

## Independent in sorrow

Tim Albert

"The grief comes over you in waves," says Harry, busying himself with the teapot. "And then the remorse. Why did I let her go? She only went because I urged her. And because she knew Basle. And because they needed to make up the numbers. . . . It seems silly, but I just can't accept it. It's one of those things. I try to keep things going as they were. . . . I'm a realist really."

Harry, now 51, writes and illustrates technical handbooks. His 16 year old son is away on an apprenticeship, and Harry lives alone in a neat little bungalow. A year ago, on 10 April 1973, his wife was among the 77 women, 17 men and ten children killed when their chartered Viscount crashed into a mountainside in Switzerland. Nearly all of them came from a network of north Somerset communities, in the shadow of the Mendips, traditional and rural, and linked by country roads and blood relatives. On the flight were the young wives from Axbridge, a town of 1,200 with roots in the past, and the nominal centre of a rural council; the skittles club from the more remote village of Congresbury; and the MNO (Mum's Night Out) club including Harry's wife, from Cheddar.

Almost immediately after the first reports, key points in the villages (vicarages, hotels) were flooded with telephone calls, often from inquiring friends and relatives. As a response to this, and to the lack of information, an emergency centre evolved, staffed completely by volunteers. The key positions were filled by Rotarians, Lions and Round Tablers.

One result of the special activities laid on for the children was to shield them from the press who, inevitably, swamped the little town of Axbridge. Generally, the press fell into the easy angle of the village that had lost its mums. But only ten children in the town lost their mothers, less than in the relatively neglected Cheddar. Congresbury's own peculiar situation was overlooked. A slightly older age group of women went on the flight, and this left not so much a problem of single-parent families, as of widowers.

As for the men left behind, welfare workers say there have been a variety of reactions. Those who had good marriages seem to have faced up to it; those who didn't are wracked by guilt. Some seem to operate on two levels, seemingly cheerful but still lonely, depressed and sad. Others have started courting; one has married somebody else's wife; and six others have got married, too. These men were mostly in their forties; the marriages took place all about six months after the crash, two with their housekeepers and one with a Salvation Army girl from Switzerland. A few are now,

it seems, confirmed bachelors.

The communities decided early on that they would manage on their own, without help from so-called experts from outside. Dr Norman Golledge, a 59 year old parish councillor and traditionally-minded GP, made the point forcibly at an early meeting called by the Somerset social services department (and rather tactlessly held in the local mental hospital). "Basically I told them what I had observed," he says. "People here have always been prepared to stand on their own two feet."

The social services officials decided to leave the communities to their own devices. The RRL (Rotary, Round Table, Lions) committee, with funds of well over £50,000 given after the disaster, assumed responsibility. It took on a staff of three. It started off with practical help, like washing machines, organising about 50 home helps, and, during the summer, giving all the children affected free holidays. Its full-time secretary is Mrs Margaret Tucker, a mother who has been in and out of hospital with arthritis: this she says, helps her to appreciate the problems of motherless families.

Now, after the first year, lessons are beginning to emerge. The first is the need for some kind of national disaster team. The fact that the communities had to evolve their own organisation to cope with the disaster no doubt gave them long-term strength. But, in the short-term, their inexperience contributed to the periodic misbehaviour of the press, and probably compounded some of the personal tragedies. A national disaster fund might also help.

In north Somerset the organisers, conscious of Aberfan, have sensibly kept the financial aspect low-key. The RRL committee keeps its funds more or less as a current account, while the £133,000 raised by English and Swiss appeals, and now in the care of local trustees is on deposit awaiting the result of pending legal action against the airline company. "Dishing it out is going to be the next hurdle," says Barney Lovell, the managing director of a motor company, and chairman of the RRL committee. "We're on a hiding to nothing."

The main controversy at present is whether a planned anniversary trip back to Basle is a good idea. "About 50 per cent just don't want to know," says Margaret Tucker. Some want to be there and others have got to be there. They hope it will have a cathartic effect, will purge their guilt. Those survivors who weren't injured have a very real need to go back, to prove to themselves that they couldn't have got the others out, to see what it was really like, to get things back in perspective."

