdu class was being run for the Muslim kids in the fifth year, so we were sort of forced into it.

*(Seema Tanveer)*



25. Smith and Tomlinson (1989) also observe that though schools recognise, yet they do not always make clear to pupils and parents that entry to a variety of post-school careers could be affected by the choices made at 13 plus.

26. Ladbury (1977) writes about three girls of Turkish Cypriot origin studying for their A'levels, who were under pressure to enter arranged marriages and were using sixth form work to prolong their freedom.

27. Many other teachers also thought that these girls wanted to go into further education in order to postpone their marriage (cf. note 26 above):

Those who are academically able have extremely high aspirations. Here a lot of them want to be doctors, lawyers, and most of them will actually get there. But we do have some who aspire far too high. Whether it is parental pressure as much to do with it as what they want to do, I'm not sure, because with some of them, I think, they find that parents may let them carry on with their education if they think there is a chance of a really good profession, whereas if they don't think they stand a chance, then the answer is no: no further education; no going to work. I think they are aiming that bit high in order to get out and have that bit of freedom for that bit longer.

*(Helen Williams, Head of Careers, Blossomdale Girls')*

28. Some teachers were convinced that these girls would not go into further education:

I deal with every child and I am still finding in fifth year, usually within the last two months before leaving school, the girls would say, 'It's just a waste of time; I am not doing anything, because I am not allowed to go to college', and that hampers their career hopes.

*(Margaret Smith, Head of Careers, Springfield High)*

Similar findings have been documented by Sharpe (1976). Almost all the British Asian girls in her sample expressed career hopes and had some idea of the job they might take up. However, Sharpe asserts that for some, such aspirations may turn out to be wishful thinking, since most of them will be married soon after leaving school and may not work at all. She concludes that only girls from middle class backgrounds who have parents in good jobs are more likely to realise these hopes.

29. All the girls expressed an interest in further education:

At first, I wasn't sure about education. Then I started to get interested. My dad gave me a choice: if I want to do a job when I am 16 or go into the sixth form. I said, 'I want to carry on and see what I can do'.

*(Tallat Zahid)*

30. Literature on ethnic minority girls, on the one hand criticises their parents for not letting them continue their education (see p. 193); on the other, several studies suggest that these girls are more likely to stay on in education beyond the school leaving age than the indigenous girls (Rutter et al. 1982; Eggleston, et al. 1986; Department of Employment, 1991; Mirza, 1992). Various reasons have been given for it. These range from the girls' attempt to postpone labour market entry because of high unemployment of ethnic minority youth (Eggleston et al.) to a way of counteracting the negative effects of material, economic and social deprivation experienced by a migrant community in Britain (Rutter et al.) and to redress the unsatisfactory outcome of their particular schooling experience (Mirza).

31. Research into the aspirations of Asian school leavers (see, for example, Kallie, 1986) also suggests that both boys and girls have much higher inter-generational mobility aspirations compared to their indigenous counterparts; and both Asian parents and children, though working class, have aspirations that are largely middle class in nature.

32. Many other parents also indicated their willingness to let their daughters go into further education:

As far as I am concerned, there is no restriction. She can get as much education as she wants. It's all right with me even if she wants to go to university; I'll fully support her.

*(Khalida Dar's father)*

33. Many parents were concerned about the moral welfare of their daughters:

There is no such thing as to what level she *should* study: there is no end to it. If your son or daughter wants to study, you should educate them as much as they want. But I wouldn't want them to do anything unIslamic.

*(Tabassam Raza's father)*

34. The vast majority of parents had been educated in the rural parts of Pakistan or Bangladesh. Only one father had a Bachelors degree from a university in Pakistan; another had gone to college, but had not completed the course. A few had a Matric certificate, connoting the successful completion of ten years of schooling and passing an examination in a certain number of subjects at the end of it, whereas the others had been to school, but had left after a few years without any formal qualifications. The majority of mothers had either never been to school or had had only two or three years of schooling. Two mothers, however, had been to college and had attained qualifications, equivalent to A'levels, in Pakistan; another two had a Matric. One mother had her schooling in Britain, but did not go into further education.

