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The Growth and Organization of the Muslim Community in Britain

by

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THE GROWTH AND ORGANIZATION OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN*

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Migration of Muslims to Britain

Settlements of Muslims can be found in all of Britain's major industrial cities and seaports. The earliest settlements date back to the middle of the 19th century and are located in such ports as Cardiff, Liverpool, Tyneside and London. But in more recent times, large industrial cities like Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Bradford and Nottingham and others have been attracting a rapidly increasing Muslim population, which is now in the region of 700,000 to 1 million. These migrations to Britain may be divided into three periods. The first is the period between 1850 and 1914, the second between the two World Wars and lastly, the period from 1950 to the present.

Migration between 1850-1914

The first group of Muslims to arrive in Britain were Arab seamen, mainly Adenis and Yemenis, and Indian seamen from Bengal, Gujarat, Punjab and Sind. Their life-style was adapted to the life of a seaport. They were frequently absent and largely isolated, for their lives were governed by the rhythm of a maritime community. They embarked on a British ship in their home port and disembarked when they arrived in Britain. It is estimated that between 1890 and 1903, the number of foreign seamen in British ships amounted to 40,000 and at least three quarters of these spent some part of their lives in British ports. On their arrival, whether in transit or discharged and waiting to join a new ship, they would find accommodation at the Sailors' Home or at a boarding house.

The life of the seafarer was unsettled and wages were low; there were repeated tales of debt, occasional drunkenness, fraud and unemployment. Therefore, it was not unusual to find many of these seamen, on being discharged at port, looking for more secure and better paid jobs. Many of them found work at the dockyards and other newly founded industries. Alternatively, some of these seamen opened small shops, businesses or, in the case of Indian Muslims, started peddling.

Having become economically stable and more secure, some of these Muslim men married local English girls. Many of them bought their own

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houses near the docks, in the case of Cardiff the-Bute Town area, in Liverpool the West Derby Road area, in Tyneside the Edward Square area, and in London the East End by Poplar, Shadwell and Wapping. Much of the Muslim population in these areas was concentrated in particular sections of the town, as they prefered to retain and strengthen social relationships with members of their own group rather than endeavour to be absorbed in the life of the host society.

In addition to the seamen, there were also Muslim students and professional men, mainly from India. From the beginning of British rule in India, Indian Muslims often came to Britain to be educated at public schools and the older universities. Most returned home, but some remained to practise law or medicine or become involved in the politics of the Raj.

Many of these students and professional groups resided in and about London, but they did not form separate geographical or social units and many had their businesses or practices in white communities. Likewise, the businessmen were frequently linked with English companies that had interests in India, but unlike the pedlars, many of whom were long-term residents in Britain, the businessmen did not operate from communities of Indians who kept close ties with India. However, many maintained their Islamic culture and were instrumental in the formation of a number of Islamic societies during this period.

Migration between 1914-1949

During the two world wars, the number of Muslims was greatly increased by several streams of immigration. The wars brought to Great Britain many Muslims who in normal circumstances would have been repatriated by the Government after being paid off. Many ships, which ordinarily operated on the West African and other routes, and on which Muslim and other coloured seamen were usually employed, were requisitioned by the Government for transport service and their crews left behind in Britain. Similarly, Muslims, who had been part of the labour battalions formed for service abroad, were demobilized in Britain. In addition, a number of Muslims were brought in to work in munition and chemical factories in cities in the Midlands.

It meant, in effect, the domiciling in this country of quite a large number of coloured, Muslim men. With the closing down of war industries, many of them chose to find work in other forms of industry. With the help of their gratuities, many Muslim ex-sailors and others started to rent apartments and sometimes entire houses, sub-letting them to compatriots. Others opened cafes in the vicinity of the ports.

Patterns of social relationships developed in accordance with occupational level, the socio-economic characteristics of the area in which groups lived, the degree to which inter-marriage was practiced, and the degree to which separate religious observance was maintained. Segregation into largely Muslim groups became an established pattern for the community. The degree of non-acceptance was not entirely a matter of colour; cultural and socio-economic factors also played a large part.

1950 to the Present

After the two world wars, the first impulse for new migration came in 1947 with the creation of Pakistan. Approximately seven million refugees from India put a severe strain on Pakistan's economy and social order.

