# The Opinions of Mirpuri Parents in Saltey, Birmingham, About Their Children's Schooling

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ABSTRACT

The issues affecting minority children and the school have been mostly discussed at government level. The voice of the ethnic communities themselves appears to have been rarely sought or registered. Little systematic investigation has been carried out to explore the expectations which ethnic minority parents have of their children's education.

This study investigates the views of a well defined community: the Kashmiri community settled in Saltley, the majority of whom come from the Mirpur district of Azad Kashmir.

The areas delineated for investigation can be grouped into four categories:

- the parents' views about the academic standard of the education provided and the achievements of their children.

- the cultural content of education which includes: mother tongue teaching, religious instruction, a multi-cultural curriculum and other matters related to culture and religion such as single-sex education, diet etc.

- contacts between the school and home, the degree of communication between the school and the parents and the role played by the community itself.

- discrimination at school.

This research is based on in-depth interviews with 35 families (a random sample from the 500 Kashmiri families residing in Saltley).

The aspirations of parents for their children's schooling emphasise two main aspects: a high standard of education and specific needs related to their own culture and religion: these include the teaching of Islam (by a bona fide Muslim) and of Urdu, at certificate level, single-sex education, and the employment of Asian teachers.

## Section A: INTRODUCTION

### I Ethnic minority children and the school

The first measures taken to cater for the educational needs of ethnic minorities were mainly concerned with the teaching of English to those children whose mother tongue was not English. (The first government recommendation on this matter was issued in 1963, English for Immigrants). The knowledge of English, which is the medium of instruction in Britain, appeared as an evident necessity; as Townsend and Brittan noted, multiracial schools saw it as "their major task". This need could be met by the education system without any great organisational or financial upheaval, through a variety of means such as withdrawal classes, language centres etc. It was then assumed that having learned some English, the children would and could sail through their schooling with no more ado. Barry Troyna has quoted the Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council report of 1964 to illustrate the philosophy which underpinned this practice: the teaching of English was seen as a means to assimilate children partaking of other cultures to the "British" culture. According to Mullard, it was ultimately designed
to ensure the "stability of society".

Further practice and experience, followed by research on the achievements and problems of ethnic minority children, revealed that the teaching of English, although essential, was grossly insufficient to satisfy their educational needs. In terms of strict academic achievements - as defined by the educational system - it has been demonstrated that ignoring the cultural and linguistic character of ethnic minority children was detrimental to their performance. As Telford and Sawrey have put it:

"Such acts are viewed by the children as a rejection of themselves, their families and their way of life. Rejection has considerable negative impact on the child's motivation and attitudes. To learn well in school, children must feel genuinely respected and valued for what and who they, their families, their language and their culture are".

Some teachers have become aware of this reality and the teachers' unions have published definite views on these matters. In Mother Tongue Teaching, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) emphasised the importance of teaching the children's mother tongue for a better educational development.

The NUT also pointed out the role played by the open and subtle forms of racialism which affected ethnic minority children's development in the school: the low expectations of teachers must be singled out as a major factor influencing their performance. The National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) saw in a multicultural curriculum "a chance for enrichment"; it deplored the lack of ethnic minority teachers and recommended a better link between schools and ethnic minority parents through making information available in the appropriate languages, and by ensuring that school premises are accessible for the use of the community. The race relations bodies have also contributed their share of recommendations and advice on the education of ethnic minority children, in order to enhance a multicultural approach in school.

However, as the notion of multicultural education became more widespread, the danger of a "ghetto" education began to loom, a multicultural curriculum being dispensed only to ethnic minority children. A recent NATFHE conference on multicultural education quoted examples of headteachers who did not see the point of incorporating a multicultural program me into their curriculum because in their schools "they did not have that problem", i.e. ethnic minority children. This attitude, combined with the low status of uncertified

multicultural parts of the curriculum awarded to minority cultures, could soon relegate "black" studies or minority languages to a remedial position. John Rex proposes that multicultural studies be given a place at certified level in order to avoid this development. NATFHE adds that a multicultural curriculum ought to be administered in all the schools whatever children attend them. The incorporation of multicultural programmes in examination syllabi could secure for them a high status and a generalised application.

## II Review of previous word

The brief outline above shows that the issues affecting ethnic minority children have been discussed to some extent at government level, sometimes acted upon by local authorities or left to the initiative of individual teachers or headteachers. Community Relations Councils, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), members of the teaching profession and researchers have expressed their views on the question. The Department of Education and Science (DES) and the organisations it consulted surprisingly did not first make any "endeavour ... to discover what non-English-speaking clients for their services wanted or thought practicable". The voice of the ethnic communities themselves appear to have been only rarely sought and registered. The better organised section of ethnic minorities made their opinions known through political action for instance; or the communities made themselves heard through minority teachers or through CRCs where they are represented. Nevertheless, little systematic investigation has been carried out to explore the expectations which ethnic minority parents have of their children's education. This is the purpose of our project.

A first survey of the literature brought forward a few accounts of the ethnic minorities' views on their children's education.

1972 - Townsend and Brittan indirectly described the minorities' attitude of various aspects of schooling, but as seen through the eyes of the teaching staff, under two headings:

- some problem areas
- home-school cooperation

1976 - Lionel Morrison presented a "study of three areas from a black viewpoint" (Huddersfield, Brent, Wandsworth) in a CRC publication. He dealt with a wide range of issues concerning ethnic minorities and devoted only a short passage to education concentrating on achievements and opportunities.

1977 - In a CRC publication on the education of ethnic minorities the parents' views were studied in their own right. A total of 700 parents were interviewed for a comparison of parents of white, West Indian, Indian and Pakistani origin. Topics such as religious instruction, school uniforms, mother tongue teaching were studied, but the analysis of the results are altogether contained within a chapter a few pages long.

1977-8 - N.S. Noor and S.S. Khalsa made a survey of parents' views on their children's education in Wolverhampton. They addressed themselves to the question of performance and cultural identity in 100 questionnaires on general views and attitudes. The limited number of questions covering such a vast range of issues did not allow for an in-depth study.

1981 - Jennifer Wilding made a survey of Asian parents in Leicester as regards ethnic minority languages in the school. A total of 312 Asian parents from East Africa, India and Pakistan were interviewed, whose language was mostly Gujerati and Punjabi. Her conclusions drew attention to the strong allegiance of

Asian parents to their first language and their desire to see it taught at school.

In addition to these studies, a number of projects took place or are currently going on particularly concerning the question of "mother tongue" teaching. These include:

(a) Projects commissioned by the DES

Investigation of the Language of Inner City Pupils
(Professor H. Rosen, University of London Institute of Education, October 1978 - June 1981).