35. Similar hopes were expressed by the immigrant Muslim women in Afshar's (1989) study.

36. Many other parents also linked education with respectability:



We hope she gets as much education as possible: the best education, the highest education. We will support her as long as we are capable of supporting her and will give her all the financial help that we can afford. If she is educated, she will be respected in her new home when she gets married.

*(Razia Zia's father)*

## **Chapter 8 - Aspiring to a Career**

1. The egalitarian marriage ethic suggests that when men are at home, for example in the evening or at weekends, they do fifty percent of the domestic work done at that time. In fact most do very little except repairs. Minai (1981) observes that the most universal obstacle against a career woman's progress is found right in her own home. Juggling a marriage and profession has grown more difficult in recent years as the extended family with its built-in baby-sitting service is disintegrating fast.

2. A recent qualitative report on part-time work shows that most women choose to work part-time as a way of balancing family and work commitments, achieving some financial independence and gaining self-esteem (Department of Employment, 1992).

3. Newson et al. (1978) observe that boys are given greater physical freedom, while girls are kept closer to the home and mother from an early age.

4. Delamont (1980) points to the number of different ways in which children can be taught to recognise at a very early age a gender classification system and to use it to label their environment accordingly. She notes the significance of cultural artefacts such as boys' and girls' names, their clothes and the different colours used in the nursery, among other things, that discriminate between the sexes.



5. Still, despite cultural imposition of traditional images of a woman's role, girls can and do succeed academically. Arnot (1986) observes that, on average, girls develop an early proficiency at language and reading skills and a verbal fluency that excels that of boys. In pre-school years, girls also tend to score higher than boys on general intelligence tests and up to the age of twelve, girls are on a par with boys in arithmetical computation. Recent evidence also suggests that girls are outperforming boys at both GCSE and A'level (Central Statistical Office, 1993; BBC 1, 1994).

6. Kelly (1981;1982) puts forward a variety of different explanations for why girls do not do science. These range from their lack of self-confidence to the masculine image of science and the impersonal approach to science which do not relate easily to girls' previous experiences and interests. Still, Arnot (1986) contends that a genuine equality of opportunity for boys and girls to study all school subjects does not exist in British secondary schools. Since the National Curriculum now requires all the pupils to study science, it is difficult to ascertain how many girls would *choose* to study the sciences at GCSE level.

7. Stanworth (1981) notes in her research that both female and male pupils perceive boys as receiving far more attention from the teacher than girls. Boys are more likely to get involved in classroom discussions, to comment, to demand help or attention and to be seen as 'model' pupils by their class-fellows. Boys are also thought more likely to be asked questions, to be seen as highly conscientious by the teacher, to get on best with the teacher and to receive more praise and criticism. Stanworth concludes that girls are placed on the 'margins of classroom life'.

8. See, for example, Brooks and Singh (1978); Hubbuck and Carter (1980); Troyna and Smith (1983); Drew et al. (1991).

9. Anwar and Ali (1987), in a report published by the Commission for Racial Equality, suggest that British trained doctors from the ethnic minorities have trouble in getting the best jobs. McKeigue et al. (1990:961-4), in a retrospective research study of 1500 doctors graduating from five British medical schools between 1981 and 1987, also conclude that ethnic minorities experience disproportionate difficulty in obtaining hospital posts. However, the most recent evidence comes in the form of a prospective study reported in the British Medical Journal by Esmail and Everington (1993:691-2). This study shows how young ethnic minority doctors could be discriminated against, because of their foreign names, as early as at the stage of job application, even when they have similar qualifications and experience as their indigenous counterparts.

10. However, the young Muslim women in Brah and Shaw's (1992:49-50) research referred less to overt racial abuse and more to the less explicit, subtle and sometimes indirect forms of structural and institutional racism.

