

Pakistanis in Bradford

John Barr

"'Ther a'reet sa long as they don't botha me'"—with this crisp comment over a pint in the Flying Dutchman, an old Bradford man summed up the prevailing attitude of his townsmen to the new Bradfordians among them: more than 12,000 immigrants from Pakistan, India, and the West Indies. Outside in Lumb Lane, the scene seemed to more than confirm his view: Muslim butchers and Urdu speaking barbers and Hindu greengrocers comfortably coexisting with English shops; along the pavement glumfaced Pakistanis clutching their collars against the November wind and rubber limbed Jamaicans brandishing transistors at full volume and English girlfriends pushing prams filled with cafe au lait faces; in the smoke blackened back to backs beyond the shops, white housewives at one window, coloured at the next. To all appearances a scene of multi racial harmony, even of social integration.

But in other places the harmony was less apparent. Behind the doors of the Ajaib Club at the lower end of Lumb Lane, a magnificently moustachioed elderly Pakistani, his voice nearly drowned by a juke box thumping out the latest from the Karachi hit parade, proclaimed: "England is the best country in the world... no colour bar." A cluster of young, educated Pakistanis hooted sharply and argued militantly: 'They paid more for car insurance, for *them* down payments were three times higher, *they* couldn't get white collar jobs.'

Nearby in Great Horton Road at the Pak Social Club, its walls lined with one armed handis and papered with coloured photos of filmy veiled Karachi starlets, a Pakistani bus driver spoke with resigned bitterness: His people were the first to be sacked, his people couldn't get mortgages, his people were insulted on buses. And a mile away in Hall Ings at the offices of Bradford's local paper, the files of Letters to the Editor revealed all too clearly the grievances and prejudices of an immoderate and invariably anonymous minority of white Bradfordians: "The filthiest slum house here is better than they live in back home." (signed *Ex Far East Land Forces*) or "Saris abound in the Corporation housing estates while respectable young white couples start life in a back to back" (signed *Slov White*).

It does not, then, take long for a visitor to Bradford to sense the subterranean resentments on both sides that threaten racial harmony in a city where today nearly 1 in every 20 inhabitants, 1 in every 13 workers, 1 in every 4 busmen, 8 in every 10 nightshift textile workers are coloured. Yet one senses something more significant—the old Bradford man's "they're all right if" verdict was essentially right; while "social integration" may be little more than a social worker's dream, racial coexistence is a fact of Bradford life. It is a quite remarkable coexistence which, if one is less idealistic and more realistic, is perhaps the best any English city with a large immigrant population can hope for in this generation. Why has race not become a political issue in

Bradford? Why have Bradford's racial relations been unmarred by violence?

A contributing factor is undoubtedly Bradford's long history of invasion by outsiders: from Flemish weavers and German wool merchants to Irish navvies and post war Eastern European refugees to, finally, today's Commonwealth immigrants. This has certainly contributed to a generally tolerant, unshocked attitude towards new arrivals.

Bradford is also fortunate in that it does not suffer from the critical housing pressures that inflame racial antagonisms in the booming overcrowded Midlands. The city's population of just under 300,000 has remained stable over the past decade despite the influx of immigrants and the Corporation's ambitious redevelopment scheme is providing new estate housing at a rate paralleling slum clearance. Since the vast majority of Pakistanis are single men (or married men without their families) they do not seek family housing in direct competition with white Bradfordians. Even the classical complaint that immigrants lower house and land values does not apply to the same degree in Bradford: curiously, in certain areas of dense immigrant population, the new Bradfordians have kept values *up* by buying old, depressed properties that the English buyer simply doesn't want.

In at least the present scene of high employment, most white Bradfordians are sensible enough to appreciate the economic contribution of immigrants and know that the city's transport, the local hospital services, and the woollen mills would limp or even collapse without immigrant

workers. Even in the event of a local trade recession, there might not be a crisis; the fact that the single Pakistani males are extremely mobile and prepared to move to another area in Britain if made redundant in Bradford means that relatively few—

now 215 immigrants among 1,250 unemployed—remain to compete for jobs with whites or to support the unjustified complaint that the first two, and only, words a Pakistani learns are "National Assistance". In fact, nearly all Pakistanis are in Bradford to *work* for an intended period of five-seven years, save £400-£350 from their weekly pay packets of about £14 in the mills or £16 on the buses, and return home. Most white Bradfordians recognize this.

Finally, the moderate and responsible editorial approach of Bradford's only daily—*Telegraph & Argus*—has undoubtedly shaped local opinion to tolerate if not adore the immigrants. The paper's editor, Charles Leach, emphasizes that he does *not* play down incidents which could create racial tensions, but "keeps incidents in proportion, treats them on their news not sensation value". The *Telegraph* is widely praised by moderates in Bradford, though more than one less moderate Bradfordian expressed a view that the paper "has not faced up to the real situation." Yet there seems little doubt that the *Telegraph* has kept the temperature down, avoiding such inflammatory banners as

PAKISTANIS BLAMED IN SMALLPOX CITY (during 1962 outbreak of smallpox—or as some angry townspeople called it, "Pakibox") and DIRT AND PAKISTANIS (in response to the complaints of a 20 year old Young Conservative)—both of which were used by the Leeds based *Yorkshire Post*.

