

# **Women and International Migration: A Cross-cultural Analysis**

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2007

ISBN: 978-0-946665-55-6

## Acknowledgement

All academic pursuits are rarely carried out without a great deal of help being sought. This work is no exception and has possible due to direct and indirect contribution of many people. I take this opportunity to thank all of them.

I am sincerely indebted to Professor John Eade for giving me this opportunity to work on the subject with him. His invaluable comments at every stage of the work have given it the shape that it is in today. I thank all my respondents in Birmingham who devoted their time in discussing their lives with me and allowing me to enquire about their thoughts and emotions. If it was not for them, this study would have remained a distant dream. I would also like to put on place my gratitude to Roehampton University and University of Surrey for registering me as a Research Fellow and providing me travel expenses for data collection. Ms. L. Wilson has helped me in this pursuit of mine for which I am thankful to her.

Last but not least I would thank all my teachers who gave me the wisdom to reason, to all my friends for being there and believing in me and my family members especially my brother, sister and sister-in-law for their support and understanding.

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2003-04

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### ***Statement of the Problem***

International migration is not a new phenomenon. The desire of man to reach unforeseen shores led people like Christopher Columbus of Spain and Vasco da Gama from Portugal to discover America and India respectively. History tells us about trade relations between different countries of the world. Thus, migration is not a new phenomenon however, increased international connectivity has accelerated the process as there is increase in flow of information, capital and people as never before in human history. Further, the liberalized immigration policies of some of the developed countries (Zlotnik<sup>1</sup>, 1998:429-430) have accelerated the pace of international migration of both men and women for settlement and temporary residence.

Migration literature for very long was biased towards women as they were considered as passive agents of migration. The impact of international migration on women, both those migrating and those left behind has been a sorely neglected issue in international migration research (Boyd<sup>2</sup>, 2003). The male bias in this research is undoubtedly based on the assumption that most women migrated for reasons of family reunification.

This assumption is epitomized in The ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1949 (No. 86)<sup>3</sup>, when it refers to a migrant worker's family as being "his wife and minor children". Gender has been neglected in the international migration research. The increasing participation of women in international migration processes and gender-related issues in causes and consequences of emigration can no longer be ignored. An increasing number of women in the Asia and Pacific region are migrating either with families or autonomously to more developed countries to seek employment and higher

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<sup>1</sup> Zlotnik, H., 1998. "International Migration 1965-1996: An Overview". *International Migration Review* Vol. 24(3) 429-468.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, M., 2003. *Women and Migration: Incorporating gender into international migration theory*, Migration Policy Institute, University of Toronto: Toronto.

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization, <<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/projects/gender/2001>>.

wages, better lifestyle, social and economic benefits, social security and to escape cultural constraints (United Nations, 1997<sup>4</sup>; Jolly, Bell, and Narayanswamy, 2003).

Recent migration statistics and research literature points that women are an important component of international migration: nearly half the international migrants are women (Jolly, Bell and Narayanswamy<sup>5</sup>, 2003; Russell<sup>6</sup>, 1995; United Nations<sup>7</sup>, 1998). Increasing feminization of the labour market, rising demand for women's labour and the ready supply of these from developing countries and above all changing perspectives on women's mobility have motivated women to seek employment in overseas destinations.

According to ILO (2001),

*It is the gender-segregated labour markets as well as the sexual division of labour in the household that determine gender-selective migration flows. Stated simply, men and women follow different migration patterns (e.g. they migrate for different reasons) because they do different things in the sending country and are expected to engage in gender-specific occupations on arrival in the host country.*

Thus, although men and women account for about equal proportions of international migration, research has concentrated much more on factors affecting men's migration. This relative dearth of knowledge about women's migration has occurred in circumstances where its determinants are recognized as being complex, ranging from situations where they are the main or only decision makers, to situations where they are equal partners, to those where they have no role in the decision making process. The neglect of research on women's migration is attributed to a number of circumstances including the emphasis placed on the human capital model in migration theory, in which

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations 1997. Follow-up Action to the Recommendation of the international Conference on Population and Development, 1994: *International migration, with special emphasis on the linkages between migration and development and gender issues and family*, E/CN.9/1997/2.

<sup>5</sup> Jolly, S., Bell, E., and Narayanaswamy, L., 2003. *Gender and Migration in Asia: An Overview and Annotated Bibliography*. Bridge (development – gender). Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex: Brighton.

<sup>6</sup> Russell, S.S, 1995. *International Migration: Implications for the World Bank*, Human Resource Development and Operations Policy; Working Papers No 54, 1995. World Bank: Washington

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, 1998. *Technical Symposium on International Migration and development*, Press Release, The Hague.

-----1998. *International Migration Policies*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, United Nations. New York.

migration is seen as motivated by economic opportunity; an underestimation of women's economic activity and labour force participation; a general neglect of women in scholarly social science research; the fact that most research on migration has been carried out on men; and, in particular to inadequacies in existing data on women's migration.

Social scientists have emphasized that the social, economic and environmental contexts of the society determine to a large extent the different roles men and women have in the society. These roles affect the interactions and relations that men and women have with other system and processes within that society. The same also holds true for migration process. Thus one can say that the men and women will have different motivations and strategies to migrate. Likewise, the impact of their migration will be different at family, household and community levels both in places of origins and destinations.

The explanations for international migration are diverse, complex and inter-linked (Massey, et. al.<sup>8</sup>, 1993 and Russell, 1995). Titelbaum and Russell<sup>9</sup> (1994:229) suggest, "International migration may be best seen as a focal point of intersection among economic, demographic and political differentials. As these disparities widen, so does the potential for (although not necessarily the actuality of) international migration." International migration is a strategy used by women and men in developing countries with problems of low income, poverty, unemployment and limited economic opportunities and socio-political problems such as ethnic tension and violence, and personal and group insecurity.

Over the last 25 years, there has been little concerted effort to incorporate women issues into theories of international migration. Migration theory traditionally has neglected gender-specific migration experiences, understanding these issues are critical in understanding migration in a holistic perspective. Without clear theoretical constructs, it

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<sup>8</sup> Massey, D.S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A and Taylor, J. 1993. "Theories of international migration: A review and appraisal", *Population and Development Review*, vol. 19, No. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Tietelbaum, M.S., Russell, S.S., 1994 "International migration, fertility and development" in Cassen, R. et al. (eds). *Population and Development: Old Debates and New Conclusions*, Overseas Development Council: Washington, DC.

would be difficult to explain the situations/circumstances in which women have become active agents in migration process, the basis of choosing a particular country or occupation. The answer to these questions require a clear understanding that one cannot treat migration as a gender neutral phenomenon as it has different implications and connotations for men and women in both the host and the parent country. The work on migration so far partially addresses the issue of gender because of the complexity in doing so. For one migration itself is of different types i.e. temporary, permanent, illegal, labor, and conflict-induced migration and secondly different disciplines like anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, demography, law, and history have tended to focus on migration within their own framework and worldview.

Lack of importance given to women in migration is also due to the societal context, where women's roles and positions in the family and the community emphasize their dependence on men. Their movements to overseas destinations are believed to be limited and often associated with men's emigration. One of the major obstacles to a deeper analysis of gender in international migration is the lack of sex-disaggregated data on emigrants and their characteristics.

Within the context of labour migration, only economically active migrants were accepted as worthy of sociological investigation and thus as women were supposed to be economically inactive, they were neglected by researchers. For an increasing number of women globalisation has led to migration: more and more women are involved in internal, regional and international migration to find jobs. As one of the most striking economic and social phenomena of recent times, the feminisation of international migration raises crucial policy issues and concerns. Stated very simply, the policy concerns derive from the fact that the problems faced by migrant women are compounded by their being both women and migrants. From a gender perspective, women should have equal opportunities and treatment as men in immigration and emigration policies and in access to international labour markets. On the other hand, their status as women, as migrants or non-nationals, and as workers in gender-segregated

labour markets makes international women migrant workers particularly vulnerable to various forms of discrimination exploitation and abuse.

In view of the above stated drawbacks/shortcomings in the research on female migration, the present study would make an attempt to explore the social, political, psychological and individual context of female migration.

### ***Overview of Literature***

The studies done in 1960s and 70s considered only men as active migrants, while women were passive who only followed men with children. Not much changed in 1980s in migration literature which continued focusing on men with marginal shift to access if women enjoyed better privileges and opportunities as a result of their movement with their husbands. It however saw a shift to view migration as a modernization tool to check if women could break away from their traditional roles in the new environment.

The earlier neoclassical economic models and push-pull models though looked at individual decisions but they were more from a familial point of view where the men being the bread winners migrated to secure better economic condition for themselves and their families. Women accompanied them or joined them later as passive migrants. The studies in 80's saw a marginal shift from this point of view and Gender became a subject of focus in migration studies. The focus however was not to find, if men and women migrated for different reasons, if there was difference in their assimilation patterns and the overall impact of migration on women and men but concentrated more on different role of sexes in migration process.

Like in economics where the work done by the women in the household is not included as an economic activity, the migration studies also were more skewed towards economic aspect of migration of men. This however, changed with changing recognition that economic development affected men and women differently as it opened doors to many economic activities for women thus affecting their economic role in the social milieu. Likewise demand for certain type of gender specific labour activities by host countries

may affect gender specific migration, for example demand for female nursing professionals and domestic workers saw large movement of women from developing countries to Middle East, North America and Europe.

Another factor which contributed to focus of migration studies on women was the changing world view which saw women as equal partners in development. The paradigm shift of United Nations from Women in Development to Gender and Development was the beginning of a move away from looking at biological differences to social differences between men and women. Gender as a concept was different as it concerned itself with socially learnt roles and relationship between men and women. The concept also sharply focused on how availability of opportunities and resources may alter the entire debate of women emancipation. Thus, studies on migration started including social aspects related with Gender like power relations, access to resources, decision making as a research priority.

Another interesting development was looking at women migration on a traditional-modernity continuum, whereby migration was seen as an outlet to break free from traditional roles imposed by one's society to a modern emancipated society to attain personal freedom. Lebon (1979) in his study implied that immigrant women may be adopting the model of indigenous French women for whom the norm is to work outside the home, the implicit assumption being that it is not the norm for migrant women. Likewise Patterson<sup>10</sup> (1965, p.266) speaks of 'general improvement resulting from migration' and Foner (1979, p. 83) states that 'regardless of other drawbacks that residence in England has for Jamaican women, the chance to earn a regular wage has led to a dramatic improvements in their lives'.

Morokvasic<sup>11</sup> in the 1970s, was one of the first to address that women's migration is not only a response to economic problems, but also often a deliberate action to escape other

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<sup>10</sup> Patterson, Sheila, *Dark Strangers*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Book Ltd., 1965.

<sup>11</sup> Morokvasic, M. 1974, *Emigration of Women and Subsequent Social Transformation with special reference to Yugoslav Women*, OECD, CD/AG, Vol. 74.

social problems such as marital discord and conservative social legislation and practices. There is also evidence that women's ability to earn and send home remittances has increased their social status. Hence, there are actually economic and non-economic factors that influence women's decision as to whether or not to migrate.

Although migration can be associated with women's empowerment, it does not necessary follow that women who migrate will be empowered. In fact the opposite may be the case (Hugo, in Presser 2000).

Some researchers have concentrated on the cultural diversity and the adaptation of migrants in the host country as well as the maintaining of the local identities of their country of origin by the migrants. (Choudhury<sup>12</sup> 1995, Eade<sup>13</sup> 1997, Gardner<sup>14</sup> 1995, Visram<sup>15</sup> 1993).

### ***Justification of the study***

Analysing the gender dimension of international migration helps to distinguish cultural differences between men and women and how they interact and shape the historical and social dimensions of international migration. Local and global gender relations influence international migration, and each culture's gender relations are the effect, in part, of past local and global migration changes. Men and women are by nature different. Their differences reflect on how they perceive migration and therefore produce different impacts as they migrate.

Gender-differing interactions are influenced by differences in biology, as well as social and economic pre-suppositions and interests. For these reasons, international migration

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-----1983, "Why do Women Migrate ? Towards an Understanding of Sex Selectivity in the Migratory Movements of Labour", *Studi Emigrazione*, No. 70.

-----1984, "Birds of Passage are also Women", *International Migration Review*, Vol. 18, No.68 (Special Issue: Women in Migration).

<sup>12</sup> Choudhury, Y. 1995, *Sons of the Empire*, Birmingham, Sylhet Social History Group.

<sup>13</sup> Eade, J. 1997. "Restructuring places: Changing images of locality in Docklands and Spitalfields". In J. Eade (ed.), *Living The Global City: Globalization As Local Process*, London & New York, Routledge.

<sup>14</sup> Gardner, K. 1995. *Global migrants: Local lives: Travel and transformation in rural Bangladesh*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>15</sup> Rosina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, Pluto, London, 1986

will have different impacts on women and men in any culture or sub-culture. Recently, international migration has become a world phenomenon. It is estimated that in the 1990s, 120 million people were living abroad (McFalls, Jr<sup>16</sup>, 1998). In the last decade, population mobility within Southeast Asian countries and outside to other countries, has been increasing. This phenomenon has influenced redistribution in southeast Asian countries, and socio-economic and cultural changes that have impacted population mobility (Firdausy<sup>17</sup>, 1998).

A classic migration theory suggests that most migrants are men in their productive age, looking for better economic opportunities and, women are their husbands' dependents (Demographic Institute, 1981). Recent global trends indicate that this statement faces some challenges since more and more women migrate, not only as their spouses' dependents, but are also migrating independently, for economic reasons, as students and refugees. Moreover, recent data depict that women have been exercising inter-country movement, as opposed to the classic formula that they only move to closer places as compared to their partner.

The significance of women in international migration lies not only in their increased numbers, but also through their contributions to economic and social life in receiving and sending countries. Women migrants have always been active in the labour market in receiving countries and have always been a source of family income in their origin countries. Despite the benefits of their migrating status, women also form significant numbers of undocumented workers, some of them experienced unpaid or poorly paid jobs and, racial and sex discrimination in the labour market might lead to their unemployment (Kofman and others<sup>18</sup>, 2000). Although issues on women-related migration have been

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<sup>16</sup> McFalls, Jr, Joseph A. 1998. *Population: A lively Introduction*, Vol. 53. No. 3. Washington DC: Population Reference Bureau.