In the light of the tragic situation, it was not surprising that Indian Muslims living in Britain became anxious about relatives and fellow villagers. These pioneer settlers from India began to send for their kinsmen and fellow villagers.

Migration from Pakistan to Britain consisted overwhelmingly of the migrants from rural areas, while the remainder originate from urban areas such as Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Sialkot. The migrants come from a limited number of villages in specific areas of certain districts. These are Mirpur district in Azad Kashmir, Chhach area in Campbellpur district, certain villages in the Nowshera sub-district of Peshawar, and certain villages in the districts of Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Gujarat and Lyallpur. Among the East Pakistanis, now called Bangladeshis, Sylhetis predominate, but fairly large numbers have also come from the port town of Chittagong and from Camilla.

Although the problems at home were acute for most of these migrants and a strong motive for leaving, that is not to say that the prospects of coming to Britain were not equally attractive. Post-war reconstruction had rapidly absorbed the returning soldiers and any existing pockets of unemployment, and there was soon a marked shortage of labour. Consequently, Britain made systematic attempts to attract workers from abroad.

The other group of Muslims to come to Britain after the Second World War were Turkish Cypriots. The migration of these Muslims was stimulated by the civil strife of the 1950's, but behind this were economic forces: the inability of the Cypriot labour market to keep pace with the rising aspirations of a fast growing and youthful population. With the coming of independence in 1960, a new wave of Muslims left Cyprus for Britain in search of work and stability. Many of these Muslims were rural labourers.

The nineteen fifties also saw the migration of a few Muslims from the West Indies, mainly Trinidad and Tobago, and from Guyana. Invariably these Muslims came for further education. Those who completed their education returned, those who did not remained.

By the late nineteen-sixties, many countries under British colonial rule had attained independence. In some of these countries, in particular those of East Africa, sizeable Muslim populations imported from India by the British in the nineteenth century to develop this part of Africa. These newly independent states developed strong nationalistic tendencies which led to the departure of those Indian Muslims who had British Passports. Most of them came to Britain. The majority of these Muslims were middle class Gujurat merchants, and therefore far more cosmopolitan in outlook than the Muslims of the South Asian sub-continent (Pakistan, Bangladesh, India), and already had a knowledge of English.

At the same time small numbers of West African Muslims, especially from Nigeria, started to arrive. Most came to Britain between 1961 and 1966, almost invariably to study. Only a few of these students were completely self-supporting when they arrived. The majority were financed by their families, friends or townspeople. A few were on government or other scholarships. Those sent by the collective efforts of relatives and friends were obliged to train another person in turn, thereby contibuting to the development of the group. With the outbreak of war

in Nigeria in 1966 and the imposition of a blockade in 1967, most sources of finance dried up and most studies were temporarily postponed or abandoned. With the relationship of dependence now reversed, the majority are now working full-time in order to support themselves and their families back home.

Demographic composition

It is quite clear that the Muslims, who have chosen to come to Britain have come from a predominantly rural background to an industrialized country. The Muslims in Britain are of various nationalities and speak various languages, and this has an effect on the way the community is structured and the way it has developed.

Until 1961, the migration of Muslims to Britain was regulated by conditions in the labour market in Britain as well as in their own countries, and their stay was very much considered to be temporary. Consequently, up to 1961, the Muslim community predominantly consisted of men, in particular those in the age group between 20 and 45. Invariably these migrants came to work so that they could support their families back home.

The passing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962 radically changed the pattern of migration from Muslim countries. The fear of control caused even greater Muslim migration, especially from Pakistan. In 1961net immigration from Pakistan increased ten-fold over the previous years. Approximately three quarters of the 60,000 Pakistanis, who arrived in Britain before control, arrived in the 18-month period January 1961 to June 1962. Many of these immigrants were brothers, sons and relatives of those who were already here.

The 1962 Act imposed on adults intending to work in Britain a system of regulations based on employment vouchers issued by the Ministry of Labour (now part of the Department of Employment and Productivity). There were three categories of voucher: a) for those who had specific jobs to come to, b) for those who possessed special skills or qualifications, and c) for unskilled workers without definite prospects of employment. In the first eighteen months after control was introduced there were over 300,000 applications, mainly from India and Pakistan. In this period, just over 40,000 c) vouchers were issued, of which nearly three quarters went to India and Pakistan. Between the introduction of control and the end of 1967, India and Pakistan alone received 72,940 vouchers of all kinds. However, not all the vouchers issued were used. Between 1July 1962 and 30 June 1968 only 43,753 voucher holders from India and Pakistan entered Britain.