Mother Tongue and English Teaching for Young Asian Children in Bradford. (Dr O.A. Rees, University of Bradford and Mr Fitzpatrick, Bradford College, October 1978 - June 1981).

The Linguistic Minorities Project. (Dr V.Saifullah Khan, University of London Institute of Education September 1979 - February 1983; with EEC sponsorship.)

(b) Projects sponsored by the European Community

Bedford Mother Tongue Pilot Project (1976-1980)

Schools Council Mother Tongue Project (April 1981 - April 1984).

## III Design of the project

The lack of research on the educational aspirations of Pakistani parents makes our project all the more relevant. This project is at the same time more general and more specific than any past research on this subject More general, because it investigated the views of Pakistani parents on a variety of issues related to their children's education. More specific because it concentrated on a geographically and ethnically defined community: the Kashmiri community in Saltley, Birmingham, the majority of whom come from the Mirpur District in Azad Kashmir. Because of the specificity of the community contacted, we want to guard against making undue generalisations concerning the Asian population or even the Pakistani community in Britain without exercising the utmost care. Mirpuris come from a relatively less developed area of Pakistan where there are not so many towns, they are Sunni Muslim and speak a dialect of Punjabi. Mirpuris are also likely to show a lesser allegiance to Pakistan and tend to assert their particularism as Kashmiris; this is manifested by the existence of separate Kashmiri parties among the community.

### (a) Selection of sample

We had no difficulty in locating and identifying the members of the community under study thanks to the census carried out by Dr Ramaz Klimiashvilly on Saltley. He drew up a list of 500 Kashmiri/Mirpuri families living in Saltley. This list is unclassified and addresses were numbered in the order in which they were returned when the census was being carried out. We decided on a 7% random sample which would constitute the corpus of the study (that is, 35 families). Every twelfth address was retained in order to obtain 40 families, 5 of which would be used for piloting purposes - every seventh address out of the 40 became selected for piloting. On numerous occasions, the address was not adequate: the families had moved out, generally on a temporary basis, while their house was being restored, as a result of the restoration program me which affects entire streets in Saltley; but we were not in possession of their new address. There was also occasions when the family contacted were found either not to have children of school age or that their child had just started school. In the

latter case, it was obviously difficult for the parents to form an opinion on the issues. In both instances, therefore, we moved to the alternative address (or addresses) selected from the initial list: first the number after the address in question on the list, then the number before and so on.

(b) Methodology

The information was gathered through in-depth interviews with each family, carried out with the assistance of an interpreter. The interpreter worked in a community centre in Saltley and therefore had many contacts among the local Kashmiri community especially among the women.

Our intention was to interview both parents together whenever possible. The father is likely to have more official contacts with the school, but the mother would spend more time with the children, especially if her husband is at work for lengthy hours, so that both of them are equally able to contribute to the discussion on the education of their children. However, it was sometimes very 'difficult for both parents to make themselves available for the interview. We interviewed 18 couples and otherwise contented ourselves with a single one of the parents. Altogether we spoke to 23 men and 30 women.

When we interviewed them together both parents generally agreed on the education of their children. We believe that this does not imply a passive acquiescence on the part of one of them; in a few instances, we were fortuitously able to test this assumption, when one of the parents arrived at the end of the interview and we then started all over again with him/her. But we indicated it whenever any discrepancy occurred. On several occasions at least one of the parents could communicate in English so that the interpreter did not need to translate the entire exchange. This proved very useful in evaluating lacunae resulting from the language barrier. No fundamental difference was noticed in this respect.

The interviews were intregrally recorded; we had a list of check questions in order to ensure that the main areas of investigation would be covered. The important issues could be grouped into four main categories:
(1) parents' view about the academic standard of the education provided and the achievements of their children.
(2) the cultural content of education which includes:
- "mother tongue" teaching
- religious instruction
- a multicultural curriculum
- other matters related to culture such as single-sex education, diet.
(3) contacts between the school and home, the degree of communication between the school and the parents and the role played by the community itself.
(4) discrimination at school.

This survey of attitudes was established against a background of factual information for each family: demographic details, the educational level of the parents, the occupation of the parents, their affiliation to political, religious or community organisations.

## Section B: RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

### I The Kashmiri community in Saltley

From our observation the Kashmiri community in Saltley appears to be a well established and stable one. Generally, wives and children have joined husbands/fathers; the older members of the community already have daughters or sons-in-law in Birmingham; some of the younger ones brought their own parents over, and they all live in family units. 82% of the thirty five fathers have lived in this country for over 20 years, some of whom up to 27 years; only one

out of the 35 heads of families has been here less than 15 years. Mothers came later but also arrived in Britain a good many years ago: 73.5% of them have lived in Britain over 10 years, very few entered during the last 5 years. The stability of the community is further strengthened by the fact that 71% of these families leave stayed in Birmingham during most of their time in the U.K.

Nearly all the families declared that they were well settled here: nobody stated that they firmly intended to return to Pakistan. The most affirmative statement was: "We will go some day". Some parents mentioned that they did not have the economic means to go back and others showed a good sense of humour on their own "myth of return".

"Yes we are settled here. Always we think of going back, but we are settled.

We are always thinking of going back; this is why we have a small house here, we have a nice house back home. l don't know what happened. All of us we thought, just a few months or a few years, that's all. We did go back of course, but then we come again..."

One must not draw the conclusion that those families have cut off links with the homeland. They visit Pakistan for holidays occasionally, especially if their parents still reside there and they retain numerous bonds with the community back home.

We found great uniformity both in their period of residence in the United Kingdom and in their occupation. Apart from two fathers who own a shop, all of them are factory workers or unemployed workers. The rate of unemployment is high: 27% (the rate of unemployment in Birmingham is 15.8% ). However, even the ones who are in employment do not enjoy a good standard of living as is indicated by the great number of free school meals awarded to their children (18 families, that is over 50% of families); housing conditions are characteristic of those found in inner city zones, often damp and draughty. The restoration programmes launched by Birmingham Corporation testifies to the poor living conditions of the community and unfortunately grants for internal restoration remain partial, so that occupants of the houses often cannot afford or raise the extra œ4000-œ6000 they must produce from their own pocket.

A few of our interviewees have become active in some association; 8 fathers, that is 23% of the sample of fathers,' were involved in the mosque, a housing committee, a funeral association, political groups, the British Muslims Association, Norton Hall Community Centre, the Naseby Club. A few mothers have attended English classes or participate in Norton Hall Community Centre.