Outwardly, the north Somerset communities seem to have got the tragedy in perspective. But Margaret Tucker makes this warning. "It is becoming apparent that, in some of the cases, the mother held the family together. You can see families beginning to break up. The strains are there." So too are the scars. After every interview, I was told to mind what I wrote. Harry, for example, stood at his gateway as I drove off. "Don't hurt us," he said.

# The patience of Southall

Paul Harrison; photographs by Dennis Morris

Southall has the largest concentration of Asians in Greater London. Will they continue to put up with the life they have to lead?

At regular intervals, all round the clock, Southall's narrow streets jam up with buses: special buses carrying Asian and West Indian children to and from distant primary schools, vans and minibuses ferrying one shift of workers to the factory and the other shift back. It is as if the school busing is preparing the children, as part of their education, for the pattern of work that awaits most of them in adult life. Southall, housing the largest concentration of Asians in Greater London, suffers with remarkable patience under its burden of work and overwork, the tensions between cultures evolved for agriculture and the industrial setting into which they are projected, and the continuing harassment of discrimination.

It is now very nearly a ghetto: the streets of terraced houses in Northcote ward, on either side of Southall Broadway, are almost entirely Asian, and not just because they gravitated together but also because white areas pressured estate agents to resist their encroachment. The bulk of Ealing's 24,000 people of Asian origin live here. Probably 70 per cent of these are Sikhs from the Punjab, but there are also 2,000 or so Pakistanis and around 4,000 East African Asians. Northcote ward is now predominantly Asian. The 1971 census showed it to have a number of distinctive features: for a start there were 131 males to every 100 females, due to the single male migrants who still have not brought families over. Overcrowding was chronic: for every 1,000 households in Northcote, 385 were living with more than one person to a room, and 226 with more than one and a half. In Ealing as a whole, only 96 households per 1,000 were more than one person to a room, and only 39 more than one and a half.

Asians first came to Southall because the personnel officer at Woolf's rubber factory had fought alongside Sikhs in the Middle East and found them loyal and conscientious. He started a policy of hiring Sikhs, so that by 1965 three quarters of the factory's staff were Asian. The nucleus at Woolf's attracted others. They were prepared to make up for very low basic wages by working long hours—as they still do. Even the community leaders are hard to contact; most of them are working shifts. Many men work seven days a week. Some shop owners even do factory jobs as well. More and more women now work—in sweatshops, cleaning jobs, food factories.

Originally the Asian workers were non-union: no doubt one of the reasons why employers hired them in large numbers. But from the early 1960s on, the Indian Workers' Association realised that some of the tension with white workers arose because Asians were undercutting them, and began a campaign of unionisation. The first target was Woolf's rubber factory. Management were resistant, so people were canvassed in their homes, and a branch was formed. The management still resisted, promoted shop stewards to foremen to buy them off, and finally, in 1965, dismissed some of the most militant unionists. The Asians went on a strike, which collapsed after six weeks.

But the Woolf strike did have an important influence in demonstrating to the Southall Asians the importance of trade union unity. The Indian Workers' Association now has 13,000 members, and there are 250 Indian shop stewards in the Southall area. In the latest work dispute, at Perivale Gütermann, threadmakers, racial divisions seem to have combined with lack of full unionisation to weaken the workers' side. According to the management about half of the 140 production staff, when the dispute began, were Asian men, almost all of them members of the Transport and General Workers' Union. The rest were mainly white women and West Indian women, who were non-union. But according to the union, 85 per cent of machine operators were unionised. The union members, led by Aslam Khan, a Pakistani shop steward, were pressing for a change in the group bonus system. They started a go-slow. According to the management, the non-union workers threatened to take industrial action themselves unless the management introduced an interim individual bonus scheme which would protect their own earnings against the union go-slow. The management complied. The union members held a protest strike, and were suspended. At the end of their suspension they were asked to sign new contracts which incorporated the individual bonus scheme. Some 60 of them refused, and were dismissed. The men sued the firm for unfair dismissal, but lost their case at the Industrial Tribunal. But since December they have been picketing the factory every day. The firm has now hired workers to fill most of the gaps.