The 1962 Act and the subsequent tightening of control has had a number of consequences for the composition of the migration, not all of them intended. The balance of the migration since 1962 has shifted from the economically active to the economically inactive, from men to women, from adults to children and, within the small number of men still entering, from the unskilled to the professionally qualified.

While the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 limited the right of Commonwealth citizens to enter the United Kingdom to work to those issued with vouchers, wives and children under 16 were free to accompany or to join husbands or parents already here.

The table below shows the number of dependents arriving from Pakistan, East and West Africa and Cyprus, in relation to voucher holders during the period 1 July 1962 to 30 June 1968.

	Voucher Holders	Dependents	Others	Total
Pakistan	21,582	51,836	1,517	74,935
Cyprus	1,807	5,598	1,061	8,466
West Africa	3,241	11,412	738	15,391
East Africa	318	4,181	915	5,414

Distribution

Eighty percent of the Muslims of Britain are distributed in seven major conurbations, of which Merseyside and Tyneside play minor roles in the total pattern. Certain aspects of the geographical spread of different Muslim groups do, however, stand out. The Pakistanis have the greatest tendency to disperse, with only 30% in the South East, and with sizeable proportions of the total in three other regions, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the North West.

As regards those born in India, the greater relative importance of the West Midlands and South East regions is apparent. The West Indians, Africans and Turkish Cypriots are heavily concentrated in the South East. For all these groups the North, East Anglia and Wales play a very minor role, although they do contain 65% of the Arab Muslims originating from the early migration period.

Despite the inadequacy of much of the data, several general features of the situation can be distinguished. The Muslim population is not uniformly spread throughout Britain. It would be surprising if it were. Three quarters of the community is heavily concentrated in a few urban areas. The continued immigrations, while adding in some areas to the total population of Muslims, has not altered the geographical distribution to any significant extent, particularly since many new arrivals are dependents of people already here.

Muslim Institutions

One of the major characteristics of the Muslims since the beginning of their migration to Britain has been the development of the associations, mosques, schools and institutes which organise their religious life. This network of institutions revolve around three segments of the community. The first segment is the male immigrants of various nationalities, the second segment their wives - including those who are natives - and the third segment their children.

Zawiyahs

In the 19th century, the links of the newly arrived Muslim immigrant with the community were the Zawiyahs. They were run by shaikhs who

were disciples of Shaikh Ahmad al-Alawi (1869-1934). These Zawiyahs were first established at Cardiff but subsequently also at Liverpool, South Sheilds, Hull and inland at Birmingham.

The Zawiyahs were frequented mainly by Muslim seamen who wished to perform their salat, but they also served a social and communal function by providing burial and marriage facilities, Eid celebrations and a place to care for the sick.. The shaikhs, having developed a high level of trust among the seamen, also became their bankers, and thousands of pounds were deposited with them. They also acted as welfare officers, making sure that the old and infirm were sent back home. Those that wished to remain were given a pension from Zawiyah funds, as were those who were unemployed.

As the seamen began to marry local women and start families, schools were set up where boys and girls went for instruction. The English wives of Muslims responded enthusiastically to the shaikhs' leadership. They were able to learn from them the doctrines of faith, and their bonds with the community were considerably strengthened.

These Zawiyahs continued to exist until the First World War, but many were bombed during the War and most became inoperative because of the deaths of their shaikhs.

Mosques

The first two mosques were the Woking and Liverpool mosques in the 1890's. Since then, the mosque has been the major institution of Muslim religious life. Perhaps 1,000 mosques exist in Britain today. Many of them are converted private dwelling houses bought and owned by the community. At least two-thirds of the total have appeared since 1962, when Muslims from Pakistan came in larger numbers. Most of these mosques are run by a full time imam under the control of a mosque committee. The activities are basically the daily salat, jum'a, Ramadan and Eid celebrations. Very few have facilities for women or activities for youth.

During the last decade about two dozen jami' mosques have been developed. About a dozen of these have been built in the traditional style, half the money being donated from within the community and the rest coming from abroad. The remaining dozen are converted factories or warehouses. The range of activities and facilities are hoped to be much wider than at the small mosques. About six of these mosques have been registered as places of marriage. Four have facilities for cleansing (ghusl) of the dead. Ten have youth activities and programmes. All are intending to have facilities for women.