Most of the men came to this country very young; between 7 and 9 (20-25%) of them were town dwellers, and the others were villagers. A good proportion of them, although of Kashmiri/Mirpuri origin, did not travel to Britain directly from Azad Kashmir, as they had migrated to neighbouring districts in Pakistan, including Pindi and lellum. On the whole, fathers were either children (or adolescents) when they left Pakistan; most of chose who were employed worked as farm labourers; only 22% of them had other kinds of jobs (3 in the army, one in the police, 2 'teachers, one shopkeeper and one peon).

Considering the number of people coming from villages, the percentage of literacy is relatively high; 19 (54%) of the men interviewed could read and write Urdu and they had attended school until the age of 14. Some told us of the ten miles or more they had to walk to the nearest school every day; two had FA and one held a BA. The rate of literacy among the women interviewed is much lower; 7 (20%) of them could read and write Urdu. The distance between their homes and the schools must have been an additional factor which precluded the girls from attending school. 23 (65%) of the fathers interviewed could speak

English at varying degrees of fluency whilst the more educated ones could read and write English (16, that is 45% of them). This discrepancy is accounted for by the fact that some of them learnt English at their workplace. The women could not avail themselves of the opportunity: only 7 (20%) of them would speak English, although more had a smattering of English or could at least understand some; 2 of them could read and write English.

Three of the parents interviewed attended school in Britain for two or three years, and another one obtained 'O' levels in Uganda.

These few details draw up a brief outline of the community under study, a fairly homogeneous and stable community, and this constitutes a general background for the study of parental aspirations for the education of their children.

## II The standard of education in the UK

From our survey, it appears that the Kashmiri community in Saltley presents a unanimous concern for the education of its children. All the parents interviewed expressly stated their wish that their children should receive a 'good' education. Whatever the level of education of the parents, whatever their occupation, their gender or age, they all agree on the value and desirability of education. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the parents who were interviewed, many indices could confirm it. One widow, bringing up five sons, said that she preferred to starve herself rather than interrupt her sons education, the eldest of whom was attending college; one father showed us the encyclopedia which he bought for œ115 to ensure that his children could improve their educational level. These are only two examples among numerous others of highly motivated parents who did not cease to stress the importance of their children's education. Other parents put forward the education of children as one of the factors which committed them to remain in Britain. "It will spoil their education if we go back" is how they put it.

All the families wanted their sons to continue school after 16 if it were possible. Although the majority of those parents were not educated and could not provide any academic help, they were prepared to give all their support and encouragement to the children; they would, for instance, ask the children if they had done their homework; one father who worked from 2 p.m. until 10 p.m. had the children's books left ready for him so that he could sign their homework.

Many parents were keen that the child should appear in examinations (even if they did not know which were the appropriate examinations), as results in examinations were considered to be the sine qua non for further success.

The parents obviously brought with them the psychological make up of a society where education is highly valued. In addition and more importantly, they considered education as the medium for social mobility and self-improvement. Some parents who were asked what careers they would like their sons to enter first stated their choice in contradiction to the father's job.

"They should get good education, so that they would get good jobs, teacher, doctor, not factory worker.

A good job because their daddy is a labourer, so we don't want the children to be labourers.

I know what is education: education is the main thing for the person. If you have no education you can't be a better man in the world. I always advise my children that you must learn something, you must not be like me, a factory worker."

Kitwood and Borrill draw similar conclusions from the aspirations of young Asian boys noticing that

"From their own point of view and that of their own community, however, they are refusing to accept the implicit message that their natural destiny is that of an apprentice or an unskilled labourer"

This attitude may have been brought over from a country where the correlation between education and an improvement in status appears to be more definite. It could also be argued that the geographical and social mobility of parents - from farmers to industrial workers - provides them with an indication that another move could be realised.

This is compounded by the excellent reputation enjoyed by British education in Pakistan. Most of the parents interviewed. and particularly the men, had come to this country young and unmarried so that they did not give much thought to the education of children; those who had considered this issue expected high educational opportunity. According to John Rex, necessity is one of the factors driving the Asian community towards higher educational goals.

"The whites set their children up in jobs with people they know. The Asian has to have a certificate".

Only two parents mentioned skilled craftsmen's jobs for their sons: electrician and mechanic, which they considered as an improvement of the family status. One father had sent his son to a special school for Muslim "priests", and hoped that he would become a "hafiz" which is very highly regarded among the Muslim community.

Twenty three parents (66%) had "academic" ambitions for their sons; they wanted them to be highly educated and gain a "nice" job, a phrase often used to signify a white collar position or a profession.

"I would like them to be highly educated and have a nice job.

For example, a doctor, or highly qualified".

Caroline Haydon in the Times Educational Supplement sees in the young Asians' tendency to opt for an academic rather than vocational orientation "a reflection of parental values", and this may well be the case even if the parents do not explicitly state their choice. 8 (23%) of our Kashmiri parents in fact declared that it was up to the children to decide their own future.

An important reservation must be added to the above statements: the parents' educational ambitions for their sons are generally not parallel to their aspirations concerning the daughters of the family. 19 (54%) of the parents did not wish their daughter to continue school after 16 and only 5 out of 35 (14%) envisaged that she could train for a profession. In both cases the ones who would let their daughter stay on at school a little longer or prepare for a job frequently imposed a number of conditions.

On many occasions in a family where, according to the parents, their daughter but not their son obtained excellent reports, the son would be encouraged to continue his education after 16, whilst an early marriage would be planned for the girl.

One major reason for this difference is the necessity to ensure the best future for the son, who will become the breadwinner and will be expected to support his family, not only his own wife and children but also his parents. The traditional role of the woman is equally well-defined in the community that we are studying.

She is expected to be married soon after 16, look after a home and bring up a family. In this context, further education is often regarded as a waste of time or even a hindrance. A more detailed analysis of the cultural factors involved will be presented in the next section. In contrast with the oft quoted "unrealistic" educational aspirations of the Asian community our Kashmiri parents did not display an unmitigated certainty about their children's educational success. Whilst stating their hope and eagerness that their children should be highly educated, many parents added that it depended on the child's intelligence and industriousness: 12 parents (over 33%) made a point of drawing our attention to this.

"I don't know, it is still a long time. It is good to think about the future, but nobody knows what life says. It depends how clever the children are. I am going on this way: the kid is 16, right, and he is not good enough in education I am wasting my time and wasting his time as well; if he is intelligent he should continue".

"Stay at school after 16 and go to college? Yes, I would like them to, but I don't know if they will; it depends on the results and on the children as well, what they are thinking."