The story of Aslam Khan, the shop steward, exemplifies the difficulties of Asian workers. Khan has a law degree and a master's degree in political science. He came to Britain hoping to teach. He signed on with the professional and executive register, but he has not been offered any white collar jobs. He even had trouble getting a factory job because he was too highly qualified, so finally he stopped mentioning his degrees in application forms. "Where do I fit in? I can't get a teaching job, and I can't get a factory job unless I lie. I am a misfit," he says. Khan's case for unfair dismissal was dismissed immediately, as he did not have 104 weeks' unbroken service with the company. Though he has been with Perivale Gütermann for four and a half years, last year he went back to Pakistan to settle some family business for six months.

This same absence disqualified him from receiving unemployment benefit. He now gets £6.50 supplementary benefit, but he cannot get a rent allowance because, like almost every Asian landlord in Southall, his landlord refuses to give him a rent book. "Even among our own community we have got black sheep," he says philosophically. He pays £4.75 for one small room, which will leave him £1.75 a week for all his other needs.

Another Asian graduate who was forced to take up manual work is Sardul Singh Gill, one of only two Asians on Ealing borough council, a JP, and now a successful estate agent. Gill, who was secretary of the Punjab Students' Federation back in



**private life**  
Cooner and his  
sisters share two  
rooms with his sister-  
in-law's family. His  
world.  
is his world.  
he proudly  
owns a radio, his  
most valued possession.  
Right, keeping  
company with his Guru  
in a picture.  
This page, far  
from a traditional  
wedding: will  
Cooner's daughter  
have one, too,  
when they're older?



**The public life**  
Life "outside" has its  
extra pressures. Left,  
two girls, dressed  
English-style, encounter  
a right-wing  
extremist in Southall  
market. Bottom,  
children wait at 7.15  
in the morning, to be  
bused to a mainly  
white school. Below,  
high-street mock  
Tudor is Southall's  
familiar setting for  
its unfamiliar com-  
munity



India, came to Britain eleven years ago, to study for the bar. "I heard that if you worked for three months, you could finance your studies for another three months. But in fact I found that if you left work for even three days you could never catch up your lost money," he told me. "So I had to come out of my dream world and stand on my own two legs." He got a job in a plastics factory, and worked a twelve hour day for seven days a week, until at the end of a year he had saved enough money for a large deposit on a house. Then he started selling insurance for the Life Insurance Corporation of India, and sold £100,000 of policies in his first year. After two years he had saved £4,000. In 1968, when Asians still had difficulties with many estate agents, he bought the lease on an office in Southall Broadway and set himself up in business. Gill combined good luck with a great deal of foresight and hard work. Others were not so fortunate. Gill himself estimates that 60 to 70 per cent of the Asian graduates in Southall are working in manual jobs. Non-graduate Asians have difficulties in gaining promotion beyond the grade of foreman.

Economic pressures are driving Asian women out to work. There are no nurseries in Southall where a mother can leave her young child for the whole day while she goes out to work. Many leave them with illegal child minders who evade the law by pretending they are looking after relatives' children. It costs from £2.50 to £3.50 a week for each child. What is really needed is free day-long multiracial playgroups with qualified leaders.

Women working has led to other pressures on the extended family system. Asian women have been very astute in using our legal and social services framework to escape intolerable conditions which in, say, rural India, family pressures would have compelled them to suffer indefinitely. Asian women here soon learn that they can be rehoused by the social services department if their husband maltreats them. I was told of one woman whose husband often beat her. On one occasion she let him beat her black and blue without defending herself, then went straight to the police with the evidence. They kept him in a cell for two days, then he was fined £60 and bound over for a year. Now she boasts that he daren't touch her. The contrast with Asia is shown by another woman of 20, who is in emergency accommodation in an Earl's Court hotel with her four children. When she wrote to her mother back in India that she had left her husband, the mother wrote back, "I have been unhappy with my husband for 30 years, why can't you stay with yours, too?"

Economic pressures bear harder on Asians than on the English, because of low pay continued with higher expenses. The range of housing choice is more limited and they are more easily exploited. Rents of £22 a week for a three-bedroomed terrace house, or £7 a week for a single room, are not uncommon. Asian landlords often evict families—either because they are on social security and the supplementary benefits officer may insist on rent books being provided, or because the landlord lives on the premises and needs more room for his own expanding family. Families are forced to split up into several smaller units. Tenants put up with exploitation to avoid feuding, with repercussions back in Asia. These housing problems make home ownership even more essential for Asians than for the English, and prices are no cheaper in Southall than elsewhere in Greater London. The price of many staple Asian foods has risen by 100 and 200 per

cent in the last year: rice up from 74p a pound to 23p; red lentils from 7p a pound to 22p; chapati flour from £1.37 for a sack to £3.83.

