

# Meeting Community Needs

by

**Jean Ellis**

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## Meeting Community Needs

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Issue

Most of the public sector provision of services for ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom is through local government. In responding to Section 71 of the 1976 Race Relations Act, in utilising the provisions of Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act, and in working with central government through the Urban Programme, many local authorities have made considerable strides in developing sensitive and appropriate services.[1] Either because of a wish to do so or because of regulations governing additional funding, local authorities have also developed some experience in community consultation. This is, however, an area of considerable difficulty. For local authority officers, there is a tendency to attribute a cohesiveness to supposed ethnic minority 'communities', which they would not expect to find among indigenous whites, and to assume that a small number of 'leaders' speak with authority. For the communities themselves, there is a problem of comprehending bureaucratic procedures, which have often been made more complex by the intrusion of central-government programmes into what has hitherto been the domain of local government.

Among the arguments put forward in countering assumptions made by pluralist models of local government is that local decision-making and policies are not specifically related to the needs of areas (Dunleavy, 1980: 135). Moreover, certain groups are excluded from the decision-making process, whether because of the difficulties people face in dealing with local government institutions or through the existence of a mobilisation of bias operating to reduce the chances of issues challenging dominant values (Newton, 1975: 6; Boaden *et al* 1982: 3; Hampton, 1987: 135; Solomos, 1989: 142-143). Where the community is invited to participate either formally or informally in local government processes, that participation is restricted, it has been argued, to groups sharing an 'operating ideology', the local authority having no interest in broadening the scope of participation to encompass those outside the process (Darke and Walker, 1977: 76; Messina 1989: 71). Furthermore, groups given access to the system are



those seen as 'useful' in terms of policy implementation (Boaden *et al* 1982: 12).

Solomos (1989) raises the question of the relationship between racial ideologies and politics, noting that the literature on local government relationships with communities has very largely failed to look specifically at relations with black groups, although there are exceptions (see for example, Ben Tovim, 1986). The question of attitudes, values and ideology in decision making has in general received little attention (Goldsmith, 1980: 46), although particular studies have raised the importance of the individual council officer or member. Attention has been drawn to the role of local-government officers who can 'define the situation', operating a 'selective perception' (Darke and Walker, 1977: 65; Ben Tovim, 1986: 103). Studies of ethnic minorities in the local political context have tended to concentrate on participation in the electoral process (Goulbourne, 1990), or have focused on the social and political organisation of communities without placing the study within the context of policy making (Pearson, 1981), or centred on political institutions (Reeves, 1989; Ellis, 1989) rather than on the communities themselves. Studies which have been essentially ethnographic in nature have provided only a minimal local policy context (e.g. Bhachu, 1985; Shaw, 1988).

In July 1989 the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations was commissioned by Coventry City Council to undertake a feasibility study. The issue centred on the provision of a community centre for Muslims in the city, complicated by a long-standing dispute between groups putting forward rival applications for urban programme funding. But although the particular focus was the provision of community centre facilities, CRER needed to look at the broader context in which the issue had become problematic. We were concerned, for example, with the relations between identifiable groups within the community, and those of the various groups with the City Council. It was also important to make the link between the nature of that contact and local authority policy more generally, and to investigate the way in which services impacted on the Muslim community. The need for community centre facilities, an important demand for the community, was not separate from this but interrelated. In a context in which provision for Muslims was sadly deficient, the diversion of energy into a dispute over a

community centre was significant. Original applications for a centre made in the mid 1980s had made a strong link to the need for services to the community. Yet during the years of conflict these issues had been lost in the discussion of buildings and sites, in the struggle for power and control. It was important to make the connections again between issues.

### The Research Design

The core of the research was semi-structured interviews with some eighty individuals and meetings with groups of Muslims. These individuals included 'visible' members of the Muslim community, that is, those involved in religious organisation, community groups, language teachers and others. It was considered important that interviews should be conducted with as wide a cross section of the Muslim community as possible, so that views recorded would be representative of all identifiable Muslim subgroups within the city. We met Muslims of all ages, including young people in their early teens, young westernised Muslims, those deeply involved in mosque affairs, both professional and manual workers, university educated, and those with little English from rural villages, those living in the suburban areas of Coventry and those in the inner areas of Foleshill and Hillfields. We also interviewed Coventry City councillors and officers, and key workers and managers having a service or welfare contact with the Muslim community. The decision making and events which related to the community centre issue were researched through examination of relevant City Council departmental files. The issues were contextualised by a research of available documents and reports produced by Coventry City Council departments and other agencies, and by visits to other community initiatives and resources in Coventry and community resources for Muslims in other parts of the country.

### Demands for a community centre

In 1984 the Muslim Community Centre Association (MCCA) in Coventry made an application for funding under the Inner Area Programme for a community centre which would meet the needs of all



Muslims in Coventry. From the outset the MCCA itself and its bid for funds were opposed by a group which later established itself as the Pakistani Cultural Association, led by the executive committee of the Islamic Brotherhood, which is the managing body of the main Eagle Street mosque, and by the Pakistani Workers' Association, a body established in the late 1950s to provide advice and welfare assistance. These last two groups were those to which City Council officers and other agencies referred on issues relating to Muslims in the city. The early response by the City Council to the conflicting applications was that funds would be available for a single community centre only, to meet the needs of the whole Muslim community in Coventry, and that common ground for a single application should be found.

The situation, already difficult, became further confused when the MCCA purchased the Methodist church on Stoney Stanton Road to serve as premises, using both a bank loan and loans from individuals within the community, anticipating a successful grant application. It was shortly afterwards refused funding on the basis that the grant would then be retrospective, in respect of money already spent, and as such would contravene Department of the Environment (DOE) regulations. What became known to Council officers as the 'mosque-based' group then put forward a second and rival application for a Pakistani Cultural Centre. The MCCA attempted to function in the Methodist church building without renovation costs or revenue funding, while the two groups remained with lines drawn and resistant to attempts at mediation until late in 1988, when there were renewed attempts to bring the two sides together.

During the years that the conflict remained unresolved, Muslims in the city became increasingly bitter as they saw other minority community groups making successful bids for community buildings and other resources. Yet the failure to provide an effective community centre owed much to the factionalism embedded in the community in which the City Council and broader community leadership in Coventry was already implicated, now given new life through the competition for resources. There were problems for the City Council in moving to a position of support for a bid for a major resource that was opposed so visibly by what had been considered the most influential Muslim group in Coventry, through which dialogue with the community had for so

long been mediated. Resolution of the problem was also hampered on the one hand by the inflexibility of the DOE regulations and the concern of the City Council to absolve its own officers from any charges of incorrect procedure or inadequate advice, and on the other by an attitude which laid the difficulties the MCCA had encountered with bureaucratic procedures entirely at the door of the community; the council, it was said, should not be expected to 'bail them out'.

#### Defining the Community

Another major theme expressed by the DOE and the City Council was that the Muslim community should 'put its differences behind it', an approach which denied the complexities of community. Several writers have stressed the lack of homogeneity, indeed the multiplicity of identities, within what is perceived from outside and often experienced from within as a single community (Cohen, 1985: 13; Eade, 1989; Shaw, 1988; Alam, 1988). But it is relatively recently that politicians and service providers have moved even from a perception of an 'ethnic minority community' to a recognition that the reality is one of many communities. In Coventry we found a reluctance to move beyond a recognition of 'Asian' and 'Afro-Caribbean' as concepts applicable to social or political groupings (or in terms of targeting or monitoring of services), not just because such definitions are relatively easy to deal with logistically. For example, the early official response to the demands for a Muslim centre included an influential view against putting public funds into 'promoting the interests of any religious groups or organisations', the argument being that it would 'generate sectarianism, draw scarce resources from categories of needy groups'.<sup>[2]</sup> In Coventry linguistic need has been recognised, and to a certain extent cultural norms and values have been acknowledged, in terms of making services accessible. But it is Asian communities which have themselves sought to be defined whether as Indian, or Pakistani, or Bengali, or Gujerati as they have looked to retain a sense of identity through religiously or culturally specific provision for themselves and their children. In Coventry the City Council has followed reluctantly, expressing a concern at the increasing number of groups identifying themselves as having separate needs. The paradox is that unity of



action between various black and Asian communities in Coventry is indeed regrettably absent; policy has not encouraged such joint action.

Boaden *et al* (1982: 37) make the point: 'The needs of most forms of administrative organisation for continuity, order and settled boundaries conflict with the kaleidoscope of community feeling.' In Coventry there were reasons of political and administrative simplicity for a relatively uncomplicated view of the community, and this was reflected in the assumption that the community could be served through dialogue with its 'representatives', even though these individuals were quite clearly heading up oligarchical organisations. Council officers had neither the motivation nor the inside knowledge required to challenge claims to represent majority interest, nor was it politically expedient to examine critically their own working assumptions that such a notion could be meaningful in the context of community politics (see Dunleavy, 1980: 104 and Goldsmith, 1980: 74).

Because the City Council had operated a 'taboo' on any approaches which smack of the 'community development model' and had insisted that all its policies operate in a framework of harmonious community politics, it had forced underground real divisions in the community and prevented the development of strengths in individual committees. It is necessary to recognise that ethnic minority groups are diverse and that some groups need greater assistance to articulate their demands and needs than others: to insist that full agreement is expressed from 'below' before any projects or schemes can be adopted works against the interests of weaker groups and may prevent progress.

Communication with the community through a few perceived 'leaders' or 'representatives' served to mask the existence of other needs and the obligation to give them expression. Young people did not relate to the divisions within the community and were growing impatient with what they saw as the conflicts of their elders. And while male community politics dominated the media coverage of Muslim affairs, there was minimal response to the fact that during the 1980s some women were increasingly developing their own forms of organisation and self-management, although group activity was under-resourced, and developed in modest ways and on a piecemeal basis by and large through the enthusiasm of voluntary workers.

### The feasibility study

The decision to commission the feasibility study represented, among other things, an emerging recognition within Coventry City Council, by its members and officers, and within other agencies, that Coventry's Muslim population had in the past an inadequate share of available resources. The welcome expression of intent to go forward in a new phase of relationships with the community was a departure which ran parallel with the development of the City's equal opportunities policy and a new emerging policy for the community sector. Several factors however, need to be taken into account by policy makers.

The original hope had been that the study could be completed in three months, pressure being felt particularly by MCCA members, who hoped for a speedy resolution to pressing financial problems of the Association. Even with an agreed six-month timetable, there was little enough time. However, there were certain constraints beyond those of time. While we felt that goodwill and cooperation on all sides allowed a great deal of ground to be covered, there were other elements that acted as constraints on the development of the study. These by and large had their roots in early assumptions by Coventry City Council about the task in hand and in the way the study was established, and there are lessons to be learnt for future undertakings.

(i) The original concept for a feasibility study had been with reference to the area in and around Eagle Street, the site of the existing centre and Coventry's central mosque. Although a wider brief was accepted by the study's steering group, there were early tensions caused by the new direction. The parallel belief among some members of the group that the aim of the study was to choose between the two alternatives represented by the MCCA and their rivals, the Pakistani Cultural Association, caused some impatience with the terms of reference, including as they did a wider investigation of needs and provision of services to Muslims in the city.

(ii) An early consultation with the community at large, or even and accurate information to the community about the project in its early stages, might have offered several advantages. Additionally:

(a) The Gujarati Muslim community, which had itself made applications and plans for community-centre facilities, as a concerned



group, might have been placed more centrally within the terms of reference of the study. By implication this would have given recognition to the wider nature of the debate, without losing sight of the original impetus for the study: the unresolved conflict between the MCCA and the Pakistani Cultural Centre Association.

(b) In a similar way, it would have been useful if women had been included in the structure for feedback and deliberation. The steering group was all male and offered no leads into the many active women in the community. In the absence of this, it was our task to ensure that women had an effective voice.

(c) It was also undoubtedly the case that the lack of early communication resulted in speculation and rumour about the impartiality of the study, particularly among the 'original founder' group of the MCCA, a group which had lost its seats on the management committee of the MCCA in 1988, many of whom had made loans to purchase the premises in Stoney Stanton Road.

(iii) It would have been helpful if the meetings of the steering group had been structured in such a way as to permit real feedback from the individual members into the research process. The greatest preoccupation was for harmony and successful completion of the task. This was of vital importance, and there was a sense of progress during the period of the study as the two sides moved closer together. However, such harmony was achieved to the exclusion of other groups within the community, and at the expense of discussion and debate.

Furthermore, there was little evidence that the members of the steering group served the function of reporting back or representing the views even of their own constituents. Frequently, those we met, even from those very organisations, were unclear about the terms or intentions of the study and expressed views which were contrary to those of their representatives on the steering group. It would have been useful if these differences of view had been reflected in the deliberations within the steering group.

### Implementation

The early response to the feasibility study was an encouraging one. Press statements announcing the release of the final report proclaimed

it 'A Charter for Partnership' with the Muslim community. The City Council's view was that it was 'indeed a very important document in relation to the Muslim community as a whole with possible repercussions for the black communities within the City'. The full report was circulated quite widely to key staff within the Council. Criticisms contained within the report were publicly accepted and the subsequent task outlined was to work with other organisations, including central government departments, to build 'a new relationship with the Muslim community'.

Over the next few months there was a plethora of meetings with certain Muslim groups in what was proclaimed by the Council as a 'new era of open consultation'. But it would not be so easy to shift the years of distrust, and among Muslims there were serious doubts as to how far there would be real change, backed up by various charges made against the Council. There were complaints about the way the report was circulated, that translations of the document were provided only after prompting from the community. Some interested individuals were not part of recognisable groups and did not appear on the circulation list. One person, after a wide consultation in the community, wrote to the Council with detailed comments on the report, requesting information on next steps. He received no reply.

A consultative group, it had been promised, would be established quickly. But there were growing feelings of disillusionment as people were not aware of any obvious trawl for a list of names. It was felt that unless this happened the Council officers would rely on the existing groups and individuals known to it rather than approach the issue completely afresh. One letter was written to the chief executive immediately after the report was published, posing a series of pertinent questions: how would the proposed consultative forum be formed and how would it take into account all shades of opinion and avoid a monopoly by one sector? what changes would there be in service provision following the report's recommendations and what was the intended timetable and plan of action? The writer received no reply to his letter.

His analysis was that the City Council would not 'grasp the nettle' and, despite its pronouncements, would at the end of the day have lost a valuable opportunity to build up trust. The central fact in this mismatch



of expectations and immediate Council action was that Council officers remained fixed on resolving the issue of the community centre as a priority before they were ready to turn serious attention to other issues. For the Council the key task of the feasibility study had been to establish a centre based on its terms of getting the groups to agree where the centre should be. Asking CRER to do the study was an ideal opportunity to obtain a profile of the community as well, but essentially anything else which came out of the study was a secondary objective.

Yet for the community at large, although the public debate had focused on the community centre, the wider discussion in the feasibility study on community needs and service provision had responded to its own very real preoccupations. Having heard the Council announce that it accepted the document, there was now an expectation of action. Indeed, there was substantial activity in terms of moving on drawings and costings for the community centre building. But if there were also changes in intent by the Council on other issues raised in the report, it was difficult for the Council to communicate this to the Muslim general public. One verdict was that hope, kept alive while the feasibility study was in progress, was fading. Indeed, if the community had expected a corporate response, it had not understood the workings of the Council. While there had been encouraging murmurings from various departments, the chief executive, when asked about adoption of the recommendations had put the responsibility for this back to council members, and from that point there were no obvious developments.

Meanwhile, consultation focused on decisions required in relation to the siting of the community centre, and later the costs and drawings. The choice had finally fallen on the site of the Stanton Bridge School in Red Lane off Stoney Stanton Road. Two exhibitions of drawings were held, allowing a degree of public consultation, with a separate exhibition for women held at the Cornerstone Centre which some 50 women attended. These exhibitions did result in some changes to the design of the proposed centre. For example, a separate entrance for women was introduced, and it was agreed that building foundations that would enable a second storey to be built would be laid. However, the basic concept was predetermined, dictated by the need to push through an early bid for Inner Area funding, and tied to acceptable cost limits. It seemed that the Council design prerequisites would determine the

function of the centre rather than the reverse, which had been urged in the report.

Concentrating discussion on site considerations meant that there was no early public debate on the recommendations of the report as a whole. Some suggestions in the report, such as that a separate Asian women's centre would best accommodate Muslim women's needs, were treated as non-starters by the Council. This was not unexpected, given cost factors. What had been important was to raise the profile and level of debate on women's needs, and a separate dialogue on appropriate resources with Muslim women themselves had been urged as one way of doing this.

Council officers accepted that attention to women's issues was vital. In response to the report, discussions had been opened up with the health authority about ways of incorporating health care for women into the activities of the proposed centre. By the end of 1990 the Muslim Girls' and Young Women's Association had been allocated urban programme funding and two part-time appointments were already going ahead. However, the problem was that council officers simply did not know other Muslim women's groups. Indeed, it has been accepted that it might need a clear initiative at member and officer level before effective work could be done. One officer's comment on the inability to draw women into the consultation process at an early date demonstrates the temptation to leave the responsibility with the community itself: 'What we have ended up with in a way is symptomatic of the culture, faith and everything we are dealing with. Tapping into or dealing with women's groups is extremely difficult.' More telling is a second comment: it had not happened 'because we are not equipped to do it, and not structured to do it'.

One way of focusing on development issues within the community, rather than simply on the contentious issues of site and buildings, would have been the early appointment of a development worker. CRER had recommended this in an interim report to the Council in September 1989, but the suggestion had been resisted by the members of the steering group, and Council officers had been happy for the proposal to drop. After publication of the report in January 1990, at least one steering group member could recognise that the resistance had been in large part because it was felt that the appointment would take power



away from the group. Now, without such a worker, volunteers were attempting to contact families in the community about the proposals, aware of the lethargy in the community and the lack of a direct way to pressurise the Council into action. It was appreciated that a worker already in place would have been invaluable. In fact, an employment and development officer was not appointed until the end of 1990, nearly one year after the report was accepted. As one person put it, it was good that the community centre was materialising, but it was high time to attend to other issues: 'To take the report out and wipe the dust off it and read the rest of it.'

There were personal decisions at officer level involved in the delay in appointing the development worker. At an early stage there was anticipation of possible clashes between such a person and the existing steering group. This is an example of the difficulty council officers have of shifting the focus away from existing 'leaders'. But beyond this, one of the problems in Coventry in terms of service-delivery issues is the lack of personnel to put any new policies into place. The policy coordinator for the community sector, who might have pushed the issues through, had a seemingly impossible task. This post had no operational support, and the same official also headed up the equal opportunities team, which had as one of its main tasks to get its policy out to consultation in mid 1990. There is a recognition that the successful implementation of changes in services to Muslims does require an action plan. However, as well as pressure of work, there are other important barriers, among them the feeling by the Council that it should avoid compromising itself by advance promises of resources or action.