<sup>17</sup> Firdausy, Carunia Mulya (ed). 1998. *International Migration in Southeast Asia: Trends, Consequences, and Policy Measures*. Jakarta: Toyota Foundation and LIPI.

<sup>18</sup> Kofman, Eleonore and others. 2000. *Gender and International Migration in Europe: Employment, Welfare and Politics*. London: Routledge.

increasing in recent decades, the plight of their situation has not yet been widely addressed. It appears that most studies on migration are gender-neutral and utilize models based on male experiences (Simon and Bretell, 1986).

Thus we see that female migration has so far been neglected in the vast literature of migration from the developing countries to the developed ones. Only 5% of the total studies undertaken on migration are restricted to female migration. The need is therefore to concentrate solely on women involved in international migration as there is not much data available on the individual context of female migration which addresses the factors that determine the reason for their migration, how decision to migrate or stay behind is reached, is there any change in the socio-cultural profile of women in the last decade and the like. This are some of the issues that will be addressed in this study and will contribute significantly in understanding the changing face of international migration and the need for gender-specific studies.

### ***Context of the Study***

The available literature on the South Asian migration has concentrated on the coping or adaptation capacities of communities whether it was Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Indian. Not many have tried to see the common threads or deviations among the communities coming from Indian sub continent. The study of Migration process has been skewed towards migrant men. This study is an attempt to view the impact of migration on women, their views, their stories, and their coping strategies. The study focused on women due to number of reasons, some of them are”

- 1) The underlying assumption that women play a passive role in migration.
- 2) From sociological perspective women play an important role in socialization i.e. attitudes, culture, religion of the children born there (influence of women in assimilation of the community in the migrant society).
- 3) Race relations and immigration to England are two topics of paramount concern in both Great Britain and India.

An understanding of these immigrants is not only important from the social science point of view but also for planners, policy makers and layman. Therefore, this work focuses on studying South Asian women's adaptive behavior in England what it seeks to present is a reasonable comprehensive picture of the quality and character of the self-created world of Asian women and the way they are bringing their children in the changed environment

### **Field Situation and Access.**

As during the review of literature it was found that a number of studies were carried out in London, Manchester, Gloucester, Lancashire with the exception of Birmingham (South Asian dominated region in Midlands), Birmingham was chosen as the Universe of Study. Going through a detailed historical listing of advent of South Asians in Birmingham is beyond the scope of this study, though the next chapter will give a brief account of the same.

Table 1.1 gives the Growth of Britain's South Asian Population while table 1.2 gives year wise movement from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to Britain (1991 to 2001)

Table 1.1 : South Asian Population in Britain

Country of Birth	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
India	81400	240730	673704	823821	1053411
Pakistan	24900	127565	295461	449646	747285
Bangladesh			64562	157881	283063

Table 1.2 : Migration from Indian Sub continent to Britain over a decade (1991-2001)

<b>Year/State</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>Bangladesh</b>
1991	5680	5820	2780
1992	5500	7060	2520
1993	4890	6650	2550
1994	4780	6240	3050
1995	4860	6310	3280
1996	4620	6250	2720
1997	4645	5565	2870
1998	5430	7355	3635
1999	6295	11865	3285
2000	8045	11005	3680
2001	7280	11535	4050

The Tables clearly reveals the increasing number of migrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh to Britain.

### ***Methodology***

This study will not be based on any hypothesis and would be basically exploratory in nature. The data would be collected empirically from the field.

#### *Description of the variables to be studied*

1. Reasons for migration: education, work, family or any other.
2. Decision to migrate: is the decision to migration taken by women themselves, is it a family decision or due to any other socio-political reason.
3. Socio-cultural Profile : age at migration, educational background, economic background, religion, kin or friends abroad.
4. Economic activities: what kind of occupations are these women engaged in and their earning level.
5. Role and Status: has their been any change in their status and role in the family and community life due to their migrant status or is it still the same as it was in their country of origin especially regarding decision making, financial matters, children and division of work at home.

### ***Field Situation and Access***

My fieldwork is a 'network study' since this was the most practicable way of working in a large town with a population as geographically spread as the South Asian Settlers. Also methodologically, it was the only way of being certain to get the right criteria. If I had used a statistical sample, there was the possibility of leaving out important criteria in a universe of such small size.

The study attempts to throw light on how South Asian women have been able to cope with changes due to migration, their adjustment pattern, their coping strategies, their status in the family and society, their economic profile, their relationship with their

husband and children, their personal growth, social networks which have been influenced as a result of migration.

The study aims to offer a culturally sensitive viewpoint about the life of South Asian women in Britain.

The ethnic and cultural background of researcher helped in the process of data collection.

Two case studies of twice-born South Asian Women (One Muslim and One Sikh) have also been incorporated.

### ***Limitations***

Population census is the main source of data on international migration. Unfortunately, most census like other main sources of data from population registers and border statistics, fail to publish data on international migrants by sex. Due to the nature of the phenomenon of migration itself, it is difficult to get accurate data on international migration and there are other overall inadequacies about the accuracy of data on the actual outflow of emigrants

A longitudinal data collection technique would be able to show how the process of migrant women's adaptation differ overtime, whether these processes are different for different types of women , and the degree to which the consequences differ (e.g., are less favorable) for migrant women than migrant men. However, due to resource constraints the present study would not be able to pursue such a research.

## Chapter II

### A Historical Perspective of South Asian Migration to Britain

Although the principal concern of this work is to explore the qualitative character of South Asian Women migrants some mention of the history of their migration as well as quantitative dimension is also required. The migration of South Asian Community to Britain can be viewed with relation to colonial rule, political ideology and “Push”and“Pull” factors of economies.

Migration to Britain from the India sub-continent is often thought to have started after independence in 1947. In fact, it goes much further than that; it is the direct result of long contact between Britain and India. This contact began in 1600 when Queen Elizabeth I granted a charter to the East India Company, giving it a monopoly of trade with India. British rule over India resulted in the movement of Indians to all the countries of the Commonwealth including Britain itself. India was initially a source of cheap labor and Indians were used to fill the gap needed to run British-owned, labour intensive industries. Indians built the East African Railway and worked as sailors on the British Merchant Navy. Indian soldiers fought for Britain in both world wars and many won some of the highest possible awards for bravery.

Many servants and “Ayahs” (Nannies) were brought to Britain during this period Sake Deen Mohammed, the “Shampooing Surgeon” (Barber) to George IV, came to Britain with Captain Baker in 1784 and published his first book the “Travels of Dean Mohamet”.<sup>19</sup> The history of South Asians is thus closely connected to the British labour market and International Economic conditions.

Although large scale South Asian presence in Britain is related to post world war phenomenon its history goes back as far as seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dean Mahomed (1759-1855) George IV’s “Shampooing Surgeon”, *Frontispiece, the travels of Dean Mohamet, a native of Patne in Bengal 1794*, BL:1507/1395

<sup>20</sup> Rosina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, Pluto, London, 1986

The earlier migration was intimately bound up with the trade between the British Empire and the Indian sub-continent. Some of the people from the sub-continent were taken as personal aids (servants) by English *Saabs* and *Memsaabs*, while others joined the ships leaving the Indian ports as labourers is *Lascars* from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Western India. Those who migrated in this manner were generally young and once reaching their destinations provided cheap labour to industries/factories that were coming up in Britain. These migrants helped their kin to make an entry to Britain by providing relevant documents and money. This led to “Chain Migration”,<sup>21</sup> whereby each entrant helped few more to be part of the wider migration process. These migrants were looking for economic gains and for them coming to England was a means of accumulating money which could be used back home for buying land and improving the living condition of the family members. Most often all the male members of a family and next to kin migrated to Britain, with the exception of one’s who could be trusted to deal with financial matters back home and to take care of women and children.

Almost all South Asian countries had access to employment in the land being a part of commonwealth, to which they responded by mass-migration. There were areas in the countries like “Doaba region of Punjab with villages like Jandiali”, Sylhet of Bangladesh, “Gujranwala”, Rawapindi from Pakistan which became centers of out-migration.

However the growing number of South Asians in Britain was causing public concern and by early 1960’s had become an issue for governmental debate (Solomos, 1989:45).<sup>22</sup> There was no doubt that cheap labour from developing and over populated south Asian countries were providing an invaluable supply of labour and contributing to British economy, they came to be viewed as potential threat by the local natives.

Such feelings led to introduction in 1962 of Commonwealth Immigration Bill, which restricted the entry only to those who possessed work vouchers issued by Ministry of

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<sup>21</sup> Chain migration can be defined as the movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants.(John MacDonald and L. D. MacDonald, “Chain Migration Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social Networks”, *Social Research*, 29,4(1962), pp. 443-8)

<sup>22</sup> Solomos J., *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain*, Macmillan, London 1989

Labour Employment. This was a decisive watershed in policy and the first restrictive step to non-whites in Britain.

The salient dimension of pre 1962 migration was that the migrants were predominantly, unskilled males, who did any kind of work, as long as it paid them well. Members of a family, kin, relations, village or district lived together in a house so as to maximize their savings. However, the 1962 Act brought about considerable changes in the migration process. Although it was an attempt to limit immigration, the period from 1962 to 1965 saw greatly increased movement from South Asia to Britain. The new “Labour Voucher” system was seen by South Asians as a curtailment of their economic ambitions, and also a threat of them being isolated for ever from their loved ones. Thus men called their wives, children, relatives, village-mates and all those who were eligible and had support in Britain found themselves in the foreign land.

This period saw the entry of South Asian women to Britain and changed the social-cultural context of the host country. Deakin<sup>23</sup> sees this as an unintended consequence of the immigration controls he suggests that the male chain migration (where a man spent few years in Britain and was then replaced by another male relative) towards families coming for settlement. According to 1971 census nearly 70% of the Pakistani born females in Britain arrived after 1967.<sup>24</sup>

Since 1960's the immigration Act lessened the number of entrants from South Asia to Britain with little relaxation towards the end of 1990's and early 2000, but it certainly changed the type of migration from unskilled labour to professionally qualified workers.

### **Models of Migration**

Migration as per dictionary meaning is a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. It can be from one part of the country to another or from one country to other. The cross-continental migratory movements are very difficult to understand, although

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<sup>23</sup> Deakin, N., *Colour, Citizenship and British Society*, London, 1970, p.54

<sup>24</sup> Lames, *Census, 1971*, p.32 and Table 1.5

there are a number of anthropological approaches to international migration, none of them give a satisfactory explanation of the migration process, migration especially international migration has remained somewhat marginal to mainstream anthropology.<sup>25</sup>

According to Everett S. Lee,<sup>26</sup> the factors which affect the decision to migrate may be classified as follows:

- 1) Factors associated with the area of origin
- 2) Factors associated with the area of destination
- 3) Intervening obstacles
- 4) Personal factors

Lee presents the first three of these in diagram form to show the movement.

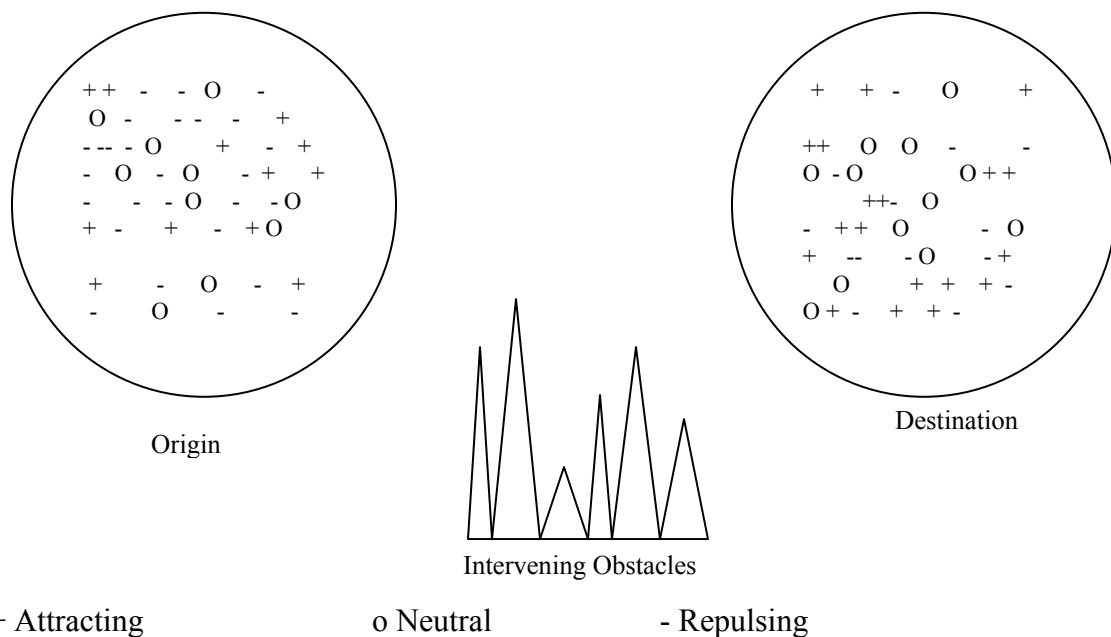


Figure: Origin and destination factors and intervening obstacles in migration

All the areas have countless factors, which tend to hold people together while there are others which tend to repel them. In the figure these are shown as '+' and '-' signs by Lee. These set of plus and minus factors at both area of origin and destination would be

<sup>25</sup> Eade J. (ed.), *Migration, Worker and the Social Order*, Association of Social Anthropologists Monograph, 26, London, Tavistock, p.1-16

<sup>26</sup> Everett S. Lee., "A Theory of Migration". in J. A. Jackson (ed.) *Migration*, Cambridge University Press, 1969, p.285

viewed differently by every migrant or prospective migrant depending on their personal factors.

However, the factors associated with the area of origin and area of destination are difficult to evaluate as the knowledge about the area of destination is seldom exact and dependent on the perceptions that one makes on the information given by others.

Similarly, the intervening obstacles such as financial outlay, official restrictions and difficulties, particularly the role of immigration laws and their application, the process of chain migration and many personal factors affect individual motivations and facilitate or retard migration.

However, this does not provide a clear understanding about the migration and raises the most pertinent question “Why do people migrate?”