11. Still, for some ethnic minority groups, it seems that particular cultural traits can impede progress when good educational results would potentially allow people higher jobs. For the generally successfully educated Chinese and Japanese Americans, courses are organised in assertiveness and communication techniques since these highly qualified people are often barred from management and other leadership functions because of supposedly less suitable qualities of leadership and communication ascribed to cultural traits (Teunissen, 1992:89). In the same way, going to the pub with colleagues after work to unwind, or playing golf with the boss to facilitate links is the kind of networking alien to certain British ethnic minority groups, notably Muslims.

12. But, recent research (such as Penn and Scattergood, 1992) into the career aspirations of Asian fifth-formers points to the absence of Asians from the YTS.

13. Many other parents also made such comments:

She should work if she got a degree. It would be pointless to have a degree and waste it by sitting at home.

*(Arifa Mahmood's mother)*

14. Almost all the families in the sample in the present study appeared to be of a working class background. The only quasi-middle class families in the sample were those four families who owned a shop or a small business. When the parents were asked about the kind of work they did before immigrating to Britain, it was found that only one mother in the sample had worked, prior to her marriage and coming to Britain, as a machinist. Some of the fathers had also not worked in the country of origin, since they had come here in their youth. The majority of those who had jobs before emigration worked mainly in manual occupations as factory workers, mechanics or plumbers. Very few worked in professional or white-collar occupations: one father used to be a primary school teacher; another was a bank clerk.

15. They had been unemployed for 2-14 years. Two of them were retraining at the time of the interview and were hopeful of their employment prospects. The fathers who had jobs were in semi-skilled or un-skilled occupations and were taxi-drivers, mechanics, factory or railway workers; two fathers managed their own shops. The fathers who were unemployed at the time of the fieldwork had held somewhat similar jobs in the past and had worked as taxi-drivers, bus-drivers, bakers, waiters, mechanics or factory workers. Only one father used to be a restaurateur, but had to sell his restaurant as it was running at a loss.

16. Only two of the mothers worked at their own shops. Further, one mother, a single parent had a small textile business in which she manufactured goods - stitched by herself, her daughter and her daughter-in-law - and supplied them to

retailers. Some of the mothers who were not employed at the time of the interview had worked part-time at home occasionally in the past as machinists or making small items, such as Christmas crackers. A few mothers still worked for an hour or two every day, teaching the children in the neighbourhood to read the Quran. Thus, economic necessity, if the father was unemployed, and the desire to improve their standard of living had even motivated the mothers with no formal qualifications to contribute to the family income.

17. And the other side of the coin: the father opposing a career for his daughter and the mother favouring it:

When she gets married, it will be up to her to decide if she wants to work.

We wouldn't want her to work while she was living with us.

*(Tallat Zahid's father)*

But we have to do in Rome as the Romans do. One has to work when one is living in this country. If they get a good education, they will also work.

*(Tallat Zahid's mother)*

18. Many other girls also expressed their desire to achieve more than their parents, as far as education and a career were concerned:

My mother doesn't have a job and my father has a shop. I don't want a shop, because I know what hard work it is. I've seen my father work, getting up at six o'clock and working long hours: that's not the life for me. And housewife! I think, when I have children, I'd like to be a housewife for a few years, but not for ever.

*(Nasreen Butt)*

19. Many other teachers also observed that career choices were gender-based: There is much greater interest in boys in engineering and electronics. Girls, on the whole, go into office type work.

*(Alison Fraser, Information Technology teacher, Springfield High)*



20. Some other teachers also thought so:

Generally I would say the girls tend to like the caring careers. In the recent placements, they have gone into schools and hospitals, whereas boys have gone into car mechanics, garages, engineering.

*(Cynthia Roberts, Head of Careers, Hillview Comprehensive)*

21. Research shows that ethnic minority girls, while choosing jobs ranked high on the social ladder in terms of skill and status also select distinctively female jobs (Eggleston et al. 1986:93). Nevertheless, it has also been observed that they do not regard the jobs they select as women's work, challenging the assumption of what is a traditional female job (Riley, 1985:66). Others argue that the prospect of men's work is unattractive to women who see it as dirty, noisy and lonely (Griffin, 1985:80). Still others contend that the reason for this choice is to opt for realistically accessible careers to maximise their chances of upward mobility, within the existing constraints afforded by a racially and sexually structured labour market and their low educational attainment (Mirza, 1992:121-2).