### Siting the community centre

One of the reasons for the continuing focus on the site for a proposed community centre, at the expense of other issues raised in the report, was that the choice of site continued to be contentious. Recommendations as to site had been made by CRER taking into account information given in the city architect's report, received the day before submission of the feasibility study report. We had rejected Eagle Street, one possibility, as carrying with it too great a history of dispute,

both around the mosque and the existing community centre, as well as for technical reasons. One of the two remaining sites, the Stanton Bridge School in Red Lane, although potentially suitable, we rejected on the information that adjacent land was being heavily developed for industrial use. Our choice of site had therefore been Harnall Lane West, close to the Coventry and Warwick Hospital and the Cornerstone Family Centre, already used by Muslim women's groups. The site was unanimously agreed by the steering group at its meeting of 7 February 1990.

Within days letters had been received by the Council from both the Shree Hindu Satsang Mandal and the Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, protesting the decision and citing prior claims to the land. A protest from the Shree Krishna Temple read: 'It seems to us that the authority take greater notice and interest in a community which expresses their interest in a volatile manner at the expense of other harmonious peace loving communities.' They were referring to violent incidents in Eagle Street in September 1989, well after the feasibility study had been commissioned, but the Council was to show that it was sensitive to reactions from other ethnic minority groups, whatever their actual validity. The political pressures to look at an alternative site increased, and the decision was made following the receipt of a city engineer's report, not available earlier, which indicated potential technical problems, and a change in the intended use of the Red Lane site. Approval of Red Lane as the new site for the centre was given by the Policy and Advisory Committee on 19 July 1990, and by early July 1990 the application for a Muslim Resource Centre was approved by the Economic Development and Planning Committee and forwarded to the DOE, which in a reversal of its previous position, now accepted that it was unrealistic to expect the whole community to be in harmony before resources could be allocated.

In all of this the MCCA had been left behind. Despite adverse statements to the press from the secretary of the MCCA about the Harnall Lane West site, the association had always claimed it would stand by the decision of the feasibility study. When the choice moved to Red Lane, the MCCA declared itself opposed, arguing that Eagle Street, the site of its existing centre, should have been the second option.



One of the issues that complicated the potential support of the MCCA for the new proposals was the need to resolve its financial problems, so that it could repay loans to individuals in the community which had been outstanding since 1986. The Council's objective was to transfer any existing loyalty within the community from Eagle Street to the new centre. This transfer might well be aided by assisting the MCCA with their financial situation. However, at the same time, the Council did not want to be seen to be doing anything that could not stand up to scrutiny from other ethnic groups. The furore over Harnall Lane West had shown how sensitive an area this could be.

What the MCCA wanted was financial assistance to clear the debts of the association and funds to continue to operate until the new community centre was ready. On 31 May, the Council agreed a package which would relieve the debt, tying it in with the sale of the site. However, it would not agree a grant to continue existing operations, even on a temporary basis, and the whole package was tied to the association's support of the new centre in Red Lane. The result was deadlock. Lines were once again drawn firmly on both sides, with the MCCA declaring active opposition to the proposed Red Lane site, taking out a complaint with the ombudsman and enlisting the assistance of their MP.

Use of the old Methodist Church on a temporary basis might have been a face saving solution for the MCCA, and it might have provided an opportunity to start youth and other activities which could have later moved into the new centre. Certainly this would have carried with it a risk of severe opposition from at least one other Muslim group, but it is difficult to see how the 'questions of legitimacy and ownership of the new centre' which so exercised the Council would have been compromised by such a short term arrangement. All options carried some risks, but the element of coercion involved in the Council's package probably ensured that it would be rejected by the MCCA.

There is now an awareness by the Council that the ethnic minority communities in Coventry by and large missed out on inner area programme funding, which at one time was the only way the Council accepted bids from the voluntary and community sector. There is a recognition that the Council needs to explore the needs behind the schemes put forward and to be prepared to finance such services

directly. But there is no doubt that dialogue with communities will continue to be problematic, and the continued problems in the Council's relations with the MCCA pointed that up. It may well be true that, in accepting the feasibility study report, Coventry City Council has made a real break with its own tradition, engaging, as it has been asserted, in a two way process, listening to what people want. There are certainly changes in the processes of consultation with the community. Consultations on the Council's equal opportunities and community sector documents and the Section 11 review were carried out with a large number of organisations and groups, rather than with the Coventry Community Relations Council and the Coventry Voluntary Service Council alone, as would have previously happened: it may well be that challenges to policy are being received in a way that was not possible previously. Yet communities are unlikely to be convinced by a promise of 'partnership' while the response to communities continues to be shaped within the limitations of institutional policy formulation and decision making, and by the pressure of political considerations, rather than by need, whether given formal expression or not.



## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Muslim needs and provision of services**

Muslims in Coventry are particularly over-represented among the long term unemployed, both among the group of older men who have been most vulnerable in the contraction of the manufacturing industry and among school leavers. Muslim women, although increasing numbers are beginning to work outside of the home, swell the high levels of 'economically inactive' women in the Foleshill and St Michael's wards. Muslims are not taking up training opportunities in health, welfare and community care fields, where there are so few Muslims employed in the city.

At the same time the community is particularly ill-prepared to meet the skills needs of the economic growth areas of Coventry, having gained little benefit from new skills and training initiatives within the city. The lack of viable contact points within the Muslim community has undoubtedly been an element in this. Also important is the lack of adequate policy, coordination and resourcing within those bodies responsible for training in the community. Response to ethnic minority needs, and with them for Muslim needs has been the responsibility of Section 11 workers who have often been left to find their own direction and have inadequate resources and conflicting sets of priorities. In this situation, gaps can neither be adequately identified, nor can the means be found for overcoming them.

Service provision for Muslims in Coventry demonstrates how far practice falls short of the vision of successful partnership with the community. Few services have the skills or resources to do the outreach work necessary to identify potential client groups, recognise areas of needs or ensure that even the basic communication necessary with community groups is established.

As in the provision of skills training, the lack of a base within the community able to provide an effective contact point for key workers in service departments has been one element in a continued inaccessibility to key services by Muslims. However, there is another factor: the lack of recognition of the need to target services to subgroups within the general category of 'Asian'. The impact of services on Muslim

communities and particularly on Muslim sub-groups has been seriously constrained by the language and other skills available within services departments. This is evident in the gaps in day-care provision, health education and health services generally, where lack of an interpreter service continues to be a important issue. Health education and prevention work has often depended in the past on initiatives emanating from women's groups and has been sporadic and limited. There are currently no initiatives that attempt to reach the Muslim community through imaginative and innovative ways, nor the resources to do so. The effectiveness of health and welfare projects is often limited because of under resourcing, and mainstream service provision fails to make sufficient or effective use of the knowledge and skills which exist within the community. Although the amount of Urdu teaching in schools has improved in the last five years, Bengali and Gujerati speakers are still badly served.

Even where staff within agencies have had a particular remit to identify community needs, resources have frequently been inadequate for such a task and have been unsupported by central policy and strategy within the agency. This has been the case for vital services in terms of meeting community needs, such as community-education teams based in colleges of further education and community schools, or in the health services.

The argument that services should be delivered according to need and not ethnicity has sometimes been posed in a way that has obscured the evidence that failure to deliver a service to areas of high need may coincide with lines of linguistic or cultural division. There are indications, for example, that the nature and extent of disability within the Muslim community remains hidden, and that Muslim families caring for disabled family members are receiving inadequate support within the community and through statutory services. Where agencies are grappling with the issue of redressing the balance between black and white users, an interventionist or positive action approach has not been recognised as one which applies to subgroups within ethnic minorities. There has been so far a consequent lack of a strategy within agencies for evaluation of the extent to which services are reaching community subgroups. Very often agencies are unable to identify whether their services are reaching Muslims or not.



It can be hoped that a new emphasis on action planning and performance review to meet equal opportunity targets will provide an opportunity for these issues to be taken on board, as should the City Council's new policy for bringing together policy and planning for the community sector. Those implementing equal opportunities policies will need to recognise that if large gaps in service provision to particular sections of the community are to be challenged, there will be particular effort required to reach those with whom there has been no tradition of contact or ready channels of access.

A central contradiction is that increasingly agencies have community dimensions to their work, but not the skills nor the time to engage in the essential groundwork of community development. Task Force in Coventry, for example, demonstrates an overwhelmingly reactive rather than proactive approach to communities. Workers with a community sector brief have been constrained through lack of central policies at management level, and through a lack of coordination and a sensible use of existing knowledge and experience. The result has been that those groups less well established, and most in need of resources, have often been least able to benefit. The Muslim community has been particularly disadvantaged in the development of partnership initiatives within Coventry.

#### **The need for effective strategies**

There has been a practice of short term funding of projects and piecemeal development, which has proved wasteful of skills and knowledge obtained, compounded by a negative response by City Council departments and other agencies to projects that have appeared to challenge the status quo. There has been what has been characterised as a 'Coventry centred approach' and a lack of ingenuity in developing services which are sensitive and appropriate to community needs. Insufficient use is made of evaluation of practice in other parts of the country, and of bilingual material developed by national or other local agencies. Furthermore, little attempt has been made to evaluate projects before they have disappeared, or to take up short term projects into mainstream services; rather, data and information have been inadequately shared between services.

#### **Communication with the Muslim community**

Lack of interpreter posts within key service departments, particularly within the health service, has affected the quality of service delivery and put great strain on bilingual departmental officers who have not been appointed as interpreters but are performing this function on a goodwill basis. Posts within departments have essentially been established to interpret Council policy to the community, black workers' roles being seen in terms of departmental rather than community needs.

In working with Muslim clients, service departments have used a network of volunteers and a few Asian professionals, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who have been prepared to work outside their job briefs to remedy deficiencies in resources. This network has been stretched to an intolerable degree. Furthermore, the skills and knowledge of such individuals is rarely fed back in a way that can alter perceptions, policy and practice within agencies.

In the past, there has been inadequate recognition of the consequences of communicating and consulting with the community through very narrow and unchanging channels. There is a new awareness in certain sectors that without flexible and responsive structures for communication with the Muslim community, the expression of community needs has been a muted one, mediated through a few individuals working within City Council departments or influential through political parties.

#### **Community access to decision making**

Community influence on local decision making in Coventry has been restricted, apart from the general ability of registered residents to elect council members. Consultation and communication have taken place through the safe routes of the Coventry Community Relations Council (CCRC) and the Coventry Voluntary Service Council (CVSC). There has been minimal contact between the CVSC and the Muslim community, and representation on the CRC has been through a small number of individuals. The view of many Muslims is that the CRC has served to interpret and decide community needs without adequate



authority from the community, when a more appropriate role would be to represent the needs defined by the community itself to local decision makers and to the wider community.

Party political activity at ward level is viewed by the community as being restricted, and has not been an effective arena for Muslim influence on decision making. However, there has been an increasing move of individuals within the community to attempt to affect decision making through such channels.

The failure of the attempt in the 1980s to provide a well-funded, effective community centre serving the needs of the Muslim community in Coventry owed much to the pre-existing divisions and factionalism which deterred many from becoming involved in community affairs. Unless community activity can attract Muslims who have until now stood apart from it, and the base of community activity is broadened, the effect of new council initiatives to consult directly through community centre and other channels will be severely constrained.

An important component of the history of the proposed community centre was an official response which at best could be construed as an attempt to make sense of divisions within the Muslims community. A constricting adherence to bureaucratic technicalities flourished alongside a situation which never produced a clear and unequivocal response to the moves and counter-moves within the community. Concern not to be embarrassed by backing the 'wrong camp' was in part derived from the view of the Muslim community as comprising two or three power groups, each claiming to represent the majority and which, if brought together, could be taken to represent the whole community. There has recently been some adjustment towards a more kaleidoscopic picture of the community, to allow for the multiplicity of need existing alongside some central themes common and important to all Muslims.

## Community Centre Facilities

### Need for a centre

There is a need for a physical base that can be managed by the community itself, which is not attached to nor identified with mosque management, but in which an Islamic identity can be expressed, and in which ways can be found to respond both to the demands of traditional Islamic culture and to the wider environment in which people live. This base should take the form of a centre managed by and catering for all Muslims in Coventry.

There is also a need for a safe and familiar environment in which services could develop, experiment and feed back into the mainstream. There are important ways in which social, welfare and education provision overlap in such areas as community education and day care provision. There can be no doubt that additional provision is required which is community based, which can increase the impact of existing resources within the Muslim community and which can serve as a model to inform existing practice.

A single community centre cannot meet the needs of all Muslims in Coventry for the following reasons:

(a) There are already well-established organisational divisions between Pakistanis and Gujarati Muslims within Coventry.

(b) The demand that a centre should be 'within easy walking distance' cannot be fulfilled for everyone, wherever a single resource is based. There is very little movement between the upper Foleshill, lower Foleshill and Hillfields areas, particularly for elderly people, children and women. It is quite possible that those Muslim families living in outer parts of Coventry with access to a car will be more likely to use a central facility than those without.

(c) The indications are that a single joint centre would not provide many Muslim women with a facility that would allow the development of group activity. Many Muslim women have gained valuable experience in supporting their own structures and feel comfortable doing so, and this may be better nurtured and developed within a separate facility for women.



There continues to be an emphasis at local and government level on developing community resources and projects that are able to generate income. This is reflected in a recent City Council consultation document which notes that 'community organisations will have to try to develop other sources of income rather than rely solely or mostly on the City Council'. This argues the need to go beyond a social project and develop a strong economic and income-generating side.

The argument for this lies not just in funding imperatives. The mismatch between skills in the community and available jobs would argue the need for initiatives to provide training and increase access by the Muslim community to other training opportunities and to improve communication with potential employers. Furthermore, the DOE may be willing to look at additional costs if a scheme is put together that addresses the issue of training.

While recognising the demand for a resource that will itself provide facilities, at the same time there is a need for a structure that will have a multiplier effect. The design should be such at the outset that it will:

- attract further resources through partnership working and funding;
- provide a base for and a route into educational facilities;
- generate training/employment opportunities and links with local industry;
- provide access to information and advice;
- provide access to and provide feedback into existing services and sources of decision making;
- encourage the development of self management skills within the community.

In looking at community centre provision, several factors required careful consideration within the context of that tension between the perception and requirements of both funding bodies and the community for unity, on the one hand; and the reality of complex and not always compatible needs, on the other. Those considerations were the following:

(i) How the needs of those whose voices have been least heard, such as sub-groups, women, young people and disabled people, can be met while responding to the 'majority'.

(ii) How contact can be made at an early stage with health, welfare and other services, and with the training and employment

sector, so that those aspects can be brought into the initial planning and design. One problem here, after the years of dispute, is the need to rebuild energy to look creatively at the options and opportunities.

(iii) Another important issue has been that of location of a site for any community centre building. As had been part of the original proposal, the estates department was requested to identify possible sites for a building. Subsequently independent architects and surveyors were commissioned to examine the merits of the sites identified. The information in the technical report was set beside other important considerations for the community, permitting recommendations to be made about the best possible site location for a Muslim community centre.

We considered the sites identified by the city architects as available for the building of a community centre and noted that four of the six possibilities were rejected by them for technical reasons. We suggest that the two remaining alternatives may best be resolved by consideration of the following issues:

(i) It is desirable that any new project be clearly distinguished from those sites which have been historically associated with the present dispute.

(ii) Any site adopted must be explicitly distinct from and preferably neutral in relation to the premises of groups implicated in controversy to date.

(iii) Any site adopted needs to be acceptable to women's groups and not associated with areas of male control, while being equally acceptable to men's groups.

(iv) The project must be sufficiently centrally located and accessible to members of all communities of interest, including those who already have their own accommodation.

### Management of a Muslim community centre

Often community centres that are founded on a religious basis are in the hands of elders within the community. The voices of young people and women have not yet been heard. The monopoly of a future Muslim community centre by one section of the community would have a very negative effect on community relations.



The election of representatives at a public meeting as the sole method of establishing management committees has not provided a method whereby a large cross section of residents and potential users can be represented, and ways must be found which remain democratic and not subject to arbitrary control but which ensure that a monopoly does not take place.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Coventry City Council

#### Community Centre Provision

- 1 There should be funding for a community centre jointly managed by all sections of the Muslim community.
- 2 The separate needs of a large section of the community which relates to the Gujarati-managed mosques in Coventry should be recognised, and the City Council act as a financial partner in the substantial resource which will be provided by the proposed Zeenut-ul-Islam centre.
- 3 Facilities for Muslim women should be primarily met through the funding of a separate Asian women's community and training centre, although use would be made of a Muslim community centre for functions and some activities. As a poor second-best option only, an alternative should be separate, self-contained accommodation within the context of the Muslim community centre for training, group meetings, child care and other activities.
- 4 Negotiations on the proposal for an Asian women's centre should take place with separate consultation with Muslim women.
- 5 A Muslim consultative forum should be established which would draw in a wide cross section of subgroups, some of whom will not want to be concerned with the provision of (or participate in), a jointly managed Muslim community centre, but who have educational, social and other needs represented in this report. In the first instance, such a forum would serve to feed back the findings of the feasibility study. It might further serve to constitute the basis for future consultation on a wide range of issues.

### Management of multipurpose community centre

6 It is essential that there should be resources available for adequate training for those involved in managing community centre facilities. Tile Hill College is currently exploring the possibilities of management training for voluntary organisations, and this might prove a useful development.

7 The Council should provide a consultant or second an officer to work alongside the centre manager in the early days of the community centre to set up management and financial systems, and to explore the following needs:

- (i) the need for a full-time administrator/finance officer;
- (ii) options for a developing into a limited company;
- (iii) funding of training and income generation.

### Development of Community-centre facilities

The Council should take the following immediate steps so that information can be fed back into the planning and design of centre facilities.

8 An employment and training officer for the Muslim community should be appointed to work with Muslim men and women. The appointee should address himself or herself to the following tasks:

- (i) a training-needs analysis of the Muslim community;
- (ii) contact with the unemployment initiatives team in the economic development unit, and Task Force, to identify ways in which vocational training schemes can be supported within the context of a joint Muslim community centre and a women's centre;
- (iii) contact with the technical college and Barr's Hill and the community college to pick up on proposed initiatives;
- (iv) contact with individuals within the community who have links into the business sector;

9 A social/education development worker should be appointed who will:

- (i) liaise with health authorities and women's groups to research possibilities of bringing health care and education facilities within the proposed community centre;



(ii) research the Muslim take up and satisfaction with existing provision for under fives, and identify the need for playgroup or crèche facilities within the proposed community centre facilities;

(iv) explore how far existing English language classes meet the needs of Muslim women and the nature of the demand for additional classes for women;

(v) and research the need and demand for English language classes for Muslim men.

10 Funds should be found for the appointment of a short term researcher into the needs of Muslim disabled people, so that information can be supplied to the social and health services, as well as to enable provision to be made within community centres.