"If they are hard working, intelligent and clever".

"Unrealistic" they are, insofar as they fail to realise the limitations of the schools themselves; most of them are not aware of the fact that the children's chances of success depend first and foremost on the standard of education provided. The general respect paid by our Kashmiri parents to education is often extended to the schools, and teachers, who are expected to know better (this opinion prevails mostly among uneducated parents).

One mother, asked whether she thought that her daughter should have had special English tuition at the beginning of her schooling, answered that she did not know.

"The teacher knows better what is best for the education of the children".

One father elaborated on this point:

"We are Muslims, our religion teaches us, you must respect your teacher, because teachers are like parents. We were in the dark till they taught us, they are our spiritual parents".

Moreover, compared to Pakistani schools where one usually needs to pay fees, schools in Britain initially strike Pakistani parents as having at least one major advantage: they are free and accessible to everybody.

"Schools here are much different from Pakistani schools. In Pakistan you must pay and buy books, pencils, etc. Here schools are free, the standard is good".

Consequently, they are not inclined to be critical of the education their children receive. Over two thirds of the parents interviewed were satisfied with the standard and quality of teaching. Nonetheless, 11 (31%) of them criticised the standard of education. The group of parents are not necessarily the ones whose children received bad reports from the schools; neither does their opinion appear to be directly related to their length of stay in Britain, their age or their gender. It is to be noticed that all the "critical" parents themselves had a fair degree of education. They had all achieved at least matriculation (8th class in Pakistan), one had obtained 'O' levels in Uganda, one held an FA, and one a BA from Pakistan. One of the parents who was unhappy about the standard of education, was, himself, uneducated, but his brother used to be a teacher in

Pakistan. Coincidentally, we happened to interview the brother in question who lived in one adjacent street and he proved to be highly critical of the schools in this country; it is reasonable to assume that the two brothers had exchanged opinions on the question. Their own experience of education obviously enabled those 13 parents (27% of them) to establish a comparison with British schools; quite logically, there is no absolute judgement on "standards of education", which can only be assessed in relation to another reality: their own experience and expectations.

"The standard is not good; my children go to school a long time ago but they still have not learnt. They can read and write but not much; they can speak a little bit of English".

"The standard of education is not too bad; they just go and play and come back. Not much learning, he plays with toys."

"I am thinking in our country, it is better teaching; before, when l came, there was good teaching in here, only few years ago, but in these days, not much good".

"I came to Britain at 14, I went to school two years here; at that time a lot of difference. In 1965 in Mount Pleasant there was a lot of efforts in teachers to teach the students. They were interested too much. Now teachers are not interested very much in the children. At that time l did not know a single word. The teacher spent a few minutes extra to teach me English. At the moment if they were doing the same as in 1966, the children would know more. The standard has gone down".

Furthermore, their first general impression was sometimes reinforced by other experiences. One father of a crippled son who attended a special school commented on his more serious learning than the other children in conventional schools in Saltley.

"My twelve year old boy, who goes to a special school, has a good knowledge of everything. When a sixteen year old comes, he knows less. Therefore, it is a direct result of the school".

Another father noted the better level of education that his nephews had enjoyed; they had come to Britain much earlier than his own family and were admitted to University. Another spoke of his friend's son, who learnt far more in a Solihull school than his own in Saltley. One ex-teacher in Pakistan and one lady teaching a group of children Urdu and Qur'an in this country were both disappointed by their children's school.

Another family did not accept that its own son should stay in a remedial group alongside newly arrived Pakistani children.

"In Arden school, my son is in the lowest class, and I don't like it because he was born here and can speak English; newcoming boys go to these classes. His future is gone now if he is in the lowest class. I did ask teacher but the teacher said all classes are the same. Teacher just found excuses. I speak to the headmaster - he don't care".

"Schools are not that good, they could be improved; most of the time they think that our children are backward in English and spend all the time on the language, whereas all the children don't need that; there are very few who need to spend all this time on English. They are as good as the rest, quite a few of them; if they could be given more encouragement and hard work they could improve a lot in every subject".

One must beware of drawing the hasty conclusion that the owner 22 families (63%) are entirely satisfied with their children's schools, and educational facilities; they simply do not conceptualise their dissatisfaction and formulate it in the same manner. Some parents deplored the lack of nurseries and how many times they tried to register the children to no avail, (8 families, 23%, only obtained places for their children). Whereas 25 (71%) of the parents interviewed stated that their children spoke no English when they started school only one of them believed that they had received special English tuition, and half of them thought that the child should have benefited from it. However, most of them felt confident that the child had caught up after a few years. According to 7 parents (20%) their children's fluency in English could be improved by the presence of English children in the school.

Few parents found their children's homework insufficient: only 5 fathers (14%) went to speak to the teachers in order to ask for extra homework. 12 parents (33%) were not impressed by the discipline in the school

"They get homework only if you ask".

"My husband talked to the teacher and said that she should give homework to the children. She said, OK, l will give some tomorrow. For a few days she gave homework, then she stopped. l am worried because he is ten now; when he is eleven, he will go to the high school and he won't be able to work".

"There is no discipline in class; they do whatever they want to do".

"Teachers don't hit children at all; they don't punish them. If they get cheeky, they need it. But in schools here, teachers don't do it. Teachers are not as strict as they should be with children".

These views can be directly related to the patterns of education in Pakistan and the parents own experience and expectations.

All those particular complaints are voiced most frequently by parents who criticised the standard of education in the schools, but also by some of those who were satisfied in general. The latter tended to individualise their complaints and would blame the child himself or herself for the fault, not the school.

"My two boys went to school here; they were six and four when they came. As they grew older, they showed no interest in education; they left school at sixteen. It is not the fault of the school, teachers or anything, but the children's fault."

This attitude accounts for the parents' confidence that the children are not barred access to professions because of their ethnic or social position, they have not understood as yet the place which is assigned to them by the British system of social relations and they were taken in by the talk of equal opportunities in education. A great many white British also refute the fact that working class or/and immigrant children fail to achieve University places as a result of the discrimination inherent in the system in subtle and pervasive forms. The parents' confidence that the children's chances of success are held in their own hands may in turn psychologically arm the child himself towards hard work. It has been argued that teachers' expectations were shaped accordingly and reacted favourably to the child's performance. On the other hand, their little knowledge of the system prevents Kashmiri parents from giving the appropriate advice to the children.

## III Specific needs of the Kashmiri community

Pakistani parents in Birmingham have not organised anything approaching the large-scale protest staged by Muslim parents in Bradford. However, this should not be interpreted as a proof that Kashmiri parents in Saltley are indifferent to the neglect of their specific religious and ethnic needs by the schools. This survey testifies to the contrary.