Another pressure is the rising cost of marriage to the bride's family. Before the Immigration Act, 1968, Asian girls in Southall had no trouble getting husbands: any boy from back home would jump at the chance of marriage as a means of getting into Britain. In those days, it seems you could marry your daughter for £5. The 1968 act prevented girls from importing their fiancés, but allowed boys to go on doing so. Now Asian boys in Southall prefer to send back to India for wives, since they can expect them to be more dutiful and obedient. Several Sikh boys I spoke to said they did not like the girls brought up in England, because they wore their hair loose, showed their legs (traditional Sikh women wear pants) and spoke too much with boys. The girls complain that the boys chat them up and try to get them to go out with them, but consider them corrupt and unworthy of marriage if they respond.

The result of all this is that there is a surplus of marriageable Asian girls in Southall who cannot find suitable partners, yet would not dream of marrying boys of another religion or caste, let alone white boys. So the cost of marrying off a daughter has escalated. Middle-income couples are now said to spend £1,500 and upwards on their daughter's marriage. Against the single religious ceremony in India, over here they have to pay for three separate celebrations: for engagement, civil marriage, and religious marriage which follows some time later. In addition to the reception, they give their daughter as many as 30 saris at £20 to £40 each; gold jewellery—and the price of gold is soaring, too; domestic equipment; jewellery for the boy; and a gift, for example, of a shirt plus £1 for every male guest at the wedding.

For these reasons it is even more a curse to have a daughter in England than it was in Asia. Hardev Jassar, whose 65 year old husband is in India, has the misfortune of having six daughters. She succeeded in marrying her eldest very cheaply. There was no religious ceremony, only a reception in the Dominion cinema, and the cost was £150. But she's been looking for a husband for her next oldest, who is 19, for two years now. "He must be a decent working man, but he need not be rich or educated," she says. Other women are beginning to taunt the daughter, asking why she is not married: they think there must be something wrong with her, or that her mother is keeping her working to bring in money. Sikh parents are not supposed to accept anything off their daughter.

How Mrs Jassar survives is a miracle. During the day she sews garments at home while looking after some relatives' children. When her daughters come home from school she goes out to work, cleaning the machines in a sweet factory for £9.91. She gets £12.91 in family allowance and supplementary benefit. The family eats little, no one smokes, drinks or goes out. For the first marriage she borrowed £500 from a bank where one daughter used to work, and paid it back in a year. Now she has borrowed another £250 to repair the roof and pay for her husband's return fare from India.

The old and the young also have their special problems. There is nowhere for old Asian men to go during the daytime—every afternoon, however cold it is, a school of them gather round the pavilion in Southall Park to play cards. Because the Asian family is still a good deal stronger than

the British, there are not yet many homeless old people. One old man of 70 who was sleeping rough was put into an old folk's home, but he left after three days because he could not speak English and couldn't eat the food. Another old woman I met was thrown out by her own daughter because of rows and lack of space—there were eight other people in the three-bedroomed house. Now she is living with a friend who owns a sari shop. I asked her if she would like to go into an old folk's home. "They are all white people," she said. "Who will I talk to?" Clearly it is unrealistic to expect people of this age to integrate and a separate community home for elderly Asians will have to be provided.

Children have their own set of problems. Before school age, many of them go to child minders. Later, 2,400 of them are bused every day to primary schools in other parts of the borough, at an annual cost of £200,000; and 1,200 secondary school pupils have to find their own way through the chaos of public transport to distant schools. The busing policy started back in 1963, when the parents of white children in two Southall primary schools complained to Sir Edward Boyle, then Minister of Education, that their schools were being taken over by immigrants. It was as a result of that visit that Boyle suggested a limit of 30 per cent immigrants in each school. Busing in Ealing, as the community relations officer, Martyn Grubb, points out, is based purely on a pupil's skin colour. No white children are bused in or out of Southall.

