

# *Upsurge of Racism in Toronto Afflicts South Asian Immigrants*

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Special to The New York Times

TORONTO—After the big front windows of Aslam Khan's expensive house in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough had been shattered by stones for the fourth time, he moved his family to less conspicuous quarters in an inner-city apartment building.

"I knew that we were not wanted," Mr. Khan told a recent visitor to his two-story restaurant and bar on Yonge Street, Toronto's Broadway, one of several successful businesses he has built up since emigrating from Lahore, Pakistan, a few years ago. "People said, 'How can a Paki live in a place like that?'" he went on, repeating the opprobrious term originally applied to Pakistanis but later extended to include all of South Asian descent in Canada.

Mr. Khan's experience, among many related by nonwhites in a week of interviews, is part of an upsurge of racism

that has attracted national attention to this polyglot city, Canada's largest, with a metropolitan population of more than two million. South Asians have been the target of insult, vandalism and assault.

Official and private surveys by alarmed governmental agencies and civic groups confirm the widespread nature of racial prejudice in Toronto and other centers where immigrants have concentrated. A majority of 225 youngsters aged 12 to 15 years, interviewed in eight Toronto schools and two in Ottawa for the Human Rights Division of the federal Secretary of States Department, displayed "overt racism" to a degree that "demands emergency action," said a 150-page report on the survey. "Some teen-agers speak of a new pastime called Paki-busting," the

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# RACISM IN TORONTO FOCUSING ON ASIANS

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report said of the attacks on South Asian youngsters in school yards.

Spokesmen for the immigrant communities, sociologists and other authorities agree that the prejudice is motivated to a large extent by economic insecurity, expressed in resentment of competition by Asian newcomers in a time of high unemployment.

There are estimated to be 90,000 Pakistanis in the city, and they generally fall in the business and professional classes as a result of having had to meet immigration restrictions.

In a widely publicized incident on New Year's Eve, several well-dressed white youths harassed two unidentified brown-skinned men, presumably South Asians, with racial taunts on a crowded subway train. When a 61-year-old retired social worker named James Carson intervened, he was attacked by one of the youths and suffered a broken nose. Later the same night a 16-year-old Asian immigrant from East Africa and two teen-age cousins from New York were manhandled and kicked on a subway train by three white men.

## 'Hey, Paki!' but He Wasn't

A few days later a 22-year-old restaurant cook from Guyana named Indal Narine was accosted by several white men calling out "Hey, Paki!"; when he explained that he was not a Pakistani, he related, they knocked him down. Shamshudin Kanji, a 49-year-old immigrant from Tanzania, is still on crutches as a result of an attack by white youths in a Toronto subway a year ago. The Ontario Attorney General, Roy McMurtry, has appealed for an increase in the sentences of 16 months and 21 months given two of the assailants.

The list could go on. Crime in the Toronto subway system, including assaults, has increased by 16 percent in the past year, but how much of this was racially related is undetermined, a police official said.

"The physical aspect of racism is directed more at Asians than toward blacks perhaps because they tend to be small in stature and don't retaliate so easily," said Alfred W. Hamilton, publisher of Contrast, the weekly newspaper of the city's large black community. Concurring with Mr. Hamilton, K. Rajagopalan, an engineer from India, said, "South Asians generally are a nonviolent people who, when attacked, tend just to turn away."

Blacks also suffer discrimination, Mr. Hamilton noted, explaining, "Institutionalized racism affects black Canadians as a fact of life and everyone is aware of it." In one instance, the Supreme Court of Canada is hearing an appeal in the case of a black youth convicted of manslaughter after a fatality during a racial altercation at a high-school hockey game.

## Life-Styles Severely Affected

Discrimination has severely altered the life-styles of at least some Asians since they arrived from countries where many had occupied superior economic and social positions. Gurcharan Singh, a 35-year-old postal clerk, reported that the paint on his 1974 car had been scratched repeatedly by vandals, his children had been beaten up by schoolmates and members of the family had been insulted in the streets so often that they hesitated to go out unnecessarily. He plans to return to India. A light-skinned Pakistani who wished to remain anonymous said that she often camouflaged her Asian background by wearing Western dress instead of the customary sari to avoid unfriendly attention. "People ask me if I'm Latin," she said with a laugh.

Dr. Wilson Head of the sociology department of York University said that 59 percent of blacks interviewed in a survey under his direction for the Ontario Human Rights Commission reported having encountered racial discrimination in jobs and housing. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association found that 27 of 30 real-estate agencies and 11 of 15 private employment services reached in a telephone check made a practice of screening out nonwhites if clients requested it.

A common complaint of nonwhites looking for employment is that the phrase "Canadian experience," often specified as a qualification for jobs offered in newspaper advertisements, is really a euphemism for "whites only."

## 'We Have a Racist History'

In years past, Chinese, Japanese and Jews have been victims of discrimination. Like the United States, Canada interned thousands of Canadian Japanese during World War II. "We have a racist history," said Dr. Bruce McLeod, a member of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, a government agency.

Organized racism in Toronto appears to have been spearheaded by a small, shadowy group calling itself the Western Guard, which seems to have either disbanded or gone underground after official threats of legal action to curb its activities.

The racial attacks in Toronto are a symptom of a larger problem, according to Premier William Davis of Ontario. "Economic difficulty and a sense of aimlessness from some of our young people can contribute to the type of insensitivity and inhumanity which these incidents displayed," he declared in a recent speech to members of the Progressive Conservative Party.

## Origin Traced to Britain

Many South Asians, in interviews, linked the recent prominence of anti-Asian prejudice in Toronto, especially as manifested in the use of the term "Paki," to outbreaks in Britain, which still supplies the largest percentage of immigrants to Canada in most years.

"Racial bigotry is encountered mainly among the lower economic classes, especially the English-speaking immigrants who brought their attitudes from England," said Surjit Singh Hans, president of the Shromani Singh Association, whose 2,000 members are adherents of the Sikh religious community. He maintained that the South Asians had had little difficulty with the white group that he identified as old Canadians, those descended from the English-speaking early settlers, and none at all with the French Canadians, whose roots go back even further.

Mr. Hans rejected the militant response of another Sikh group, the East Indian Defense Committee, which staged a protest march to the Toronto City Hall last month and threatened to meet violence with violence. The group is led by radicals out of tune with the peaceful South Asian community in general, he said.