Minor adjustments have been made by the Saltley schools to comply with the community's demands. Kashmiri girls are allowed to wear shalwar, kameez or trousers and tunics instead of skirts, provided that they keep to the school uniform colour. One headteacher we interviewed mentioned that opting out of physical education and swimming was possible in her school. In some schools, the religious education syllabus now incorporates elements of religions other than Christianity. One member of the East Birmingham Parents Association had been allowed by a local headteacher to take the morning assembly once a week and conduct it in the Muslim faith; but this was discontinued when he was no longer available.

Despite these few attempts none of the major demands of the community have been satisfied or considered seriously.

The "mother tongue" issue is the most burning one. In the case of our community, "Mother tongue" is a misnomer; none of the parents we interviewed expressed the wish that their mother tongue (a dialect of Punjabi) be taught in the schools. Yet, they were generally in favour of having Urdu taught in the schools. Urdu is the official language of Pakistan, but is also the written and literacy language (the language spoken by the people from Mirpur is not generally written). When we put the question to them, their faces lit up at the idea that such an event could be possible. Jennifer Wilding, in her survey of Leicester's Asian communities, produces similar results to ours: 90% of her sample of 312 parents were interested in their children learning an Asian language. We find it difficult to accept the percentage of 27% (out of 48 parents interviewed) advanced in a CRC survey but their sampling and methodology are not explicit enough to allow for a sound criticism. Only two fathers (6%) did not consider the teaching of Urdu in the school as a priority, but rather envisaged it as taught alongside other languages. For them the teaching of Urdu was seen through the prism of academic and educational attainment (interestingly enough, one had himself attended school in Great Britain from the age of 13 until 16).

"If the children learn any language, it is good; not only Urdu, this is nothing. I want them to learn several languages".

All the other parents insisted on the necessity of including Urdu in the curriculum, as a proper subject leading to the relevant examinations.

"That will be the best day when they start Urdu in the school".

"We would be very happy if there are Urdu classes".

"If French and German are necessary, Urdu must be important for our people because it is our own language".

The overwhelming majority of families had arranged for their children to study Urdu either in the mosque, or in a house taught by a relative or friend who took small groups of children for a fee. One mother who had lived in Britain from the age of 11 and gone to school here did not do so; but she wanted her children to study Urdu at school. The parent's did not disguise their astonishment at being asked why learning Urdu was important. Most of the time the parents gave the same double answer, of a cultural and a nature.

"Because it is our own language, our country's language. And all the letters coming and going and we can't know what they have written in the letter, so the children can read they can know what is going on".

"It is our country's language, everybody knows Urdu there. If she will send Letters in English, nobody will understand, specially father and mother; and as she lives in our community she will be happier if she can help others and help herself".

Although the parents have alternative means of teaching Urdu to their children, they evidently prefer to hand this responsibility over to the schools for material as well as academic reasons: the majority of those parents are either unemployed or poorly paid (as was noted above, 18 of them, that is over 50%, are entitled to free meals for their children), as a consequence the fee to be paid weighs heavily on their budget - they trust the schools to provide a good standard of Urdu teaching, dispensed by a trained teacher 'n a regular basis; they expect the children to study it for several periods a week in a serious manner and prepare for examinations.

"If there are classes, there should be a full course with examinations".

"It would be a lot better if he studies Urdu at school. There would be trained teachers there and he would learn properly".

The parents indicated that the mosque or the house provisions were inadequate and insufficient. Some of them added that the children were overburdened with work as a result of the supplementary evening and week-end studying.

Similar responses to the issue of teaching Urdu in schools were expressed about the teaching of Pakistani history, geography and other aspects of Pakistani culture. In the eyes of Kashmiri parents, these subjects undoubtedly deserved to be studied in the schools. Some parents identified them as essential components of the children's identity which they needed to comprehend fully.

"Most children are lost here; they don't know much about their own country".

"It will be a very good idea because they could learn our culture. For that we have to send them to aunties, to mosques, etc. It would be very nice if taught in school".

Two of the parents (6%) replied that they did not mind whether Pakistani culture was to be taught in the schools or not, one of those parents is the same who did not consider the teaching of Urdu as a pressing necessity, and the other one believed that the children were learning it at the same time as Urdu anyway. An East African father whilst welcoming the teaching of subjects mentioned above, warned against possible distortions; according to him, if the 'truth' was to be taught, it would then help to dispel myths and prejudices.

"They believe that there are only jungles there; in India and Pakistan there are as beautiful cities as here, the impression they give: there are snakes outside, elephants running wild. The rest of children, so innocent, say, "you come from the jungle". I want them to start from the village and go up to cities. I want them to teach the real thing".

The question of reading Qur'an at school is not as straightforward. According to the parents interviewed, all the children without fail, have read or are reading Qur'an. They attend the mosque for two hours every evening or go to a friend's house or a relative. And yet the parents were not wholeheartedly in favour of their children reading Qur'an at school. 23 (66%) of them are in favour of it, as against 97% (all except one) for the teaching of Urdu. It is possible to attempt an explanation for such discrepancy. Our Kashmiri parents

obviously do not perceive English schools as the religious institutions which they in one sense are (Religious Education is the only compulsory subject in school according to English law). It is the prerogative and responsibility of the school to teach academic subjects as Urdu or Pakistani history but Qur'an is a slightly different matter. As one mother put it:

"Religious things depend on oneself and God, but language is for a purpose: communications".

But there are other reasons for this partial support from the parents. Although the disruption resulting from "supplementary" means of teaching Qur'an and Urdu are comparable (accompanying children after school hours, overwork), most parents are far from convinced that the school would offer a better service than the mosque in the teaching of Qur'an.

"There are several mosques around here, so that there is less need, but it is specially important for Urdu".

Or they think that the children can read it at home.

"Yes, there should be, but if there are not any, they can study Qur'an at home".

5 parents (14%) pronounced themselves openly against the teaching of Qur'an at school for fear that the whole ritual might not be respected; or agreed to it but under the condition that it be observed properly.

"I prefer that they go to the mosque because the teacher is more qualified, he knows about the religion".

"There could be, but then, only if they respect all the ways; we have to wash our face and hands and everything".

Despite (or perhaps because of) their children's regular attendance of Qur'anic classes, the Kashmiri parents did not show a widespread hostility to religious education or assemblies imposed on their children at school, as they appeared to feel secure in their own faith. In the first place, a large proportion of parents (14, that is 40%) were not aware that religious education forms part of the curriculum. Another, 14 claimed that they did not mind that their children studied other religions than their own; a few parents added that it did not matter as long as they knew Islam well enough. A few others thought that it was useful to compare different religions:

"In RE they learn about different religions, it is good, very good".