But this is not to suggest that Bradford's racial coexistence is without problems or tensions which, given the right (or should one say wrong?) circumstances could upset the rather tenuous balance. These problems and tensions are centred almost wholly on the Pakistani community, which makes up three quarters of Bradford's immigrant population.

The Pakistani single men are forced by economic circumstances, "English only" policies here and there, and their desire to save money to overcrowd multi-occupied houses in slum areas. Without their wives to housekeep, they generally have neither the inclination nor—after, say, a twelve hour night shift wool combing and scouring—the physical energy to tidy their rooms, thus contributing to white complaints of dirt and squalor. The housing situation was unfortunately aggravated recently when Bradford Corporation took over a large Victorian house, split it into flats for 15 Pakistani males, and installed all mod cons—at a total cost of £6,500. When, to their astonishment, they were unable to fill the flats, many ratepayers were angered by the waste of money and confirmed in their view that Pakistanis preferred to live in filth. What they—and the Corporation—overlooked was that the weekly rent of 30s-35s was

twice what the average Pakistani pays multi occupied house, that he simply fears the company of a number of countrymen to a single or double room that communal living saves on heating cooking bills, and that the Corporation smacked of official rather than chosen segregation.

Health is a critical problem in view the high incidence of TB among Pakistanis—more than 20 times the rate for Bradfordians. A common assumption that Pakistanis always bring it with them in fact more than half contract TB in Bradford. Overworked, often nutritionally frail, living in overcrowded conditions, stinking on food to save it, terrified of losing their jobs and sent home, the Pakistanis are not highly susceptible to infection but to conceal it as long as possible.

Veneral disease has increased by one fifth each year; of 707 new cases gonorrhoea among males in Bradford West Indian, 148 English; of 237 West Indian, 212 English. Dr. W. D. Dolton, deputy medical officer of 11 says these statistics clearly reflect that VD is spread essentially by English girls, a small colony of young white often Borstal escapees, who form a Young Girl Network, roaming seeking out concentrations of immigrants.

Some take Pakistani consorts and down to raise a family (an "ilium" of sorts) but a majority are girls" in the literal sense. They ring bells in Lumb Lane and other inner districts and offer themselves for £1 moving in a single day from one street to the other, earning as little as £30 a week. Like the milkman, come off the night shift at the mill time is often about 6 a.m. as Pakistanis are not too exhausted by their work to resist and it is not

difficult to find it difficult to resist and it is not there have been complaints by responsible English housewives of being ogged by Pakistani men; their only experience has been with call girls, and they imagine Englishwomen are like that. Both Dolton put it "the English prostitute is her castle," the girls always home in her room and are deeply offended if it is suggested that men visit their often houseproud bed sitters.

Education has been less a problem in Bradford than in many immigrant areas. The 1,500 Commonwealth immigrant children in the city's schools cost only 3 per cent of the total. Of 552 are Pakistanis, 569 Indians, 498 have been classified as "non-speaking". Fortunately the problem is far restricted principally to the rather than secondary schools, and the past two years the local education authority has held concentrated language classes at one mixed school encouraging the immigrants to participate with their English schoolmates in assembly, and all possible activities.

But when schools reopened this year, 314 new immigrant children registered an indication that more and more immigrants are in fact remaining in Britain bringing their families over. Phil Dall, assistant education officer, says the city's schools are "already at



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Veneral disease has increased by about one fifth each year; of 707 new cases of gonorrhoea among males in Bradford last year, 279 were Asian immigrants, 231 West Indian, 148 English; of 237 new cases among females, 2 were Asian, 17 West Indian, 212 English. Dr. W. Duncan Dolton, deputy medical officer of health, says these statistics clearly reflect the fact that VD is spread essentially by English girls, a small colony of young white girls, often Borstal escapees, who form a kind of Young Girl Network, roaming Britain seeking out concentrations of immigrants.

Some take Pakistani consorts and settle down to raise a family (an “integration” of sorts) but a majority are “call girls” in the literal sense. They ring doorbells in Lumb Lane and other immigrant districts and offer themselves for £1, often moving in a single day from one end of the street to the other, earning as much as £30 a week. Like the milkman, delivery time is often about 6 a.m. as Pakistanis come off the night shift at the mills.

Those men not too exhausted by work find it difficult to resist and it is no wonder there have been complaints by respectable English housewives of being ogled by Pakistani men; their only experience has been with call girls, and they imagine all Englishwomen are like that. Both to avoid brushes with the law and because, as Dr. Dolton put it “the English prostitute's home is her castle,” the girls always go to the man's room and are deeply offended if it is suggested that men visit them in their often houseproud bed sitters.

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But when schools reopened this autumn, 314 new immigrant children registered—an indication that more and more Pakistanis are in fact remaining in Britain and bringing their families over. Phillip Ben-dall, assistant education officer, said that the city's schools are “already at satura-

tion point” and next term—with obvious reluctance and as a temporary measure only—a disused school will be opened as a centre for older immigrant children to learn English; the segregation is regretted but seems inevitable.