Theoretical perspectives on migration can be classified under two heads – The first attempts to cover all migration under general heading of push-pull hypothesis.<sup>27</sup>

Based on classical economics and drawing on the works of Ravenstein<sup>28</sup> it suggests that migration is due to socio-economic imbalances between regions, certain factors ‘push’ persons away from their areas of origin, while there are other factors which ‘pull’ them to the area of destination. The best of these studies indicate the complexities of causes and effects, locating them in socio-economic context (e.g. Oberoi and Singh<sup>29</sup>, 1983, Gilbert and Gugler,<sup>30</sup> 1981 and Laite, 1981<sup>31</sup>).

These perspectives, however do not take into consideration the intervening and personal factors. Peterson<sup>32</sup> argues that “man migrates because of wanderlust” and goes on to

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<sup>27</sup> Patterson, Sheila, *Dark Strangers*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Book Ltd., 1965 pp 64-6.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in Addleton, J., *Undermining the center: The Gulf Migration and Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1992

<sup>29</sup> Oberoi, A. S. and Singh H. K., *The Causes and Consequences of Internal Migration: A Study of the Indian Punjab*, Oxford, ILO, Oxford University Press, 1983

<sup>30</sup> Gilbert and Gugler, J., *Cities, Poverty and Development: Urbanization in the Third World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981.

<sup>31</sup> Laite, J, *Industrial Development and Migrant labour in Latin America*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1981

<sup>32</sup> Peterson, W., “A General Typology of Migration”, *American Sociological Review*, Vol.23, 1958, pp.256-66.

suggest that people migrate either in order to achieve new conditions or in response to a change, which affects them and they want to retain what they have.

However, both these assumptions are unable to explain as to why individuals respond differently in similar situations. They do not give proper understanding of how social factors affect individual decision-making.

Galbraith on the other hand, argues that international migration results from the global need to balance economic and population inequities. Thus people from labour surplus countries move to areas where there is enough work, which the local population is unable to take. According to him “Over the last two centuries the individuals seeking escape from equilibrium of poverty..... have had one remarkably certain recourse. For most of those who have attempted it, it has served well. For their children, even better..... The recourse is for those who reject accommodation to move from the poor country to one of the advanced nations.”<sup>33</sup>

According to Neo-marxist interpretations, migration can be best understood in terms of exploitation, the result of capitalist imperialism. The famous articulators of this notion are Gundur Frank<sup>34</sup> and Immanuel Wallerstein<sup>35</sup>. According to this view, politically and economically colonized Southern Countries, are unable to develop on their own right and have not only provided raw material to the imperialist countries, but have helped them in capital accumulation also by providing cheap labour via slavery, indentured labour and in modern days through labour migration (other proponents of this approach include Rhoades,<sup>36</sup> 1998; Méillassoux,<sup>37</sup> 1981, Castles et al.<sup>38</sup> 1984, Cohen,<sup>39</sup> 1987)

From this point of view, migration is the result of inequality among nations; those who migrate act passively in the global labour market.

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<sup>33</sup> Galbraith, J. K. *The nature of Mass Poverty*, Harvard University Press, London 1979, 98.9

<sup>34</sup> Frank A. G., “The Development of Underdevelopment”, *Monthly Review*, 1967, 18:17-31

<sup>35</sup> Wallerstein, I; *The Modern World System*, Academic Press, New York, 1974.

----- *The Politics of the World Economy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

<sup>36</sup> Rhodes R., “Foreign labour and German Industrial Capitalism, 1891-1978: The Evolution of Migratory System”, *American Ethnologist*, 5:553-73, 1978

<sup>37</sup> Méillassoux, C., *Maidens, Meal and Money : Capitalism in the Domestic Economy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981

<sup>38</sup> Castles, S., Booth, H. and Wallace, T., *Here for Good : Western Europe’s New Ethnic Minorities*, London, Pluto Press, 1984

<sup>39</sup> Cohen, R., *The New Helots: Migrants in the International Division of Labour*, London, Gower, 1987

## **Structural and Contextual Factors<sup>40</sup>**

Those discussing the structural and contextual factors discuss linkages between places that reflect levels of aggregation, 'above' the individual, the family, the culture, the polity, the economy and so on. These linkages, according to their paradigm are conditions that influence an individual's decision to immigrate. According to them, there are major categories of factors that influence international migration flows.

### **I State-to-State Relations and Comparisons**

Theorists have devoted considerable attention to international economic relationships as a factor in immigration theory. These approaches have a political dimension too, usually ascribing dominance (or exploitation) to capitalist societies. The various dimensions of economic and political relations that affect immigration decisions are

- Differences between internal and political system
- Mutual political recognition
- Political dependency or dominance and military alliances
- Economic dependency or dominance and trade agreements
- Emigration and immigration policies
- Economic and technical assistance programs
- Disparities in level of economic development

### **II Mass Culture Connections**

Cultural and Linguistic differences once served as formidable barriers to immigration. These barriers have greatly diminished owing to factors as the internalization of the mass media, accessibility of international travel to large numbers of people, and the rapid spread of English as the major international language. An analysis of the following factors illustrate the weakening of cultural distance between nations

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<sup>40</sup> Fawcett, J. T. and Arnold F., "Explaining Diversity, Asian and Pacific Immigration Systems" in Pacific Bridges, p. 453-473

- Cultural similarity or dissimilarity, value systems
- Cultural dependency or dominance, ‘Westernization’
- Media diffusion – Television, Radio, Films, Music, Print Media
- Use of a Common Language
- Common religion or compatible religious beliefs
- Similarity of educational systems
- Face-to-Face contacts through international travel

### III Family and Social Networks

Although economic and political factors may be the underlying motive for international migration, but the real process is triggered by family and social network.

Today’s immigration laws make provision for family reunification. Studies have also demonstrated relatives and friends made necessary arrangements for movement at both the places of origin and place of destination (Helweg,<sup>41</sup> 1979, Bhacu,<sup>42</sup> 1985, Gardner,<sup>43</sup> 1995). Connections with friends and former community members in destination countries are also potent elements in prompting a move and facilitating settlement by providing help with jobs and housing. The following aspects of family and social networks related to immigration should be taken into consideration

- Geographic dispersion of relatives and friends
- Geographic dispersion of members of home country or community
- Historical depth of family and community migration
- Visiting and communication pattern of absent family and friends
- Occupational niches of earlier waves of migrants
- Social and economic status of previous migrants
- Frequency and amount of remittances

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<sup>41</sup> Helweg, A. W., *Sikhs in England*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1979

<sup>42</sup> Bachu, Parminder, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain*, Tavistock publications, London, 1985

<sup>43</sup> Gardner Katy, *Global Migrants, Local lives*, Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1995, New York

- Normative household and family structure
- Normative family obligations and commitments

Once the pioneers have settled, linkages are established that motivate and facilitate further migration. The social networks also promote geographic clustering in the country of destination. Many of the immigrants who enter a country under provision of family reunification do not have a job to go to. They rely on their relatives or family members for food, shelter and other assistance.

The strength and extensiveness of family obligations also plays an important role in the immigration process.

Relevant data on family and social networks are not generally available from official data sources, thus it is essential to conduct micro-level studies, usually based on sample surveys on community studies that involves a combination of direct questioning and observation

### **Studies on South Asian Diaspora**

Migration is a complex process; because similar factors at two different places might not result in migratory movement, in the same way migrants are to be understood as part of both worlds, (the place of origin and destination) to which they relate in a dynamic manner. Before 1947, all migrants from Indian sub-continent were Indians divided along religion, language and region of origin. In 1947 there was emergence of separate national boundaries, thus giving rise to national identities. However, in 1947 there was emergence of separate national boundaries, thus giving rise to national identities. However, in Britain, there is a general tendency to treat all South Asian immigrants as a single category, overlooking tremendous cultural disparity between different groups and generalizations about one social unit may not be applicable to another, despite of them hailing from the same sub continent. The heterogeneity of South Asian Communities

should be borne in mind by all social science researchers before making any generalizations.

A great deal of literature is available about South Asians in Britain. A large proportion of this focuses upon the Pakistani Community (Dahya 1973<sup>44</sup>, Saifullah Khan, 1975<sup>45</sup>, 1977<sup>46</sup>, Jeffrey, 1976<sup>47</sup>, Anwar, 1979<sup>48</sup>, Ballard<sup>49</sup> 1983, 1987, Werbner<sup>50</sup>, 1990). Other contributions have been made for Sikhs (Helweg<sup>51</sup>, 1979, Ballard and Ballard<sup>52</sup>, 1977) and East African Sikhs (Bhachu<sup>53</sup>, 1985), Bangladeshi Communities (Carey and Shukur<sup>54</sup>, 1985, Adams<sup>55</sup>, 1987, Eade<sup>56</sup>, 1986, 89, Peach<sup>57</sup>, 1990, Gardner<sup>58</sup>, 1995)

Much of the work on British South Asians over the last four-decade has been largely empirical and concentrated on patterns of migration, kinship and people's life styles in the UK. Other studies gave attention to the adaptation process, by focusing on the

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<sup>44</sup> Dahya, B., "Pakistanis in Britain: Transients or Settlers?", *Race*, 14(3), 1973, 241-77.

<sup>45</sup> Saifullah Khan, V., "Asian Women in Britain: Strategies of Adjustment of Indian and Pakistani Migrants" in De Souza A., (ed.) *Women in Contemporary India: Traditional Images and Changing Roles*, Manohar Press, New Delhi, 1975, 164-88.

<sup>46</sup> Saifullah Khan, V., "The Pakistanis: The Mirpuri villagers at Home and in Bradford" in Watson, J. (ed.), *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1977, 57-90.

<sup>47</sup> Jeffery, P., *Migrants and Refugees*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976.

<sup>48</sup> Anwar, M., *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain*, Heinemann Educational, London, 1979.

<sup>49</sup> Ballard, R., "The Context and Consequences of Migration: Jullunder and Mirpur Compared", *New Community*, 11(1/2), 1983, 117-36.

-----, "The Political Economy of Migration" in Eade (ed.) *Migration, Workers and the Social Order*, Association of Social Anthropologists Monograph, 26, Tavistock, London, 1987, 17-41.

<sup>50</sup> Werbner, P., *The Migration Process: Capital Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis*, Berg, Oxford, 1990.

<sup>51</sup> Helweg, op.cit.,

<sup>52</sup> Ballard, R. and Ballard, C., "The Sikhs: Development of South Asian Settlements in Britain" in Watson, op. cit., 21-57.

<sup>53</sup> Bachu, P., op.cit.

<sup>54</sup> Carey, S. and Shukur, A., "A Profile of the Bangladeshi community in London", *New Community*, 12(3), 1985, 405-17.

<sup>55</sup> Adams, C., *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers: Life stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain*, Tower Hamlets Arts Project, London, 1987.

<sup>56</sup> Eade, J., *The Politics of Community: The Bangladeshi Community in London*, Ph.D. thesis, London, 1986.

-----, "The Constitution of Identity and Political Representation: The Bengalis in East London", *paper for UK South Asian Anthropology Group Seminar*, London, 1989.

<sup>57</sup> Peach, C., "Estimating the Growth of the Bangladeshi Population of Great Britain", *New Community*, 16(4), 1990, 481-91.

<sup>58</sup> Gardner, op. cit.,

‘nature’ of social structures and processes that were maintained in Britain by South Asian Community that hindered their assimilation in the British Society.

Since there has been unforeseen changes in the world both economically and politically, thus changing the equation of migration that were relevant in 1970’s and early 1980’s. In response to these global changes, recent work mixes both anthropological and sociological perspectives. But despite this, still social institutions, racism and ethnic identity forms the basis of studies on ethnic minorities. Eade has argued on the applicability of these approaches to the study of minorities labelling them as being culturally determinist. According to him, the academic writing is based on the presumption of cultural essences which are available for empirical investigation, and revealed through social and cultural institutions (Eade<sup>59</sup> 1992:6). However, Gardner is skeptical in outright rejection of these approaches and emphasis on recognition of their cultural diversity and dynamic nature (Gardner<sup>60</sup>, 1995 : 7)

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<sup>59</sup> Eade, J., “Ethnicity and the Politics of Cultural Difference: An Agenda for the 1990s?” unpublished paper given at a workshop on “Ethnicity”, St Anthony’s College, Oxford, May, 1992.

<sup>60</sup> Gardner, op.cit.,

### **Chapter-III : South Asian Population in Birmingham**

The earlier section had dealt with South Asian Migration to Britain, models of Migration and studies conducted on South Asian Community. This chapter concentrates on South Asian Population in Birmingham.

According to 2001 Census, the resident population of Birmingham was 977087 of which 48% were male and 52% were females. Birmingham is technically the biggest city in the United Kingdom. The city is situated in the West Midlands conurbation, of which it forms the largest part. Along with the city of Wolver Hampton, the Black Country and a number of surrounding towns, this conurbation consists of around 2.25 million people. Birmingham is part of the traditional county of Warwickshire, although it does not lie within the administrative county of the same name (established 1889).

Birmingham is a multi-cultural city, with a large population from the Indian sub-continent and Caribbean, this has meant that the city has a surprising mix of cultures. In the years following World War II a major influx of immigrants from the British Commonwealth changed the face of Birmingham, with large communities from Southern Asia and the Caribbean settling in the city, turning Birmingham into one of the UK's leading multicultural cities. As of 2001 29.7% of the city's population is made up of ethnic minority communities. Amongst the largest minority communities: 10.6% of Birmingham residents are Pakistani, 5.7% are Indian, 6.1% are Black Caribbean or African, and 2.9% are of mixed race.