"I know that they are taught Christianity and different religions and l don't mind that. It is better that they know of other religions so that they can compare them with their own religion and they will love it more".

7 parents (20%) were opposed to the ideas of teaching RE in schools since they were Muslims:

"It is not good for Muslim children because they have a different religion and get mixed up like".

But nobody actually appeared to be conscious of his/her right to withdraw the child from RE lessons or assemblies.

There was no apparent consistency among the parents who opposed the teaching of RE; two of them (6%) were well educated, speak and write English and, in appearance at least, seem fairly well integrated into British society; two are recently arrived (in the last 6 years) and more insistent on the overall

importance of Islam, the last one, a widow had lived in Britain for twelve years and was much less strict than the norm in her aspirations for her daughter.

The parents' confidence in the stability of their religion is matched by their apparent trust in the soundness and continuity of their culture. 24 (70%) of the parents claimed that they were "not worried that their children might become like English children". 17 (49%) believed that the child's culture is well established as he/she learns it from his home.

"I don't worry because it depends on parents as well, how they treat their children. I know my children".

8 parents (23%) actually state that it does not disturb them if their child learns from both cultures.

"I am not very much worried about it that they will be like English but then it is obvious that as they watch television all the time, and in school with other children they will be half English, but not totally: then I am not very much worried".

"As we live here so they should learn some manners from English people. There are good points and bad points in every culture".

8 parents (23%) were worried as they feared that television and school were a powerful influence on the children's development; or they wanted to ensure that children are anchored in their own religion and culture and know it well.

"This is a major problem, that they might become like English children. Our religion, our culture, our ways are different. We expect that when we grow old, children are young and will look after their parents; but here they are not expecting anything from children in this respect. As children spend more time in school, they will learn more of their ways than ours and it is really a problem for us; we worry about it".

Nonetheless, it is only a small percentage of parents who feel concerned with the future cultural allegiance of their children. Presumably, the vast majority, having lived in Britain for a long time without witnessing major or numerous catastrophic ruptures between children and parents, have become reassured; a few of them seem to have already come to terms with the fact that children will learn from both, cultures; they acknowledge that the children need to be well equipped and sufficiently adaptable to operate in this society. Alternatively, the case may be that parents did not wish to acknowledge their worries.

Another measure of change in the parents' attitude is their opinion on their daughters' education. A relatively high percentage of parents, 16 of them, (46%) declared that they were willing to let their daughters carry on at school after 16. John Rex found that 63% of the Asian parents in his Handsworth sample wanted their daughters to stay on at school after 16 (33%); it is relevant to mention that the Asian population in Handsworth is mostly Indian, which may partly account for the difference in attitudes. We should need other additional details on the composition of the Handsworth community to elaborate on the question. Half of the Kashmiri parents in Saltley who answered positively, set conditions as addenda to their statement; if the daughter was really clever, if she did not misbehave or if she attended a single sex school, she would be allowed to continue. Two (6%) fathers wanted their daughters to stay on whereas their wives opposed It. These answers have to be pondered over carefully. Considering the assumed destiny of the girls in the Kashmiri family and the experience of the Kashmiri parents' generation, their readiness to send their daughters to school after 16 denotes a considerable evolution in their mode of thinking. The question of the education of the girls calls into play a complex set of values

and cultural elements. The daughter who, according to tradition, should marry as soon as possible after leaving school (16), must learn the different aspects of her career as a housewife and mother, she therefore ought to stay at home and help her own mother in these tasks. Her priority remains marriage and if her schooling interferes in any way, it must be foresaken. For instance, attendance at a co-educational school will expose the girls to the company of boys and "spoil" their reputation.

Agitation has shaken the Kashmiri community in Saltley when it was announced that one of the few single sex schools (there are three of them) was due to merge with a boys school: this created a considerable amount of aggravation, parents signed petitions and attended protest meetings. Eventually, the closure of the school was postponed by a few years, but from 1984, it will stop admitting new pupils. This event is a good indication of the strength of feeling on this issue. 29 (82%) parents interviewed wanted single sex education for their daughters. The 6 (18%) who claimed that they did not mind are a pointer to slowly changing attitudes.

Swimming and physical education for girls are related problems, the parents we saw voiced little dissatisfaction on this issue, for the simple reason that most of time this did not take place on a mixed basis and, of course, one must remember that parents would have no objection in primary schools. However, we learnt from our discussion with a few daughters that some classes of boys and girls went to the swimming pool together, but father did not realise it. In secondary school very few parents had written letters requesting that their daughters be exempted from swimming. For physical education, many headteachers allowed the girls to wear tracksuits (so that they would not need to uncover their legs).

Fewer parents wish that their daughters prepare for a career. The choice of jobs acceptable for girls is more limited. Even a mother who vehemently asserted that she would encourage her daughter to study as long as she wished to, did not like her to train secretarial post, as she would thereby be constantly in the presence of and at the orders of men. A father was arguing that his daughter could become a doctor but not a nurse on account of her future husband's say in the matter.

"If the girl is clever, she can be a doctor or a teacher, not a nurse, it's a waste of time, because when she marries her husband would not let her continue".

Food presents a number of difficulties for Muslim children taking school dinners: every one of the parents we interviewed instructed their children not to touch any meat served at school because they know that the animal has not been slain in accordance with the Muslim ritual (the meat is not halal). They completed forms from the school to let teachers know about it. This total unanimity among our Kashmiri parents cast strong doubts on the results published by a CRC survey, claiming that only 13% of Pakistani parents had religious objections to school dinners and that 56% of them had no query at all on the question of the food. We can only conceive such an answer if it meant that, after the meat was struck off their children's menu, the parents on the whole found little objection about the food.

In addition to this major religious objection, 23 (65%) of Kashmiri parents in Saltley complained about the quality or the cost of the school meals.

"It is very insufficient. Many times children tell me that, if it is the second service, the children don't have enough".

"The food is horrible, children are always hungry when they come back from school; they eat like anything when they come home. They say that food is rubbish at school, they can't eat it, it smells bad; they get boiled potatoes or

tin tomatoes. Our children can't eat that, we usually put it in our curry, they don't even get enough in quantity".

One father proposed that a Muslim be hired by the school contractors to slay the animals. As a lot of the Saltley schools comprise 50% and above, (up to 85%) Muslim children, this measure sounds quite reasonable. All the more as the non-Muslim children could eat that meat all the same.