22. Research (such as Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1991:116;118) shows that Asian parents feel that English employers prefer English employees and give Asians the worst jobs; those that the English do not want to do. Some young Asians feel there is discrimination in jobs because of foreign names, but others say there is no discrimination in jobs, and it is due to the economic situation. Asian fathers seem to concentrate on maximising income rather than improving their working conditions and thus accept heavy jobs and long hours, although this does not necessarily imply that they are satisfied with their situation (Robinson, 1984:245; Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1991:117).

23. See, for example, Taylor (1976); Gupta (1977); Kallie (1986); Bryan et al. (1987); Kelly (1989); Mirza (1992); Brah and Shaw (1992).

24. See, for example, Anwar (1982); Brooks (1983); Brah and Golding (1983); Taylor and Hegarty (1985); Brah (1986); Griffin (1986).

25. Gottfredson (1981) argues that occupations which are perceived to be inappropriate for one's sex are first eliminated from further consideration. Next youngsters begin to rule out occupations of unacceptably low prestige because they are inconsistent with their social class self-concept. At the same time they rule out occupations requiring extreme effort to obtain in view of their image of their general ability level. Only in adolescence do youngsters turn to their more personal interests, capacities and values as criteria for further narrowing their choices.

26. Kelly (1989), in her longitudinal study of 11-17 year olds, maintains that one of the ways of looking at the development of occupational preferences is to consider the socio-economic status of jobs. This broader grouping of occupations enables patterns to be perceived more easily. It also concentrates on the status of work rather than its content. The job of care-assistant, nurse and doctor all have a similar caring for people content, but they vary widely in status; by contrast, the job of doctor, lawyer and archaeologist all have similar socio-economic status, but vary widely in content. Broadly speaking, psychological models of career choice (such as, Holland, 1973) suggest that children choose their occupation on the basis of interest (i.e. content) whereas sociological models (such as, Roberts, 1975; Gottfredson, 1981) suggest that status is a more salient factor.

27. Some other teachers also made such comments:

One of the problems in the past have been with pupils who said, 'I want to be a doctor'. And their qualifications would never have been good enough.

They did not have the ability to be a doctor. 'So, if I can't be a doctor, can I be a chemist'? 'Well, no, you don't have the qualifications for that either'.

'Well, couldn't I try'? 'Well, of course you can try, but take our advice and look at other things.'

*(Christine Turner, Head of Upper School, Hillsvew Comprehensive)*

28. Many parents made such remarks, indicating their awareness of the importance of educational credentials for careers:

Her career would depend on her ability and qualifications. If she applied for a job now, she won't get a very good one, but she could with A'levels or a university degree.

*(Fehmida Saleem's father)*

29. Many girls showed such persistence:

I hope to do A'levels and then train to be a teacher. If my GCSE grades are not good, I will go to college for three years. I will do retakes for one year and A'levels for the next two.

*(Raheela Noor)*

30. Some other teachers also thought so:

It depends on what career they feel they have got mapped out for them. I mean, some of them are far-reaching and they know they want to go from here to a sixth form college and may be to university and they know what career they are going to follow. But for others, if they feel may be they'll have an arranged marriage, then a lot of them are quite happy to settle for that.

*(Elizabeth Robinson, Head of Year 11, Blossomdale Girls')*

31. See, for example, Brah and Golding (1983); Parmar and Mirza (1983); Brah and Minhas (1985); Shaw (1988), Afshar (1989); Penn and Scattergood (1992).

32. Many other girls expressed such career hopes:

If I take this course in Fashion Designing and pass it, that will probably be the best thing that I'll ever do in my life because it will lead to my future career and improve my life.