Already there is a high proportion of immigrant children (exceeding 50 per cent in one school, between 40-50 per cent in three others) but, oddly perhaps, so far there have been few protests from English parents worried that their children's progress will be held back by large numbers of non-English speakers, nor have there been any noticeable efforts by white parents to transfer their children to schools with fewer immigrants. Such protests may come in time and, according to Mr. Ben-dall, “parents are perhaps a little less satisfied now than they were”. The education committee's goal is to keep proportions in any one school to a maximum of 40 per cent immigrants and may consider providing transport on the New York “busing” pattern to spread immigrant children more evenly.

While none of these problems of housing, health and education is liable to upset Bradford's delicate racial coexistence in the near future, the factor which most militates against integration is the composition and attitude of the Pakistani community itself. A majority of the Pakistanis are illiterate peasants from Azad Kashmir, who do not speak Urdu much less English, and as they at least intend to remain only temporarily in England they have neither the capability nor the inclination to integrate. Their own community in Bradford is so splintered by factions they cannot fix on a spokesman for the community as a whole. As Muhammad Darr, Bradford correspondent for the *Mashriq Urdu Weekly*, neatly put it: “People who are not spokesmen want to be, and people who could be don't want to be”—there are too many internal dissensions for a wise man to take on the spokesman responsibility.

Pakistanis tend to make their essential contacts with the English through English speaking scribes at their social clubs or through such non-official figures as Norman Bishop, a local Urdu speaking solicitor, who takes a deep personal interest in their problems, goes to bat for them in cases of injustice, and generally acts as a one man Pakistani citizens' advice bureau. Additionally, the Pakistanis have a highly developed sense of community welfare, assisting each other in difficulties, forming cooperatives to buy houses, even establishing a burial society.

This sense of sticking together has even been extended in instances to elderly white women living in houses purchased by Pakistanis; they have allowed her to remain as a sort of grandmother figure and even done her shopping and cooking for her.

Thus there is a self-contained character to the Pakistani community, which has its own shops, mosques, cinemas and there is little initiative from the Pakistanis for social integration, except from a handful of young, educated ones who are bitter about a real or supposed colour bar.

Can this remarkable coexistence continue undisturbed? Will race become a political issue in Bradford? Everyone—excepting a minority of extremists unwilling or embarrassed to identify them-

selves—prays it won't. Though three Pakistanis stood unsuccessfully for the local council in the municipal elections of 1963, the Pakistanis have otherwise displayed little but political lethargy—less than 20 per cent of the 6,000 on the electoral rolls voted in the general election. Herbert Lee, Conservative Party agent, says, “It would be quite impossible to swing the coloured vote as a bloc.” The Labour Party distributed campaign literature in Urdu and Bengali, but it contained no specific promises to immigrants as such. The racial issue did not arise overtly during the general election campaign in the Smethwick manner, apart from an anonymous petition circulated by a Bradford teacher and a group of local businessmen who sought 500,000 signatures demanding a ban on all immigration for five years; Peter Griffiths supported it, but only 15,000 signatures were gathered, including 5,000 from Smethwick.

Yet the just under the surface grievances remain to simmer, though the Labour Party agent, Bill Bramhall, has detected only a “negligible white backlash” in the campaign. Mr. Lee feels sub rosa Smethwick feelings could be worked up by extremists outside the party; Mr. Bramhall agrees the racial issue could be exploited politically, but “if raised, would be raised in desperation”. But one anonymous white Bradfordian said: “I wouldn't like to say what would happen if race was raised as political issue . . . I for one would support a Smethwick type candidate if he was within a recognized party framework.”

Bradford's racial coexistence is subject to such influences as a trade recession, possible political exploitation, press sensationalism from outside the city, housing frictions as the redevelopment scheme reaches immigrant areas and they move in greater numbers to now predominantly white council estates. Moderate Bradfordians realize their coexistence is delicate and are making efforts to encourage social integration or at least to maintain the *status quo*.

Three Pakistanis have been appointed as liaison officers in the Public Health Department; a Pakistani has been coopted on the city council; the Moral Welfare Council is striving to arrange adoptions for unwanted children of mixed race parentage; and S. Ervin Scott, general secretary of the Bradford Council of Social Service, is organizing an Immigrants' Advisory Committee drawn from both English and immigrant communities and designed as a study group (“working by observation not supposition”) to sort out racial problems and to establish a channel of communication between the two communities.

On balance the chances for continued coexistence seem bright; for social integration dim. In any case, integration in the circumstances of Bradford is a questionable aim; as one city official said, “If we turn Kashmiri peasants into good little Yorkshiremen they will be unfitted to resume life in Pakistan.” Both Pakistanis and moderate English are agreed that integration, if it comes, will take a generation at least, probably more. Meanwhile the remarkable racial coexistence of Bradford today is summed up by one articulate immigrant: “While two streams flow into the same river, their waters do not mix.”