#### Other community facilities

11 It is desirable that the planning department should work together with the several mosque committees in the city, to assist them with their needs in respect of additional space for religious education, parking facilities etc. In general, it would appear that such developmental work between local authority departments and minority community groups is frequently lacking, and that community groups have little understanding of or access to the kinds of assistance that might be forthcoming from planning departments.

#### General Service Provision

12 It is vital that advice work in the city be increased to meet the needs of Asian communities, in particular Muslim ones. In the immediate term, a Sylheti speaking female advice worker should be appointed to the Foleshill Information and Advice Centre who would be available for outreach sessions at the community centre and at Bengali women's groups.

13 Youth services should review their provision for Asian, and particularly for Muslim, young people in the Foleshill and Hillfields areas of the city. A detached youth worker (Muslim community) should be appointed with an immediate remit to establish youth-club facilities

in the Edgwick and lower Foleshill areas, some developments to be transferred at a later date to the Muslim community centre.

14 Service departments, particularly social services, should examine their monitoring and data-gathering procedures so that the delivery of services to the Muslim community and to Muslim subgroups be brought within the area of performance review.

#### The steering group

#### Planning a centre

15 Posts and job descriptions in a Muslim community centre should take into account the need to cover the following functions:

- generating more community awareness;
- improving community access to existing resources;
- providing support to the organisers of community groups;
- making known to the local authority the needs of the community;
- outreach community development;
- identifying educational, social and leisure needs of the Muslim community.

16 In the planning stage of a community centre, careful consideration should be given to how existing project initiatives, and employment and training initiatives in the city, could be used to more effect by Muslims. This has implications with particular regard to the location, management and design of provision for women.

17 Within the centre design, the following elements at least should be provided:

- \* a large, well equipped social area/sports hall/conference hall
- \* workshop facilities
- \* a large room for job-club facilities
- \* classroom space
- \* spacious office areas
- \* small rooms to allow for confidential information and advice provision
- \* lounge area which can be booked for small functions and used for group activities
- \* adequate space for crèche facilities
- \* large kitchen with industrial kitchen units



\* separate entrance and access for women to some of the above facilities.

18 In the case of separate resources not being made available for women, the building should be designed in such a way as to ensure that adequate provision for women is made available in a separate part of the building.

#### Consultation

19 A steering committee should be established for a Muslim community centre on a broader and more representative basis, which would ensure the representation of a broad range of skills. This would include health, education and industry.

20 The steering committee should have as one of its last tasks the formulation of a constitution for a management committee of the centre itself. Such a management committee should have a mix of:

- (i) individual members of the community elected at open meetings
- (ii) user representation
- (iii) co-opted or reserved representation to ensure that the following skills and experience are present on the committee:
  - \* financial management
  - \* industry
  - \* health/education/welfare

21 There should be consideration of ways in which a wide cross section of the community, its subgroups, young people and women, can be represented.

22 Proposals for the establishment of any consultative forum, or steering group for community centres should be communicated within the community as widely as possible.

23 Once a new steering committee is established, its deliberations and progress should be communicated as widely as possible.

24 The management of the community centre should be conducted through full committee meetings, and there should be encouragement to all Muslim households to take up membership through leafleting and other methods of widescale publicity. We were impressed with the Pakistani Centre in Liverpool where elections are held six months after

the annual general meeting to allow for new membership to be established and find a voice.

#### OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

25 The DOE should be more helpful in terms of offering advice on the kinds of programme it is seeking to fund.

26 The DOE should offer clearer guidelines and propose ways of overcoming the apparent contradiction between requesting groups to secure an appropriate building for projects without having incurred any expenses in doing so.

Other recommendations for specific community groups to resolve immediate problems arising from the dispute or emerging during the course of the study were also put forward.



## Chapter One: COVENTRY CITY: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

### Introduction

Coventry, once an agricultural market and church foundation-based settlement, developed rapidly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an industrial town specialising in engineering, textiles and other manufacturing. Historically it has been a city of immigration of French Huguenots, Welsh, Irish and Scottish, and other European groups fuelling since the fourteenth century Coventry's innovative and expanding industrial sector. After the devastation of the Second World War, a period of prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s enabled large scale redevelopment and rebuilding to take place. However, this had little impact upon the inner residential areas to the north and east of the city centre which largely consist of terraced housing built at the turn of the century to house the earlier settlers. It is these terraces which now house many of the more recent migrants to the city.

The expansion of the wartime workforce was the product of more migration. Many women as well as men were drafted into Coventry's industry from outside. When hostilities ceased, Coventry was able to undertake a rapid conversion to peacetime production. Indeed, the city was a key centre of production, particularly of vehicles, in the national export campaign.

Post war prosperity was built to a large extent on the development of the vehicle manufacturing industry and the associated engineering factories. The local labour market was often in the immediate post war years troubled by labour shortages, and during these years migrant labour was increasingly used to fill the less attractive jobs in expanding industries. Migrant labour from Central Europe, including speakers of Polish and Ukrainian, arrived in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and Italians also came at about the same time. By the late 1950s, migrants from different parts of the Indian sub-continent had begun to settle in Coventry, including Muslims from West and East Pakistan (later to become Bangladesh) and from Gujerat in western India. In the 1970s the number of Gujerati speakers grew substantially, many of them arriving as refugees from East Africa. Although some were Muslims,

most of this latter group were Gujerati speakers whose religion was Hindu.

While the main growth in the number of Asians took place at this time, it should not be considered that the settlement of Asians in the city was exclusively a post war phenomenon. One of the first Muslims settling in Coventry arrived in 1942. The first settlers came as temporary employees on ships, and settled in Church Street, Foleshill, near the present mosque, working in the Jaguar and Alfred Herbert factories. In the mid 1940s an economic boom, coupled with the establishing of recruiting offices in India, brought increasing numbers of Muslims to Coventry. The first Muslim enterprise shop was in Station Street East, which still exists.

By 1951 then, Coventry was predominantly a city of newcomers. There are reports that besides racial prejudice, Coventrians were reputed to be anything but welcoming to newcomers generally. Clubs, pubs and religious institutions often catered for particular migrant groups. Again, this had a precedent. In 1912, for example, English migrants had established their own clubs and societies. The Association of Lancastrians met regularly in the Kings Head Hotel, the Society of Yorkshiremen in the White Lion and the local Society of Londoners was also active. Sargat Florence's 1949-1951 survey confirms that migrants continued to socialise inside their own regional and ethnic networks, a situation which could produce a lack of interest in establishing neighbourhood friendships.[1]

The small wartime Indian and Pakistani population expanded to an estimated 4,000 by 1954. It soon took over some of the most rundown housing stock in the Foleshill Road and began to develop as a community. In October 1952, Muslim members of the Indian community applied to the Planning and Redevelopment Committee for separate burial facilities and land for the building of a mosque.

More definite figures from the census of 1961 showed 2,843 residents from India and 596 from Pakistan, out of 5,764 residents born in Commonwealth countries, 'colonies, protectorates etc'. There was a substantial increase in numbers during the period 1961-1966, to around 11,340 born in these places. However, the rate of migration had slowed down by the mid-1960s, the failure of Coventry's manufacturing industry to maintain its immediate post-war growth rates providing



fewer opportunities. The 1971 census recorded the 'New Commonwealth' population as 15,190, of which 1,570 were from East and West Pakistan and 8,560 from India. A total of 1,195 'Kenyans' were probably also predominantly of Asian origin. By this stage, the ratio of males to females was beginning to close, having shown at the earlier dates a clear imbalance of up to two males per female. These early statistics, however, give little detail which could be used to estimate religious or cultural sub categories. However, official Coventry Community Relations Council (CCRC) figures for 1974 estimated that the city's population included some 1,600 Urdu-speaking Muslims and some 400 Bengali Muslims (Winchester, 1975).

#### The Asian community and its geographical origins

Most emigration from the Asian sub-continent to Britain originated in three areas in Pakistan, two areas in India and two areas in Bangladesh. From Pakistan these were the Pathans from the North West Frontier Province, and people from Punjab, Mirpur, or Azad [Free] Kashmir. Indian migrants came primarily from the Kutch in Northern Gujerat or from the remainder of the Punjab. Most Bangladeshis came from villages in Sylhet, and a smaller number from the maritime areas of Bangladesh. Additionally, many of the East African refugees were Gujerati in origin. The majority of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis came from two rather remote and relatively inaccessible districts in the foothills of the Himalayas, each of these areas being part of the northernmost borders of the two countries. Both are hilly and rocky terrains where families either have joint farms or work for landlords as farm workers or small peasants. Both districts suffered heavily in 1947 at the time of partition from India. In West Pakistan the fight over Kashmir brought thousands of refugees into border villages on the Pakistani side.

Both Punjab and Kashmir have a long tradition of migration. In Punjab the 'push' factors have been population pressure, fragmentation of landholdings (particularly in the east) and debt to money lenders. The tradition was that almost half the Indian army came from Punjab, whereas in Mirpur there was a tradition of working in the British merchant navy. Like the Punjabis, the Kashmiris were affected by

partition, and the disturbed conditions which followed. Before partition, they used to travel to the Vale of Kashmir, now under Indian control, to work in the catering trade or as porters.

Those from Sylhet had likewise been accustomed to migrate, the 'push' factor being the stoney soil, and the pull in this case not towards the army, but towards British steamship companies. Some of these *lascars*, working in intolerable conditions, jumped ship and settled in port towns in England and Wales. These links influenced the migration of the 1950s.

The Kashmir question remains a bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The international status of Kashmir has not been resolved and the demand for autonomy and independence has had serious ramifications for relations between India and Pakistan. Actions of Kashmiri organisations in Birmingham focused attention there in 1984, when the Indian Consul was kidnapped and killed by an organisation calling itself the Kashmir Liberation Army and a Kashmir Defence Committee was set up. Separate Kashmiri organisation has been minimal in Coventry, although from time to time within organisations there has been evidence of an expression of separate Kashmiri, as opposed to Pakistani, identity. The 1979 Eagle St mosque constitution, for example, granted separate electoral representation to Kashmiris, as well as to Bengalis, Pakistanis and other Muslims. In many towns in Britain, tensions within and across organisations based on a Punjabi-Kashmiri split have been a dominant feature of Muslim community life. There are differences of view among Muslims themselves as to how far such subgroup differences have affected community politics in Coventry. Some are anxious to deny the relevance of this issue at all, while others see such differences as critical. It is inescapable that regional identity and sometimes ill feeling and rivalry, coinciding with lines of regional identity, if not a primary feature, have formed part of the dynamics of community groupings and action.



### The settlement of Muslims in Coventry

Academic and policy analysts have put forward a number of theories to explain the residential patterns of Asians in Britain. The most significant of these are that of discrimination and the thesis of 'return migration orientation', a preference for the low-cost housing found in the industrial terrace, based on a belief in an eventual return to the home village and necessitate by the obligation of sending money home. Discrimination, both in the labour market leading to restricted available disposable income, and in terms of lettings, sales, and problems of access to rented tenures, has been proven to have an effect in repeated studies across Britain.

There is also a degree of segregation within the broader Asian community along lines of birthplace, language and religion, which might suggest the strength of voluntary segregation. A desire for easy access to communal facilities such as shops and places of worship significant. Even now, many Muslims cite easy access to a mosque as a primary reason for choosing to remain in the lower Foreshill and Hillfields area. Others quote fear of attack or harassment should they live elsewhere in the city, and the positive advantages of living within the community. In a study of Blackburn (Robinson, 1979), a preference for living close to community and community facilities was shown to influence a very large percentage of decisions relating to housing choice. Equally, we can see housing choice operating increasingly for some Muslims and other Asians in Coventry, who are choosing to move away from the inner city to better schooling and other facilities.

Chain migration ideally leads to family reunion in Britain, but it is still often the case that older kin are left in the homeland and life in Britain imposes constraints on traditional patterns of family life. Members of the same family are often forced to live in different parts of the country, following employment. The British family house is often too small to accommodate a joint family, and while some families were able to find housing in adjacent streets, or purchased neighbouring houses, the pattern varies, and in some cases family and village networks are spread across different locations in the inner city.

### Linguistic diversity

Geographical diversity of origin is, not surprisingly, mirrored in linguistic diversity, complicating reference to 'Asian', or even 'Muslim' or other religious categories. Thus in Pakistan the main spoken languages of the four provinces are Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto and Baluchi. Pathans speak Pashto, Punjabis speak Punjabi, and Kashmiris from Azad Kashmir speak Mirpuri, a distinctive dialect of Punjabi. A knowledge of Arabic is important for reading the Quran and for use in the mosque. The majority of Bangladeshis are from the Sylhet district where the dialect spoken, Sylheti, is so far removed from standard Bengali that the two cannot be used interchangeably. Written Bengali is written in a variant of the devanagri script and will be familiar to few rural Sylhetis. Since independence, the official language in Pakistan is Urdu, written in the Perso Arabic script, and for many Pakistanis the mother tongue will be regarded as Urdu. Often families will say that they speak a mixture of Urdu and Punjabi, for example, in the home, the emphasis between the two varying between households.

While Bengali language teaching is one of the primary requests of Bangladeshis in Coventry, increasingly Urdu is in demand by other Muslim language groups, including Gujeratis, as a language of literacy for writing letters home and for reading religious and literary material. The Punjabi spoken by Sikhs in Coventry, while being intelligible to Punjabi speakers from Pakistan, is written in the Gurmukhi script, while the Punjabi of Muslims in Coventry is written in the Perso Arabic script, setting a particular set of issues for Punjabi language teaching.

### Population statistics: the present day in Coventry

Recent estimates of the Asian population of the city may be derived from the Department of Economic Development and Planning analysis of Asian names on the electoral register, an exercise carried out in 1981, 1983, 1985 and 1986, and most recently in 1988. For the analysis each name on the list of Asian names was assigned both a religious and a language code. Where names could not be positively identified as belonging to a particular religious or language group, they were included in categories such as Sikh or Hindu, Gujerati or Urdu.



This information was combined with statistics of the ethnic minority population aged up to 17 from the City's Education Department. The planning department figures suggest a total of 3,177 Muslim names and a further possible 1,271 either Muslim or Hindu and Muslim or Sikh.[2] Of the city's school population, 1,438 are 'Pakistani' children and 338 'Bangladeshi' children. It is not possible to estimate the number Muslims of Gujerati or African backgrounds as these are lost in general birthplace statistics.[3]

This population estimate of some 6,000 would be seriously challenged by most Muslims in Coventry. Friday prayers in mosques across the city accounts for some 2,000 adult males, and a conservative estimate must put the population at around 7,000. Others would put in at nearer 8,000. The planning department is itself aware of the limitations to the electoral names analysis and suggests that there may also be considerable under-enumeration because of non registration. A 1979 survey concluded that 23 per cent of Asians were not registered, as against 19 per cent of Afro Caribbeans and 17 per cent of whites. (Anwar, 1986). The current estimated 'non-response' figure for Foleshill was 7.3 per cent and that for St Michael's was 5.2 per cent (against 3.4 per cent in the city generally). Further, the ALUS Coventry language study suggested heavy under representation of Bengalis on the electoral register.[4] We are fairly sure that there are at least 200 Bengali-speaking families in the city. Even this may be an underestimation. We have seen that as early as 1974 there were an estimated 400 Bengali speaking Muslims. This was before many men were joined by their wives and families. In the electoral register analysis it appears that a large number of Bengali names were coded as Urdu or Other, as Bengali names were classified only when there was complete certainty.

The 1980 ALUS study showed that the household members of the Punjabi (Urdu script) respondents in Coventry showed an age structure which was predominantly young, with large numbers of children under 16. There were also noticeable bulges in the 26-30, and 41-50 age groups, and in some age ranges the gender imbalances were quite striking. Significantly, there were more males than females in the over 40 age group. For future planning purposes, these facts are important since, although a number of family completions have been achieved by

the migration of wives and other family members during the last decade, many of the earliest migrants are likely to reach old age with no spouse or family support; expectations of return migration on retirement for these groups are low.

A projection of population trends undertaken by Bradford Metropolitan Council[5] estimated that the number of people of Pakistani/Bangladeshi family origin was expected to increase by 49 per cent between 1985 and 1996 and to double by 2006. A calculation of this nature is not possible in Coventry because the necessary demographic data is not available, but age structure and family size would indicate a substantial increase in the size of the community over the next two decades. The trend for large families in the Muslim community is likely to continue for some years to come. The total number of full-time ethnic minority pupils in Coventry city schools is declining (falling from 9,285 in January 1987 to 9,140 in January 1988) and there is evidence of a levelling off among Muslims, but the existing 'bulge' will take some time to work through the system.

#### Settlement patterns

If population estimates themselves remain unclear, Coventry's electoral register statistics are most useful in showing where most Muslims live within the city. The most concentrated areas of Muslim population are between the lower part of the Foleshill Road and Stoney Stanton Road around the Eagle Street mosque. Another area of concentration is in Edgwick on either side of the Foleshill Road, in the original areas of settlement. There are distinct clusterings in Radford, Holbrooks, Earlsdon, in the Hearsall Common area, and in Cheylesmore, and in a line from Spon End to Mount Nod. In the outer areas groups of settlement appear to be related to occupation, around the Walsgrave Hospital and the University; or indicate school choice, for example around Woodway Park Comprehensive School. The latest analysis of the electoral roll 'names' data showed a slight percentage decline in the predominance of Foleshill, even greater reduction of numbers of Asians in St Michael's, and a corresponding increase around the suburbs. Since this was based on the names of electors on the electoral register it masked an increase in overall minority population numbers in those



areas, as children under voting age are not taken into account. It was clear that both Bengali- and Urdu-speaking Muslims are part of this movement outwards, but the same identification could not be made for Gujarati Muslims, as they are lost within the Gujarati-speaking statistics. Indeed it was difficult to be clear about the size of the Gujarati Muslim population at all.

The largest concentration of Punjabi (Urdu-script) households is around the Eagle St mosque north of the Coventry and Warwick Hospital. There is also a small cluster of this language group settled in a single polling district on the western edge of the city centre. The rest of the Punjabi (U) language group shows a settlement in line with the general South Asian population: that is, with the major settlement in the Foleshill ward and a few scattered households in other parts of the city. The Gujarati Muslim community's focal neighbourhood is the Hillfields area. Another area of settlement by this particular group is around Stoney Stanton Road and adjacent streets. We were advised that there are some fifty Patwari speaking families from Rawalpindi, living mainly to the north east of Foleshill Road. Bangladeshis live principally to the north of Harnall Lane. With many professional families moving out to the suburban areas of Coventry, these linguistic distinctions are crosscut with economic and other social factors. Certain observations are made within the Muslim community, such as: 'Longford Mirpuris are richer, as are families from Lahore.'

The study of the electoral roll showed how distribution is constrained by the type of housing available. For example, in the polling district of St Michael's ward, dominated by municipally owned accommodation, areas of high-rise blocks had less than 10 per cent south Asian names while in adjacent districts containing substantial numbers of old terraced houses in private ownership the proportion rose as high as 40 per cent. Indeed, there are probably more south Asian names in the owner-occupier belt of the suburbs of Coventry than in the council estates.