Most of the immediate specific needs of the Kashmiri community have now been broached. Last but not least we asked our sample of parents if they would like their children's schools to employ an Asian teacher. Some parents remarked that a few schools already did so and that they are very useful. All the parents but one welcomed this idea. The once exception explained that he had no difficulty in communicating with the school. The others found it advantageous for children and parents alike, especially mothers.

"Asian teachers know more of our culture and could tell our daughters what to do and not to".

"Whatever I can explain to an Asian teacher, I could not explain to an English teacher".

"The Asian teacher would understand the children's culture and learn them better; he understands the minds of our children very quickly".

"An Asian teacher could explain to children as well as parents".

The Kashmiri parents whom we interviewed are undoubtedly intent on preserving their own culture and religion; nevertheless, they are not impervious to the surrounding culture. Recognising that their children mixed with English children and would do so increasingly in later days, they found it important to create a better understanding between English and Pakistani populations. Confident in the value of their own culture, they did not view this understanding as a one-way exchange, but also wished to see English children study Pakistani culture.

"This is general knowledge, if any child studies it, it is better for him. Also it is better because we live here and if they understand our culture, it is better".

## IV The relationship between the home and the school

Linking home and school has often been regarded as a means of providing an improved motivation to children of a working class background. To what extent is this valid for our Kashmiri children? The main problem facing the schools of the children is not a lack interest on the part of Kashmiri parents, but the lack of facilities to promote contacts between home and school. Although they cannot be said to participate heavily in social functions organised by the school, they seem to attend parents' evenings regularly. All the parents interviewed claimed that one member of the family would respond to invitations to parents' evenings from the school; this was confirmed by one of the headteachers in Saltley who noted:

"On the whole, parents come to parents' evenings, make contacts with the school and respond to letters more than English parents, as long as it concerns the children's progress".

As a rule, the fathers take responsibility for the visit to the school; the mother sometimes accompanies her husband or replaces him if he cannot attend. 6 mothers (17%) said that they visited the schools). Four fathers (11%) were

unable to do so on account of their shift work. Only in two instances were we told that nobody went to the children's school.

In addition, three parents stated that the school had never invited them. All three referred to the same school, and one of them added that he visited his other children's school regularly for parents' evening.

However, we are less than certain that parents draw the best possible benefit from this visit. Kashmiri parents are hampered by a language handicap since 12 (33%) of them have to rely on an interpreter or on the child him/herself to communicate with the teacher. Even if the others can speak some English they might not feel at ease in a language which they have not mastered completely; they are further disadvantaged by their lack of knowledge or understanding of the educational system. Many parents did not receive any education and even the educated ones are not much better informed, since they are likely to be familiar with the Pakistani system which is quite different. Most of the parents interviewed, if aware that their children were preparing for examinations, did not know whether they would take CSEs or 'O' levels. Moreover, they are likely to be overawed by the teachers who to them represent a higher social class and they rely on his/her expertise for the education of the children. Only two parents (6%) felt unhappy about the attitude of teachers towards them. The others found that teachers were respectful and friendly. Seven parents (20%) had visited the school outside parents' evening for a specific problem or in order to ask for some homework. The limited involvement of parents cannot be attributed to a lack of interest. It is more dependent on a culture or language gap between the home and the school; this explanation is borne out by the parents' appreciation of a special arrangement made by one of the schools whereby an Asian teaching assistant visits the children's home to discuss their situation and progress. This gap is further testified by the parents' wish to see an Asian teacher employed in the schools, who could help children and parents and explain what is going on, especially to the mothers. To the satisfaction of the parents, a few schools in the area had also tried to facilitate communications through sending reports in Urdu and English or letters in Urdu whenever the situation was serious: when the child had been hurt or when the school was due to close down. One is tempted to ask whether the schools considered all the other letters to be unimportant, including the children's reports (in all the schools except one), since they contented themselves with writing in English.

Parents on the whole welcome evenings or week-end activities organised by the school; this constitutes more than a void claim, as John Newing, from Naseby Centre confirmed. Our results dispute the assertion by M. Feeley that "Asian parents discouraged after-school activities for the boys". 9 (23%) of our Kashmiri parents disapproved of evening activities for boys and girls on the grounds that it is too dark in winter and that the children had to spend their evening studying Qur'an.

"l have a lot to do at home. I won't have time to take and fetch the children in the evening; plus it is dark".

"Children do not have any time because they have to go to the mosque in the evening".

A few of the younger parents appreciate activities organised for parents themselves; one father participated in sports activities in the Naseby Centre; some mothers took part in language or craft lessons in the school bus or in Norton Hall.

In conclusion, one must stress the potential and room for improvement in relationships between school and home. The Kashmiri parents appear to be far

more willing than is generally assumed, but the ball rests in the schools' court.

## V Racial discrimination at school

Racial tension in the school does not at first sight loom as a major problem in the eyes of the parents interviewed. 8 families (22%) referred to an incident of a racial nature in which their own children or friends' children were involved (being bullied or called names by white children).

"Sometimes other parents tell me about such troubles and they went to see the teacher".
"It happens; it is only kids' stuff, no problem".
"Children talk about other children; their hair is pulled, their shalwar made fun of".

In circumstances such as these, a lot of parents tend to lay the blame at the feet of the Asian child, who is supposed to be of the troublesome kind if he/she is implicated in a fight.

"It doesn't happen to our own children because they are sensible".

"Our own children have not reported anything, but we heard about other children who were themselves very naughty and picked up fights".

The rest of the sample 27 parents (78%) claim that they have no knowledge of such incidents. Two parents were astonished by our implication that there would be racial conflict among the children at school. "My children's friends are English" replied a young mother, who herself had come to Britain at 11 years old and attended school in this country for three years.

This percentage is comparable to the proportion of Pakistani parents in a CRC survey where 18% of parents reported that their children had experienced racial problems in the school. However, it stands in opposition to the apparently regular racial strife cited by Kitwood and Borill.

"Right from the start of schooling an Asian child in the North of England has to face being called such names as "Paki", "Wog", "Curry" or "Chapatti" face, or being subjected to a string of insults borrowed straight from adult usage. Inter-racial conflict is a recurrent feature of school life".

We have good reasons to assume that these incidents happen more often than parents realise. The children simply keep it to themselves and do not care to make a fuss of it at home. On two occasions, whilst their parents had just answered to our question on racial abuse by the negative, the children who were present disclosed that they had been bullied or called names by white children.

"We did not tell our parents about it. We never tell, mother does not know about it. We can deal with it ourselves".

