

## Recognising the Kashmiri Community in the UK: Implications for Education Attainment

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### Introduction

Since the introduction of extended ethnicity codes in the censuses of 1991 and 2001, many ethnic minority groups up and down the country have benefited in terms of resources and engagement at the decision-making level. The RAISE Project case study suggests that census recognition is critical in terms of resources for service delivery. It also notes that Kashmiris are still wrongly identified as Pakistanis, therefore remaining excluded at all levels.

First generation Kashmiris were agrarian mountain farmers, who worked in steel and textile industries where they suffered discrimination and bigotry at the hands of their neo-colonial masters, Indians and Pakistanis. With the 1970s and 1980s industrial decline, second and third generation Kashmiris able to speak English and engage with decision makers, started asking questions of the authorities in relation to Kashmiri exclusion. This coincided with disturbances in Kashmir hence, instead of British authorities and academics looking at the demand for Kashmiri inclusion in the right context, they related it to the political situation in South Asia. Evans (2006) argues that there are about forty pro-independence activists who are lobbying for Kashmiri recognition.

Recent research studies clearly indicate that Kashmiris in England do not want to be identified as Pakistanis and their language is not Urdu or Punjabi. For example parents of children at Eastbourne Junior and Infant school in Dewsbury, Kirklees, clearly demand recognition for Kashmiri ethnicity and the Pahari language. In Slough it emerged that Kashmiri parents often do not understand the English education system and audio or video information in Punjabi and Urdu is foreign to them. DfES national data on minority ethnic pupils clearly shows that Kashmiris do not want

to be identified as Pakistanis; for example with the 1991 and 2001 census extended codes, the use of 'other' categories have dropped considerably but 'Pakistani other' has gone up. In one of the tables it shows nearly 9000 Kashmiri Pakistanis, 10000 Mirpuri Pakistanis, and 52000 'other Pakistanis'. Kashmiris in Britain are not happy to be identified as Pakistanis but for some reason public service decision makers continue to identify Kashmiris as Pakistanis.

### Background

Kashmiris originate from the state of Jammu Kashmir. The State of Jammu Kashmir is bound by Tibet in the east, China and Afghanistan in the north, Pakistan in the west and south, and in the south east by India (Hussein, 1987). In the British imperial time, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was not under direct control of the East India Company or the British Raj. By virtue of the 16 March 1846 Amritsar Treaty it had a special status and relationship with the British Government and in practice it was an independent princely state (Khan, 2006). It is for this reason, that the state of Kashmir along with other princely states was not part of the division of India from which Pakistan was carved out on a religious basis. In fact the princely states had a choice to join either India, Pakistan or remain independent (Jinnah, 1947).

The majority population was Muslim and the ruler was Hindu, therefore both India and Pakistan staked their claims on religious grounds for the future accession of the state of Jammu Kashmir, without due consultation with people or the ruler, who wanted to remain neutral and independent. In 1947 British India endured a lot of violence but Kashmir remained calm. However, after scores were settled in Punjab, both Indian and Pakistani religious fundamentalists started operating in the state

with their respective communities. In October 1947, Pakistan brought in troops, followed by India. The case went to the UN and Kashmir was divided, which it remains to this day. The 84471 square mile, 13.5 million people's state remains two thirds under Indian administration and one third under Pakistani administration (Mir, 1999). The Pakistani administered part of Kashmir is known as Azad Jammu Kashmir and Indian Kashmir has become like a province. However, both Kashmiris have got special status (Nicholson, 2006). By the nationality act of Kashmir introduced in 1927, only Kashmiris can buy, sell or own land and property in Kashmir, excluding even Indians and Pakistanis. Azad Kashmir enjoys its own parliament, legislature, national anthems and the whole of Kashmir has defined borders with India, Pakistan and China. Hence, Kashmiris are not Pakistanis or Indians.

### **British Kashmiris: The Issues**

British Kashmiris are British citizens and residents whose parents or themselves originate from the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which as mentioned above is divided between the occupation of India and Pakistan (Shamas, 2000). Except for about 200 families from Indian-controlled Kashmir and a few families from northern areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, an overwhelming majority of Kashmiris came from Azad Kashmir, mainly from the Mirpur division which consists of the districts of Mirpur, Kotli and Bhimbar. Prior to the division of Kashmir, Mirpur formed one of fourteen districts of the state and Kotli and Bhimbar were its sub-districts. After the division of Kashmir, Mirpur formed one of the two divisions of Azad Kashmir, the other being Muzaffarabad. Shams (2000) writes that 'Because the British Kashmiris mainly come from the Mirpur division, therefore they are sometimes referred to as Mirpuris by academics and others'. However, I beg to differ, because Indian and Pakistani communities in this country are competing over the ownership of Kashmir, Pakistanis on a religious basis and Indians on their stand of Kashmir being an integral part of India. Therefore, both deny Kashmiri ethnicity and nationhood and both try to accumulate Kashmiris in to their ethnicities and nationalities, Pakistan with more success.