This picture of diversity contrasts strongly with the vision of a single unified Asian group. Vaughan Robinson (1979: 18) in his study of Blackburn comments: 'The Asian community is itself divided by deep historical schisms and differences of values that make internal conflict more common than external consensus. It is inevitable that the concept of a united ethnic group sharing certain aspirations and problems with

neighbouring whites has little value except as a mental construct.' The 'social distance' between groups may affect the likelihood of the development of any perceived unity of purpose between or even within communities. In the last two decades, early perception of unity of interest between Muslims and other Asians within Coventry has given way to a greater emphasis on a 'Muslim' rather than an Asian identity, indeed frequently emphasising subdivisions and differences within the Muslim community itself.

#### Employment, Asians and Coventry

In the Coventry City Council 1988 document *Coventry Looking Forward*, the following observations were made:

Over the past 15 years or so, Coventry has seen a drastic decline in its fortunes. Its manufacturing industry, once its great strength, has been decimated. Unemployment has risen to alarming levels and many sections of the local community are suffering appalling deprivation. The economy is now improving, and the City is back into wealth creation, but we have a long way to go to get back to employment levels we had in the 1960s.

Until the mid 1970s, Coventry's economic prosperity went hand in hand with the success of the manufacturing industry. Its car industry, machine tools and engineering firms were all major employers. Manufacturing employment in Coventry was, and still is, dominated by a few large companies. All of the top 10 manufacturing employers are multinationals, the largest (including Peugeot-Talbot and Massey Ferguson) having their headquarters outside Coventry. In 1966, seven out of every 10 working people were employed in manufacturing. Since 1973 more than one in three jobs has disappeared. Most of these jobs have been lost from the manufacturing sector, with over 40,000 jobs lost in the motor vehicle industry alone. In the Foleshill area during the 1980s many of the major industries closed or moved away. They included Alfred Herbert's, Webster and Bennetts, Dunlop's in Cash's Lane, Jaguar, Stirling Metal, Cash's and the GPO Telephone Engineering Centre. Other smaller firms also closed.



In spite of this contraction, manufacturing remains the single most important source of male employment. By the end of the 1980s 52 per cent of men living in Coventry in work were employed in this sector. Furthermore, male manufacturing employment remains highly concentrated within those industries for which the Coventry area is renowned. Motor-vehicle manufacture and engineering provide employment for 40 per cent of the male residents with a job. The remaining male manufacturing jobs are largely within telecommunications and textiles and man made fibres. Residents of Foleshill and St Michael's tend to be employed in lower status jobs in all industries and are under-represented in administrative and managerial jobs. The labour force in these wards has not benefited from recent economic growth and falling unemployment in the same way as other parts of Coventry. It is worth noting that often in the 1960s and 1970s even those migrants with higher educational qualifications found themselves working in low-grade jobs in industry when they first came, rather than being able to utilise those qualifications fully in the local labour market. Such individuals frequently ended up as supervisors and shop stewards with GEC and Talbot.

According to the 1980 Alus language project, over half of the Punjabi (U) speaking respondents who were employed worked in the manufacturing industries a fifth in the business or commercial sector, and 14 per cent in services including transport. Sixteen per cent were in family businesses or self employed. Of Bengalis, 53 per cent worked in manufacturing and 24 per cent worked in shops or restaurants. It is virtually impossible to ascertain this kind of information for the other sections of the Muslim community through 'name analysis' data since in both the ALUS and planning department data Muslim Gujaratis were combined with Hindu speakers of the language.

At the time of the Coventry Skills Audit survey in 1988, of those Coventry residents who had ten years earlier been working in vehicle assembly, one in eight was unemployed. Among the estimated 9,000 Asian men in the 20-60 age range, the unemployment rate stood at 23 per cent, compared with 12 per cent across the whole city. In Foleshill and St Michael's wards unemployment was much higher than average, about 30 per cent for men and over 20 per cent for women. Not only was there a rapid growth of unemployment amongst school leavers in

the 1970s and 1980s, but the Skills Audit revealed long term unemployment as a major problem. Members of the Asian community experience longer durations of unemployment than the average for the unemployed in Coventry.

It was also clear that those employed in engineering and car manufacture accounted for a very large proportion of the unemployed workforce. As manual workers in the manufacturing industry, Muslims have been in a particularly vulnerable position.

Unemployment in Coventry fell rapidly over the year 1988/89, although figures were affected by a major change in the registration figures which removed all 16-18 year olds from the unemployment count. Despite the fall in overall unemployment, the St Michael's and Foleshill rate remained persistently high. In March when the city's unemployment stood at 9.5 per cent, St Michael's had a rate of over 20 per cent and Foleshill was not far behind.[6]

New trends in employment and unemployment in Coventry have affected Muslims in complex ways. Despite long term unemployment, particularly among the over 50s, some families now have four to five wage owners meeting household expenses, although each may be at low levels of pay, and some families feel that they are more prosperous than they were 10 or 15 years ago. Further, many Muslim households are no longer sending remittances home. Higher living standards in Coventry are thus possible and essential to meet the demands made by family life.

We found no statistics for Muslim women working outside the home. In the 1988 Coventry Skills Audit, a high proportion of Asian women were recorded as 'economically inactive', more than half recording that they had no paid employment at the time of the survey, compared with only one-third of white women. While undoubtedly many Muslim women fall into this category, we found that with unemployment putting pressure on the whole family, younger women are increasingly going out to work, although this may be less likely for unskilled older women. A number of factors influence the decisions entailed in going out to work. Few jobs are considered by many families to comply with the demands of modesty. For example, many Muslim women are employed in clothing firms owned by non Muslim Asians. However, there are changes taking place, and skills training needs to reflect this.



### Self-employment and small business development among Muslims in Coventry

Among the so called growth sectors of the city economy, Asian owned and managed textile and clothing businesses are highly significant. However, this growth is affecting Muslim enterprise only marginally. We found reference to only two Muslim members of the Coventry Clothing Manufacturers Association: a medium-sized Muslim clothing company in the city and one other rather smaller one. This situation contrasts with Birmingham and Leicester where there are quite a few Muslim clothing companies. This may reflect local situations such as the influence on business patterns in Leicester of migrants from East Africa Tanzanian and Kenyan Asian businessmen who had the training and knowledge to set up in business in Britain.

It has become a part of the accepted wisdom of British urban economics that Asian families are disproportionately involved in retailing and self-employment, and the extent and nature of Asian economic activity in Coventry must not be underestimated. During a study of Asian retailing in the Foleshill ward in 1980 a series of interviews was carried out along Foleshill Road and Stoney Stanton Road, the major arterial routes crossing the ward. Among those interviewed were six who were Pakistani or Bangladeshi Muslims: these were found to be on the whole the least successful group in economic terms. Muslims were overwhelmingly the owners of single shops which require few staff; wherever possible these are male members of the family, and they were the most reliant upon custom from within the community (Robinson and Flintoff, 1982).

This was echoed in Leicester where a study pointed out that although many Asians have promoted successful enterprises, commercial success is both marginal and constrained, the poverty of the market served by these businesses acting as a ceiling on the profitability of commercial ventures (Sills, 1983).

In Coventry, Bangladeshis have been involved successfully in the catering business since the 1950s. There have been other recognised commercial sectors such as carpeting retail, but it is in recent years, in response to the hardening economic situation, that there has been a

noticeable increase in self employment among Muslims in the city. Redundancy payments and savings have been used to invest in corner shops, meat shops and milk rounds and catering. We met one family where the men were working in the plumbing and building trades, but this would be seen as uncharacteristic. The taxi service is often mentioned as an option for those who would otherwise face unemployment. Some own three or four taxis, but most have just one car or work in existing taxi fleets on a 'franchise' basis.

### The inner-city environment

Even during the height of its prosperity, Coventry continued to experience problems of poverty and inequality. The Community Development Programme showed in a report on the Hillfields areas of Coventry that rather than being the prosperous city it was believed, poverty was far from eradicated in such areas where the majority of the (then immigrant) minority community lived.[7] Between 1920 and 1960 house building levels in Coventry were very high in response to the influx of people who came to Coventry to seek work in manufacturing. Since then the level has fallen away sharply leaving Coventry with a housing stock that is getting steadily older. Urban renewal programmes have improved a vast amount of this housing stock in the inner city, but with high unemployment and low incomes in these areas the state of repair of private housing is likely to continue to deteriorate. There is also continued evidence of severe overcrowding.

Employment opportunities are not being created in the centres of unemployment. Indeed, employment is moving to the edges of the city as new modernised industries insist on high quality settings for their new factories and offices, in areas like the science and business parks on the outskirts of the city. At the same time, for those people currently living in areas of low price and often poorer quality housing in north Coventry, it is becoming more and more difficult to move house to south Coventry, to the areas of new employment. One of the most visible signs of polarisation is the way house prices in the city are changing; for those who are unemployed or on low pay there is little chance of moving at all.



The City Council's planning department took up the issue of social polarisation in the second Unitary Development Plan. It pointed to Foleshill and Hillfields, where so many Muslims live, as areas suffering from inferior environment, lack of open spaces and parks, lack of available land and appropriate buildings for community use and inadequate funds. It recognised that the pressure on local communities to meet their immediate and basic needs resulted in unauthorised use of houses, shops, warehouses and small factory units. During the last decade new play areas have been provided in Foleshill and Hillfields. However, although these are used by teenage Muslims boys, young children frequently meet with harassment. Some older men commented to us that Edgwick Park was at one time landscaped, pleasant to walk in, but that now it has become a 'dog park', and they contrast the meagre play areas locally with the attractive open spaces in the suburbs and on the perimeter of Coventry.

There is little dispute, as is pointed out in City Council documents, that in many respects Coventry has become two cities in one: one with poor housing, high crime rate, poverty, lack of adequate facilities and environment; and one with affluence, almost full employment, safe, good local community facilities. It is in this context that we placed our study of the needs of Coventry's Muslim community.

## Chapter Two: MUSLIMS IN CONVENTRY

Akbar Ahmed (1988) has referred to a tension within Muslim communities caused by the distance that exists from the twin Islamic ideal of unity within the *umma* (Islamic community) and a life style that conforms to and exemplifies Islamic values and precepts. The tension is evident in the development of Coventry's Muslim community, and has sometimes proved a usefully energising and sometimes a divisive force. In establishing a Muslim presence and identity in Coventry, there is an interplay between tradition, culture and religious obligation, and there is little uniformity of view between individuals and groups as to the relationship between those elements. Those who insist on responding to the Muslim community as a monolithic entity either explicitly or by implication are ignoring that reality. As Akbar Ahmed points out, with a sentiment echoed by many of those interviewed in Coventry: 'In certain ways Muslims are the same everywhere, and yet their societies are different everywhere.' (Ahmed, 1988: 4)

### Establishing a Muslim identity

In many respects the way of life of many Muslims in Coventry in the 1990s contrasts quite sharply with that of the early 1960s, when the bulk of Muslims arrived. Thirty years ago few men had their families with them, often living with other single men in congested conditions in property owned by an earlier generation of settlers. Daily life at that time was characterised by several of those interviewed as one of exile, overshadowed by preoccupations with finding employment and accommodation, and sending money back to families in India and Pakistan.

It was difficult to buy property in Foleshill and Hillfields in the early days, despite the fact that it was regarded as an inferior area. Hillfields particularly had a reputation for street fights, alcoholism and prostitution. The sense of being a ghetto area has changed over the years; small businesses have been established and families have tended to stay together in the area where community facilities were available. In the 1950s the few Asian shops served as employment and accommodation agencies, as people queued up to use the services of the



few who could read and write. There was a great sense of unity in those days. Even twenty years ago, one young woman recalls from her childhood, 'in those days the women recreated here the community that they had in Pakistan. We used to see a woman like us in the street who had a strange look on her face and ask where she came from.'

That sense of unity went beyond the Coventry boundaries. In the late 1950s and 1960s men would travel on a Sunday to towns in the Midlands where there were Indian films showing, providing an opportunity to exchange news. Village and kinship ties also created links between towns and these were strengthened when families arrived in the 1960s and 1970s and weddings, funerals and social events brought Muslims together from across the country.

As families arrived in the early 1960s, there was an increasing sense of community. Families moved into houses on the same or adjacent streets, and despite some dispersal into the outer areas of Coventry, this continues. In one street in Foleshill we encountered one extended family living in four adjacent houses, and another who had family members living in ten separate houses in the immediate area. Gradually the old sense of unity between Sikhs and Muslims who had lived together in Punjab before partition and who shared cultural traditions began to dissipate. The early overriding concern for children to learn English was replaced as fears grew of assimilation into the dominant white culture. Emphasis turned to identity, increasing a concern with the Islamic tradition. Although Muslim families brought with them a reinforcement of Islamic values, some of which had been neglected while men were working on their own in Coventry, there was also a return to village and kinship as the primary reference points, and a fragmentation both between and within communities.

The first mosque in Coventry was built on the present Eagle Street site in the late 1950s with public subscriptions and money given by the South African Muslim community. At that time the Muslim community in Coventry was small, with fairly equal numbers of Pakistanis, Gujaratis and Bengalis. At the time of the rebuilding of the Jamia (central) Mosque on the same site in the late 1960s (accommodating up to 2,000 people) tension was building up between the Gujarati and Pakistani communities, the latter now swollen by migration in the 1960s to form the majority Muslim community. In 1971 the Gujaratis left

Eagle Street, establishing their own mosque in Stoney Stanton Road, a converted house in fairly close proximity to the Eagle Street site. In the late 1970s the Hillfields Muslim Society sought to establish a second Gujarati mosque, in Berry Street (accommodating some 200 people for prayers) to meet the needs of the community in that part of Hillfields. The Masjid-e-Zeenat-ul-Islam is the new purpose-built mosque at the corner of Stoney Stanton Road and Cambridge Street, built and managed by the Gujarati community to accommodate some 1,500 people, which became fully operational at the beginning of 1990.

Coventry's mosques do not serve in any sense as social centres, although food is brought in at sunset during the fasting month of Ramadan and men frequently linger after prayer time for religious discussion. The mosques only marginally perform the function of information points on secular matters, contrary to popular supposition.

The building or conversion of all of these mosques has been done with great sacrifice. Many Muslims remember contributing large sums out of personal savings and physically participating in the building of the Jamia mosque. The new Cambridge Street mosque was an enormous financial undertaking, financed partly from Arab sources and fundraising among South Africa's Muslim population and in other countries. Financing of the conversion of the Berry Street mosque building is still being accomplished piecemeal and painstakingly through door to door collections at weekends. Actual funding of the running of the mosques is by annual membership subscription, and through donations at Friday prayers.

The pressure of inadequate space in the mosques has been felt particularly during the time of festivals. During the celebration of the two important religious festivals, the *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Adha*, Eagle Street, the mosque with the largest capacity, has been the most taxed: the congregation frequently overflows into the streets, and there are enormous parking problems. Also celebrated are the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, during which a special service is held, and the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet. Women attend the Jamia Mosque only infrequently for Friday prayers, with a screen drawn across the top hall. The reason given for non attendance is lack of space, but there is a general assumption that women will pray in the home, and it is unlikely that less pressure on space will alter this.



In addition to the designated mosques, there are houses throughout the city which have been bought or are used for the five daily prayers, which are led by a person who has a level of religious knowledge. Although these are frequently referred to by local residents as mosques, they have not been officially designated as such and are really, as one Muslim put it, 'simply a praying place'.

Each Muslim child has the task of learning the 114 chapters of the Quran, and provision for Quranic teaching is provided by the community in a number of ways, usually in the hours immediately after the end of the school day. Children start at the age of five or six years, and take up to five years to complete their education. Learning of the Quran is by rote, often accompanied by Arabic and Urdu lessons; the older children are given reading and discussion of religious texts, sometimes in English. In the Eagle Street mosque 150 to 200 children learn together in the top hall with six teachers. The conditions are far from ideal, and many Muslims parents express anxiety about the standards and levels of discipline. Mosque authorities themselves are anxious for an extension to be built which would cater for religious education.

Until the Muslim Community Centre in Stoney Stanton Road was closed at the end of 1989, a similar number of children were catered for there, and a similar number attended the Berry Street mosque where some six classes are held in the evening. Two thirds of the children at Berry Street *madrassa* are non Gujarati, with quite large numbers of Bengalis and Pakistanis from the immediate area. Some children from car owning families are also brought in from the outer areas of Coventry. However, a number of professional families teach the Quran at home, frequently paying a teacher for private tuition. In Radford and Longford *imams* are taking classes for children. And there are countless front rooms used for teaching small groups of children, often without contact with the mosques.

In this area of children's religious education, so important to Muslim families, there is enormous pressure and frustration experienced. The management of the Eagle Street mosque has been involved in attempting to run a *madrassa* in Churchill Avenue in Foleshill, the Diwan-e-Huzuri Centre, to cater for the needs of small children who are unable to walk the considerable distance to the mosque in the

evening. After one year of operation, planning permission was refused on the basis of nuisance in a residential area. A similar initiative in Victory Road was delayed until the results of appeal on Churchill Avenue could be resolved.

Initiatives by the Gujarati managed mosques have come up against similar problems. One such was a house in Princess Street, run by the Muslim *Madrassa Talim-ul-Quran Trust*, which was also refused planning permission. A house bought in Station Street East for prayers and religious instruction seemed likely to meet the same fate. Meanwhile, planning permission for the use of the Stoney Stanton Road premises as a mosque was expired at the end of March 1990, and it was expected that this would affect Quranic instruction there as well.

The *Jamia-e-Islamia*, the Islamic Studies Centre, has also had its share of planning problems. It is a residential centre for higher education in the study of the Quran, Arabic, Urdu and Islamic Law in Stoney Stanton Road, founded in 1982. The philosophy of the school is to produce scholars and imams considered more appropriate to the British environment than those coming from the Indian subcontinent. The emphasis is on an Islamic way of life within a multicultural and multireligious society. As such, the centre is unique in the Midlands, and attracts students from all over the United Kingdom as well as from Holland and the United States. The Islamic Studies Centre is linked to the International Muslim Organisation, which has its headquarters in Coventry, with branches in New York, Holland and Canada.

In recent years soaring property prices and lack of savings within the Muslim community in Coventry have increased the problems of finding suitable premises for religious activity and instruction. We felt it essential that there should be a concerted effort by the planning department to resolve these difficulties through consultation with the community and through assistance, where appropriate, in locating and making available suitable premises for community use.

#### Living in the community

The Muslim demand for a community centre in Coventry could be seen as a search for a resolution of two needs. What was most frequently articulated among Muslims in the city was the need to accommodate



both cultural and religious roots and new value systems. But linked to this was the struggle to continue to function socially within what often appears to be a hostile and even dangerous environment.