## Ethnic Group

Table 2.2 Ethnic Groups composition of Asian or Asian British in Birmingham and England

	Edgbaston	Birmingham	England
White	65.9	70.4	90.9
of which White Irish	2.9	3.2	1.3
Mixed	3.7	2.9	1.3
Asian or Asian British	17.0	19.5	4.6
Indian	8.9	5.7	2.1
Pakistani	5.6	10.6	1.4
Bangladeshi	0.8	2.1	0.6
Other Asian	1.7	1.0	0.5
Black or Black British	8.4	6.1	2.1
Caribbean	6.0	4.9	1.1
African	1.8	0.6	1.0
Other Black	0.7	0.6	0.2
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group	5.0	1.2	0.9

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

## Religion

Resident population (percentage)

	Edgbaston	Birmingham	England and Wales
Christian	51.8	59.1	71.8
Buddhist	1.4	0.3	0.3
Hindu	3.4	2.0	1.1
Jewish	2.6	0.2	0.5
Muslim	9.5	14.3	3.0
Sikh	4.2	2.9	0.6
Other religions	0.6	0.3	0.3
No religion	18.6	12.4	14.8
Religion not stated	8.0	8.4	7.7

Source: 2001 Census, ONS

South Asian settlers are further concentrated in particular residential localities, usually – although not always in inner city areas. In Birmingham, nearly a quarter of all school entrants are now of South Asian decent and in certain neighbourhoods they form the overwhelming majority.<sup>61</sup>

Since the early 1980s Birmingham has seen a new wave of migration, this time from communities which do not have Commonwealth roots, including people from Kosovo and Somalia. Birmingham's reputation as a city built on migration looks to continue. If Birmingham ended the 19th century as a Commonwealth city, the future diversity of the City is set to be global.

### **History of Indian Community in Birmingham**

Historical Records show that the Indian community in Birmingham was established by the early 1900s. Birmingham central library records mention that in 1924 an Indian optician operated in Bath Row. There is also a record that in the 1930s an Indian student came here to train in the fire service.

Many Indian students came to England to study and one of them was Dr Dhani Prem. He became the city's first Asian councilor, representing Great Barr in 1946. By the 1960s numbers had increased, fuelled by the demand for labour. Many Sikhs came from the Punjab area to work in the industries in Birmingham and a lot of them settled in the Handsworth area.

For Indian families education was the key to better prospects. Indian children tried to do well in their new schools<sup>62</sup>.

In the 1970s many Asians came to the UK having been expelled from Uganda. A lot of Indians opened shops and restaurants, some became medical personnel and others entered

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<sup>61</sup> Ballard, Roger (ed.): *Desh Pardersh, The south Asian presence in Britain*, B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi 1996

<sup>62</sup> extract from the Birmingham Post, December 31 1964.

professions such as accountancy and law. By 2001 the Indian community numbered over 55,000, the second biggest ethnic community in the city.

### **A Brief History of the Pakistani Community**

The Pakistani community is the biggest ethnic community in Birmingham. By 2001 they numbered over 104,000, nearly twice as many as the second biggest ethnic community which are the Indians.

#### **Beginnings**

Large scale immigration to Britain from Pakistan started only in 1950s, the main reason for this mass migration was firstly, Britain's policy of encouraging migration from its former colonies to satisfy its manpower needs, after the Second World War. The other significant reason was partition of India in 1947 which resulted in displacement of millions of people who had to shift to either Pakistan or India, had lost almost everything and had to start life afresh. For them England seemed a better choice giving more opportunities than either country in the subcontinent..

Many Pakistanis migrated for economic reasons and belonged to rural areas of the country. Majority of them came with the mindset of returning to Pakistan after making enough money in Britain. There numbers increased through the 1960s and 1970s. Men came over first generally in clusters and then wives, children and dependants followed. Most of the Pakistanis who came to Birmingham were from the Mirpur district in Kashmir. However others were from areas such as Campbellpur, Nowshera and Gujarat.

By the 1960s and 1970s many Pakistanis realized that it was increasingly difficult to return home due to various factors: higher living standards in the UK, the need to maintain established businesses, children had got accustomed to the British school system and way of life and political instability in Pakistan. The community thus stayed back and made attempts to grow.

Balsall Heath was a popular area to live, it was close to many factories where most of them worked and housing was cheap. Homes were often shared between different households and over-crowding, cramped living conditions and lack of adequate sanitary provision was common. Many families tolerated such housing conditions due to lack of money to afford anything better. One survey showed 32% of households were overcrowded. This was often due to the high number of children and relatives living as a family unit.

The 1991 census found that 66% of the community was concentrated in the inner city areas of Small Heath , Sparkhill, Sparkbrook , Washwood Heath and Nechells. Other areas where the community has made its home were Aston, Handsworth, Moseley and Ladywood.

### **Work and Education**

As the first wave of immigrants had a background of little if any proper educational qualifications due to various reasons, they became factory workers. With the decline of the manufacturing industries in the city during the 1980s, many Pakistanis became unemployed. By 1991 56% of men had no earned income.

Some of the community became self employed . Retail businesses were started, often involving the whole family. Businesses such as Travel Agents , Chemists and Jewellers sprang up in Balsall Heath's Ladypool Road, Stratford Road, Green Lane in Small Heath and the Alum Rock Road in Saltley. Many private Mini-Cab firms were started, leading to most inner city cabbies being Pakistani. Of course the most famous businesses were the Balti restaurants.

Education of the children was always important to the families. Some state schools were seen as educationally poor and sometimes Muslim values were not maintained. This led to the setting up of private education in specialist schools, where Islamic values were taught. By 1991 there were three of these schools in the city.

However, some second or third generation children of the original factory workers have done well out of the state education system and a growing number have become professionals in the fields of medicine, teaching ,community work and local government.

### **A Brief History of the Bangladesh Community<sup>63</sup>**

According to the 1991 census the Bangladeshi community in Birmingham numbered over nearly 13,000. This is quite a significant number for a relatively recently arrived ethnic group

#### **Beginnings**

A number of Bengalis began to arrive in the city in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Most were from the rural area of Sylhet, in Bangladesh. They were mostly men who aimed to work and send money back home to their families. Many of the men that came over were seamen. However, most of them found work in the factories of inner city Birmingham. They often lived in crowded houses, near to the factories. The areas of Lozells , Aston and Balsall Heath had a lot of Bangladeshis in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They settled there because property was cheap being of poor standard. However in 1971, a survey for the Race Relations Institute found that few of them wanted to move.

#### **Work and Education**

With poor language skills, due to lack of education in Bangladesh, educational and career prospects were limited. Some Bangladeshi boys began to work part time in relative's restaurants . Many left school at the earliest opportunity to earn money and got married young. A cycle of low pay and few career opportunities had begun. White workers had begun to reject the unskilled and heavy jobs which were vital to the local metal-bashing industries, so immigrants began to fill the gaps. Some companies like Delta Metal Works in Dartmouth Street, BSA and Morris Motors took the workers on. By the late 1970s a recession made smaller factories close down and unskilled labourers such as Bangladeshi men found themselves unemployed.

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<sup>63</sup> "From Bangladesh to Birmingham" - Yousef Choudry and Peter Drake (2001)

However some of the community then became employed in the catering industry, a great many working in "Indian Restaurants" which are really Bangladeshi owned. The number of restaurants has continued to grow. Today there are about 500 Asian caterers in Birmingham employing about 4,000 workers. The majority of them are Bangladeshi owned and run.

### **Community life**

For some of the population the feeling of community continues today. Many families shop in specific areas like the Stratford, Coventry , Soho and Alum Rock Roads. The youth try to adapt to their Birmingham background whilst facing pressures from their extended families to retain Bangladeshi Muslim culture.

Over the years community and religious groups have sprung up to help the community in some way, trying to replicate the communal village life such as the Sylheti seamen left behind on their journeys to Aston, Balsall Heath and Saltley.

## Chapter IV: Qualitative Analysis : Findings Of The Study

This section will deal with the responses of south Asian women on issues related to areas like causes/reason for migration, effect of migration on education, family, marriage, children, status, roles and responsibilities, attitude, value system and employment.

The study is based on in-depth interviews with 30 (thirty) first generation migrant women from South Asia. The details pertaining to the age, educational background and country of origin is appended at Table 1, Table 1.1 and 1.2. In all 14 Indians (2 Muslims, 2 Sikhs and 10 Hindus), 10 Pakistanis (Muslims) and 6 Bangladeshi (Muslims) women were interviewed. All these women were residing in Birmingham. Before analyzing the responses, one thing has to be borne in mind that although these three countries fall in the South Asian region and have a shared history, the women of these countries cannot be treated as a homogenous group. They are very diverse due to regional, religious, ethnic cultural background and politico-social system prevailing in their countries. Moreover in the Indian Sub-continent, it is believed that there are cultural changes due to regional variations in customs, language, food, dress code every 50 kms., so treating any group from here as a homogenous category would be a fallacy.

The post-independence social, political and economic environment of these countries has to a great extent shaped the status and role of women, their social interactions and individual lives. The observations made during the study are as follows:

- ✚ Indian women can be considered more progressive among the three groups.
- ✚ Almost all women from India had minimum “A” level qualification while very few women from Pakistan and Bangladesh had A level or higher qualification
- ✚ Indian women between 20-49 years of age were all degree holders and nearly 65% of them had post graduate qualification and above.
- ✚ Forty percent of Pakistani and 50% of Bangladeshi women had primary education.
- ✚ Only 20% of Pakistani and 17% of Bangladeshi women had post graduate and above qualification

- ✚ Majority of Indian women who have migrated in last two decades are professionals.
- ✚ All women below 40 years of age had Post graduate qualification and above.
- ✚ Indian Muslim women are more educated than their Pakistani and Bangladeshi counterparts.
- ✚ Young south Asian women were more open and responsive than older women.
- ✚ Women from Pakistan were more responsive to personal questions than women from Bangladesh.
- ✚ Although belonging to the same religious group Muslim women from different countries do not see themselves as an ethnic community.
- ✚ Most of the Bangladeshi women were unemployed.

This study builds on earlier studies done on South Asian women in Britain; however it has restricted itself to first generation migrant women. The purpose of analysis is to explore the processes and dynamics involved in transition made by these women on moving from their respective countries to Britain and the coping strategies adopted by them. The research interviews aimed to explore the individual views/attitude towards migration, familial support system, coping strategies, push and pull factors in making the transition, changing roles within the kin groups, family and outside world, views about child rearing practices, education, impact on marriage, their personal ambitions and aspirations, attitude towards home, employment and identity. An attempt has also been made to highlight the conflicting social processes in identifying ones role sets. I hope that findings would be of interest to different cross sections of society especially those working in the fields of ethnicity and gender.

Table: 4.1 Age-Wise and Country-Wise Distributions of Respondents

Age	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi
Below 20			1
20-29	2	2	3
30-39	7	4	1
40-49	3	2	1
50 and over	3	2	
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>

Table 4. 2: Country –wise and Religion-Wise Distribution of Respondents

Religion	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi
Muslim	2	10	6
Sikh	2		
Hindu	10		
Total	14	10	6

Table 4.3: Country –wise and education-Wise Distribution of Respondents

Education level	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi
Illiterate		2	
Primary		2	3
Middle		2	
High School/O level		1	1
A level	3	1	1
Bachelor’s Degree	2		
Post Graduate & above	9	2	1
Total	14	10	6

The following sections will offer new insights into the lives and minds of first generation South Asian women.

## ISSUES RELATED TO MIGRATION

The interest of researchers and policy makers in migration of women is of recent origin, women in migration literature were considered as passive migrants. Passive migrant is used here to refer to those migrants who go as dependants with the main migrant and are incapable of migrating by themselves. They have no say in the decision to migrate and are considered of no economic value by the economic researchers. One of the significant finding of the study is that majority of women who migrated before 1990's fall in this category of migrants. They did not have much say in the decision to migrate and had either come to England directly after marriage or joined their husbands who had migrated earlier in search of greener pastures. Women who had migrated after 1990s had played major role in decision-making. These women were educated and had made conscious decision to migrate along with their husbands. They were prepared to face the challenges associated with migration to a foreign land. Although some of them joined their husbands two or three years later but their influence in decision-making cannot be overlooked.

### **Age at which migrated**

Women who migrated after marriage were between 20 and 30 years of age at the time of migration, while women who had migrated with their fathers were of less than 12 years of age at the time of migration.

### **Initial Reaction**

The initial reaction of moving to Britain was of anxiety, nervousness and apprehension.

*“Everything was so different, I felt nervous and apprehensive”*

*(Rajinder Kaur Bedi , Indian Business Woman, Sikh, 40 to 49 years.)*

*“I was very scared as the place and people were unknown to me and I had come from a much protected environment”*

*(Rahila, Pakistani Business Woman, Muslim, 30 to 39 years.)*

To some it was a very lonely experience, coming from a house full of people, to a strange environment with strange people and different lifestyle, while for some the arrival promised a life of opportunities and growth.

### **Support from Family/Relatives Abroad**

Migration before 90s was influenced to a great extent by presence of family and relatives, which was the major contributing factor supporting the decision to migrate. Jobs, house, children were all taken care of by family members, and the migrant women did not feel lonely as they could depend on the support of their kin and even distant relatives in the foreign land.

*“When I got married, my husband’s brother had already migrated and then he started asking my husband to join him. After one year of my marriage my husband moved to Britain. After two years they called my sister-in-law and me to join them. As we all came together I never felt any apprehension”*

*(Asha Handa, Indian Homemaker, Hindu, 50 and over)*

In fact people from same village preferred to live together; sometimes two – three families shared the same house. Because of this, it never seemed to these women that they were miles away from their homeland.

*“When I joined my husband he was staying with his sister’s family, the house was full of people as there was not only my sister-in-law’s family but also her brother-in-law with his wife and two of her husband’s cousins also living with them.”*

*(Tripti, Indian, helps in family business, Hindu, 50 and over)*

These women managed to live in Britain without ever knowing a word of English; their children went to local schools and learnt the ways of British People. As most of the migrants at that time were unskilled and uneducated their main purpose was to set up small businesses, which were eventually taken over by their children and therefore these families did not emphasize much on education.

People from a region helped others to migrate and eventually bought houses in the same colony/locality, as a result those areas came to represent people from same background. This further helped settlement in Britain. The small businesses also supplied to majority of the migrant population and flourished as a result of mass migration. It is interesting to note that in migration prior to 1980s and 90s, presence of a relative was a major positive factor; while for those who migrated later support came from batch mates and professional colleagues rather than relatives.