Kashmiris have been working abroad for centuries and migration to Britain was primarily due to the lack of economic opportunities and continuous human rights abuses and violence (Asia Watch, 2006). Very little investment in the region by Pakistani occupiers, as argued by Baroness Emma Nicholson's European report on Azad Kashmir (2006), contributes to Kashmiri migration, mainly from Pahari areas, globally in general and chain migration to Britain in particular.

### **Brief historical background to Britain's Kashmiri community**

The Kashmiri community started coming to Britain straight after the Second World War and worked in textile and steel industries, as well as taking up other manual unskilled labour jobs. Unlike their counterpart Pakistanis and Indians, who were mostly from urban educated middle class and settled mostly in the south, Kashmiris settled in industrial areas of northern cities and the Midlands. It is widely believed that Bradford has a Kashmiri population of more than 80000 while Birmingham has more than 100000. Fifty years on, the Kashmiri Diaspora has a different economic profile, for example Kashmiris are over-represented in taxis and take-aways, and under-represented in business and public sectors (Hanif, 2002).

Tabbassam (2003) argues that the Pahari region of Kashmir has a semi-nomadic way of life, the agriculture only supporting families for eight months at best. For their other needs, people rely on selling their livestock and working in the Angrazi Allaqa (as British India was known to Kashmiris at that time). Like the Filipino domestic women workers, one male member of the family volunteers for this sacrifice.

Migration case studies clearly show that Kashmiris used to work abroad often in the rail or maritime industries. Many joined the merchant navy, or provided domestic labour and other manual work. This work was mainly in the cities and ports of southern India like Bombay, Calcutta and Chittagong (Ali, 2006). In 1947 India was freed, Pakistan was carved out of India and Kashmir was colonised by both India and Pakistan. The case went to the UN and it is

still there gathering dust (Gilani, 2006). Due to the above mentioned Kashmiri economic conditions, Kashmiris had to work abroad. For people of all areas occupied by Pakistan, India became a no go area, so Kashmiris, through chain migration, ended up in Britain. Obviously, it needs close scrutiny but it is certain that Kashmiris never came here as Pakistanis. Recently, in a programme on the BBC Asian Net Urdu service, they were trying to find out about the first Pakistani to come to Bradford. Some one phoned with a name and said: 'The first Pakistani came to Bradford in 1928' (BBC, 2001). As Pakistan did not exist in 1928 the person must have come from Kashmir. It seems that, within the South Asian debate, Muslim equals Pakistani and Asian equals Indian.

Also it is certain that almost all Kashmiris who migrated never had access to education and were illiterate, only concerned with work and sending money back home. In the earlier stages they never felt the need or had the ability to engage in any meaningful way, politically or academically. Hence, it gave a free hand to Pakistani academics to construct Pakistani or Muslim identities and completely ignore and erase Kashmiri ethnicity and identity. It is for this reason that earlier debates on education and public service delivery disregard the Kashmiri community completely, and Kashmiris do not figure in any ethnic or black discourse debates at all. Perhaps the other reason for Kashmiri exclusion may be that the census, CRE, academia, central Government, policy makers and service providers work from different value bases and do not adhere to a uniform set of ethnicities, and if they do it certainly does not include Kashmiri ethnicity. For example, the Office for National Statistics, in most cases works on the basis of nation states and the CRE supports that. The classic example is Irish ethnicity; whilst Irish are Christians, white European, speak English, eat fish and chips and their country is divided in to south and north, they are deemed to have different needs. At the same time Kashmiris have a very long shared culture, heritage, language and history but because most of the Kashmiris are Muslims and come from the Pakistani colonial area therefore they are Pakistanis, and have no need for their language, culture or heritage to be

distinguished. This could be that they have no nation state, however, neither have Kurds, Palestinians nor many more ethnic groups which are recognised and included. This then begs the question: is the Race Relations Act and other equality legislation brought in to contain communities of black nation states and marginalise and discriminate against politically vulnerable groups?

Whatever the case may be, it is certain that the Kashmiri community does have different needs based on language, culture and shared values (Ali, 2005: pp10-15). He concludes that Kashmiri elders are not accessing mainstream services, for their language is different from that of other south Asian communities, they suffer from lack of confidence and are discriminated against. Also Kashmiri elders have very little knowledge of the availability of services. All written and oral materials are provided in languages which are foreign to them. This is confirmed by a recent report carried out by JRF (2006) into the participation of Bradford's ethnic minority communities in the public service decision making process. The report finds that within ethnic minority communities it might be difficult for marginalised groups to participate. The report identifies those groups as gays, lesbians, people with mental health problems, people with disabilities, women and Bradford's majority Mirpuri (Kashmiri) community. The questions of Pakistani ethnicity, Muslim community, Pakistani migration and settlement in the UK, factors behind the migration and patterns of migration perhaps need revisiting with a view to looking at Kashmiri migration in its own context. The JRF report on Bradford's ethnic minority communities suggests Mirpuri exclusion. Does it mean that the ninety percent Kashmiris are excluded and ten percent Pakistanis pull the strings?