A 1987 survey of white and Asian residents of Foleshill and Street Michael's[1] showed a markedly greater anxiety in Asians about crime than in white residents. Many Asian women, the survey showed, never went out of the house unless accompanied by their husbands. The study concluded that, while part of the reason might be cultural, fear of harassment and burglary was an overriding factor. Thirty per cent of that Asian sample were Muslims, and while fear of crime and harassment was not a specific subject of our enquiry, it made an appearance at every step. One man quoted some 50 break-ins in his immediate neighbourhood in the preceding eight weeks; another elderly man left his group meeting early to avoid potentially abusive groups of children coming out of school; a group of women wanted somewhere to meet where they could feel secure, and which was close to their homes for dark nights. The 1987 survey showed that very few people visited the city centre as part of their social life because they believed it was dangerous. This was confirmed by our study; one young man said that neither he nor his friends would visit the city centre in the evenings for fear of attack: 'There is no safe way to go.'

The problem of fear and harassment is one that concerns residents in Hillfields to a far greater extent than those in Foleshill. Added to this is also a more recent fear of harassment by the police, and increasing discontent with the general state of the environment, with the dilapidation of the area and lack of street cleaning. 'In the old days,' one man said, 'we came here to earn money and if things were good or bad we didn't care less. Now we have our families we want improvements.'

Over the last 30 years the efforts of individuals and of the Coventry Community Relations Council have been directed towards securing racial equality in employment, and important gains were made concerning prayer time and leave provision. In the relationship of schools to the community, particularly in inner-city schools, there has been substantial change. Yet among individuals there is a strong sense of a deep seam of racial prejudice affecting the lives of the community - whether it be in the allocation of housing, planning permission, provision of adequate translation facilities or appropriate recreation and

welfare provision. The feeling is that race issues remain the subject of a closed debate and have not yet been brought into the political arena. If racial harassment and fears of invasive Western culture are seen as encouraging Muslims to retreat within their own communities, a community centre could be one way of coming safely back.

### The political arena

One striking factor is that there has not been in Coventry a politicisation or articulation of issues of racism as such, either through mainstream politics or through campaigning activities. It is argued that several factors have contributed to this situation. Firstly, the point is made that there has been a sanitising of issues through the CRC. Secondly, it is claimed that political parties have been happy not to widen their base within the community. Finally, from the point of view of the community, there has been very little collective action on issues. On the one hand there has been a preoccupation with internal division and conflict, and on the other there has been an apathy, a tacit acceptance of mediation through a few individuals.

The accusation frequently made was that the CRC had maintained too close and cosy a relationship with the City Council. What was felt within the community was that instead of providing an effective ethnic minority pressure on council policies, the CRC operated rather as an arm of the Council on race issues, and that the Lord Mayor's Committee for Racial Harmony was an establishment body which inadequately reflected ethnic minorities in the city. The Standing Conference of Asian Voluntary Organisations briefly attempted to provide an alternative to the CCRC. What was seen as the need for all initiatives within Coventry's ethnic minority communities to be sanctioned by the CRC, and the accreditation of community organisations through membership of the CRC, was more widely resented than the failure of such an alternative indicates. There was a strong belief that success for any project within the Muslim community had required the assent on the one hand of the management of the Jamia Mosque, and on the other of the CRC (and those individuals in the community who had the ear of the CRC and of council members). One comment was that there had been a time when certain individuals



within the Asian community 'were the sole rulers of the Asian community - not because they were influential in the community, but because the authorities gave them that role'.

On the other hand, the CRC had frequently consulted with a much wider constituency. Important areas where the CRC had provided a voice to Muslims through consultation were minority access to higher and further education, and the Education Reform Bill. Consultation also took place on issues to do with local educational authority policy. The work of the various panels had led to initiatives: for example, the input of the youth panel into the proposed development and extension of facilities to the Indian community centre in Edgwick Park, and an important input into discussions of health issues. However, the point about the CRC providing a monopolising and narrow channel of communication on community and race issues was a valid one. Further, there is no equation between consultation and influence on political decisions.

Theoretically, the other important point of access to power and decision making is through party politics and ward councillors. The city councillors representing the Foleshill and St Michael's wards are undoubtedly consulted by their Muslim constituents on the major issues that concern the community.

What many within the community perceived, however, was that the existing leadership of the Muslim community was effectively reinforced through its association with the Labour Party, and that leadership was not necessarily in a position to represent fully the needs of Muslims in Coventry. One view was that the only logical strategy was to get involved politically and attempt to shift the balance of influence and power in that way. As has happened in other parts of the country, Asians have seen that if resources are to be gained it might be useful to affiliate to political parties. Three to five years previously, Asians in Coventry were encouraged to join Labour ward parties, particularly in marginal seats.

However, attempts to gain influence achieved only a limited success. A small but significant number of Muslims we met had become active members of ward parties, some of them office bearers. But it was among these individuals themselves that there was most cynicism: talk of continual packing of meetings, votes cast in return for anticipated

favours, of membership existing on paper rather than any active membership. One ward chair recalled that when he was elected it was with the vote of only 13 party members. From those who remained outside party activities there were accusations that applications for membership had been ignored.

Whatever the particular realities behind these accusations, there remains the fact that at the time of our study there were only two black councillors on the city council, neither representing St Michael's or Foleshill wards where some 50 per cent of the Asians in Coventry live. Many believed that the inability to obtain resources in recent years had highlighted the lack of representation from within the Muslim community. It was not surprising that there was a strong belief that it suited parties not to widen the democratic base: 'Once you expand the base there is a possibility that you will lose that influence, that it will be diluted.'

#### A 'lost' generation?

Another major focus of concern among Muslims was the lack of contact with the home culture. Fewer Pakistanis continue to have business links with Pakistan, for example, than might have been the case at one time. Whereas higher income families might be able to visit more frequently, for the average factory worker or unemployed person, what might have been 12 monthly visits have lengthened to three or four years, or even to 10 or 12 years, as children's schooling and punishing financial commitments - weddings, burials, money sent home - take precedence.

Talking to a group of Bengali women meeting for language classes at John Gulson Junior School, we found that about half had taken children to visit Bangladesh. Often children are taken as babies when they can travel free, and many had not been for many years. For some of the children, they said, 'Bangladesh is like a shadow'. Many talk of the freedom their children experienced visiting families in the villages. One young girl echoed those feelings about a visit to Pakistan:

I went around with my cousins, and some of my aunties and uncles were there. And me and my cousins used to go to all the



fields, and it used to be really nice, because we used to play and everything. And now I never get a chance to meet them now.

Many parents see their own children as 'in between', talking a different language from them and knowing nothing of life in Bangladesh or Pakistan. They see that their daughters may no longer be satisfied with a role which places them in the home, but have not yet found an alternative role: a typical complaint is that 'they do not find any peace in themselves'. Many see the generation that has grown to adulthood in Coventry as a 'lost' generation, feeling that there has not been the collective will or the unity or the facilities to teach these children the Quranic values, culture and literature.

One man who had migrated as a young boy in the 1950s felt that whereas the first generation had a goal of bettering themselves and their families in their home villages the second generation does not know what its goal is. 'They don't have the old cliché of "back home", and somehow they have not made home here. They have not set their roots down and said, "Our children have been brought up here, their children are going to be brought up here, this is their country, their land and their life." It has not been said and it isn't happening.' At the same time, he felt, values were being lost:

It is very important that our children cling on to their culture, to their origins and values, and enrich society with those values. In terms of goals and achievements you must have a base, and that base is your own values. It used to be unthinkable that Asians should go into old people's homes, but as I see it now, going into the nineties, most of the parents and grandparents are going to be shuttled off to institutions, nursing homes, because the family unit is breaking down. Values are not changing; they are being abandoned because they haven't had a chance.

He mentioned children who do not know why they fast at Ramadan or who do not maintain the fast: 'It hurts me because they have not had the opportunity to be taught the meaning behind the various rituals.'

Another older man reinforced this view. Young people wanted to be part of the scene, he felt, not to be different, but because of their colour this was impossible:

The urge among young people is to be English. When they go to their classes the young people talk about pop stars and football clubs because this is the English culture. If children would have their own way they would be totally British.

Young Muslims often go out to day parties and discotheques in Birmingham. For the girls who go to college there is more freedom during the day, but they remain restricted in the evening. There are strong feelings among young women:

My uncle's generation [ten years older] was prepared to go along with what the parents wanted. But now the younger generation find it difficult. Quite a few of my friends are leaving home. It is the girls who are westernised who have the most problems. Other women come and pry on you. Girls who haven't been to college have really dull lives. They get up late, clean up, look around the shops in the afternoon, watch Indian films . . . that's it!

Although there is optimism from some among the older generation, particularly among professionals, that a satisfactory way has been found of living within a new culture, taking what was felt to be appropriate and discarding what was not; among the working class, particularly among the older generation of Kashmiris, there is a real sense of threatened loss of culture and identity. Yet this view of the younger generation as in danger, so widely held within the community, is only a very partial view. And there is no evidence that it is those who go to college, even outside Coventry, who are susceptible to turning away from Islam. The young woman quoted above said that she had several friends who had themselves become deeply religious, and for herself, 'to a certain extent you return to the Quran when you are feeling depressed. When I was at college I was really into religion and prayed three times a day. Sometimes when you go away you get close to God because there is no one around for you.'

One young man from a Gujarati Muslim family described growing up in Coventry as following a familiar pattern: 'going out at night - the British way of life - possibly ending up in a pool club'. However, he said, he became disillusioned, and as time went on he became more



Muslim than Asian because he found 'that the Muslim religion gave more than the system did'. He reacted defensively to the way the media portrays Muslims in a negative light, he said, and at college this was reinforced when, studying sociology, he found that there was no form of recognition of the Islamic contribution to modern society: 'It caused a lot of bitterness in me.' Now choosing to live in Coventry in the community he was brought up in, close to the mosque and next door to his father, he goes five times daily to the mosque and afterwards passes time in the houses of Muslim friends to discuss religion.

Whereas twenty years ago Muslim children's encounter with Islamic teaching was in languages - Urdu and Arabic - that were themselves unfamiliar, now children are able to discuss religion in English with young people who have been raised in the same system, and with whom they can identify. There is now more religious literature available in English. At the time of the study there was a group of some fifty or so young people based around the Stoney Stanton Road mosque, with a core of fifteen to twenty young men aged between sixteen and thirty five living in the Hillfields area. They were connected with the Tablighi Jamaat, who engage in frequent religious discussion groups, 'looking to the Quran for answers to criticism'. They met up with Arab and Malaysian students, and aimed to take opportunities to draw other young people into discussion. There was a parallel development among young women, and it was from young mothers in this group that demands for separate Islamic education was becoming articulated. The generation split, in terms of common language and ideology, begins to recede, at least for some of the community. They see a difference in the younger generation between those 'who go back to Islam and those who are not really practising'. From these strongly religiously motivated young people, there will be a higher level of communication of values to their own young families.

This change in generations is a factor of long-term significance, as Jorgen Nielson points out (1987: 391). On the whole, mosques and community organisations in Coventry, as in other parts of Britain, are still in control of the first immigrant generation. But in recent years there has been a development of agendas and priorities perceived as relevant to the British context, as distinct from the traditional agendas, so deeply affected by the history of the Indian subcontinent.

Nielson has described how many Muslims today are falling back on a direct exploitation of the basic textual sources of the faith. Among the community leadership there are very few individuals who are thoroughly at home with the long heritage of Islamic thought; more common are the self taught, at home with the Quran and the Hadith, the record of the life and model of the Prophet Muhammed. Among the young people brought up in British schools the process is going further:

Many of those who have established for themselves some space for manoeuvre, separately from the domain of parental and closely defined social pressures, when they look to a resource in Islam resort to *Qur'an* and *hadith*, are reading them as documents speaking directly to their own situation (Nielson 1987: 392).

#### Muslims and Coventry schools

For many Muslims concern for their children is fuelled by the British education system, based as it is on notions of individual independence from the community, while maintaining what are seen as low standards of discipline and learning, reflecting and reinforcing what are considered to be low standards in society at large. There is often disquiet that teaching about Christianity in schools may induce confusion, and concern that after school Quranic teaching may not be a sufficient counterbalance. In its 1976 document 'Guidelines and Syllabus on Islamic Education', the Union of Islamic Organisations argued that 'religious education means the teaching of religion as a comprehensive way of life'.

Certain Coventry schools have approached religious leaders for advice on books about Islam to be used within the school, and arrangements have been made for prayer for Muslim pupils. However, the provision for Christian religious assembly under the Education Reform Act has caused concern. The Hillfields Muslim Association, for example, wrote to schools asking for details of the numbers of Muslim children on the school rolls, and offering to provide Muslim religious teachers. Within Coventry there has been what is perceived as a cooperative approach between the community and school authorities on what might have been



areas of conflict, such as suitable clothing for Physical Education and swimming. On some issues the compromise has not favoured the Muslim community: halal meat is not provided in schools, nor is it within the health or social services. In other instances the debate has been deferred: proposals that Lyng Hall should cease to exist as a girls-only school provoked deep concern. Arguments put forward by Muslim religious and community leaders concerned the need to follow religious precepts, but it was also seen as necessary 'to defend against rapidly deteriorating morals'. Although the school continued to function as a girls' school, single-sex education as a principle was not conceded by the authority.

The debate on education has been on the whole a restrained one, carried out through formal channels within the Muslim community. The Islamic Brotherhood, the executive committee for the Jamia Mosque, is the body that carried forward the argument for halal meat in school meals with the education committee. There is an unresolved contradiction between, on the one hand, schools' notions of equal opportunities, as expressed in the importance attached to mixed gender groups, insistence on swimming and activities such as music and dancing, as essential to children's education, and, on the other, the recognition of a need to value the often conflicting references set by the home environment.

Discipline in inner city schools continues to concern individual parents. Other worries include the belief that disproportionate resources are put into schools on the outskirts of the city, that things might get worse under local management of schools (LMS), and that insufficient attention is given to appointing teachers with an understanding of Asian cultures. As a consequence, some parents are sending their children to private schools and some to schools outside the inner area. For those families whose children remain in inner-city schools, dialogue is vital and school should continue to be seen as an important point of contact.

#### Stress within the community

For many Muslims, contact with or involvement in school activities must simply take second place to the daily problems of survival. This is

a problem which is increasing with greater unemployment in the community. One Muslim professional worker, newly working in the Foleshill area where there are many low income or unemployed Kashmiri families, described her shock on finding so many families living in cramped conditions, damp houses, without running hot water or heating. It is in Kashmiri households, of which there are many in the Foleshill area, where the woman is often homeworking, looking after the children, possibly an unemployed husband and elderly relatives, that the traditional constraints on leaving the house are greatest. Even when there was a Muslim health visitor working at Broad Street Health Centre, there were fewer Muslims attending parentcraft classes than there were other groups. It is in these families that religious tradition is most often handed down by word of mouth, and where there is most fear expressed that children, particularly daughters, will be affected by Western values. Haleh Afshar (1989: 218), in her study of Muslim women in West Yorkshire points out that an understanding of what a good Muslim upbringing would be may vary between families, although there is a generally held importance of wearing of the traditional shalwar kemiz, keeping hair long and covering the head in the presence of older men, and generally living in separate areas from the men. But what is particularly feared is that a daughter would make an unsuitable marriage or that the marriage would fail and bring dishonour to the family.

Young men have far greater freedom of movement outside the home, a blind eye often being turned to visits to snooker halls and discos. 'Clubs and pubs, that's where they all go,' one man said. But, for the women particularly, with a television set available in most households, the gap between the fantasy life of Indian films and western television and the life-style permitted within Muslim households can lead to great tensions, particularly for young girls. Such pressures combine with financial worries and poor living conditions to create enormous stress within the community. Adding an overwhelming burden is the concern for family members still waiting for visas to join them in Coventry. One young man who waited for a visa for twelve years remembered his arrival in Coventry as a teenager without any English as a 'terrible time for me', and talked of the large numbers of parents spending ten years



or more worrying about children left behind in their home villages, a 'punishment without trial'.

There is a quality of anger contained within the community: in the men this is often expressed in the home, while Muslim women present themselves for psychiatric care with pains, cramps and headaches. For older men there are the pressures of unemployment and the resentment caused by conflict with bureaucracy: for instance planning applications turned down. Many Muslims working in council departments talked of the stress of day-to-day encounters with racism. There are frequent delays and problems when applying for passports and visas to travel. These add a further level of harassment. Time and again, professionals and volunteers referred to the levels of depression within the community, particularly among women. As one health professional expressed it: 'We have hardly scratched the surface.'

These women have been described by such professionals as typically bored, lacking in stimulation at home, isolated, overburdened from caring sometimes for both children and elderly family members in cramped conditions. But there is a danger in generalisation, as for example in the long held assumption that all Muslims care for their own in the extended family.

One extended Kashmiri family living in several houses in Foleshill, taking care of an isolated widowed female relative, provided a good example of the support that can be provided, and there must be many other such examples. But it is also true that isolation has increased in recent years as financial pressures have forced Muslim women to take on homeworking. There are no ready figures on homeworking in Coventry, but we do know that the numbers are substantial and affect Muslim women quite substantially. Homeworking involves low pay and late night working, but may be the only solution for economic survival.

One worker in the Hillfields Community Education Project frequently found mothers confined to bed, having lost interest in family affairs or outside contact, and there appeared to be a consensus in the health field that Muslim women are more depressed than other Asian groups whose women can use temples for religious and social gathering during the day. They also agreed that mental health problems are seen increasingly in younger women, who have nowhere to discuss family conflict. Increasing numbers of older women working means an

increasing reliance on young teenage girls for housework. The great difficulty for health professionals in this area is the lack of willingness within the community to recognise mental illness, which is often seen as a spiritual disorder.

Nor is physical or mental disability within families brought out within the community. There is very little home help available for such families, and often resources are not used because of language barriers, or simply for fear that family affairs will be known throughout the community. Both health workers and women complain that doctors are often impatient. One woman commented: 'They don't value me.' Certainly there is a sense of great loss of power when there is inability to communicate, pointing up the vital importance of interpreting facilities for the health services.

Yet it would be a gross distortion not to recognise the variety of experience which exists within different households, and to some extent the picture of the constraints placed on young girls is a shifting one. For many girls and young women, there is a great desire to dispel the image 'that we live in some sort of a prison'. Even where households are more free, in many cases women restrict their own movements, few feeling able to go out in the evening. As one professional woman put it, 'Even though I am educated, I keep myself to myself. Otherwise I feel guilty.' In some cases this may be due to fear of public disapproval. Many women would like to have more opportunities for discussion of the Quran so that a distinction can be made between traditional, rather than religious, constraints.