*“After clearing his PLAB my husband came here and stayed with two of his batch mates, they cooked in turns and helped each other emotionally as well as financially. They are a big support to us here”*

*(Shabana, Pakistani, Doctor, Muslim, 30 to 39 years.)*

*“Two of my friends were here and they informed me of the openings, they not only provided a place to stay but were helpful in every possible manner”*

*(Pooja, Indian IT professional, Hindu, 20 to 29 years)*

But all were not fortunate enough to get support from relatives or a friend, for some migration was nothing short of a nightmare. They were born in well to do families and were married to boys living abroad; when these women joined their husbands in Britain they found that the entire family of about 7-8 people lived in two room houses. The houses were therefore overcrowded and they had no place to call their own. They were made to do all the household work, were not allowed to go out and not even write to their parents back home.

*“I was a qualified nurse working in a hospital, when I came here I had a lot of dreams, but my life was very tough here, my in laws took away all my money and jewellery given by my parents, I was made to do all the household work, not given enough to eat and was not allowed to write to my parents, life was very tough.”*

*(Dalbir, Indian, working in an NGO, Sikh, 50 and over.)*

### **Changes made in order to live in Britain**

There are significant differences between the two societies (South Asian countries and Britain) in terms of dress, language, food, climate, life style and social interaction and norms governing behavior are different. In south Asian Societies, the family structure is hierarchical with clear defined roles and responsibilities. However, there are differences in social roles as per caste, class, location and religion of families. Women from lower castes are allowed to work outside the house while the upper caste women are more or less confined to house. The same holds true for class distinctions. Likewise, women in rural areas are involved in a lot of outdoor activities pertaining not only to agriculture but also collecting wood, water and grazing animals while their urban counterparts are expected to be involved only in the household chores. Since 1980s there have been significant changes in position of women in urban areas and they started working outside their homes in productive activities (in employment), but this has not changed their traditional role positions. Even now the young daughters of middle, upper middle and upper class families lead quite protected lives. One can say that south Asian women in all their social roles lead much protected lives, their relationships and interactions are all governed by social customs and taboos. They are not expected to do any work outside the house like payment of bills, buying rations/goods for the household etc. They have socially determined roles and their entire socialization process teaches them to look at male members of the family for support and guidance.

Another aspect, which distinguishes the two societies, is ready availability of house helpers to do washing, cooking and cleaning in South Asian region, the help that is

available in Britain is very expensive. The kind of social support system provided by the community is also quite different in South Asia than in Britain. How did women cope with the demands made upon them, if any, as a result of the new environment? To find answer about the same an enquiry was made to know what significant changes had to be made by migrant women in order to live in Britain and who/what helped them to make these changes. The findings show that women who were professionals reported changes they had to make in context of their work, whereas housewives and especially women from Pakistan and Bangladesh spoke about change with reference to their familial interaction and household roles.

*“I had to change a lot, our Indian style of cooking made everything greasy here and the smell of spices was objected by the neighbors, so I modified it to large extent. In India, I was only doing the household chores, while my husband did all outside work. But here he was busy with his job and I had to do everything myself, finding out about houses, schools, shopping etc. which was really a change. I tell you at times I used to feel very depressed and helpless but I managed”*

*(Kavita, homemaker, Indian, Hindu, 30 to 39 years)*

A large number of women spoke about the sheltered and protected lives they spent under the guidance of their elders. Women of the house were not expected to look for employment, even if they were inclined to be gainfully employed, the preferred occupation was teacher, typist etc.. This feature was not restricted to any one South Asian country or community or religion, women from all countries, religions and socio-economic background talked about this aspect of the society.

Daughters in these societies are expected to perform their “traditional roles” within and outside the domestic realm. Even where women were professionally qualified, it was considered an extension of their “primary role” with no or little modification. Thus professions like that of a teacher, nurse, typist, social worker were

considered appropriate for women. Similar trends have been reported by Bachu (1991)<sup>64</sup> and Madood et.al.(2003)<sup>65</sup>

Some of the women reported, that back home everything was more or less laid out for them and they were just expected to follow that, as a women they were not exposed to the realities that existed in the world outside, while on coming to Britain they were thrown open to a world they were not prepared for, thus making it even harder for them to adapt.

*“I had to build the confidence to go out and do my work myself. Back home, I used to live indoors and used to go out only with family and friends, But here I had to do everything myself. Initially I found it very difficult to talk to strangers, I used to be literally tongue-tied, I used to worry about my English, and people could at times not understand what I said so I had to repeat it many times. It was quite embarrassing. I also had to get used to openness in this society, where everybody expresses their affection freely but not inner emotions like happiness or sorrow and do not react to things, while our behavior seems to be an overreaction.”*

*(Rahila, Pakistani, own Business, Muslim, 30 to 39 years)*

*“I adopted western dresses, English style of cooking, driving and keeping to oneself”*

*(Rasheeda, Bangladeshi, homemaker, Muslim, 50 and over)*

Most of the women reported change in the style of cooking and dressing as the main change, most of them do not use the spices that they used in their countries. They have stopped deep frying food at home as many a times it activated the fire alarm causing a lot of embarrassment. A large majority of women who had migrated before 1980s had to make conscious efforts to learn English while migration after 1980s involved well educated women who had good command over the English language. The same hold true

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<sup>64</sup> Bachu,P. 1991, “Ethnicity constructed and reconstructed: the role of Sikh women in cultural elaboration and educational decision-making in Britain”, Gender and Education, 3(1):45-60.

<sup>65</sup> Madood Tariq et.al. (2003), South Asian Women & employment in Britain, Policy Studies Institute, London, p.14

about doing work outside the homes. This can also be seen as a reflection of the changes that have taken place over the decades (1960s and later) in the social situation of women in urban areas of migrating countries (as most of the women who migrated after 1980s belonged to urban areas).

*“It all depends on the kind of environment you had back home. I came from a very difficult home, my mother was a Sikh and my father Muslim, my fathers family never accepted my mother as a result we were treated as outsiders by my father’s family, there was always so much tension. My coming here was an escape from unpleasantness and here I found freedom, Freedom to be me.”*

(Mamuna, Pakistani, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)

The condition back home is also an important factor in assessing the change as positive or negative. Most of the respondents realized that their movement to Britain opened new avenues and a more fulfilling lifestyle thus they were more receptive to change. In most of the cases spouses provided maximum support in making changes.

*“When I came here with my husband both of us were into adjustment shock. We are from traditional and conservative societies where everything follows some predefined pattern. But here things were very different. I had to improve my employability and thus I enrolled into college and started driving and doing maximum work myself including decision-making. So I learnt to be independent”.*

(Shabnam, Pakistani, economically active full time student, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)

The presence of a micro culture within a wider culture also became evident from some conversations.

*“People, language and the culture are different. Even the way you perceive and perform work is different, the work environment, attitude to work, the way you relate to people around you, everything is different, but this is outside our house. In the house we are the same, we speak urdu, we eat same kind of food, we follow same rituals, but outside everything is different.”*

(Imrana, Indian, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs)

*“In India if you are a woman professional, you have to choose between family and work, in spite of the social support system. Here, the working system is very different, work as well as family oriented. The volume of work was reduced considerably and one could plan and organize things, which I could never do in India”.*

(Nikhila, Indian, doctor, Hindu, 40 to 49 years.)

This question revealed some interesting findings, women who migrated from smaller places and before 1980's cited changes pertaining to living styles particularly in relation to familial roles, thus doing things outside the house, driving, adopting western clothes were seen as major changes by them. For many of these women to be totally independent, to decide and be responsible for oneself, to do all household work and in absence of husbands who are busy with their jobs drive, shop, bank was a shock.

*“Back home I had many friends and we used to play out on the roads and in each other's house, my mother was not checking on us all the time, but here our movements were restricted, our interaction with people became very less. Even when we joined school, it was obvious that we were different than others.”*

(Safiya, Bangladeshi, own business, Muslim, 20 to 29 yrs)

Women who came to Britain after 80s were from urban areas, where due to urbanization the traditional roles associated with women have altered to certain extent, reported changes pertaining to attitudes of people towards work, working environment and culture. Professionals found the attitude towards work very different. There was a higher degree of professionalism. They reported a strict adherence to work schedule, which gave flexibility to plan. There was also more emphasis on striking a balance between work and family. However almost all the women reported lack of familial/social support as a major factor necessitating changes in their day-to-day life? A large number of women spoke about the sheltered and protective lives in India, under the guidance of their elders. Women of the house were not expected to look for employment to support the family, even if they showed inclination to be gainfully employed, the preferred

occupation was teaching. This feature is not restricted to any one South Asian country or community or religion, women from all the countries, religion and socio-economic background spoke about this aspect of the society.

### **Education, Language and Interaction with the host society**

The study revealed that the women who migrated before 1980's especially after 1962 had joined their husbands who were already living in the UK. These women were largely from rural background, where not much emphasis was given on a girl's education (Anwar<sup>66</sup> Bhachu<sup>67</sup> , Ballard<sup>68</sup> , et.al.). These women had been taught other household skills befitting their future role in married life and were exposed to only elementary level of education. They could not speak English and many of them have survived without learning the language, as their interaction was limited to people of their own community. As the migration after 1962 was mostly family reunion most of the women did not migrate alone but with women and children of other migrant families (migration before 1962 was chain migration, described earlier in the paper) from among relations and friends from the same area. When they arrived they had social cushioning of fellow natives living either in the same house or same locality. These people who migrated to Birmingham in response to strong demand for unskilled labor in textile industry came from small peasant families and as migration and settlement in Britain was characterized by kinship ties, everyone joined kinsmen already established there in localities which were Asian in character (Ballard,)<sup>69</sup> These women if employed worked in factories or stores. The families at that time did not emphasize on education of their children and lived in a social cocoon, whereby they could survive in the foreign land without

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<sup>66</sup> Anwar, M. 1979, *The Myth of the Return*, Heineman Educational Books, 1979

<sup>67</sup> Bachu, P. 1986, *Twice Migrants*, Tavistock, London

<sup>68</sup> Ballard R. and C. Ballard, "The Sikhs", in *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, ed. J.L. Watson, Basil Blackwell, London.

<sup>69</sup> Ballard, Roger, "Migration and Kinship: the differential effect of marriage rules on the processes of Punjabi migration to Britain", in Colin Clarke, Peach and Vertovec edited *South Asians Overseas*, Cambridge University Press,, 1990, 219-249

interaction with the white natives. The migrants prior to 1980's confirmed earlier studies which emphasized "extensive research shows that individuals with similar cultural origins tend to cluster together and thus become residentially segregated from the rest of the society..... it allows people with similar values to maintain their group norms to preserve a sense of ethnic identity and to feel a familiar social network" (Anwar, 1979:11)<sup>70</sup>.

From the point of assimilation also women migrants prior to 1980s have shown neither cultural nor structural assimilation with the host society<sup>71</sup>. For their day-to-day shopping they depended on their local retailers than the white shopkeepers. Their children studied in state run schools where they were subject to lot of racism and thus were not really interested in studying. Children were taken out of school once they acquired necessary skills to see them through their ascribed roles i.e. for boys, which meant taking over the business of their fathers and for girls to be married and look after their families. It was also found that many families were apprehensive of sending their children to school because of the fear that they will be contaminated by the English and would learn sexual openness from British.

However, even before 80s those families, which belonged to urban areas of their countries of origin and belonged to middle or upper middle class, had a different perspective.

*"When we came here, we had to struggle and realized that if our children wanted to lead struggle less life here, they have to get good education. Education was the only key to success."*

((Asha Handa, Indian Homemaker, Hindu, 50 and over)

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70 Anwar, op.cit. p.11

71 M.M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American life*, New York, 1964.

Some of the women expressed concern over lack of education among the South Asian communities especially Muslims. According to these women, by not educating the children, these communities have followed the white.

*“The British have no value for education, because education is not directly linked with employment, the same is being followed by South Asian Community. We have always prided ourselves of good knowledge base. The role models of our children back home are people of substance who have high moral values, high social feeling and high education, here the role models are pop singers, their girls want to be like Maddona, Britney Spears, you see, they get things easy in life, which has made them vain, but unfortunately, our children are following them, we are also not educating our children, which is bad.”*

(Mamuna, Pakistani, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)

Significant findings emerged on analyzing the responses of women who migrated after 1980's .

- Almost all the Indian women who have migrated after 1980s come from major cities including metropolitan cities and are either professionals or have higher qualifications, while very few of those coming from Bangladesh and Pakistan show similar educational background. Mostly Indians speak good English while the same is not the case with women of other countries. This can be due to the fact that in Urban India English is introduced at the school level and all private schools teach through English medium and as most of the Indian women are from urban areas they have good command over English language.
- Another significant feature that emerged is that most of the Indian families send their children to private schools as compared to Pakistani and Bangladeshi families.
- In most cases where the mothers are themselves professionals or have higher education they place greater emphasis on education of their children.
- Families in employment rather than business place greater emphasis on education.

However, almost all women expressed their desire to educate their children, as they thought it will help them in their life in terms of better life chances especially women who are not able to speak English, see school and interaction with whites as the only way their children can pick up the language, which they feel would open the gates of opportunities for them. The findings are supported by work of other researchers<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> Modood, Tariq, et.al., op.cit., p.14

## **Children- Upbringing, Dreams and Relationship**

During interaction with south Asian women, a number of issues were raised regarding their role as mothers in bringing up their children, their relationship with their children and any dichotomy that they feel in their value system and that of their children.

In south Asian countries, motherhood is considered as epitome of womanhood and a mother is accorded a very high status. Children are her biggest assets as her position in the family and community is linked with the number of children she is able to bear and especially the number of sons. A mother is held directly responsible for the upbringing of her children and if they grow up to be well behaved and good human being that is considered as an achievement of the mother. South Asian literature is replete with stories of influence of mother on children.

The South Asian women in Britain expressed mixed responses about the upbringing and relation with their children. Many of the women felt that their own upbringing was much better in terms of values, interaction and support than that of their children.

*“ Yes, there is a great deal of difference, we had real fun with our cousins, aunts and uncles, there was much more freedom, while our children are living a closed life, with too many restrictions, because we are not sure of the society outside our homes.”*

*(Rajinder Kaur Bedi , Indian Business Woman, Sikh, 40 to 49 years.)*

*“ Our children have better equipped homes, which are full of comfort equipments, but ask their hearts how lonely they are, they have no one to share their achievements, failures, pains and sorrows. We are closed knit not because of choice but because of necessity.”*

*(Nadia Parveen, Pakistani, Housewife, Muslim, 40 to 49 yrs.)*

## **Values and Upbringing**

Apart from few, most of the women felt that their children had a value system quite different from their own as a result of being brought up in a different society. They emphasized on the fact that their children were very lonely as they had less interaction with other children who shared their own social –cultural beliefs.