### **Kashmiri existence in Britain**

According to the last Pakistani census in 1998, the figure of the Kashmiri Diaspora from Pakistan-administered Kashmir is shown as 1.5 million all over the world and close to a million in Europe, the majority being in the UK.

It raises the question as to why the Kashmiri community did not resist the formation of their new identity and why they stood silently while their identity was being cleansed and they were being branded into a new ethnicity. To answer this I think it is important to know about the community and its ability or inability to participate within the British state and society in any meaningful way.

As mentioned above, most British Kashmiris have migrated from the Pahari region of the State of Jammu Kashmir. Pahari is the name of their language, which is a language of the Indo-Aryan family of languages (Tabbassam, 2005). It derives its name from Pahar meaning 'hills and mountains' for it is spoken over a very large area starting from Nepal and running throughout the foothills of the Himalayas, which includes Indian and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. From where most British Kashmiris have migrated, however, there are many languages spoken in the state and Pahari should be understood as being British Kashmiris' mother tongue, rather than the national or the only language of the state of Jammu Kashmir.

In Britain sometimes Pahari is referred to as Mirpuri, (a British phenomenon). It is the spoken language of nearly all Kashmiris in the UK. When it comes to reading, some Kashmiris can read Urdu as some can read English. Karamat Ali, an educationalist argues that:

Many British decision-makers, in an attempt to make services accessible, have invested in interpreting and translation services. However, the languages offered to people from South Asia have been limited to Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi or Gujarati. There has been very little reference made to the Kashmiri community or Pahari language: instead decision-makers have incorrectly tended to use Urdu or Punjabi to communicate with UK's Kashmiri community. In such instances, members of the Kashmiri community have had to settle with another group's language.

Hence, the Kashmiri community is unable to take advantage of many services through lack of knowledge, communication and participation in decision making (Ali, 2005). The research shows

that many Kashmiri elderly are unaware of any services offered by voluntary or statutory sectors and they are unable to take part in any consultation despite the availability of interpreters in Urdu/Punjabi. The services that they do access are by default, rather than the services being aimed specifically at them.

This has a far reaching effect in education, for parents have often not been understood by the education providers and vice-versa. One example is production of audio CDs by a Parents' Centre titled 'Other Languages'. The centre had Punjabi and Urdu for Kashmiri and Pakistani heritage pupils, but no Pahari/Mirpuri. This raises the question of the effectiveness of interpretation/translation services and monies spent by service providers to reach communities. Exclusion of the Kashmiri community results in a loss of custom for the private sector, marginalisation by public sector providers and an inability by the Kashmiri community to participate and engage in the mainstream in any meaningful way.

### **Education Policies**

The principal of equality and equal access to education is enshrined in the 1944 Act (the Butler Act) which for the first time committed the British state to the provision of free education for all. Fifty years on, policy seems to have gone full circle. In the post-colonial era, the debate started with assimilation, has travelled through integration and cultural pluralism and is heading towards post-multiculturalism which essentially means assimilation.

This raises the question of the ability of groups to assimilate, for example in the post colonial era, it was assumed that assimilation policy meant equal rights for all. No thought was given to enablement and empowerment of former colonial subjects, a very Eurocentric approach. This led to adoption of the integration approach, in which the socio-economic, ability, culture and languages of some groups were completely ignored and this remained the case in the pluralist, multicultural and post-multicultural phases. Some community groups have never been engaged including the majority

of the Mirpuri (Kashmiri) community. This raises the question as to why the Mirpuri (Kashmiri) community has been excluded and marginalised since their arrival. Is the Mirpuri community able to assimilate and engage from the enclaves and ghettos of Bradford, Luton and Birmingham?

### **Education Case Studies of Pakistani Pupils**

Evidence from the Commission for Racial Equality, Runnymede Trust, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and academia suggest that Pakistanis and Bangladeshis suffer the most disadvantages in all aspects of life in Britain, including education underachievement. However if the Kashmiri community was monitored in its own right the levels of underachievement would be much higher. This would, based on the limited evidence available, make British Kashmiris one of the most disadvantaged ethnic groups in Britain, argues Ghulam Hussain at the time of the 2001 census consultation (2000).