*(Zubaida Saeed)*

33. Law and Ward (1981) argue that people find attractive what society conditions them to find attractive. The relative desirability of different occupations is socially structured. In other words, people like what they are brought up to like.

34. Some other girls also recognised that their choice of career did not have their parents' approval:

I want to be a pilot, but my parents don't agree, so I'll probably train to be a nurse or a teacher.

*(Rahat Basheer)*

35. Maizels (1970) points to the avoidance side of motivated behaviour, whereby people use career development not only to approach liked activities, but also to avoid disliked activities.

36. See, for example, Brah and Minhas (1985); Riley (1985); Mirza (1992); Brah and Shaw (1992).

37. Dorn (1985) observes that career officers and teachers are sometimes reluctant to send school leavers to employers whom they suspect might discriminate. He maintains that they should report this rather than collude with it.

38. Research conducted by Cross et al. (1990) notes the stereotyped perceptions which career officers seem to have. Asian girls, for example, are thought to have 'problems' in the education system because of their families. Moreover, Mirza (1992:91) observes that the career officers are presented with pupils who, during the five years of streaming and selection at school, have already been assessed and their task is to place these pupils in appropriate jobs. The young Muslim women in Brah and Shaw's (1992:50) study also spoke of racialised stereotypes about the aspirations and abilities of Asian girls that they encountered



amongst some fellow students, teachers and career officers, which served to undermine their own ambitions to pursue careers.

39. Nevertheless, a recent survey on careers education concludes that there is a desperate need to improve training for teachers delivering careers work in schools (Cleaton, 1993:82).

40. Research evidence regarding young Asians (such as Taylor, 1976; Gupta, 1977; Brah and Shaw, 1992:39; Siann and Knox, 1992:203; Penn and Scattergood, 1992:94) also explains their high aspirations and achievement in terms of parental support.

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Surah Al-Bakara (The Cow) 2:228.

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Surah Al-Isra (Children of Israel) 17:23-24.

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX 1**

**LETTER TO PARENTS**

Dear Parents,

A research student at Cambridge University is doing research in the field of education. To gather data, she intends to interview female Muslim students in the fifth form of some schools, the parents of these pupils and some of their teachers. She will be interviewing some girls at this school to find out how they feel about their education, culture and future careers. She has already spoken with me about her project and has also interviewed some of the teachers at this school. She would be very pleased if you would give permission for your daughter to be interviewed at school and let the researcher interview you as well. You will be interviewed in the privacy of your home at a time chosen by you, in English or your mother tongue.

Please rest assured that the information obtained from you will be treated with strict confidence by the researcher; it will not be made available to the staff or the administration of the school and your names will not be mentioned in the study.

Please detach the slip below and return it to the school as soon as possible.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher.

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Please delete as appropriate:

I am willing / not willing to be interviewed.

I give / do not give permission for my daughter to be interviewed.

Pupil's name.....

Parent's signature.....



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULES**

These semi-structured interview schedules were only used as a guide. Interview schedules 3 and 6 were translated in Urdu or Punjabi during each interview according to the ability and educational level of the interviewee. Interview schedules 4, 5 and 6 for the second-phase interviews were used in conjunction with the transcripts of the first interviews.

#### **Interview Schedules for the First-Phase Interviews**

##### **Interview Schedule 1 - Teachers**

1. How long have you been teaching in this school?
2. How long have you been in the teaching profession?
3. Which subjects do you teach?
4. Do you have any other responsibilities?
5. How long have you taught Muslim children?
6. Does it make any difference to have Muslim pupils in the class?
7. What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of teaching Muslim children?
8. Do you feel that Muslim girls differ from the rest of the group in any way?
9. Are they different in their:
  - i) behaviour in class?

- ii) attitude to learning?
- iii) achievement in tests?
- iv) future aspirations?

10. Do you feel that Muslim girls participate as much in the lessons as the rest of the group in:

- i) asking questions in class?
- ii) answering teachers' questions?
- iii) taking part in a discussion?
- iv) presenting written work?