In the Gujarati and Pakistani community there are strong family links within the Foleshill and Hillfields area. Sometimes there are close family members in several adjacent houses. Women of all language groups meet in each other's houses for prayer and social gatherings, an important social activity in both the inner and outer city. Women meet to read the Quran, a dozen or so together in a front room, invitations being issued on particular family occasions. More formally, a group of women involved in the Stoney Stanton Road mosque were meeting twice a week to read a book on the Quran, moving between houses in Leicester Causeway, George Street, Kings Road and Priors Harnall. However, meeting in private houses means that only a dozen or so women can meet at any one time. Men eat together at sunset in the



mosque during the month of Ramadan for example; joint activities of this nature are more difficult for women.

Within the Bangladeshi community there are few family connections within the city. For some, the working environment brings contact with a wider circle, and the use of a car, particularly for those living on the outskirts, brings different parts of the city within easy reach. However there is a strong sense of community, of mutual support and links with other parts of the country, involving family visits to London, Liverpool, Leicester or Bradford, as indeed there are for other Muslim communities.

There can be no generalisation about Muslim women's experiences. There are a minority who work out of the home during the day, some with busy social commitments; others are content with, or self impose a more restricted life style. And it remains true that for many, particularly in the inner city, the only social contact is with close family and neighbours, and this may in itself act as a buffer against entering a wider environment.

Family or marital problems are rarely shared within such a small circle. One young Pakistani woman, who described herself as feeling strongly about religion but disagreed with the strict rules on dress, said she felt that girls needed to be able to relax, pointing out that only the few very westernised girls would go to an Indian show, or out in a group:

For us it is just hell. We need something. After we go home from work, you are stuck in the house. The most you can do is watch TV or cook. It psychologically affects you, depresses you. And then after you're married you're stuck. You force yourself to think that you are married and that is it.

She believed things would change: 'For me the religion is there, strongly, but I don't think I would be like that with our children. You have got to have the trust.' But for the time, although determined to continue to go to keep-fit classes in the city centre, for example, she knew that even her own husband would say: 'What are you going there for. What if someone sees you.' 'It's a matter of respect. Whereas if it was a Muslim centre, he would say: 'Oh, go on then.'"

As Haleh Afshar (1989) demonstrates, the dilemma of providing daughters with the skills and education considered valuable, and increasingly required to make them employable, and at the same time accommodating community and family values is enormous. Many women express their distress that their daughters are not as free as they were themselves in village society; yet they see themselves as the guardians of their daughters spiritual welfare. Central to all this is the issue of not losing face in the community: concepts of *izzat*, of honour and self respect and its other side – shame. Any family on which shame falls would be isolated. The same young woman, while recognising their constraints, accepts these notions as central and essential to the Islamic family; association with wrongdoing would bring shame. Afshar explains: 'Izzat is their daughters; that's their self respect – that daughter, that wife, you are their izzat.' She quotes Amrit Wilson (1978: 5), who reports *izzat* to be more than honour or self respect: it is:

sometimes plain male ego. It is a quality basic to the emotional life of the Punjab. It is essentially male but it is women's lives and actions which affect it most. A woman can have *Izzat* but it is not her own – it is her husband's or her father's. Her *Izzat* is a reflection of the male pride of the family as a whole.

For the men lies the responsibility of not losing credibility within the community, and this is an important factor in the development of Muslim community action.

#### Differences within the Muslim community

Even from the above, it is evident that there are both shared problems and differences of life experience among Muslims in Coventry, some of which follow lines of linguistic or regional origin. That reality is expressed by Muslims as: 'We are one, but we are different. If you are talking about religion, there are no differences, but if you are talking about us as people, there are cultural differences.' Among Muslims some claimed to have friends from different geographical backgrounds. More commonly, differences of language and culture were pointed out.



One Pakistani said of Bengalis and Gujeratis that he knew nothing of them: 'They are like foreigners to me because there is so little contact.'

Shared views about group characteristics were frequently given as explanations for lack of contact, and were characteristically stereotypical. Differences in language and food were mentioned, but there were less definable areas of felt difference: 'they are more free', 'they are more shy', 'they drink and smoke', and so on. And clearly, class differences cut across national identity to create communities of shared culture: a professional Bengali family living in the Coventry suburbs might have more in common with its Pakistani neighbours than with a Bengali family with little English living in Hillfields. While one person will insist that he sees himself first as a Pakistani and only then as a Muslim, another identifies himself as first a Muslim, then a Pakistani, then Kashmiri. Among the younger generation, identification as Gujerati, or Pakistani, or Bengali may still be there, but the level of the family's insistence on ethnic identity will often affect that of the younger generation. Very often such perceptions of ethnic difference are giving way to an identification as British Muslim. As one young man expressed it: 'All these things are for our parents; they have nothing to do with us.' Another said that he and others are returning to the roots of Islam and divesting themselves of old ethnic identities. Even the importance attached to Urdu, he felt, decreased as more Islamic literature is written in English. He rejected the notion of ethnic identity: 'Muslim culture is not that of Pakistan or India. Our culture is Islam itself.'

There are no precise figures of different regional groups within the Muslim community in Coventry. A popular conception is something along the lines of 65 per cent Kashmiris, 20 per cent Punjabis, 10 per cent Bengalis and 5 per cent Gujeratis. The proportion of Gujeratis seems small, and may be related to the problems associated with distinguishing Gujerati Muslims within the electoral register. Added to these figures must be a small number of Muslims from Malaysia, Mauritius and Arab countries (mainly students) and a very small but growing number of 'new' Muslims, white and Afro Caribbean. Muslims of East or South African background are seldom identified as a separate group, but rather from their district of family origin - Punjab or Gujerat. In several parts of Hillfields and Foleshill, Bengalis, Kashmiris

and Gujeratis live alongside each other. Having said that, there are concentrations of communities in particular areas, in some cases extended families living along one street. There is a concentration of Gujeratis in a few streets in Hillfields, south of Harnall Lane East, dominated by one or two large family groupings. Most of the Gujeratis in Coventry come from Surat District; only two or three families being from Barodh district. Most of the Gujeratis living in Foleshill are from Malawi, Kenya and South Africa; some in business, such as Eagle Travel, and some factory workers. There are some fifty Punjabi families from Rawalpindi district, speaking the Patwari language, concentrated around Queen Mary's Road and Station Street East.

Institutionally, the separation between communities has increased over the years. Although there are a growing number of Bangladeshi professionals, Bangladeshis established in the restaurant and take-away business, form quite a substantial separate economic sector, increasingly so as many originally employed in manufacturing are now long term unemployed, and young school leavers look to family businesses for employment. We found a substantial difference in the public profile of the communities, with the older generation of East Africans and Punjabis, often urban educated, relatively well established in the public services.

In the Muslim community at large there is a firm belief that contact with, and influence over decision makers is held by a small number of these well placed individuals. The Gujerati Muslim Society claimed to have had no contact with either statutory or voluntary agencies: 'We have existed for fifteen years and have never had a single benefit from the City Council.' This view of Gujerati isolation is shared by officials. One CRC officer described relations with the Gujerati community as 'distant', the community being 'inclined to keep themselves to themselves and very hard to get in touch with'. We did not find the latter part of that statement to be true. It may be true that Gujerati Muslims, who have been familiar with minority status in India and Africa, are prepared to maintain a low profile, frequently making fewer demands in schools, for example, for accommodation with Islamic principles. Many Gujerati Muslims are Deobandis, who have traditionally maintained a distance from political dispute. Despite this, there is a measure of quiet bitterness among many Gujeratis. As one



person expressed it: 'The attitude of the Council is that the Sikh community are powerful, so give them something. If we don't give something to the West Indians, they will fight on the streets, so let's keep them quiet. But they know that we are not going to fight.'

On the other hand, the CRC had increased its contact with the Bengali community following its own door to door survey of Bengalis in Coventry, which uncovered 'horrendous problems' relating to bad housing and poverty. This contact with the Bengali community was the exception, apart from the contact within schools. Many professional workers we met were uncertain whether Bengali families lived in their area, and most categorised the community as a 'tiny minority'. Yet the CRC would put their numbers at 1,500, a figure which coincides with estimates among the community itself, although a more conservative estimate would put it at around 1,000.

Most would accept the view often expressed as: 'The Bengalis have absolutely nothing; they need everything.' There are several reasons why the Bangladeshi community has made so little clamour for its rights. Among these is the community's religious accommodation in the Jamia Mosque. There have also been very few professionals from Bangladesh, or those with access to the system or the time to give voice to demands. It also relates to the pattern of immigration: families have remained in an unsettled state as wives and children have been left behind in Bangladesh. There continues to be a slow but constant movement of families from Bangladesh. Children are still awaiting visas, and those arriving are often without English at a comparatively late age. The educational disadvantage of Bangladeshis has been recognised but nothing very substantial has been done. Because of the late entry of families in Coventry, and as house prices have increased, there are more Bangladeshi families on council waiting lists, with inadequate supplies of large accommodation.

At Stanton Bridge Primary School, for example, Bangladeshis are the most impoverished group, and of all children starting without English, 90 per cent are from Bangladesh. Older Bangladeshi children arriving in Coventry suffer educationally not only from lack of English, but from a different educational system. Many Bangladeshi children go to Sidney Stringer School, where there is a ESL Unit, but increasingly children are sent to schools further out as parents worry about what they

consider to be a ghettoising of education and inferior standards in the inner city. There is considerable frustration among parents who have high expectations for their children's education but face the reality of low achievement. In the primary schools with large numbers of Bangladeshi children we found real concern at evidence of serious underachievement in maths, reading and English, true to a certain extent also of children from Kashmiri families. The figures are often masked by the general high achievement of Asian pupils, and it is a sensitive area to deal with. But given that the underachievement of children in schools coincides with poverty indicators, stress and lack of English language skills within families, these contributory factors are ones which can and should be acted on within the sphere of social and community action.

#### Cultural activities

The popular concept of Muslim communities often fails to incorporate an understanding of the cultural tradition that exists in Muslim societies from the Indian subcontinent. In Coventry, particularly with the absence of community premises, there is no possibility of replicating the rich cultural and social life of the Punjab, for example, and Muslims are very much deprived of pastimes. For men, the only option is to meet others at the mosque. Apart from involvement in the Foleshill festival, most cultural events are elitist in character. Music is limited to a small number of people, and there is a limited participation in the Coventry Asian music circle, which cuts across religious boundaries. This is partly because of self imposed restrictions by Muslims. There is a very rich tradition of folk music in Pakistan. Bhangra dance is a festival dance for the whole of the Punjab, but it is most popular among Sikhs and would not be regarded as acceptable by many Muslims. Soma music, a religious inspirational and devotional music patronised by Sufis, would be more acceptable. Some saw a possible community centre as one where they could hold *Mushai'ras*, poetry readings, and other cultural gatherings.

A strong view expressed by many Muslims was that the energy that goes into persuading Muslim children to do swimming and other activities valued by western educationalists would be better directed into



providing recreational activities that are culturally acceptable and valuable to Muslim communities and incorporating those into the educational system. The belief that Bhangra shows cater for Asian musical needs, they said, echoes 'the steel band syndrome'. It ignores, for example, the rich folk tradition in Bengal, renowned for its music, or the khatak dance from Pakistan. Whether a Muslim community centre in itself would be able to provide a focus for this remains to be seen. The dilemma is that there will be a group within the community whose initial position at least is one of suspicion of dance or musical performances.

Against great odds, there is a strong vein of determination and energy within Coventry's Muslim communities; from the thriving Urdu poetry circle, to the supplementary educational activity which gets many children out of their houses for two additional hours every evening. A substantial number of individuals are involved in voluntary activities: language teaching, parental involvement in schools, advice giving, hospital visiting. Within the home, an enormous amount of mutual support is given. Families care for their elderly, who are often isolated linguistically and not receiving benefit entitlements, while within the neighbourhood, friends and relatives provide social and religious contact. We felt that Coventry City Council should direct its attention to how this valuable network is being intolerably stretched, and how, without adequate support and development structures, energy within the community is turning back on itself into negative and divisive action.

### Chapter Three: COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

A crucial factor in the growth and establishment of the Muslim community in Coventry has been its internal organisation, as reflected both in its management of religious activity, and in its relationship with decision making bodies. The overriding characteristic has been the monopoly of that organisation by a small number of individuals. Challenge to that monopoly was always present, but became explicit during the 1980s, resulting in a corresponding resistance to any change. The result has been, on the one hand, increased levels of tension and conflict within the community, and on the other hand, a degree of apathy and disinclination to become involved in community affairs by those who regard it as a 'dangerous and dirty business'.

#### Religious organisation

Early Muslim community activity in Coventry in the late 1950s and early 1960s developed in two quite separate but complementary directions: building and managing the Jamia Mosque in Eagle Street and providing a link into the political and other institutions of the city. In the 1960s, the great sense of unity among Asians generally that had existed in the 1950s began to change as numbers increased. As a greater number of relatives arrived, individuals turned increasingly to immediate family for mutual support and there was less interdependence among individuals within the community at large. Relatives now became brokers for jobs and housing rather than the broader community network, although that network continued alongside. Furthermore, as regional groups increased in size, the sense of regional difference intensified.

This can be seen particularly in the history of the Eagle St mosque. When the mosque had been built there had been cooperation between the Bengalis, or East Pakistanis as they were then, among the earliest of the Muslim groups in the city, and the Gujeratis and the West Pakistanis. As such they were represented in equal numbers on the mosque committee, the Islamic Brotherhood: a general meeting elected a committee of fifteen, five each from the Bengali, Punjabi and Gujerati



communities, with office bearers to be elected from each of the three sections. By the late 1960s the Pakistanis had become the dominant group numerically and this coincided with a sectarian difference. Many Gujeratis objected to the religious performance of the imam of the mosque, and the culmination was a change in the mosque constitution which operated to exclude Gujeratis from its management. Gujeratis left the mosque in 1971, coinciding with the opening of the new mosque building. The constitution which was ratified in 1979 had a total of twenty five members on its executive, seven to be elected from each of the following communities: Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Kashmiri, and the balance from other communities 'in view of linguistic differences among Coventry Muslims and their family ties'.

The oral history of those events is significant in that it shapes attitudes between the two communities. On the one hand, there is an expressed conviction by the Islamic Brotherhood that Gujeratis 'left' the mosque – that is, that there was a voluntary separation. The Gujerati view, on the other hand, is that they were 'kicked out', and that experience has shown that their voice will not be heard in a majority-rule situation. There were indeed some points of real difference between the communities, concerning the management of religion and some elements of religious performance. One expressed Gujerati view was that the split would have occurred anyway because of language and other cultural differences, and that the constitutional crisis was purely a catalyst to separation. The Eagle St mosque is a Sunni Hanafi mosque; differences emerged between those following the Barelvi school and those following the Deobandi. Significantly, the new constitution has among its objects the appointment of an imam preferably from the Barelvi school. The Gujerati Muslim Society mosque in Stoney Stanton Road, and lately, the Hillfields mosque and the new Cambridge Street mosque are run by Deobandis. The Deobandi school is associated with purifying Islam of practices which it regards as un-Islamic. It is less ritualistic and as a movement has rejected the whole tradition of worship at shrines and of *pirs* – spiritual intermediaries between worshippers and God. [1]

There is some consensus that it was the strong religious views of the then Imam which precipitated the split. He himself points to opposition to him deriving from various factors – partly personal, that some people

disliked him, and partly because he was 'too Barelvi'. While he established strong links with the secular and Christian religious authorities in Coventry, the tone set was one which was intolerant of other sects within Islam. The particular target were Wahhabis, and accusations were made that the Gujeratis were Wahhabis. The Wahhabi movement, although of the same general character as the Deobandi school, originated in Arabia in the eighteenth century.[2]

Many Deobandis strongly resent being called Wahhabis, and the accusation has been turned back on the management of the Eagle St mosque: 'It is the Pakistanis that are Wahhabis,' was one comment. The term itself has become one of dismissal and insult. Muslims do go to either mosque, even if they do not support the imam. The Eagle St mosque particularly was often attended for Friday prayers in the past, simply because it was the biggest, 'and it is supposed to represent in some strange way the city of Coventry'. With the completion of the Cambridge St mosque the element of choice may be more important. It is not only the Deobandis who object to the management of the Eagle St mosque. In fact opposition to the imam within the Pakistani community, particularly among the Kashmiris, was such that he was forced to step down as official imam of the mosque, although at the time of the study he still led Friday prayers, and as president and founder of the Jamia Islamia (with international connections) he remained very influential. The Barelvi organisation is a tight-knit one, as it is in Pakistan, with distinct circles of influence. The Moulana's father was a *pir* in Lahore, and he is being accepted as one himself, holding his surgery in the Jamia Islamia and attracting Muslims and non-Muslims from all over Britain. His influence has been of great importance; some people would say that no scheme would be successful without his blessing.

Of increasing influence among the congregation of the Gujerati-managed mosque is the Tablighi Jamaat, which has its headquarters in Dewsbury, places great emphasis on discussion of the Quranic text (*tabligh* meaning to preach), priests travelling from town to town, sometimes staying for one or two weeks in the mosque (a practice rejected by Barelvis). Francis Robinson (1988: 16) has noted that among the notable features of the movement are: its total focus on the renewal of faith; the forbidding of members to discuss politics while



preaching; the following of the sharia in its personal law dimension as set out in the medieval law books. He adds that we would expect the Tabligh in Britain to be the Islamic group least involved in controversy of any kind. This factor was important in relation to the possibility of having a single community centre, given that its prehistory has been riven with conflict.

The importance of these divisions was given different weight by different individuals. Indeed, for many Muslims the differences between schools of thought would not be perceived, people simply describing themselves as Sunni Muslims. Although the Stoney Stanton Road, Berry St and the recently completed Cambridge St mosques have been established by Gujarati Muslims, a large number of Punjabi, East African, Pakistani and Bengali Muslims also use them. To a certain extent, choice seems to be dictated by religious practice and for others it is a question of convenience. As one man expressed it:

Previously, there were Gujarati teachers at the [Jamia] mosque, but they have not taught me anything wrong. There is only one Quran. I have always said I am a Sunni Muslim, but I don't care if there is a Shi'ite, or a Wahhabi imam because the prayer will be the same. Most of the time I will go to whichever mosque I am close to.

There was no doubt that the authorities had remained caught in a time warp, hardly recognising the existence of mosques in the city other than the Eagle St one. Yet the younger generation is identifying in a different way with the mosques in the city than have their parents. Those who grew up with the Eagle St mosque regarded it as the main mosque, but for their children those patterns are breaking down; some young people are involved in the activities of the Stoney Stanton Road mosque, even if their parents attend the Jamia Mosque. Formal membership of the Hillfields Muslim Association and the Gujarati Muslim Society (restricted to Gujaratis) are 50 and 150 men respectively. On the other hand, the Gujarati managed mosques themselves attract not only Gujaratis but an increasing number of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Muslim students. At the end of 1989 the new Cambridge St mosque, with a capacity similar to that of Eagle St, was close to completion. Yet there was still general talk of 'the mosque'

as if there was only one. In the past a crossover between the mosques was necessitated not only through choice but because of the ability of the Eagle St mosque to accommodate large numbers during Friday prayers and festivals. Convenience was the reason for the setting up of the Hillfields Muslim Association in 1977, drawing its membership from the Gujarati Muslim community living in a cluster of streets to the south of Harnall Lane East. The two largest mosques are now in close proximity to one another, and factors other than travel time may dictate choice.