*“We had a social life which our children here I think miss out, there is a difference between our children and the English and though being polite, one can feel it, so our children have to be stronger in order to cope with these feelings.”*

*( Gargi Bhattacharya, Indian, software professional, Hindu, 30 to 39 years)*

Many mothers expressed that there is a great deal of influence of other cultures on their children and because of lack of extended family and kinship ties, they have to be encouraging and supportive towards their children.

*“ To a great extent, even though at home we are as much Indian as one could possibly be but still they are outside the house for a very long duration with English friends and teachers, so much influence comes from there though we teach them our culture, moral and religious values and principles and also they see how we behave our parents how we speak to them and treat them and also with other family members so hopefully that will influence them. But yes the outside influence is there. You can not restrict them to the house and they have become very focused and strong headed, very clear in their views, if they are not very happy with something they will be direct about it. They are not like us maybe we are old fashioned with different value system, maybe.....”*

*(Imrana, Indian, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs)*

Many expressed concern about their inability to inculcate Indian values in their children.

*“We are trying our level best to bring up our children in an Indian way, but they are exposed to varied cultures outside the home, which I think are strengthening their personalities. We were brought up in a society of poverty but they are in a society of plenty, so differences are bound to be there. These differences pose a dilemma for them; we have to constantly tell them to differentiate between right and wrong.”*

*(Nikhila, Indian, doctor, Hindu, 40 to 49 years.)*

By virtue of being their children’s only support in the host country, most of them shared open and friendly relationship with their children compared to their own relationships with their parents.

*“I am more open on many issues, here every issue is discussed, no issue is taboo, I remember I could never speak openly with my mother and till now I cannot speak to my father. They do not see as someone to be feared but as their friends, philosopher and guide. You see we were very protected and grew up according to the dictums of the society, but here our children are exposed to too many things which are not conducive to their age.”*

*(Kavita, Indian, homemaker, Hindu, 30 to 39 years)*

*“Because of us being here, we encourage them to talk to us on issues which are bothering them; we have made it a ritual to talk to them daily about their school, their friends, their activities etc. See, here a plumber might earn more than a professional but we do not want our children to do manual work. We uprooted ourselves, are struggling so that our children enjoy the positive things of this society. So we have to teach them that it is not the amount of money that you earn but how you earn it, which is more important.”*

*(Shabana, Pakistani, Doctor, Muslim, 30 to 39 years.)*

Social pressures and norms govern south Asian societies more, while British society values individual rights and dignity. Most of the women who were interviewed shared the view that they see their children more as individuals who have a right to express their views freely, take a stand different from their parents and take decisions on their own. They also felt that they had to adapt themselves to this paternal role more out of necessity than out of choice, because they feel that if they do not give freedom to their children, they will seek external support mainly from peer group and might end with identity crises and choosing wrong path in life.

### **Tensions/ Concerns about children**

Most of the respondents felt that for their children, life outside their respective homes is very tough; they have to be on guard all the time as to what they speak, how they behave to be acceptable to their English counterparts. They carry a lot of burden of proving themselves the best or at least better than others in order to survive. The differences are not made apparent but they are there and the children have to be really strong to cope with these differences.

Many of them expressed concern over “acceptable behavior” because the behavior that is quite normal in Britain especially expression of physical intimacy is not acceptable in South Asian region. In most South Asian cultures a wife cannot even talk to her husband in front of the elders of the family.

*“it is very difficult to be an Asian mother here, in our societies, sex is not so open so there is less awareness among children, one can say that the instinct is not so dominant as there is pressure of parent’s approval but here everything is permitted so you are more scared about the conduct of your children. One therefore, tends to follow them like a shadow, as there is no other way you can control them”*

*(Fazia Minhas, Bangladeshi, Employed, Muslim, 40 to 49 years. )*

Most of the women were anxious about the freedom given to adolescents in Britain with members of opposite sex, which is not so prevalent in their respective countries and fear that their children might end up crossing boundaries under pressure for conformity with peer group.

*“we are scared, that our children might end up in trouble, you know our daughters getting pregnant, getting into live in relationships, bringing boys/ girls home and sleeping with them, you see in our society we are not so open, sex is a hush hush subject, but here they are so open, and our children are unable to decide what is acceptable and unacceptable, we can’t blame them, but we are tense especially about our daughters”*

*(Imrana, Indian, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs)*

Many women expressed their own confusion as to how to bring their children.

*“Sometimes we ourselves are confused as to how much freedom be permitted, how much open we should be with our children, can we be their friends, or would there always be a cultural difference between us. And when we are confused what confidence can they instill in us, I do not know at times I just find myself overstressed, because I can not reason with my children”.*

*(Nadia Parveen, Pakistani, Housewife, Muslim, 40 to 49 yrs.)*

The respondents also expressed confusion among children about their identities with respect to their nation, religion.

*“My children were initially very confused as to where they belonged, what was their religion, why they were not white, why were they different from other children in school”*

*(Rasheeda, Bangladeshi, homemaker, Muslim, 50 and over)*

*“ Things are very difficult here for the children, they are not very sure about their backgrounds, sometimes they face racist comments, they are not sure of their religion,*

*they hear snide remarks about their country, and we are their only support system, we have to make them strong enough to survive. Sometimes all this seems very harsh and one wants to run away.”*

*(Rajinder Kaur Bedi , Indian Business Woman, Sikh, 40 to 49 years.)*

This confusion or exposure to varied cultures according to some helps their children to be stronger and more accepting and tolerant.

However, with respect to second generation, the research showed that after many decades in Britain, the older generation was still rooted in values and cultural norms of their home lands and tried their best to ensure that their children also followed them. This was reflected in their clothing, language, social interactions and even marriage of their children. The study revealed that the families that migrated in 60s had married their children in the same communities. However families who had migrated in 1990s and especially where the women were below 45 years of age were more in transitory phase and were trying to modify their cultural norms. They were more open to their children adopting the ways of life of British and were open to their children marrying outside their south Asian communities. The second generations of these immigrants are rapidly integrating into the British Dominant culture. However, there were still some young families that were confronting intergenerational tensions because the older generation was still rooted in values and norms of the homeland and imposed restrictions on their children thus leading to conflict. The findings are similar to those made by Mitchell<sup>73</sup> about Canadian immigrants.

In conclusion, one can say that most of the south Asian women felt that their children had much better quality of life in economic terms; they also felt that they do not have to worry about their futures here as the society respect hard workers and recognizes potential. However they expressed concern about lack of social interaction especially

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<sup>73</sup> Mitchell as cited by Dorlet, Marie in her proposal “Gender and Socialization in Canadian Immigrant Families: The Coping Strategies of First and Second Generations” for *The seventh international conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 3-6,2007

with people of their own socio-cultural background. Many of them felt that their children were cut off from their cultural heritage and family support. They also felt that by virtue of being brought up in Britain they are more vocal about their views and aware about their rights. Grave concern was expressed about the freedom of mixing freely with members of opposite sex and acceptance of sexual behavior.

Almost all of the respondents agreed that in their countries, children would not have been given so much freedom and would have been brought up by being told what to do, what is expected from them and they would have just followed it. Another interesting observation is that many women felt that they would not have been free to bring their children the way they wanted to in their respective countries, because there would have been interference from the families, social obligations and community roles that they would have been expected to perform. Here they were available exclusively for their children. Professional women also felt that they have been able to strike a balance between family and work due to choice of working hours, which has given them more control over their lives, something they would not have been able to do in their countries.

## Views on Marriage

All the respondents (except one) for this study were married, two were divorced (one sikh and one muslim) two were widowed (one hindu and one muslim) and one was divorced and had remarried. Except three all the others had come to Britain after marriage, while three had got married after coming to Britain. All the women were married within south Asian community and within religious boundaries. All of them had arranged marriages whereby their families had chosen their husbands. One of them was forced to marry a boy of her own religion and birth place and she was quite bitter about it and had eventually sought a divorce.

One thus finds that “arranged marriages” i.e. marriages fixed by the families are prevalent in the south Asian region cutting across national boundaries. However, the concept of arranged marriages has changed showing generational differences. Older women had no say in their marriages and had not seen their husbands before the marriage; however younger women were fully involved in choosing their life partners with their parents. This was true for both Indian and Pakistani women; however Bangladeshi women reported that they had little say in their marriage. As more Indian and Pakistani women from younger age group were professionals, the findings are in line with Bhopal’s<sup>74</sup> work.

Regarding marriage of their children, older women already had married children. Majority of the marriages were arranged either by them or by their relatives. Most of the brides/grooms were from back home. As this generation felt still rooted with their country of origin for them, arranged marriages were the means of continuity between generations.

*“I have got my son married from a girl from India, we all went to India for the marriage, see this way they will have roots back home. Some reason to go back”*

*(Asha Handa, Indian Homemaker, Hindu, 50 and over)*

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<sup>74</sup> Bhopal, K, 1997, Gender, ‘Race’ and Patriarchy: a study of South Asian women, Aldershot : Ashgate.

A remarkable difference was found among women in the age group 25-45 especially from Indian origin; they were more open about their children's marriages and felt that they would have little say in the marriages of their children and would accept decision made by their children.

*"I want my children to marry someone they love and respect, the question of nationality and religion is secondary and my approval inconsequential"*

*(Leena Karnik, Indian, Professional, Hindu, 40-49 yrs)*

However, some of them openly expressed that they would be happy if their children choose a person from their own ethnic/cultural background.

*"Though, I know that we will have no say in our children's marriages but still it would be very difficult for me to accept a person from different nation, culture and religion"*

*(Rajinder Kaur Bedi , Indian Business Woman, Sikh, 40 to 49 years.)*

Further probing, reflected their apprehensions about the marriage system in western cultures, which, they felt had more of an "individual" orientation than the marriages in south Asia which were more "family" oriented.

*"Here you marry an "individual", while there you marry a "family"*

*( Gargi Bhattacharya, Indian, software professional, Hindu, 30 to 39 years)*

Majority of women from Pakistan wanted their children to marry within their own religious community and were even willing to send them back home. This feeling existed among women irrespective of their age, income and education.

*"Frankly, I would want my children to marry within my religious community, preferably a Pakistani but I am open to any Asian"*

*(Rahila, Pakistani, own Business, Muslim, 30 to 39 years)*

*“Once my children are 10 yrs. Old, we will send them to Pakistan, where they will study and get married”*

*(Nadia Parveen, Pakistani, Housewife, Muslim, 40 to 49 yrs.)*

Some women have had disagreements with their children on the issue of marriage, and were apprehensive about their children’s marriages.

*“My son does not want to marry a girl from our community because he feels that they are backward in their outlook and are not able to fit well in the British society. He is not even willing to marry a British born girl from our community. I think he will marry a white girl, and move out. That is what I think”.*

*(Tripti, Indian, helps in family business, Hindu, 50 and over)*

The study revealed that most women wanted their sons to marry a girl of their choice while they were more willing to accept their daughters marrying outside the community. This was because the son is supposed to carry forward the family customs and traditions and act as a link between future generations and the ancestors. So if they marry a girl from outside the community, they would move away from the family. On the other hand, girls leave the family of origin and become part of the other family and lineage so it did not matter who they married.

## **Relationship with the Husband**

With respect to their relationship with their husbands, there was significant difference in the responses of the women on the basis of education, income level and country of origin. Women with only school education and belonging to lower economic strata from Pakistan and Bangladesh felt that their relationship with their husbands has not changed much from what it was back home.

*“In Pakistan, a wife has a very subdued role, with no authority over anything. In that there is not much change”*

*(Razia Khaman, Pakistan, Homemaker Muslim, 40-49yrs )*

*“I was taught that husbands are superior and one should always keep them happy, listen to them and literally obey them, wife beating is quite acceptable. Here also I have to seek his permission before doing anything. Because of shortage of money, however he allowed me to work, and that is my route to little freedom. One thing which I liked here is that my husband is scared of beating me because of the fear of police. So he does not beat me which he used to literally do everyday back home”*

*(Parveen, Bangladesh, employed, Muslim, 30-39 yrs.,)*

However, highly qualified women of these countries felt that their relationships with their husbands were more or less on equal footing and were not restricted by religious and cultural norms. They were consulted by their husbands in all decision making and had equal say in upbringing of their children. They were free to take their own decisions and were respected by their husbands. Their husbands helped them in household chores and also with children.

Women from Indian families irrespective of their educational and income background reported that they shared a friendly relationship with their husbands on more or less equal footing and were more understanding towards each other. Some of them felt that there was a role reversal for their husbands.

*“Here, he does cooking, helps me in the household chores unlike typical Indian male. Every decision is taken after a lot of deliberations as it affects only us and nobody else. We are the only support for each other and that has definitely affected our relationship.”*

*(Shabnam, Pakistani, economically active full time student, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)*

### **Cultural and Religious Beliefs**

The respondents were asked if the movement to Britain have changed their religious and cultural beliefs. Almost all respondents felt that there was no change in their religious beliefs as a result of migration to Britain. On the other hand they felt that now they were more tolerant of other religions and have started appreciating the best virtues of their own religion.

*“No, we are able to follow our religion and really did not need to change anything.”*

*(Rajinder Kaur Bedi , Indian Business Woman, Sikh, 40 to 49 years.)*

*“ Not really my religious beliefs have not changed, in fact I have become more tolerant of other religions and have learnt to appreciate what is best in my religion.”*

*(Shabana, Pakistani, Doctor, Muslim, 30 to 39 years.)*

Some felt that their religious beliefs have helped them to adjust in the new environment.

*“It has provided me the support and the strength to make over the transition in my life.”*

*(Rahila, Pakistani, own Business, Muslim, 30 to 39 years)*

However where the rituals and cultural practices were concerned, most women felt that they were constrained by their environment.