Some children are out on the streets, rain or shine, at seven in the morning, probably because their mothers are going to work. The mammoth coaches lumber round between 7.45 and 8.00 am, and return again between 3.30 and 4.30. It means an earlier start to the working day, and a later finish, than for white children. And it reduces parental contact with the school. One survey found that 20 per cent of Asian parents did not know which school their child was at. Carl Mann, chairman of the Indian Youth Club in Southall, taught at one secondary school that Southall children were bused to: "They always remained a separate group, whereas the local Asian kids were perfectly integrated. Some would get to school at eight in the morning. Then every night there'd be a half hour wait at the bus stop with 70 others. It must leave a mark, to begin and end every day like that." Tuku Mukherjee, secretary of the same club, summed it up: "They go as outsiders, they stay as outsiders, and they come back as outsiders."

Ealing Community Relations Council is pressing for neighbourhood schooling, and an end to compulsory busing, and the same free choice of school for Asian parents that white parents have. Ealing council has agreed in principle to phase out busing: but in fact, this is likely to continue for a very long time. Existing plans provide for only 800 new primary school places in Southall by 1975. Facilities for youth are poor: the youth club takes people up to the age of 30. Some boys say they go and see the same film five times just for something to do. Southall's three cinemas now show nothing but Indian films.

Most young people remain remarkably obedient to their parents. But those who aren't, get far more trouble than their English counterparts would; they are often thrown out of the house or sent back to India. Solly Osman, 21, a Moslem from Malawi, left home four years ago after disagreements with his father, and he has worked in bakeries, restaurants and filling stations in the evenings while trying to study during the day. He wanted to marry

a Hindu girl from Malawi. "She asked me to run away with her," he told me. "But I said we were over 18. We could do what we liked." But her father sent her back to India, and Solly has now heard that she has married over there.

The Asian religions seem so far to have resisted the secularising pressures of British society. A very high proportion of Sikhs and Moslems attend religious services, though Hindus are less observant. Yet all three religions have suffered from petty restrictions which must make them doubt British tolerance. The Sikhs at Southall have their own large temple—a converted dairy which cost £25,000; and their congregation of 2,000 for the Sunday communal meal would excite the envy of most English cathedrals. The temple's weekly income is £400 or £500, which is spent on providing two full-time priests and on social welfare (a house was recently bought for a widow). On Sundays Sikhs flock from all over London—so the council has put double yellow lines on both sides of the road. Now you can't park legally within 100 yards of the temple. (If you're caught parking illegally these days, the police often ask to see your passport.)

The Hindus have not managed to get planning permission to build their own temple on a vacant plot behind Hambrough Road. But the Moslems have suffered worst of all: they have been refused a separate burial place, so they can bury their dead according to their own customs. A dozen of their graves have been flattened in accordance with a cemetery regulation on unmarked graves which, from their point of view, amounts to desecration. Their mosque is a terraced house in Townsend Road, far too small for the crowds that flock in on Fridays. And there is a shortage of halls for the Moslem festivals. Since these depend on the precise time of appearance of the moon, which even the London Weather Centre cannot predict in advance, they are unable to book the halls in time.

All three religions have problems with the schools, with regard to food, dress and religious instruction. There are three Christian cooptees on Ealing education committee, but no representatives of Asian religions.

The days of overt discrimination are past now, though it is only five years since the Southall District Residents' Association won two seats on Ealing council on an anti-immigrant platform. In general elections anti-immigrant candidates have got a declining proportion of the vote. In 1964 and 1966 the candidate of the anti-immigrant British National Party got 9.1 and 7.4 per cent of the vote. In 1970 the National Front polled 4.4 per cent, and in 1974 there was no anti-immigrant candidate. The Asians themselves have been curiously slow to take up their own political cudgels—Sardul Gill is the only Asian Labour councillor, and the only other Asian on the council, a Tory alderman, put up against Gill in Northcote ward. Yet the Asians make up more than half the votes in Northcote ward. No other candidates have emerged. Most politically-minded Asians concentrate on the elections for the Indian Workers Association. It is perhaps because the Asians make so little fuss that so much can happen against their interests: discrimination at work, restrictive immigration laws, lack of free choice at school, frustrations in their religious aspirations—and all this under an increasing economic strain and the gradual collapse of the extended family that has always provided a cushion against disaster. It is a tribute to their courage that they stand up to the pressure as stoically as they do, but I honestly wonder how much longer they can.