Separate mosque management by Bangladeshis and Pakistanis is often the case elsewhere in the country. The fact that this did not happen in Coventry owed much to the fact that the revised constitution of the Eagle St mosque wrote in and protected the participation of Bengalis both within the membership and management of the mosque. That association was so secure that there was cooperation between the majority Pakistanis and the Bangladesh Centre, which operated from 1972 as a support group for an independent Bangladesh. It is also important that the general secretary of the Islamic Brotherhood for sixteen years was a Bangladeshi who was also chairman of the Bangladesh Centre. This organisation is now defunct but, as the only effective leader of the Sylheti community, its chairman's support for the Eagle St mosque was an important one, bringing as he did the community with him.

However, the constitution did itself create further friction. A constitution, drawn up in 1979, was properly ratified, but the rift had dragged on for some thirteen years, culminating in attacks on the mosque management by a reform committee led by one of the trustees of the mosque, until a resolution was reached in December 1986 and a constitution agreed. Three days later an incident took place at the mosque during which a few members of the reform committee continued to protest against the imam. This group was now isolated and the protest not repeated. Nevertheless, although the new framework required the executive to hold regular elections, this did not happen, the Islamic Brotherhood claimed, because agreement could not be reached on the nature of those elections. A member of the executive committee of the Islamic Brotherhood accepted that what existed was a 'caretaker' nonelected committee, but it was not clear how much will



existed to resolve the impasse. What was clear was that until these issues are resolved, the differences will continue to harden other 'party lines'. Occasionally within the community alliances are remade and redrawn, but experience points mainly to such divisions intensifying over time, making the years of dispute harder to dispel than the issues themselves.

Control of the mosque management is clearly seen as a powerful position to hold within the community, yet the function of the Islamic Brotherhood is purely to organise and manage the Eagle St mosque's affairs, and its membership consists of as many as contribute to the annual £10 subscription which is collected door to door. The Pakistani Workers' Association, for example, which has several executive members in common with the Islamic Brotherhood, also operates a system whereby all those who receive advice and information pay a membership subscription. Apart from moves to establish community centre provision, one characteristic of Muslim organisation in Coventry has been that it has provided a service to the community which is pre-defined, whether it be religious services, funeral arrangements, education, or advice and information. In such a situation there is no great competition for management and control. Even where elections are nominally held, the pattern has been for the same office bearers to be in post sometimes for twenty or more years.

#### Pakistani Workers' Association

In the late 1950s and 1960s both the Pakistani and Indian Workers' Associations gave form to a system whereby those who already had access to higher education in India or Pakistan provided advice and welfare assistance to those in the community who were often literate in neither English nor their mother tongue. The two associations also cooperated to fight for racial equality in employment, having early contacts with among others, the Trades Union Congress, and the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination. The Pakistani Workers' Association (PWA) had played a unique role in relations between the Muslim community and the city authorities over the years and continue to do so.

Within the PWA, founded in 1957, membership was drawn from Muslims from Azad Kashmir, North East Frontier Agemcu (now Arunachal Pradesh) and Central Punjab, and before partition the PWA had a secretary who was Bengali. But from the earliest days its leadership was urban based, the three individuals who rotated the chief officer posts within the association over the years being Punjabis from Lahore. The perception of members of the association is that others were not prepared to come forward and do the hard work involved. Whatever the case, claims by the association to represent the Pakistani community as a whole were always controversial, and attempts by the Pakistani Workers' Association to gain influence in the Labour Party were resisted by those Muslims who considered themselves to be among the radical left of that party. There was also distrust from certain sections of Kashmiris; Punjabis from Lahore were only a very small minority of Pakistanis in Coventry. Indeed the Pakistan Welfare Association was established during this time as an alternative to the Pakistani Workers' Association, and offered similar services, but it was on the whole less well established within the city establishment. One of the founders of the Pakistan Welfare Association was later to be a founding member and leading figure in the Muslim Community Centre Association in its early days. Lines of division between this group and the Pakistani Workers' Association had been laid down many years before an arena for conflict materialised.

Dissent caused by rival groups among welfare associations which is what, to a great extent, the PWA is common in other parts of the country. Alison Shaw writes of conflict in Oxford:

Simply holding such a position gave the office holders authority over fellow migrants and status in the eyes of the community and, to some extent, in relation to English society too. Because of this, ever since the founding of the first welfare association, rival welfare associations have flowered and perished, each generally being short-lived, with influence limited to a small circle of kin and villagers (1988: 38).

Doubtless in the past the PWA had varied in the extent of its activities, but its leading individuals remained those who had the ear of city councillors and officers and the CRC, and it continued to maintain its



profile by inviting city council officials to meetings. Bitterness about the exclusivity of this contact was reflected in the frequently expressed comment that over the past years 'they have done nothing for the community'.

The association continues to act as an advice point. We found between ten and fifteen members of its executive meeting regularly in school halls and in each other's houses to discuss action on casework. One committee member reflected that activities were very limited but that the association had remained mobilised over the previous few years in its opposition to the Muslim Community Centre Association, and its own application for funding for a cultural centre, and more recently in drawing up a further unsuccessful urban programme funding application for £25,000 to improve the Eagle St area. This quite modest initiative did not receive city council support, apparently because it was judged that the organisation did not have the necessary expertise. Yet a few years previously the Council had been prepared to entertain an application from the same organisation for major funding for a community centre. This was one example of the important part political expediency played in funding decisions.

### Challenges

The executives of the committees of both the Islamic Brotherhood and the Pakistani Workers' Association have had particular influence with the Council over thirty years; in fact they provided the only point of communication with the community until the Muslim Community Centre Association came into being. For example, during the year 1988-89 there were three Muslim members on the executive committee of the Coventry Community Relations Council. All three were members of the PWA executive. Another PWA executive officer was a worker at the CRC.

What had been accepted mistakenly was the interchangeability of the committees with the membership of the organisations themselves. Both organisations have pointed to the size of their respective memberships as proof that they represent the Muslims of Coventry. While some Muslims in the community feel that they should be given credit for getting on with the job, many of those who wish to subscribe to the

Eagle St mosque and hence to the Islamic Brotherhood, or who have used the services of the Pakistani Workers' Association, would not necessarily identify with their respective committees, and resent what they consider to be a desire for exclusive control. Despite the extent of activity within the community, there has not then been a lively tradition of widespread participation, or experience of community management, and leaders have often lost sight of the fact that they do not have the right to speak on behalf of everyone. For those who would like to break the monopoly, the risk is that they themselves will become isolated from the community, and often highly vulnerable. As one individual who attempted just that expressed it: 'Someone with some education or position who puts himself forward finds it difficult to maintain a low profile. Even if your only purpose is to be able to contribute to a better life of the community, it is not easy to take this as your main aim and remain within those bounds.'

In a later chapter we will look in greater detail at the emergence of the Muslim Community Centre Association, which in its application for funding for a community centre in 1984, attempted to bypass, and in many ways threw out a challenge to, the existing Muslim power groups in the city. It was felt that because of the strength of certain leaders in the community, people had become apathetic. When the MCCA bid for a community centre failed, one of the original founders of the association explained: 'This reinforced a view amongst the Muslim community of a wider power struggle involving prominent figures in the Asian community who have close links with the City Council, and this has hindered and blocked constructive progress.'

One manifestation of the attempt to block the activities of the MCCA was the formation of the Federation of Muslim Organisations, which presented itself as an umbrella group of a large number of organisations representing Muslims in Coventry. The organisations which formed the federation, the World Islamic Mission, the Bangladesh Centre, the Pakistan Youth Forum, the Pakistan Kashmir Association and the Muslim Parents' Association, were all organised by the same individuals who were involved in the Pakistani Workers' Association and associated with the executive of the Islamic Brotherhood. None of these organisations showed any signs of life at the end of 1989.



The inability of the Muslim Community Centre Association to pay back loans to individuals within the community for the purchase of premises resulted in a split within the MCCA itself. When a small group from among the original committee took over the committee at the end of 1988, this reinforced what was felt by many to be family and regional factionalism. The split coincided with a Kashmiri/Punjabi division: the group who formed the new committee was led by families from Rawalpindi, while the large group which lost seats on the committee was largely older generation Kashmiris, many of whom had loaned money for the centre in 1984. This conflict cut across existing friendships, affecting wives and children. It finally erupted when the locks on the community centre were forced in September 1989. The violence which took place in the form of street fighting between the two groups outside the community centre, the involvement of the police and the subsequent press reporting of incidents, had several results. First, there was a deep sense of shame for those involved in the incidents, as well as those who remained apart from it, particularly as respected elders in the community were involved. The words of one successful young man in the city echoed those of many: 'I felt really insulted, because it was basically two families involved in the split . . . People are saying how dare you call it a Muslim community centre.' Second, relations between Muslims and the local white population and the authorities, particularly the police authorities, were felt to have received a body blow.

Among some Muslims the turn of events increased what amounted to a conspiracy theory: a belief that there would be opposition to any group attempting to upset the political balance. The joint statement by the CCRC, the City Council and the Coventry police on 3 October 1989 that the three agencies had 'cooperated, combined resources and assisted those in dispute over the centre' was seen by the authorities as a statement of successful inter-agency cooperation. But some in the Muslim community saw it as a partisan approach, and felt that 'assistance' had taken the form of inappropriate weight placed behind one group.

At the time, tension was increased by provocative reporting by the press. The Coventry Evening Telegraph's editorial of 11 October 1989 talked about 'intolerable behaviour' and continued: 'Muslims are getting

a bad press these days. They are not helping themselves to overcome it. . . . An obsession has united them in condemnation of Salman Rushdie's book. Another divides them in Coventry.' The connection between events in Coventry and the *Satanic Verses* affair was spurious, designed to cater to existing prejudices against Muslims within the community at large. For those Muslims who had for years tried to build the image of the Muslim community in Coventry in a positive way, for example through peaceful joint marches organised with the cathedral, the conflict was a disaster. As one representative of the Islamic Brotherhood said: 'Everything has been ruined. It will be difficult to persuade people again.'

This potent combination of mosque, community group and party politics is one which many who potentially have a great contribution to make to the community are anxious to avoid. The question 'If you make your name dirty, how are you going to take that away?' not only affects those who feel they have a position to maintain in the community; young people are also discouraged by what they see as a lack of willingness in elders to relinquish status and power.

#### Group activity

Muslim community organisation, then, had been most visibly characterised by the dominance of a small group of men who had been the contact points for the City Council's officers and politicians. Yet alongside there was a different sort of community activity, albeit one whose growth had been stunted through lack of appropriate conditions.

The pattern was that a group developed, and then died away. A youth group of some twenty to twenty-five young men, meeting in John Gulson school in the mid 1980s and led by an education department youth worker, faced lack of structured or long-term facilities, discouraging leadership from coming from the young men themselves. Similarly, the youth group meeting in the community centre building in Stoney Stanton Road found itself unable to continue faced with lack of funding for equipment and coordination. We found the Youth Activity Centre in Freehold Street running a youth group of about twenty five members, of which fifteen or sixteen were Muslims playing snooker, table tennis, organising trips, and helped by young Gujerati Muslim



volunteers. A new Muslim scout group, meeting in Broad St School was again facing problems of insecure premises and lack of funding. Other groups which could benefit from the use of community facilities were the Pakistani and Gujerati cricket teams, both practising separately at Sidney Stringer School grounds.

No comparable groups had arisen within the Muslim community to provide a base for the elderly, and lack of premises must be an important factor. Bangladeshi elderly men often have quite young families, because wives have joined them more recently. Yet many of these men, now over fifty, are long-term unemployed, made redundant after working for twenty years or more in the motor vehicle industry, often in one factory. One man told how he had worked with Jaguar for twenty years and was forced to return to Bangladesh because of his mother's ill health. On his return he found himself redundant, and had not worked since. This was a familiar story. Some of the older men had used the Muslim Community Centre for a short period, but it was open irregularly even before the conflict there intensified, leaving the mosque as their only meeting place. The men talked of the cultural problems of role reversal as they were forced into a more domestic role, particularly looking after the children, taking them home or to the mosque at midday and in the evenings, and collecting them from school. They saw a community centre as a possible escape, as somewhere they could take friends who come from London, or Dhaka, or where they could go to after dropping the children at school: 'We would love to have one. We would come even for five minutes to chat with the others' was a typical response.

There was only one Muslim attending the elderly Asian group meeting at Frank Walsh House. A handful of Pakistani men were attending the Foleshill Asian group, which comprises mainly older Sikh men and meets on a daily basis at the Indian Community Centre. One of those attending said he came because he was long term unemployed and it 'relieves the mental pressures' to get away from his home and family during the day. However, such facilities and group activities within the Asian community are scarce and most people expressed the need for Muslim elders to be within a Muslim group – a mixture of the political legacy of partition, language and cultural barriers, and the closeness of the elders to religion.

Undoubtedly, many voluntary groups were affected by the disappearance of MSC-funded posts; community programme workers, despite the limitations of the scheme, were in many cases able to breathe life into groups which otherwise had limited access to funding. The Ramgarhia Centre was one example: among the workers there was a Muslim who was able to attract other Muslims to use the centre for information and advice, and indeed several Muslim children continued to use the day nursery at the centre.

There is, then, a dearth of community activities arising from within the community outside religious activities, although there are indications that Muslims would respond to quite a wide variety of initiatives. There were some Muslim young men taking the foundation courses on car mechanics, electronics and bookkeeping which were run at the Foleshill Baptist Church in Broad Street; Muslim boys and girls attended the Tai Kwando classes held at John Gulson school. What the Council needed to grasp was that there was a potential in all these activities for precisely the development of the community which was essential to widen its base away from dependence on community leaders. The community development component became more apparent in the activities of women's groups.

#### Women's groups

The discussion so far has ignored the needs and activities of women. This reflects the fact that the activities arising from the community centre controversy in Coventry, and those conflicts which impinged on it, were very much the affair of men. By contrast, it was our concern from the outset to place the needs of women in the centre of the consideration of the needs of the Muslim community as a whole.

In keeping with Muslim tradition, we expected organisation by women to be a separate activity. There had been isolated Asian girls' groups meeting in secondary schools since the late 1970s, typically lunchtime discussion groups. A development from this was an evening youth club at Broad Heath School, a compromise between what the parents wanted – an opportunity to pass on traditions – and somewhere where the girls could relax. At the same time, in 1979, a women's group was started by a social worker from the Hillfields District Office. This was a Punjabi



group, drawing together both Sikh and Muslim women, largely from the Hillfields area. This group survived for almost ten years, although Muslim women gradually dropped away, as some left to work and some had transport problems. It was only when the worker was no longer in a position to coordinate the group that it collapsed.

Such mixed, that is not specifically Muslim, girls' and women's groups, continue to exist. For example, this was the case at Edgwick School, where there was a women's group, mother-tongue teaching and self defence classes, a mothers and toddlers club and a girls' group. On the other hand, there are a limited number of Muslim women who would attend such open activities which might include dancing and self defence. One such group was the Ladies' Asian Culture group, run by a Muslim woman at Broad Heath School since 1977. Combining keep-fit with Bhangra dancing sessions and celebrating all the religious festivals, it has had a changing core of women of all generations attending. Initially, Muslim women did not attend the group, music being one element giving rise to unease. But as links were made across to the Urdu class which the coordinator was taking at John Gulson School trust was built up and some Muslim women began to attend. The whole thrust of this group was multicultural and it maintained links with the Coventry Asian music circle. The coordinator recognised that this in itself was unacceptable to many Muslim women and that many more would come if it were open for Muslims only. She also recognised that the main enthusiasm among Muslim women was for religiously based activities, which could be an appropriate starting point for further developments.

More obviously, language is frequently a barrier to mixed activities, particularly for older women, and often within the life of a group, an isolated Muslim woman (or within a predominantly Pakistani group, a Gujarati or Bengali speaker) will fall away. Additionally, a group may have a particular cultural character, or be religiously specific, as in the case of the Gujarati women's group meeting at Frank Walsh House. In this case worship was an integral part of the social meeting, and the group distinctly Hindu. So, on the one hand, women may look for a group where they can express their own particular religious and cultural life and on the other hand, for younger girls and women (where language or culture may not pose a personal barrier), parents often feel

more comfortable to know that group activities will take place within the boundaries of Islamic tradition, and will be led by someone who they can trust to do this.

When the youth support team was set up in the early 1980s, Asian staff were appointed to run groups aimed at Muslim women in Little Heath School, the Ramgarhia Centre, Frederick Bird School and Eagle St Play Centre. There continued to be an enormous demand for such groups. Around the Eagle St mosque we found four Muslim women's groups meeting within one hundred yards. Such groups appear to operate best when they have ten to fifteen participants, and coordinators always stress the importance of easy accessibility; what is usually quoted is five minutes' walk, with no busy roads to cross, and a secure and 'suitable' meeting place. Yet suitability is not easily definable: for some, school buildings are associated with education; for others, identification of the group as a 'club' would feel dangerous and be unlikely to meet with approval.

Searchlight Women's Group which started in 1983 in Broad Heath School, later moving to John Gulson school, developed as a predominantly Muslim group, supported by a CRC development officer. It disproved the theory of the overriding importance of local provision by attracting women from Radford, Wyken and Holbrook, as well as from Foleshill and Hillfields. The group obtained a grant from the West Midlands County Council, and after consultation concentrated on indoor games, knitting and sewing. They also had keep-fit facilities and a small crèche provided by two or three mothers, and at one time they had regular sessions with the health visitor from Broad St Health Clinic on such things as exercise, diet and storing food. Two or three of the women themselves were beginning to take charge of this group, together with outreach workers from the CRC.

The Bengali women's group meeting at John Gulson School and Eagle St Play Centre was identified as a language class. Originally the group was encouraged and supported by the Bengali-speaking Minority Group Support Service welfare officer, and it was always seen that a variety of needs could be met through such an opportunity. Her experience was that without networks similar to those available in Bangladesh to help through bureaucratic procedures, and faced with an alien system, the women were 'absolutely terrified'. The basic issue, she



said, was that 'all the mothers want to meet and have heart-to-heart chats - just to share each other's feelings'. The group offers a high level of mutual support and some individual counselling. However, there was recognition of a heavy dependence on the group's coordinator, in this case the MGSS worker: 'If there is someone there like me, if I go into the group, they will all laugh and chat, but if I stop going that will be the end of it. One person completely stopped going because I was not there every week.' Security of premises might well help in developing self confidence within the group. Undoubtedly, for some women, the presence of men meeting in another part of the building would discourage them from attending. This is not simply a cultural inclination to keep the sexes apart, but stems from a fear that men would report back to families and neighbours, particularly if music were played.