11. Do you think that Muslim girls like school?

12. Do you think that they behave differently at home and at school?

13. Are Muslim girls inclined to choose certain options at school rather than others?

14. Do you think that Muslim girls have to face racism in school? If yes, what could be the reason for this?

15. Do Muslim girls perceive themselves as Asian or British?

16. How much freedom do Muslim girls have compared to other British teenagers?

17. Do you think that religion matters to Muslim girls?

18. How important is the home language to Muslim girls?

19. Do you think that Muslim girls want to retain their culture?

20. Do you feel that Muslim parents favour boys more than girls? Why?

## **Interview Schedule 2 - Pupils**

1. How old are you ?
2. How long have you lived in England?
3. Do you have any brothers and sisters?
4. What does your father do?
5. What does your mother do?
6. How many languages can you speak?
7. Which one of these is your mother tongue?
8. Do you see yourself as British or Asian? Why?
9. What do you think of religion?
10. Are you a practising Muslim? Tell me about your religious practices.
11. Have you ever attended a community school for religious teaching and to learn your home language?
12. Which subjects are you studying at school this year?
13. Did you choose these subjects for any particular reasons?
14. Do you intend to take any GCSEs?
15. What do you intend to do after the fifth form?
16. What sort of educational qualifications are you hoping to get eventually?
17. What sort of job would you like to do in the future?

18. Why do you want to choose this job?
19. Do your teachers offer you any advice on the choice of a job?
20. Do your parents offer you any advice on the choice of a job?
21. Do you like school? Why?
22. How do your teachers treat you?
23. How do your class-fellows treat you?
24. Who are your friends at school?
25. Have you ever suffered from racism?
26. Tell me about your life at home and at school. Is there any difference?
27. What do you like to do in your free time?
28. Which Asian customs do you like / dislike?
29. Which English customs do you like / dislike?
30. Do you think that English girls have more freedom than you? If yes, would you like to have that much freedom?
31. Do you talk / go out with boys?
32. How do you feel about marriage? Do you want to get married by a certain age?
33. Would you like to choose your own partner or would you opt for an arranged marriage?
34. What do you think of the dowry system?



35. Would you like to go out to work before or after you are married or would you like to stay at home after completing your education?
36. How do you feel about having children? Would you like to have children one day?
37. What do you think of the joint family system?
38. Do you think that men and women are treated equally in Muslim society?
39. Would you have preferred to be born as a boy?

### **Interview Schedule 3 - Parents**

1. What does the father do?
2. What does the mother do?
3. How long have the father and mother been in the UK?
4. How many languages can the father and mother speak?
5. What is your mother-tongue?
6. Do you see yourself as British or Asian? Why?
7. Do you want to go back to your home country eventually to settle down there?
8. Have you got any investments in your home country?
9. Which Asian customs do you like / dislike?
10. Which British customs do you like / dislike?

11. What do you think of religion?
12. Are you a practising Muslim? Tell me about your religious practices.
13. Has your daughter ever attended any classes outside the school for learning the Quran and the home language?
14. Do you think that your daughter likes school? Why?
15. Did you help your daughter to choose her GCSE options?
16. What sort of educational qualifications do you hope your daughter will attain?
17. Would you like your daughter to work after completing her education?
18. Do you think that your daughter is getting suitable career-guidance at school?
19. What do you think is the attitude of your daughter's teachers towards her?
20. What do you think is the attitude of your daughter's class-fellows towards her?
21. Has your daughter ever suffered from racism?
22. What do you think of your daughter's life at home and at school? Is there any difference?
23. Do you think that English girls have more freedom than Muslim girls? Would you like your daughter to have more freedom?
24. Do you want your daughter to get married one day? Do you think that it is important to get married by a certain age?
25. Do you want your daughter to have an arranged marriage or to choose her own partner?