Madrasas

With the great number of Muslim children who came to Britain or were born here after 1962, the facilities for their education has been a priority of the community. There are between 2,000 and 3,000 madrasas in Britain, at least 1,500 are run from the mosques, the remainder from local authority premises or rented houses. These institutions could more accurately be described as Qur'an schools, because their main function is to initiate the child into the reading of the Qur'an. As many as 200 to 300 students attend such a school and invariably after normal school hours, meaning after 4p.m. The

teachers are usually the imam helped by three of four parents. Due to the shortage of teachers and finances, the schools are badly organised and inadequately run.

To help in filling some of the gaps, the Muslim Educational Trust (MET) was developed. The Trust is registered with the Department of Education and Science as an educational charity. The MET plays a vital role in monitoring and supervising the setting up of machinery for handling grievances and drafting resolutions and organising petitions. It has already developed a list of areas of concern and action. It tries to follow through and co-ordinate local efforts. Some of the areas pinpointed for action are: (a) religious education period in schools, (b) religious assembly or chapel service in the morning, (c) wearing of physical education costumes, including swim suits by girls, (d) prescribed school uniforms for girls, (e) religious holidays for Muslim school children, and (f) books on Islam and Muslim affairs in school libraries. The MET has itself provided under item (a) Islamic education facilities to Muslim children in 56 county schools in Britain.

Muslim Women's Associations

As a result of the number of women that came to Britain after 1962, a few cities have in recent years seen the growth of Muslim Women's Associations. There are only about six such associations in Britain at the moment. They meet once a week to study the Qur'an and discuss mutual problems. These associations provide an important outlet for women, whose heavy domestic responsibilities tend to keep them at home.

Muslim Youth Associations

During the 1960's a number of Muslim Youth Associations began to develop in some of the major cities of Britain. The aims of these Youth Associations were primarily three: (a) to disseminate the message of Islam among youth, (b) to provide facilities for the study of Islam in an atmosphere which will develop personality and character, (c) to arrange social activities such as sports, camping, seminars and symposia.

At the end of the 60's, these youth associations decided to form a common platform with a more dynamic objective, namely, to organise those who are willing to strive for the establishment of an Islamic society in Britain. The organisation became known as the Islamic Youth Movement and at present has fifteen branches. It is currently running an annual summer school for the training of youth and an annual camp for the members of all the branches. The branches themselves run regular weekly meetings, which are concerned with a systematic study of Islam and sporting activities through which they come in contact with potential new members.

Muslim Institutes

From 1965 onwards, a number of Muslim scholars came to Britain to teach at British Universities or for further research. It became apparent to them that there was a need to bridge the two forms of educational philosophies, the Western and the Islamic. To enable this, the Islamic Foundation and Muslim Institute came into existence, both of which are run by permanent full-time staff.

The Islamic Foundation was established in 1968 and registered as a charitable, religious and educational trust. The Foundation has two

chapters in Kenya and Nigeria. The Foundation is trying to serve Islam by producing Islamic literature in different European and African languages and maintaining close contact with Islamic organisations. The Foundation also supports other Islamic organisati ns in the promotion of their activities through literature, speakers and counselling etc.

The Foundation has made a significant contribution in the production and distribution of Islamic literature in English, African and other European languages.

The Muslim Institute was first started in 1974. Since then, more than 500 Muslims of all national, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, have become members.

The Muslim Institute has three basic objectives:

a) To draw up detailed conceptual maps and operational plans of a Muslim civilisation of the future;

b) To mobilise the human, material and intellectual resources and the scientific and technological expertise of Muslim and channel them towards the creation , establishment and development of the Muslim civilisation of the future;

c) To develop concrete policy alternatives in the fields of economic development and social and political organisation amd offer them for adoption and implementation in Muslim societies.

U.K. Islamic Mission

The U.K. Islamic Mission was formally established in 1962. Its primary aim is to awaken amongst Muslims a consciousness of Islam and the realisation and dissemination of the teachings of Islam in their own lives as well as those of their fellow human beings.