In London and the South East, some of the Pakistani communities are fairly prosperous and their educational achievement is on par with, or higher than, the national average. In the West Midlands and North, the communities have been severely affected by changes in manufacturing industries over the last twenty five years and by the consequent lack of employment chances. Here, educational achievement in Pakistani communities is much lower than regional and national averages. (RAISE Project, Themes and Threads p,2)

### **The RAISE Project**

The RAISE project was set up in 2002, funded by Yorkshire Forward and organised by the Uniting Britain Trust, in association with the churches regional commission for Yorkshire and the Humber. It was managed and co-ordinated by the Insted consultancy.

The project was created because in many parts of England there is a substantial gap between national averages in school attainment and the attainment of pupils of Pakistan and Kashmiri

heritage. The project aims to demonstrate through a series of case studies that the attainment of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage pupils can be raised and describes the factors that underlie success.

There are a total of eleven case studies submitted to the RAISE Project so far. Nationally, these case studies have some common themes, for example, Kirklees, Slough and some others seem to be very clear on the Kashmiri community and Pahari language. Bradford, which has the largest Kashmiri community, completely chooses to ignore it and runs with Pakistani heritage, as do Rotherham and other authorities which have a very large community of Kashmiri heritage. When it comes to student data both Rotherham and Bradford use the word Mirpuri and Pakistani heritage. Derby, Redbridge and some others start off with Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage for a few pages and then Kashmiri is replaced by Mirpuri and eventually it becomes Pakistani and Muslim heritage.

There is no evidence to suggest why this is the case except that the people involved with the projects are either biased, that is of Pakistani or Indian origin and their white counterparts run with their advice or it may be that it is due to sheer ignorance and Kashmiri exclusion in the census and other Government departments. However, some case studies have dug deeper and involved Kashmiri parents with appropriate linguistic support to get to the bottom of the problem.

For example, the study of Eastbourne Junior and Infant School in Dewsbury, Kirklees, set out to explore the education levels of the adults within the family and languages of oracy and literacy used for daily communication between family members and the wider community. Parents had difficulty in defining their language, some saying: 'It is Pakistani' but after some discussion and bilingual support, the languages were identified as Pahari and Punjabi. Being able to identify their language positively and having the vocabulary to label it correctly enhanced parents' confidence and sense of personal identity. Subsequently, Pahari speaking parents

identified themselves on school forms as speakers of Pahari rather than Punjabi. Parents recognised the political dimensions of language and nationality and they described themselves as Kashmiris, a group distinct from Pakistanis. The study further notes that it was the Pahari speaking (Kashmiri) families, in which neither parent had personal experience of the English education system. Several of these families perceived Kashmir as a state independent of Pakistan and also felt strongly that their ethnic identity should be accurately recorded.

The major finding of this study was that:

Pakistani and Kashmiri cultures, languages and value bases were different. Pahari speaking (Kashmiri) parents had very little experience of the English education system and were submissive and hardly engaged. It was also noted that they had high aspirations for their children. However, non-recognition of their cultural and linguistic needs marginalised them.

The Slough case study draws similar conclusions. However, the study does talk about cultural pathology which problematises certain groups in that it states:

From interviewees' discourse there emerges some evidence of respondents adopting a 'cultural pathology' which particularly problematises Kashmiri pupils and their families.

The study shows that, with very limited exposure, Kashmiris don't actually know what is expected of the child. If the father is doing night duty, he is too tired to take an interest in the child. The woman is doing all the housework and has small children, so she doesn't know what is expected. This results in the child being left to his/her own devices to do whatever he/she can or just forget about homework. Therefore, there is no consolidation of the work done in the class. The study also suggests that Kashmiri parents seldom attend parents' evenings and often are very happy if their children can speak English. They are willing but unable to participate in children's education attainment. This is due to many factors

including their inability to understand the education system and engage with appropriate authorities including teachers. Though Slough employs bilingual workers, the Pahari language is ignored at its peril. No attempt is made to understand children's cultural background or family values. The study also found that all the advertisements for bilingual support assistants had Punjabi and Urdu essential and there was no mention of Pahari. Hence the Local Authority discriminated against the majority Kashmiri community in its employment practices.

### Conclusion

In the case studies we have seen how Kashmiri identity and ethnicity has been remoulded by some social commentators without any resistance initially and how it has been made to look like a political issue by some academics. Despite introduction of rafts and rafts of inclusion legislation and drives for community cohesion the state and society continue to exclude the Kashmiri community at all levels.

Some Asian academics, for example Anwar (1985) and Modood (2005), continue to ignore their own government's understandings of the Kashmiri community. Nicholson (2006), in her European Parliament's report on Kashmir notes that the Indian Constitution's Act 370 and the Pakistani Constitution of 1974 clearly define the state of Jammu and Kashmir as sovereign and give it clear ethnic identity, but in much of Britain Kashmiris are no longer Kashmiris – they are either Pakistanis or Muslims.

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