26. What do you think of the dowry system?

27. Do you think that men and women are treated equally in Muslim society?

28. Do you think that it is better to have a son than a daughter?

29. What do you think of the joint family system?

### **Interview Schedules for the Second-Phase Interviews**

#### **Interview Schedule 4 - Teachers**

1. Do you feel that Muslim girls and boys are equally interested in careers?

2. Do you feel that Muslim and non-Muslim girls are equally career-oriented?

3. Do you think that certain careers are more popular with girls and certain others with boys? Why?

4. Do you feel that Muslim girls find a career and marriage equally important?

5. What information does the school give its pupils regarding career choices?

6. Does the school provide its female Muslim pupils with any special information about the choice of careers?

7. Does the school provide its teachers with opportunities for INSET to help them teach in a multi-ethnic school?

8. Is there a teacher responsible for home-school liaison at this school?

9. How interested are Muslim parents in their daughters' education?

10. How often do Muslim parents visit the school to check on their daughters' progress? Do they attend parents evenings?
11. Do you feel that Muslim parents put pressure on their daughters to do well academically?
12. What do you think of supplementary schooling for religious education and the teaching of the heritage language to ethnic minority children?
13. What is the best way of helping Muslim girls at school? Are some teachers better at it than others? If yes, in what ways?

#### **Interview Schedule 5 - Pupils**

1. Why did you choose to study these options: parents' suggestion; teachers' suggestion; liked the teacher; popular subject; good at it; friends took it; lead to chosen career; others?
2. Which one of these has helped you the most in choosing your options: subject teacher; careers teacher; form teacher; head of year; headteacher; parents; brothers and sisters; others in the family; friends and class-fellows?
3. How much choice did you have at option time and how happy you were with the options that had been chosen?
4. Did you have enough information of various kinds to help you when choosing options? For example:
  - i) how good were you at various subjects?
  - ii) what the new subjects were about?
  - iii) which subjects were needed for jobs?
  - iv) who to ask for advice?
  - v) how to find out about going to college and getting jobs?



5. Did you at any time feel that the career advice that you were getting was being given to you because you were a girl or because you were Muslim?
6. Do you think that you should be doing more GCSEs? Why?
7. What kind of work do you enjoy most at school: practical; taking notes; tests; others?
8. Do your parents know how you are doing at school? How often do they discuss your work with you? How often do they visit the school?
9. How much homework do you get? Do your parents ever help with your home work?
10. Do you help with the housework? How do you feel about that?
11. How many times have you stayed away from school during the past year? Why?
12. Do you take part in any activities out of lessons, after-school or out-of-school?
13. What do you like doing best? Why?
14. Which television programmes do you watch? Do your parents object to any of these?
15. Have you ever:
  - i) played for a school or year team?
  - ii) been in a school play or concert?
  - iii) been on any school trips and visits?
  - iv) done something special in an assembly?
  - v) held any special job in the school or class?
16. What do you like about your school? Why?

17. What do you dislike about your school? Why?

18. Has anyone from the school ever visited you or your parents at home? If yes, how often and for what reasons? If no, was it because the school did not send them or because the parents did not want to see them?

19. Do your teachers encourage you to work? How do they do that? Do they check your work regularly and give helpful comments?

20. Do you ever get discouraged during lessons? If yes, why?

21. How much do you contribute to the lessons? Do you: ask questions; answer teachers' questions; take part in discussions; hand in written work on time?

22. Have you ever been harassed by boys / other girls in the classroom or out of it?

23. Do you like coming to a single-sex school? Why? Would you rather go to a mixed school? Why?

OR

Do you like coming to a mixed school? Why? Would you rather go to a girls' school? Why?

24. What allowances does the school make because of your religion? What else would you like to be done in this area?

25. What kind of contact do you have with the local mosque?

26. What sort of life do you want to have in the future?

27. What career would you like to have in the future?

28. Why do you want to choose this job: money; status; helping people; convenience; know someone who has this job; others?