The U.K. Islamic Mission functions on a nationwide scale. The Mission maintains branches and circles in London, Luton, Rochester, Southend-on-Sea, Reading, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Leicester, Manchester, Rochdale, Blackburn, Nelson, Bradford, Huddersfield, Leeds, Sheffield and Glasgow. The Mission's Central Office is located in its own building at 148 Liverpool Road, London N1.

The Mission owns and runs an Islamic Book Centre in order to provide information and literature to Muslims in Europe.

The Mission provides Islamic education to Muslim children at Birmingham, Rochdale, Blackburn, Nelson, Glasgow, Manchester and Walsall. The number of children benefiting from these centres is about 1,000 with 30 full-time and part-time teachers.

The Mission is keenly aware of the socio-cultural problems of Muslims in Britain and has been rendering all possible help towards their solution. It has helped solve some of the problems such as halal food and proper dress for Muslim girls in many county schools. The Mission also provides legal and financial help to deserving Muslim students.

Union of Muslim Organisations

On July 19, 1970, representatives of 38 Muslim organisations from all over Britain and Ireland met at a Conference in London to establish a representative body of all Muslim organisations, namely the Union of Muslim Organisations of U.K. and Eire (U.M.O.) with the following aims and objects: to co-ordinate the activities of existing Muslim organisations in the U.K.; to assist Muslim organisations inBritain and Ireland in providing facilities to the Muslims living in their respective areas so as to enable them to lead an Islamic way of life; to cater for the socio-cultural and educational requirements of the British and Irish Muslims and to safeguard and advance their special interests and requirements; to operate as the representative body of the Muslims in Britain and Ireland; and to work for better understanding between Muslims and other communities in the U.K. and Eire.

Recently the U.M.O. has started mobilising opinion in Britain for implementation of the Islamic family law. Several Members of Parliament have already been contacted. The U.M.O. hopes to be able to persuade a sufficient number of MPs in favour of a suitably drafted Bill giving legal status to the Islamic family law.

Federation of Students Islamic Societies

FOSIS, the Federation of Students Islamic Societies, was established in 1962 when various delegates from the student Islamic societies in the U.K. and Eire met at Birmingham and decided to join together in a federal body. The subsequent years have seen the emergence of FOSIS as a well-knit and committed body of Muslim students with a growing role both among students and the Muslim community in general.

The basic centres of FOSIS activity are its constituent and associate student societies. At the beginning of the academic year, a society receives newly arriving Muslim students from all parts of the world and introduces them to their fellow students at social functions. Prayer time-tables, Ramadan time-tables, the Muslim Student Guide to Britain, and publications of the Federation are normally distributed free. If a society is well organised and active, tempory facilities for accommodation and other help is also extended.

Societies organise daily and Friday prayers on a regular basis during term-time, and arrange social gatherings on accasions such as Eid. Special programmes such as Qur'anic study circles, lectures by prominent Muslim scholars and workers and group discussions etc. are held weekly, fortnightly or monthly. These are not exclusively for students and can be attended by the local community members.

At the central level, the federation organises a three-day Winter Gathering towards the end of December each year. The main emphasis in this meeting is on education. The meeting is usually attended by 300-400 students, and addressed by eminent scholars.

What Does the Future Hold?

The future of the Muslim community in Britain is dependant upon

the leadership's response to the problems of children and youth. A large proportion of the Muslim community are still in schools and colleges of further education and two problems confront them. First, the fact that they are straddling two diverse cultures, Western and Islamic; second, they do not have a common language.

In connection with these two problems, the EEC provides that member countries should offer facilities for the teaching of religion and culture and the mother tongues of minority groups. For the Muslim community this means that if a group of Muslim parents wish Islam to be taught to their children in school, providing that numbers are adequate, the school is obliged to provide this facility. The parents may also ask the school for the mother tongue of the family to be taught, so that if the language of the parents is Urdu of Bengali then, providing the numbers are sufficient, the parents have a right to ask for that language to be taught to their children within the school curriculum. In this connection, the Muslim leadership have still to decide whether they feel, at least in terms of language programme, that it is feasible to have mother tongues being taught in school or whether it would not be preferable for Muslims to develop a lingua franca such as Arabic, thus enabling the young people of Britain to participate in the international community of Muslims.

If Muslims wish, and this should be so, to have their culture and their language of Arabic taught in schools, then they must be able to provide trained and experienced teachers. The provision of adequate teachers for the programme mentioned above will, to a great extent, alleviate some of the problems which the Muslim community is facing.