*“ we are Bengalis and perform the puja in the morning and the evening, observe fasts and cook elaborate meals, which one has to let go off in order to live here. We are not*

*able to celebrate our festivals as the way we would have done back home. Festivals come and go and at times we do not feel it also.”*

*( Gargi Bhattacharya, Indian, software professional, Hindu, 30 to 39 years)*

*“At times of festivals you feel very lonely, children who are born here would never know the importance of our festivals. You see we explain a festival to them but it is not like living it. That is one aspect which hurts you somewhere”*

*(Nadia Parveen, Pakistani, Housewife, 40 to 49 yrs.)*

*“you want to go to your place of worship, you have to travel far and not whenever you feel like, in this way you are constrained. Second we burn incense during our puja but here with smoke, fire alarm may get activated and that is very embarrassing, I tell you it is very embarrassing”*

*(Leena Karnik, Indian, Professional, Hindu, 40-49 yrs)*

*“I want to teach my children Indian classical music but there are no facilities here, so I am compromising on that desire”*

*(Mamuna, Pakistani, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)*

*“I have learnt not to express my views openly after Salman Rushdie episode”*

*(Imrana, Indian, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs)*

Some of the women expressed dilemma in teaching their children that they were part and parcel of British life and on the other hand celebrating their festivals alone or with only Asian community.

*“the difference between us and the British becomes more apparent during Diwali because then only the Asian families get together and join in the festivities and that is also very subdued. I want to celebrate Holi here which I miss very much but what to do one has to make sacrifices in life”*

*(Kavita, Indian, homemaker, Hindu, 30 to 39 years)*

## **Relationship with family members back home**

Asian societies are considered to be family and community oriented whereby importance is given more to familial and kin roles. In order to learn how migrated women related with their families they were asked about their relationship with family members back home, their visits to their country and the kind of support that they had been able to provide to their family members.

The findings were very interesting and reflected the conflict in traditional familial relationships and the new “rational and logical” relationships that are more self-centered and less family oriented.

Majority of women said that they shared a close relationship with their family members and felt that heart grows fonder with distance. However in the same vein, they felt that in thinking or outlook they were poles apart. They felt that their siblings had very narrow horizons, while because of their own exposure and with more time to introspect they had a wider world view. They also felt that this closeness is mostly because of the distance as they have seen a lot of conflict among siblings back home.

*“I am here away from everybody that is why all of them feel that it is safe to express their true feelings to me, as I will not take advantage of their position. You see there is family politics, this one back bites this one and that one, you know how it is but because they know that I will not be asking them for gifts, money they are very affectionate towards me and my children.”*

*(Pooja, Indian IT professional, Hindu, 20 to 29 years)*

When asked about the help to family members most women felt that apart from financial help they cannot help them in any other way.

*“What can we do from here, when somebody is sick requires emotional support all that we can send is money, that is our way of getting rid of our guilt of not doing anything for our parents. When we go we take gifts, spend money freely and that makes everyone happy. We think we have done our duty and that is that”*

*(Nikhila, Indian, doctor, Hindu, 40 to 49 years.)*

Some women however felt that they were only respected and loved because of the supposed wealth that they have earned in Britain.

*“when we go home we are treated like kings and Queens, everybody looks for gifts and presents from us and if they are not forthcoming the attitude and behavior of people change”*

*(Fazia Minhas, Bangladeshi, Employed, Muslim, 40 to 49 years. )*

Initially frequent visits were made to the homeland, but then visits became irregular and purpose oriented, limited to marriages, deaths and other life cycle ceremonies/rituals.

*“ till the time my parents were alive I used to visit regularly as you felt you are going home but now you think twice before going as you are dependent on your sisters –in-law and their convenience. It’s not the same”*

*(Rajinder Kaur Bedi , Indian Business Woman, Sikh, 40 to 49 years.)*

*“Earlier I made frequent visits then children started going to school, then there holidays had to be considered and July, August are very hot. Now children do not want to go they find life very different there and are not able to adjust.”*

*(Rahila, Pakistani, own Business, Muslim, 30 to 39 years)*

One interesting fact that emerged after discussions on helping their families back home, the researcher found that the older generation made infrequent visits to their families but sent money regularly either through post or through someone traveling to their native place, they spent large amount of money on weddings in their families and for buying land and construction of houses. They would financially help not only their own siblings and parents but also other members of joint family. The family reported here was the husband’s family as in South Asia especially India parents do not accept

money from a married daughter. The women gave gifts to their parents and provided financial help to their families of origin only in case of emergencies.

Majority of younger migrants have come from nuclear families and are not helping their families with money but have invited them to UK. They have also helped their family members to visit other countries in Europe. Thus the current tourist boom of South Asians to Europe can also be attributed to presence of a family member in Britain along with higher economic growth. These women have also reported that in fact they are dependent on help from their families without which their life would have been very difficult in Britain.

This changing trend may be because one finds that younger migrants have come from urban areas and belong to middle and upper-middle class families. As their families are well-to-do they are not looking for financial support from their daughters. As most of these women are professionals and employed they seek help from their parents and parents-in-law to take care of their children as the child care facilities in Britain are very expensive and by calling their parents they feel that their children will get a chance to learn about their culture and know their grand parents.

## **Employment- Equal Opportunity**

Women from South Asian countries cutting across religious, ethnic, age and educational differences placed great importance to financial security. They considered freedom to decide and financial independence as the main positive outcomes to their stay in Britain.

As most of the women who migrated in 80s and 90s have higher qualifications they are in paid employment. They feel that the employment market is very friendly and if you had proper permits it was not difficult to get jobs. Many professionals were impressed with the working conditions and the attitude towards work.

*“The working environment is much better here. You do not have somebody breathing down your neck. You are held responsible for your work and derive satisfaction from it. When you work, you only work and once you are out of your workplace you are totally available to your family.”*

*(Nikhila, Indian, doctor, Hindu, 40 to 49 years.)*

Many women appreciated the fact that you could choose your time of work according to your needs, this flexibility helped women to strike a balance between work and family.

*“Here, if you are looking for work, you will find it to suit your personal needs. If I want to work only 3 days in a week, I will get work for only 3 days that gives you flexibility. Back home, you could not do that. You either work full time or not at all.”*

*(Shabana, Pakistani, Doctor, Muslim, 30 to 39 years.)*

Many women left work to take care of their children and joined back when children started going to school.

*“ I was working when my son was born. Initially for 1 year my parents came here and took care of my son, but then there was a problem and I had to leave my job to look after my son. When he started going to school, I picked up a job, which allows me to be able to pick him up and come back home with him.”*

*(Dalbir, Indian, working in an NGO, Sikh, 50 and over.)*

Thus we find that respondents had positive opinion about employment situation in Britain and appreciated the system that allows women to fulfill their personal aspirations as well as look after their parental and domestic role.

### **Problems related to Employment**

Although majority of women appreciated the flexibility of employment system, yet they felt that there were certain problems related to employment. The major one was to strike a balance between work, parental responsibility and domestic chores.

Many women felt that if they give more time to their jobs it will be unfair on their children as their children were more vulnerable without any other emotional support. Another problem was related to household chores that really posed as a source of tension. Even though their husbands helped many women in household work, still there were lots to be done and many felt bad putting so much workload on their husbands.

*“If I have to work, everybody in my house will pay a price, my children will have to learn to be more independent, and my husband will also have to do house work which will put extra burden on him. So in interest of all it is better that I do not work”*

*(Nadia Parveen, Pakistani, Housewife, 40 to 49 yrs.)*

Another major constraint according to them was the attitude of people. They felt that there was a subtle racism that existed. People at the outset were very polite and polished but in one way or the other they will not treat you as their equal. Professionals who opined that higher positions were seldom given to Asians and the suggestions made by them at work place were hardly given any importance especially felt in this manner.

*“Everything is OK, till you do not consider yourself at par with them, once you start showing that you are their equal, things become difficult”*

*(Pooja, Indian IT professional, Hindu, 20 to 29 years)*

*“You have to be always on the guard, one step ahead of others, prove that you are worthy to be treated as equal. It is very taxing, mentally and emotionally. But this is the only way to survive.”*

*(Mamuna, Pakistani, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)*

As women who migrated in 60s and 70s were not highly qualified and had little fluency in English they were happy with whatever position they got in the employment market. The recent migrants to Britain are highly qualified women with fluency in English and they question the differential treatment that they get at their workplace.

*“If you are English, and you do something wrong, it does not matter but you as an outsider should be extra cautious, your performance, behavior and conduct are under constant scrutiny*

*(Rahila, Pakistani, own Business, Muslim, 30 to 39 years)”*

Some women also felt that there were separate set of standards set by the society one for themselves and another for outsiders (read migrants). If an English woman wants to stay at home and take care of her children, it is her freedom of choice but if an Asian woman wants to do that it is oppression as it is a decision forced on her.

Thus, one finds that although Asian women appreciated the flexible options that the employment market offers them, they feel constrained due to many socio-cultural and personal factors.

## **Role, Status, life choices and Identity**

To an enquiry related to their role, status, life choices women expressed very different views across religious, educational and national boundaries.

Educated women from urban areas of all the South Asian countries felt that their role has widened which has affected their status in a positive way. They felt that back home they would not have been consulted in many things and decisions would have been diluted by opinion of others. Here, their role in decision making is much higher and status is also on equal footing with their male counterparts.

*“I am more in control of my life and family. I am able to plan my life the way I want to with less social demands on me. I am an equal partner and lead a very organized and disciplined life. In my country you really have no say in anything there is much interference from outside”*

*(Nikhila, Indian, doctor, Hindu, 40 to 49 years.)*

*“I come from an educated and well to do family and as such women are not as deprived as one would think of. But yes here I am totally equal to my husband and has taken decisions which in India my elders would have taken. So my role here is very different than it would have been in my country.”*

*(Asha Handa, Indian Homemaker, Hindu, 50 and over)*

*In my country, I would have led a very protected life, and would not have been consulted in many things, my children would also have had cousins, uncles and aunts to share their experiences with. Here, we have only each other, with respect to that you have a very important role and better status within the family.*

*(Rajinder Kaur Bedi , Indian Business Woman, Sikh, 40 to 49 years.)*

*“In my country, I would have continued life as I was doing without ever realizing my inner potential and strength. Here,I have learnt to survive in all diversities.”*

*(Kavita, Indian, homemaker, Hindu, 30 to 39 years)*

However, Indian women with less qualification felt that within the family there was not much change in their roles and status except that they got little help in household chores from their husbands.

*“This society gives a lot of rights and privileges to women, which is in a way helpful there are laws protecting women but where the family is concerned I do not see my role or status has changed, women adopt to traditional roles, the only difference is that they get some help from their husbands.”*

*(Mamuna, Pakistani, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)*

*“From the societal point of view, I am an independent woman and do things myself, which is not so common in our society. In my family also, I have much more say in the running of the family and take all the decisions for my children”*

*(Fazia Minhas, Bangladeshi, Employed, Muslim, 40 to 49 years. )*

Less educated women especially from Pakistan felt that although their role and status within the four walls of the household had not changed as they were still expected to obey their husbands and not to even set foot out of the house without their consent. However, due to financial constraints their husbands had to allow them to go out and earn. This gave them little freedom as they would go shopping or to movies with their female friends. This however was restricted during working hours only and they were expected to be at home by a particular time. These women also expressed that their husbands were very apprehensive of hitting them due to fear of the law. Beating was quite common back home but here it has reduced considerably.

*“Change, no there is any change you are expected to treat your husband with reverence and with blind obedience. Women can never be equal, but yes, necessity has made them to allow us to work, with that there is little freedom you can eat and roam around with your friends. Sometimes we make extra money and do not tell our husbands, we go out to movie or do something else for enjoyment. One thing has changed you see in*

*Pakistan, wife beating is very common but here he feels scared to beat me because of the law that is such a relief”*

*(Nadia Parveen, Pakistani, Housewife, 40 to 49 yrs.)*

The study revealed that younger professional women felt that their role has widened as at times they have to take decisions without anybody’s advice and support and that has given them more confidence in their own abilities and made them feel empowered and on equal footing with their husbands. These may be because older women generally lived in the joint family which did not allow them the freedom enjoyed by younger women who were living in nuclear family.

With regard to life choices there was more or less unanimous feeling among women that their life opportunities had improved as a result of migration to Britain. Most of them expressed that family system prevalent in their countries inhibits individual growth and would have hampered their own personal growth as well as that of their children.

*“life would have been very different, housing is a big issue, if you are in the same city as your in-laws you cannot set up an independent life, it is just not possible. There you cannot devote much attention to your children, can’t do anything separately for them because you have to think of the entire family, children are deprived. Family politics and pressure comes between your every relationship.”*

*(Nikhila, Indian, doctor, Hindu, 40 to 49 years.)*

*“yes, definitely, there I would have been restricted by social and community taboos, and would not have been able to do my own work”*

*(Rahila, Pakistani, own Business, Muslim, 30 to 39 years)*

*“In Punjab women enjoy higher status than in other parts of the country. Women everywhere have to work hard, but with technological advancement, there life has become a shade easier, but still mostly, they enjoy prestige within their socially defined roles. A woman who breaks away from these roles is not looked at with respect. So I think there I would have also been following the same age old roles and led a stifling life”*

*(Dalbir, Indian, working in an NGO, Sikh, 50 and over.)*

We find that while for some life choices were interpreted as a chance to lead their life as they wanted for some it reflected better quality of life.

*“what I have seen and heard life is difficult there, there is uncertainty about things that we here take as granted. You have to worry about electricity, water, traveling, job, education almost everything, here things are organized and much easier, and there is less population, less tension and better quality of life”.*

*(Safiya, owns business, Bangladeshi, 20 to 29 yrs )*

While some women felt that they were facing more constraints than choices in Britain than they would have in their respective countries.

*“Life here is very lonely; you have no one to rely on. There I would have emotional, psychological, familial and financial support. I would not have to wonder about childcare, which is going to look after my children during holidays. Here my husband and I have not been able to go out for movie or shopping as there is no one to look after the children. So you see there are both positives and negatives to things.”*

*(Shabnam, Pakistani, economically active full time student, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)*

*“I want my children to learn art, music and classical dance forms, but where do I send them. This place has kept them away from their heritage.”*

*(Mamuna, Pakistani, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)*

Majority of migrated women felt that their roles are defined by the situational necessity and shows the adaptive nature of human beings. One modifies oneself to fit into the situation one is in. It is much like “Darwin’s theory of Natural Selection” you either adapt or perish. Migrant women had to modify their roles in order to survive, if they had continued following their husbands and families and looked upon them for support and guidance, life would have been very difficult here. As most of the women were first

generation migrants they felt more affinity towards their home countries and expressed a great degree of identification with their respective countries. Many said that from exterior they are British but their hearts still belonged to their motherland.