29. Regardless of the fact whether you are capable of doing it or not, what job would you like to do the most?
30. What job would you dislike doing? Why?
31. Would you like to do the same job as your father or mother? Why?
32. How different do you think your life is going to be from that of your parents?
33. Do you have a role model?
34. How do you feel about being brought up in Britain?
35. How do you see yourself? Who are you? Define yourself.
36. What does being a British Asian Muslim mean to you?
37. How do you feel when you face racism? Why? Do you ever tell your parents about racist incidents?
38. Do you think there is racism amongst Asians also, for example, Pakistani-Bengali, Muslim-Hindu? Why?
39. Why would you prefer an arranged marriage?
40. What is your view about Muslim girls and boys marrying non-Muslims?
41. Who would you like to marry: a first cousin, a relation, someone living in Britain, someone living in Pakistan / Bangladesh? Why?
42. What is the best thing you can do? Why?
43. What is the worst thing you can do? Why?

### **Interview Schedule 6 - Parents**

1. Do you think that your daughter should be doing more GCSEs? Why?
2. Do you know how your daughter is doing at school? How often do you discuss her work with her?
3. Do you ever help your daughter with her homework?
4. How many times has your daughter stayed away from school during the past year? Why?
5. Do you let your daughter take part in any after-school or out-of-school activities?
6. What do you think your daughter likes doing the most?
7. Which television programmes does your daughter watch? Do you have any objections to any of these?
8. Has anyone from the school ever visited you at home? If yes, how often and for what reasons? If no, was it because the school did not send them or because you did not want to see them?
9. What allowances does the school make because of your religion? What else would you like to be done in this area?
10. Do you think that your religion and mother-tongue should be taught to your children at school?
11. What do you think of the teaching of sex-education in schools?
12. What kind of contact do you have with the local mosque?
13. What sort of life do you want your daughter to have in the future?



14. If given a choice, which job would you like your daughter to have in the future?
15. Why do you want your daughter to choose this job: money; status; helping people; convenience; know someone who has this job; others?
16. Do you feel that Muslim girls should only choose certain jobs?
17. Would you like your daughter to do the same job as her father or mother? Why?
18. How different do you think your daughter's life is going to be from that of yours?
19. Does free and compulsory education in Britain have anything to do with your decision to allow your daughter to go on to further education?
20. What are your educational qualifications?
21. Why did you come to Britain?
22. What did you do before coming to Britain?
23. How do you feel about racism? Why do you think some people behave like that?
24. Has your daughter ever reported any racist incidents?
25. Do you think there is racism amongst Asians also, for example, Pakistani-Bengali, Muslim-Hindu? Why?
26. Who would you like your daughter to marry: a first cousin, a relation, someone living in Britain, someone living in Pakistan / Bangladesh? Why?
27. What is the best thing your daughter can do? Why?

28. What is the worst thing your daughter can do? Why?

29. What is your view about Muslim boys and girls marrying non-Muslims?

## APPENDIX 3

### GLOSSARY

***Biradiri*** - Kin, relatives.

***Chapattis*** - Flat, round, unleavened pancake-like bread.

***Dopatta*** - Long, wide scarf to cover the head and bosom.

***Eid*** - The two main Islamic festivals: Eid-al-Fitr is celebrated at the end of thirty days of fasting in Ramadan; Eid-al-Adha on the day after Haj (pilgrimage).

***Hadith*** - Traditions relating to Prophet Muhammad: his words and actions.

***Izzet*** - Honour, prestige, modesty, virtue.

***Kameez*** - Long, usually loose top.

***Maulvis*** - Religious leaders.

***Namaz*** - The five obligatory daily prayers and also any voluntary prayers.

***Pbuh*** - Peace be upon him, usually preceded by the names of the Prophets.

***Purdah*** - Strictly speaking, seclusion of women from men. Also, a tacit ban on the free intermingling of women and men.

***Samosay*** - Snack comprising mince and/or vegetable wrapped in pastry and deep fried.

***Shalvar or Shalwar*** - Loose trousers.

***Umrah*** - Visit to the Kaaba at Makkah, involving some of the rites performed during Haj (Pilgrimage). This short visit can be made at any time of the year with the exception of the Haj period.

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