On the other hand, whereas the parents like to believe that schools were exempted from racialism, they shared with us their worries on the aggravation of racial tension in society at large. 11 parents (31%) made a specific reference to this question.

"Yes it happens all the time and everywhere. In schools, factories, in the street. It did not used to be so bad, it has gone worse

A few adopted a resigned attitude or declared that they ignored it.

"When I go on the road many people call me "Paki", l say "alright", l can't do anything about it".

"We can't do anything, it is not our country".

One parent attributed the deterioration of racial relations to the government.

"I am thinking about this government, it is not good for foreigners, Asian people, there are many Asian people here (in schools), so the government not taking much notice".

The majority of parents implied that it was partly due to ignorance and prejudice stating that a multicultural programme teaching white British children about Pakistani culture would lead to a better understanding between the groups. Their agreement on the desirability of such measures and its beneficial effect reveals that the Kashmiri parents are concerned and eager to work for mare harmonious racial relationships. Quite a number of them were not over optimistic, including the proviso that the "education people" would implement such a program me only if they wanted to.

"They should be taught (Pakistani culture), so there would be a better understanding, if they know our culture and our ways, there wouldn't be as much hatred as there is now".

"They should be taught our culture also; then there would be better understanding and there would be a bit of love in their heart for us and they would think that we are good human beings and we are coming from a good country".

The schools or the teachers are rarely criticised in this respect. Two parents (6%) accused some teachers of being unfair or discriminatory towards Asian children. Three more (~%) hinted at some form of discrimination, noting that a higher proportion of white children in the schools would lead teachers or "the education people" to pay more attention to the standard of education.

Altogether the teachers present a good record on this issue in the opinion of parents. Some parents remarked that the teachers did their best to forbid racial abuse on the part of white children. Whilst it is probably true that there is a genuine effort made in that direction it is just as probable that parents won't be fully aware of the state of things in the schools. In two families, a child claimed that teachers were sometimes unfair but they do not appear to have complained about it at home.

"Most teachers are fair; but some don't like Pakistani children. They say to English children "you can do this" (a job or a picture) and Pakistani kids can't. l have not complained about it and I haven't told my parents".

Our attention was drawn to two significant incidents. The first one concerned a' young Kashmiri boy who had been "attacked" by a gang of six white kids on the school staircase; the teacher took immediate measures to deal with it.

"It happened to my son and his friend. They first called him "Paki" etc. and he answered them "whitey", so they pushed him on the stairs and he bumped his head and he stayed off from school for a few weeks. Papers were sent to the (white) children's parents; they may be suspended and sent to other schools".

The other case involved a 14 year old Kashmiri girl, whose hair was pulled by one teacher. The incident is worth relating in full because of its implications.

"One teacher pulled my hair for no reason. I told my father and my uncle came with me to see the headmaster. The head made excuses for the teacher, when we said call him, he refused to call him; he said that he was not in school, and he was in the staff room all the time. We went about three times, every time we could not see him, the head said that he was teaching PE and couldn't leave the children. My uncle became very angry but we couldn't do anything. All the

children mostly know that some teachers are in the National Front. Some children pick on Asian girls, they haven't got a mother or a father, they only have one parent. And they know that nobody calls at school if anything happens. If my uncle didn't come with me, they'd probably do it again because they would know that nobody would come and complain. l took my uncle up for that reason. l don't like speaking to this teacher; I only have him for one lesson (basic studies); he does it to boys quite a lot. He had no right to do it, the headmaster only has a right".

We do not know at this stage whether there is any truth in these rumours about the teachers' membership of the National Front. We are tempted to follow the adage that there is no smoke without fire. It certainly deserves further investigation, all the more so as this particular school was pointed out as "not as good as the others" by a few more parents.

Altogether, our Kashmiri parents prefer to play down racial quarrels among children at school. They repeatedly recommend to their children that they must not answer back and that they should ignore it.

"We ourselves tell them never to get into trouble. If somebody makes trouble, don't fight with them. If somebody kicks you or pushes you, don't push back".

It does not appear that the children prove to be so submissive; this may be why they refrain from reporting racial incidents to their parents, as they would rather trust their own method of handling the problem. The parents will only be brought in on the scene if the question is serious and has to involve the teacher, either as arbiter (who feels obliged to notify the parents), or as the guilty party.

Conclusion

Multicultural education implementations have taken place often in the absence of consultation and negotiation with ethnic minority parents. It might be useful for multicultural education specialists to consider the views expressed through this survey.

The Kashmiri parents interviewed were unanimous in wanting a good standard of education for their children, leading to obtaining relevant certificates. The majority of them are satisfied with the quality of education, despite a strong minority who do not nurse any illusions. However, the parents are still largely ignorant of the British school system. Disappointment is likely to increase as they become better informed (through their elder children who have completed their schooling) and if the children's achievements do not meet parental expectations.

The Kashmiris founded a home in Britain and preserved their sense of dignity and their ethnic. character. They are eager to ensure cultural and religious continuity: consequently, they would like their language and civilisation to be taught formally in schools, and at certificate level. They see it as a necessity for their own children and as an enrichment for British white children. Although they would welcome the opportunity for the children to practise their religion at school they are wary of initiatives which would entrust the teaching of Qur'an to a non-Muslim teacher. In their eyes, the Qur'an must only be taught by a well-qualified bona fide Muslim. This would entail positive discrimination in the appointment of teachers.

The parents are lending an increasing importance to their daughters' education and a substantial number want them to pursue their studies. However, the vast majority of parents sets single sex education for girls as a top priority demand and makes it a condition to allow their daughters' schooling after 16.

Another major object of concern is the provision of halal meat in school dinners; this could be arranged as was suggested by some parents, through the hiring of a Muslim butcher to slaughter the animals.

The Kashmiri community need to be better acquainted with the British education system, and is willing to relate to the schools, but it still feels alienated from the children's schools. Bridges of communication are lacking to facilitate this process. More effort could be devoted by the school to keep in touch with parents and write letters in Urdu. The parents view the appointment of Asian teachers and of an Asian home-school liaison officer as the most valuable help in this respect.

Most of the parents interviewed felt that their children did not suffer from racial discrimination at the hands of teachers or other pupils. Nonetheless, they were often anxious about the general racial tension in Britain and saw in a multicultural curriculum a possible contribution towards a better understanding between "coloured" and white populations. Kashmiri children themselves did not fail to notice racial discrimination. A statement from education authorities and schools making public their position on racism, racial abuse and harassment would help to clarify the situation, and comfort Kashmiri children.

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