### ***Women in South Asia and Britain***

As there are significant differences between Britain and South Asian countries in terms of economic growth, family system and socio-cultural values, one can assume that the status of women would be quite different among the two societies. In order to find out if indeed there was a difference in the perceived status of women, the migrated south Asian women were asked to give their comments on the same. The responses received are contrary to the assumption made.

Majority of south Asian women felt that though English women enjoyed better status in society than their south Asian counterparts yet it was not an equal status as English men. Women argued that employment and education are areas where the differences are glaring. They also felt that women were not treated at par with men in employment.

*“At the outset, it looks like that, but if you see the statistical figures, you find that there are not many women at higher positions. Even when they occupy same position, they are paid less on some pretext or the other and all the important decisions are taken by them.”*

*(Anjali, Indian, Employed, Hindu, 30-39 yrs.)*

*“ No, really there is no difference in the status of women here and in Pakistan. Women there are still following traditional roles, which all culminate in pleasing men. They are only seen as teachers and mothers. Here though at the outset there seems equality of sexes but in reality women are more vulnerable than men and are following the traditional roles, whatever difference in status is there is because of their economic independence and the power of getting employment, no matter of what nature the job is but they get it as and when they want. An English woman can marry an Asian Man but for an Asian woman to be accepted in an English family is very difficult”*

*(Mamuna, Pakistani, employed, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)*

*“Maybe there are no differences at the outset, but I find that women here face as much discrimination as women elsewhere. The difference is in the system; here system vests them with more power. English women are also beaten up at homes, but the legal system helps them. How many English women are able to reach top positions in their careers? In family the sole responsibility for bringing up children vests with the mother, otherwise why should there be an allowance for unwed mothers.”*

*(Kavita, Indian, homemaker, Hindu, 30 to 39 years)*

*“This society does not have value for education especially women’s education. There are very few women managers and professionals in Britain”*

*(Shabana, Pakistani, Doctor, Muslim, 30 to 39 years.)*

While for many, the English women had more disadvantageous position than women in South Asian countries.

*“Women here are much freer and make their own decisions, but they also carry the burden and stress of these decisions. You see, teenage pregnancies, walk-outs and broken marriages all have negative impact on women, these women bear the burden of bringing up their children and running their houses themselves. There is social security, financial support from state but what about emotional support. While back home as these things are not accepted, women do not indulge in all these and if a marriage breaks down there is family intervention and support, which is lacking here, so I feel women here are very lonely.”*

*(Shabnam, Pakistani, economically active full time student, Muslim, 30 to 39 yrs.)*

*“Women everywhere have harder life than men, this independence and equality has been a heavy burden on women. Women are bound by their children and that is a limiting factor in their lives.”*

*(Fazia Minhas, Bangladeshi, Employed, Muslim, 40 to 49 years.)*

Many women, however, felt to the contrary, according to them there was a significant difference in their status and those of British women.

*“Here women are respected more, their time is valued more, and they can juggle their careers and are allowed to express their desires and wishes, a thing which is not realized in India, The society supports women. They can work at their own pace, can rectify their career paths and take a break for looking after their children and can go back to work”*

*(Nikhila, Indian, doctor, Hindu, 40 to 49 years.)*

*“They enjoy more privileges in life like equality and dignity than women in my country”*

*(Rahila, Pakistani, own Business, Muslim, 30 to 39 years)*

*“here, women enjoy a higher status, they have more control over their lives and enjoy more freedom to move around and deciding for themselves”*

*(Nadia Parveen, Pakistani, Housewife, Muslim, 40 to 49 yrs.)*

Thus, we find that migrant women do not feel that the status of women is equal to that of men in Britain and whatever privileges women enjoy is because of the state support.

### Best Aspect /Worst Aspect of life in Britain

Some of the best aspects listed by migrant women about their life in Britain are:

- To be able to lead a better and fulfilling life,
- To learn to appreciate one's own family, culture and religion,
- To appreciate differences among people,
- To be in control of one's life
- Financial stability
- Learn to "mind one's own business"
- Discipline and Organized life.
- "Respect for Individual Ideas"
- Potential for Growth"
- "Dignity of Labor"

### Worst Aspects

- Loneliness and Lack of Family Support
- Materialistic Approach
- Lack of Emotional Support
- Individualistic and selfish Attitude
- Sexual openness
- Bitter cold winters

## CASE STUDY

To get a better insight into assimilation of South Asian women in British Society, in depth interviews were carried out with a-first generation migrant women from South Asia who had migrated at a very early age with her parents and a second-generation migrant women. One woman was 29 years old and had moved from Pakistan while other woman was in her teens, her parents had migrated from India before she was born.

### **Case I**

Nasreen has separated from her husband and has two children a 3-year-old daughter and a 5-year-old son. She is working in a retail showroom. She moved to Britain at the age of 12 with her parents. She clearly remembers her life in Pakistan, which according to her was very difficult. Her mother came from a Sikh family while her father was a Muslim. They married each other despite opposition from both the families. Nasreen remembers that they never visited their grandparents and were made fun of by their neighbors. She recalls that there was always tension in the house as her father would go and meet his family but she and her mother were not allowed inside the family house.

This constant tension and conflict according to her was the main reason for their movement to Britain. As a 12 year old, everything in Britain seemed so perfect to her, Houses were of the same kind and in a line, cars moved in a line and everything was so neat and clean. The move turned her life over she was required to remain indoors, go to a state school, learn English, do household work, take care of her two younger siblings, as both her parents had to go out to work, this coupled with problems of growing up, life seemed like hell to Nasreen.

Nasreen remembers that at school also she and her siblings were often the target of verbal abuse and would come home crying almost two-three times a week. They faced a lot of problems as children of Asian origin,

*“We always had to prove ourselves better than the whites, which means that we had to work real hard. One cannot question the whites, because they make you feel guilty, their entire attitude is “Hey, you should be grateful to be in this country, what more do you want “ we are victims of racism.”*

Nasreen also found it difficult to follow her cultural and religious beliefs. She was often called a “Paki” as she always covered her head. According to her *“Britons see Asians either as homogenous societies or as religious fanatics. They always assign negative attributes to Asians. If a white woman decides to stay at home for her children, it is her choice, but an Asian woman, she will be seen as suppressed by her husband and family. Their policies are themselves quite racist, whatever they do is right, while minority communities cannot question their policies. To divide localities on geographical or religious parameter is a conscious division by them.”*

She also felt that there were different yardsticks used by British society, one for themselves and one for others.

*“They have family problems, wife beating, increasing poverty, but no one talks about it but they have set up centers for Asian women especially Muslim Women why?”*

The negative shades of racism are but one aspect of the society that has many positive attributes. Nasreen acknowledges that her life as a woman is much better in Britain than it would have been in Pakistan. She is quite resentful of certain social restrictions imposed on women in her country of origin. Her own parents to win back their families, despite her opposition got her married to a Pakistani boy who later migrated to Britain. Her husband was brought up in an environment that imposes lot of restrictions on women in way of dressing and expression. She was used to expressing her ideas freely, dress up in certain manner and lead an independent life. All this was not acceptable to her husband, who abused her physically and mentally.

She did not get any support from her family and was alone in taking the decision of separating from her husband, which she feels was possible only because she was in Britain. In Pakistan, she would have been under a lot of familial and societal pressure and would have continued with her life and marriage. The social security and support that she gets for her children have helped her to keep them with her.

Nasreen also felt strongly about certain practices being followed in South Asian Societies.

*“In South Asian Societies, there is a lot of pompous and snobbish life, where we say that we have lot of support and affection for each other, but truly speaking, the disadvantaged and disabled are left in reality to fend for themselves, while here there is a lot of social security and support for them”.*

She felt that women are empowered in Britain because of the support that they get from the state and not because of the societal norms and practices. Marriage according to her is non-existent in Britain. There is no commitment in relationships, and that is why there is increasing teenage pregnancies, neither the parents nor the boyfriend are willing to take responsibility and the right to choose vests with the teenage girl. Many young girls see pregnancy as a way out from their parental homes and support from Government.

She also highlighted that the British society does not value higher education, as there is no direct link between education and employment, a plumber can earn more than a doctor, and the same is being followed by “South Asian community”.

Nasreen during her talk brought out the identification dilemma being felt by Asian women in Britain.

*“Asian women want to dress like, talk like and walk like English women but why, why do you look down upon your own roots, you are what you are, respect yourself or you would always be looked down by others.”*

## Case II

Reshma was born in 1985 in Birmingham. Her parents are from Hyderabad, India who migrated to Britain soon after their marriage. Her father works as accountant and mother works at a store. She is the first born of her parents followed by two other children. She is planning to go to university next year and is presently working at a restaurant. She has been to India on several occasions and remembers her grandparents, Uncles, Aunts and cousins fondly. However what she has seen and heard she finds the society as very closed society with overemphasis on family decisions and not on individual aspirations. She would not like to settle in India and thinks that in Britain women enjoy a lot of privileges. However, she opined that life was much different in London than in Birmingham.

*“ You find so much disparity between London and Birmingham, here it seems like mini India to me. The majority of people here are from South Asia and therefore there is great deal of influence of their countries. The markets are full of dresses, food items from India or Pakistan. When my grandparents had visited us they were amazed that everything from India was available here. We speak our mother tongue at home”*

She also expressed that though she enjoys more freedom than her cousins back in India but not as much freedom as English girls do. She expressed that she shared a complex relationship with her parents, as they wanted her to follow Indian way of life, which was not possible as she was exposed and brought up in a different environment.

*“My mother does not allow me to go for parties, I have no boyfriend. When I go out with my friends I have to be back home by 8.00 pm. I have only few English friends. My parents do not approve of them and feels that they will be bad influence on me. On the other hand my brother who is 17 yrs. old is allowed to stay out of the house till late in night. Sometimes I feel that all the restrictions are for me only.”*

She felt disturbed by the differential treatment given by her parents to her brother. It seemed to her as different parameters and rules within the family governed their life. She shared a close relationship with her mother, who was also the link between her Indian identity and British birth. Her mother has taught Indian cooking and expects her to follow unquestioningly what she is asked to do. Her mother has also taught her that a woman no matter how qualified has the sole responsibility of her family and children.

She expressed her dilemma as to her nationality and identity.

*“ I am a British Citizen with Asian origin does that make me equal to or less than other children born here. I consider myself equal to them but I face a lot of difficulty because at times I have been stopped by English Girls who told me that this is not my country. Instances like this are very scary and difficult to bear with where do we belong. I have learnt that as long as you are quite and keep to yourself keeping a low profile, you are OK as soon as you try to exert yourself you are made to realize that this is not your country and you are sharing with them the resources that were rightfully theirs alone.”*

However apart from instances of discrimination Reshma felt that there are many benefits that are enjoyed by being in this society. You can be yourself, wear what you want, do as you want till you are not impinging or disturbing others. Everybody minds his or her own business and are very courteous and polite. Reshma also praises the dignity of work and independent attitude that people have in Britain.

*“ here people teach their children to be independent not only in terms of work but to think and be responsible for their own actions. Parent here do not pull the children down and the state provide all support so that all young and old are taken care of.”*

Regarding Employment Reshma feels that if you are looking for work you will get it according to your need and ability. She remembers that her mother was working part

time when she and her siblings were small and shifted to full time employment in later years, which she feels would not have been possible in India.

When enquired about the relationship between her parents, she expressed that it was more or less dominated by her father, who took major decisions in the house and they all sought his consent for whatever they do. Her mother is more involved in the house and her father (except for dropping them to school) does not do much at home.

Her views on marriage are more or less in line with other girls of her age. She wants to marry a boy of her choice but would prefer a person from her own religious background. Though she feels that if her parents do not approve of her choice, it would be very difficult for her to go against their wishes. But she hopes that such a situation would not arise.

She plans to go to university and for that is saving money by working part time at shops, restaurants and doing some odd errands for neighbors. Reshma also expressed that in India people have a very biased view about British Society and feel that everybody is sexually liberated and very obscene in dressing. She however, found that her cousins in India wear more outrageous clothes, have boyfriends whom they meet without their parent's knowledge. Another thing, which she feels has been misconstrued, is the perfect family system in India. She has found that though everybody lives under the same roof there is more conflict than love. She considers that British society is much more tolerant and family oriented, where family is truly valued and not just for social reasons.

Reshma being a second generation migrant thus depicts the perfect dilemma of identity and assimilation in the society she is born in and the society she has roots in.

Conclusions that one can draw from the study:

- Language was one of the major factors that prevented assimilation of South Asian Women in British Society in 1960s and 1970s.
- Women who have migrated in 80s and 90s have better assimilated in British Society.
- Women who migrated in 60s and 70s did not attach much importance to their own and their children's education, as they did not see education leading to betterment of life. They were happy to work in factories or for their own business and felt that their children should pick up the essentials from school in order to follow their footsteps. School was seen as a threat to their own social and cultural values as it would expose children to the British way of life. These women spoke their native language and taught the same to their children. The women who migrated in 80s and 90s emphasized the importance of higher education for their children as they see education as a means to gain respect and better position in life. These women are sending their children to private schools, working hard with them so that British Society accepts them on equal footing. The children speak English at home and have limited exposure to their countries of origin.
- Many women left paid employment to take care of their children especially when they felt that the influence of British society was increasing on their children.
- Almost all the women have faced conflict in bringing up their children because of difference in cultures of their own countries and Britain.
- Most women felt that their children are enjoying more freedom of expression than they ever did but at the same time they felt that from emotional point of view their children are facing much tougher situations than they ever did.
- South Asian women did not feel that their religious or cultural beliefs have changed as a result of their migration

- Most women were of the opinion that their lives have become better as they do not have to worry about day to day struggle like transport, electricity, interference from family.
- Most women enjoyed freedom in making their own choices related to themselves and their children.
- Most women agreed that they shared an equal relationship with their husbands.
- Majority of women would like their children to marry a person from their own religion and country.
- South Asian women felt that although they enjoyed greater freedom in British Society yet they were not treated at par with the British and faced subtle discrimination especially while competing for higher positions.

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