This need for somewhere where women can feel relaxed and secure was echoed by the Bengali Mahila Samity, meeting at the Cornerstone Family Centre. A community programme interpreter at the Ethnic Minorities Development Unit identified Bengali women she was working with as a 'shy, disadvantaged group', and later undertook a door-to-door survey as part of a college course. The women she met spoke very little English, and the request was for a specifically Bengali group. Starting to meet at the Cornerstone Family Centre in early 1989, trips and talks were arranged, and during the summer 1989 a Bengali girls' group was started. Once a month a health visitor has visited the group to talk and show videos on family planning and childcare, and a psychiatric nurse gave talks on stress. The group had received a small grant from the leisure services department, and intended to arrange cultural activities. This group had benefited from the input of a paid worker, and the coordinator could see self-confidence developing in the women, some soon being in a position to lead the group's activities. A further spin-off had been that Bengali families had started to use the family centre and its day centre facilities.

Another group which had worked with voluntary assistance only, but which had seen great development in the confidence of those taking part, was the Muslim Girls' Association, which had been meeting at the Muslim Community Centre on the corner of Stoney Stanton Road for some two and a half years until it was forced out by the dispute over the

centre itself. Most of the girls came from the area immediately around Eagle St. This group had operated in the face of parents' considerable reluctance to allow their girls to go out in the evenings. There is considerable anxiety among women about relations and neighbours gossiping, and there appears to be distrust among certain men about the motivation of those organising the group. But most parents are in favour of their children learning, particularly Urdu, and are happy to leave them where they know activities are organised in an appropriate way. We found a high degree of commitment to this group, some of the girls attending since it first started. While some said that their main reason for joining the group was to learn Urdu, for others it was 'just to get out of the house'. The alternative, they said, would be helping around the home or watching television 'from morning to night'. The Muslim Girls' Association was meeting twice a week, although it had hoped to increase this, and it had a membership of about thirty-five girls and young women before they were forced to move from the community centre.

With small grants from the departments of economic development and social services they had been able to develop indoor games - badminton, volleyball and roller skating. As well as sewing and cooking, there had been workshops in racism and self defence and some of the girls themselves were involved in running a summer play scheme in 1989. Mothers had also been drawn into activities, some 300 to 400 women attending religious festivals. Yet the organiser was aware that this development was vulnerable, dependent as it is on her own and other individual's voluntary effort, and the premises insecure, unless funding could be secured.

The group leaders saw the girls developing enormously through the group in terms of general confidence and long-term gain. They had an environment where they could 'be encouraged to think of doing something other than becoming machinists'. Indeed, it was possible to distinguish regular attenders from newcomers by their lively discussion. There was no doubt that this encouragement of a degree of independence in young women was seen as threatening by some men.

The Muslim Girls' Association and other groups have developed through the extraordinary enthusiasm of women who often have full-time jobs. Work with women is done on a piecemeal and ad hoc basis,



often based on voluntary effort or initiated by social workers, and as such there is the real danger of efforts being lost as other individual or agency priorities emerge.

#### Chapter Four: TRAINING NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

As had been the case in the provision of skills training, the lack of a base or effective contact point within the community had been one element in a continued inaccessibility of key services to Muslims. However, there had been another factor: the lack of recognition of the need, or the capacity to target service delivery to sub-groups within the general category of 'Asian'. The impact of services on Muslim communities, and particularly on Muslim sub-groups had been seriously constrained by the availability of language and other skills available within service departments. In many areas agencies were continuing to grapple with the issue of redressing the balance between black and white users, masking gaps which continued to exist in provision for sections of the community.

#### Community education

Community education offered a prime example of what one observer called 'the gulf between what the system thinks it is operating and what the community perceives as available'. Further education should in theory be able to supply any demand articulated, yet the complaint by community education officers and school authorities was that 'the community does not tell us what it wants'. A report from Tile Hill College identified one problem as the way in which the college contacted the community, providing one-way only communication. It seems unlikely that the alternative, a two-way process, can materialise, unless structures exist within communities through which needs can be articulated and which provide individuals and groups with the knowledge and confidence to approach potential providers of education and training. There is a very limited extent to which voluntary community workers or community 'leaders' already heavily engaged in advice and assistance roles can do this. On the other hand, for the individual member of the community, possibly unemployed, with limited contact with officials and limited English, it is quite unrealistic to expect contact to be made with one of the colleges of further education. As one experienced Muslim worker pointed out, even without language



difficulties, a task such as finding one's way to the headteacher's study can be a daunting one.

Appointments are required within further education which build contact with the community into job descriptions, in order to provide feedback on provision. The complaint often made by individual employees in further education, often Section 11 workers, was that they had to create their own direction, whereas 'it should be needs led and centrally directed'. When the multicultural adviser at Tile Hill College sent a letter to community organisations as a way of initiating contact, there was a very poor response, and subsequently no follow up. His feeling was that there was a cynicism within the communities concerning the ability of colleges to deliver. Yet locating the service within the community, targeting and publicising classes and courses, clearly can have an effect.

Henley College was particularly visible in its language provision but, in common with other agencies, was able to build most easily where there were existing community structures. Approaches which had been made to Task Force by Henley College for training provision for the Muslim community had foundered for lack of an existing viable community resource. Tile Hill College, which has adopted equal opportunity guidelines, has offered specific courses for Asian businesses in the fashion and retail trade and has provided professional and management advice through community organisations and centres such as the Indian Community Centre and the Ramgarhia Centre. Even here, a business hotline failed because it was not properly staffed. The technical college provides a wide range of community education courses, which include office and administration skills, new technology, women's programmes, construction, DIY and keep-fit. These have had a very poor take-up by ethnic minority groups. The community education department at the technical college identified the need for a crèche; to be effective this would need to be given good publicity, and in itself might not be enough to attract Muslim women to such courses. Access courses were still targeting people for further education rather than for jobs or for personal development.

### Skills training

Advice sessions within the community run by the City Council's economic development department have shown up the need for training in basic business skills and management. These sessions had been held at various community centres, including the Indian Community Centre and the West Indian Community Centre. It had not been possible for the Stoney Stanton Road Muslim Community Centre to be used in this way because it lacked staffing and running costs. Undoubtedly, the Muslim community has missed opportunities.

Basic skills, language teaching and technical qualifications are all in heavy demand in the community. The Coventry Skills Audit shows that the major concentration of employment in the city is in the centre. Yet the great bulk of jobs located in the inner-city wards are filled, not by their residents but by commuters from the rest of Coventry and outside the city. The audit makes the point that city policies should concentrate on making inner-city residents more competitive with workers from elsewhere in Coventry.

The audit breaks the population down into three broad ethnic groupings: white, Afro Caribbean and Asian. Although it does not provide a full picture, some reflection can be made from this on skills and qualifications in the Muslim community. The audit shows a higher proportion of Asians holding university or polytechnic degrees. On the other hand a higher proportion of Asians (48.5 per cent) than either of the other groups held no formal qualifications of any type. They also held the lowest proportion of ONC and OND (2.4 per cent), and held only a third of the numbers of City and Guilds qualifications of the other two ethnic groups. Asians also had the smallest proportion with clerical and commercial qualifications.

Figures supplied by the careers service[1] reinforced indications of bias towards, on the one hand, higher education in Asian school leavers, and, on the other, a low take-up by Asians of YTS and a low percentage of school leavers in employment, compared to white and Afro Caribbeans. The percentage of 1987 school leavers in employment showed 33 per cent white, 12.5 per cent Asian and 17 per cent Afro-Caribbean, while 1986 school leavers showed 61.5 per cent white, 28 per cent Asian and 44.5 per cent Afro-Caribbean in employment. Among



the general figures of long-term unemployment among sixteen to twenty four year olds, there was clear evidence that Asians are less successful in finding jobs.

The REITS (Racial Equality in Training) Report of 1987 pointed out that black trainees were continuing to be distributed unevenly on available training schemes. They tended to be concentrated on a small number of schemes, some of which provided inferior training and most of which offered little direct chance of obtaining a job after completion. There was no indication that there had been any change since then. The figures presented to the education sub-committee on 23 March 1989 by the head of manpower services indicated that in 1987/8 only 8.7 per cent of applications for apprenticeships on the City Council's YTS construction scheme came from ethnic minorities, whilst by 1988/9 this figure had reduced to 8.2 per cent. The figures for ethnic minority school leavers in those years were 15.3 per cent of school leavers in 1987/8 and 16.3 per cent in 1988/9.

The December 1988 figures of job take-up after YTS showed Asians well below their white counterparts, at 62 per cent for males and 70 per cent for females, although both of these were higher than the percentage for Afro-Caribbean females (56 per cent). These figures could be explained partly by the fact that black school leavers were less likely to be recruited onto schemes run by large local and national companies than their white counterparts. The careers service noted: 'These results are particularly discouraging as regular monitoring of the applicants put forward for vacancies . . . shows that black candidates are submitted on an equal basis.'

Within colleges, ethnic monitoring could not indicate the Muslim presence on courses because the category used for monitoring purposes was 'Asian'. However, at Tile Hill College the view was that there had been proportionate numbers of Muslims, particularly in business studies, which was oversubscribed by Asians, although the number of Muslim girls remained low. There was a very low take-up by Asians on the engineering side and in the social, health and community care fields, in which there was a shortage of Muslim workers. There were no Muslims in nursery nursing, for example, an area which should be quite acceptable for Muslim families.

Not only is the Muslim community ill-equipped to meet the continuing shift away from employment in primary industries and in low technology manufacture to high technology, professional and service employment. Muslims increasingly face competition for work requiring traditional skills in smaller engineering shops and in the particular growth industry in Foleshill, the clothing industry.

New manufacturing jobs are increasingly higher skilled and based on the use of new technology. Expanding companies are looking for young, well-educated and trained employees. Recent recruitment to the vehicle assembly and engineering sectors appeared to have benefited young people in particular. There is little interest in employing older, former factory workers or any of those who are long term unemployed, without intensive training to get back into the job market. The highest proportion of economically inactive females is found in Foleshill, resulting from the concentration of women of ethnic origin in this ward. Although there is evidence that more Muslim young women are working out of the home, they are not well prepared to move into areas of growth.

The Science Park has attracted new high technology companies and jobs to the city. In 1989 jobs grew to a total of 700 employees, and during 1989 Westwood Business Park was virtually full. During 1989, thirty-three companies decided to move to the city, with the prospect of the creation of over 3,500 jobs over the following three years. Overall, some 6,443 jobs were planned to be created by the sixty-six companies that had committed themselves to relocate to the city since 1987. Sixty per cent of those would be for local people. Some 38 per cent of the new jobs were in the financial services sector, with a further 32 per cent in office work. Manufacturing accounted for only 10 per cent of the new jobs.[2]

There is no reason to doubt that the same demand exists among Coventry Muslims for further education and training as that identified in the Skills Audit more generally among the local population, particularly for training in computing, business and clerical skills. A great opportunity would be missed if any new community facility for Muslims in Coventry were to ignore the link that could be made to skills and employment training.



### Chapter Five: CITY POLICY, PRACTICE AND PROVISION

Placed within the more general context of ethnic minority unemployment in Coventry, it was not surprising to find Muslims over-represented among the long term unemployed, both among older men, who had been the most vulnerable in the contraction of the manufacturing industry, and among school leavers. Although increasing numbers were beginning to work outside the home, Muslim women contributed to the high levels of economically inactive women in the Foleshill and St Michael's wards. What was also evident was that Muslims were not taking up training opportunities in the health, welfare and community care fields, sectors in which there are so few Muslim workers in Coventry. At the same time, we found the community ill-prepared to provide the skills required to meet the needs of the economic growth areas in Coventry, having gained little benefit from new skills and training initiatives within the city. The lack of workable contact points had undoubtedly been an element in this. Also important, we found, was the lack of adequate policy direction, coordination and resourcing from those bodies responsible for meeting training needs in the community.

#### Policy trends

Two major city council policy trends have a bearing on the delivery of services to the Muslim community: the importance attached to equal opportunities and race relations, and the principle of partnership working.

In 1980 Coventry City Council adopted a report which acknowledged its duty to foster equal opportunities and good race relations under the 1976 Race Relations Act and to establish a corporate approach to the development and monitoring of its policies. Eight years later the City Council reiterated its commitment 'to develop policies by which the City can enable its communities to overcome the powerlessness, discrimination and deprivation generated by social polarisation'.<sup>[1]</sup>

Developments within services were piecemeal and uneven. At the end of 1988 equal opportunities was declared a priority and in early 1989 an equal opportunities steering group was created from elected members to

focus and develop policy. A corporate task team on equal opportunities began work in May 1989 with a brief to develop a policy. The draft policy which went out for consultation in October 1989 committed the City Council to several points which had a bearing on the issues we were raising:

- \* service levels to be geared to the differing needs across the city, with everyone to be treated fairly when using or seeking these services;
- \* consultation with the community, including council employees, to ensure that people participate in identifying needs, and planning delivery of services to meet those needs;
- \* an emphasis on departmental action plans.

The Council's view was that, as a consequence of a new policy direction, its contact with the community had changed positively, to the extent that there were now named individuals in departments who could be contacted. The new post of community coordinator, with its priority of establishing a policy and code of practice for the community sector, was designed to bring together policy and planning on community affairs.

#### Partnership

Within social services this emphasis on patterns of partnership, with its associated requirement for consultation with the community and links with other services and agencies, has the potential for considerable impact on the community. Yet, in the absence of any community development function either departmentally or within the community, such services are reliant on preexisting structures. This is equally true of other departments. The business development team of the Department of Economic Development and Planning, for example, with its relatively new strategy of support and training to voluntary groups, is dependent on groups coming to officers of the division with proposals and ideas. Where there is little appropriate organisation from within communities, this calls into question some of the basic assumptions about partnership working.

Within this business development team there was a proactive strategy of a sort which should be of benefit to Muslims. However, there was no evidence that the business counselling sessions, held at the CCRC,



West Indian Club, Foleshill Information Centre, Coventry Business Centre and Vine St Centre, had much impact on the Muslim community. Alfa Trading, Pakistani owned and managed, provided an excellent example of a medium-sized company that has benefited through industrial improvement grants to become a modern enterprise. However, we were unable to find further examples. One other smaller Gujarati Muslim clothing manufacturer has had applications for a building improvement grant turned down. In that case successful access to the system remained elusive.

These two companies are the only Muslim members of the Coventry and District Clothing Manufacturers Association, whose forty-five or so members are mainly Asian. The association is regarded as a major new initiative within the economic development department, encouraging a growth which is new to Coventry, and throws some light on how far Muslims are standing outside the mainstream of new business developments in the inner city. The Clothing Resource Centre, which had been set up as part of this new initiative, provides local companies with access to the latest computer technology, and training courses for supervisors and instructors have been run. A major problem for local companies is skills shortages, particularly acute given the city's traditional metal-based manufacturing sectors. A machinist's training centre was opened in February 1989, offering courses which last three months, and providing direct access to the large number of jobs available in the sector.

There is support to voluntary projects by the unemployment initiatives team. However, economic development initiatives fostered by the economic development unit require not only formal structures, but some strategy of income generation within community centres. The management structure should be one capable of receiving and sustaining such initiatives; often it has proved difficult to work with the existing management of projects. Department officers felt that in the case of the Muslim community the lack of any sort of community centre had limited the possibilities of input and that liaison would be facilitated by the appointment of a development officer who would have training and employment as part of his or her job brief.

### Targeting services

The failure of such projects to reach Muslims is often masked by the fact that 'Asians' are benefiting from initiatives, as is the case for the clothing sector. Apart from the demographic information supplied by the planning department there is a dearth of information concerning housing needs, health services take-up, unemployment, and so on, within specific Asian communities, or within specific localities. Where specific studies have been carried out, such as in the EMDU Ethnic Minorities Elderly Survey, Muslim needs have remained undifferentiated under a more general 'Asian' head and sometimes are masked within an even broader categorisation of 'ethnic minority'. We found a frequent reluctance to identify service users or clients in terms of religion or by language group. 'We think Asian,' one project worker explained. The fear appeared to be one of sectarianism, with echoes of the colour-blind approach which argued that monitoring for ethnicity was in itself racist. An alternative view put forward was that, while necessary, such attention is 'fine tuning'. But that fine tuning, or absence of it, we maintained, can have considerable impact on individual communities.

One argument used to justify past decisions against providing separate services for particular ethnic groups was that service should be delivered according to need and not ethnicity. Unfortunately that proposition has been used to obscure evidence that gaps in service take-up may coincide with lines of linguistic or cultural division, and that an interventionist or positive action approach may be needed if the principle of majority access is not to be the determining one, even within ethnic minorities. The effectiveness of basic services and initiatives in reaching Muslim communities will depend very largely on where provision is based and the language skills of workers. We found that Orbit House, which provided access to grants and loans for repair and improvements for home owners, had attracted a fair proportion of Muslim clients, partly because of its positioning in the heart of the community, the presence of a Muslim from the local community among its staff, and the presence of an appropriate Muslim member on its management committee. Only too often the strategic importance of such factors in the effectiveness of service delivery is overlooked.



### An imbalance: language provision

One area in which an imbalance in provision is most felt by Muslims themselves is that of mother-tongue teaching. While Punjabi is by and large catered for, this is not the case for Urdu, and more particularly for Bengali, Gujarati and Hindi. The 1989 Foreshill Implementation Report recognised the importance of the use of mother-tongue teaching at the nursery school stage. The report noted that some schools made progress through the scheme of 'mother tongue teaching aides' initiated by the City Council in 1983, which provided primary schools with a non-teaching member of staff who spoke one or more Asian languages. Once the scheme ended in 1986, the situation deteriorated. During the time of the scheme, for example, there were Gujarati language aides; in 1989 there was no longer any Gujarati teaching in Coventry schools. Within six primary schools with high numbers of ethnic minority children, language assistants assist class teachers in the development of English as a second language, the development of the children's home language and in community initiatives.

Punjabi and Urdu teaching was provided by Asian teachers in schools supported by staff of the Minority Group Support Service (MGSS); provisions for teaching Gujarati and Bengali were not available. There were eight teachers at MGSS teaching community languages in schools. The development of an instructor grade for community languages offered new opportunities for employing appropriately qualified staff in schools throughout the city; few of these were trained teachers.

The problem for the MGSS remained that of finding DES-qualified staff in certain language skills; the community perception is that an inflexible policy about overseas qualifications results in wasting of skills available within the community for language teaching. Further education is in a better position to use overseas qualifications; some schools were employing sessional teachers through FE who are not required to meet DES requirements. John Gulson Junior School, for example, provided evening Urdu classes and Bengali classes, both supported through Henley College. Bengali language teaching remains one of the foremost demands of the Bangladeshi community, the

struggle to retain its rich tradition written into the modern political history of Bangladesh. Indeed Bangladeshis most frequently identify themselves as Bengalis, consciously drawing the community lines across the Hindu/Muslim and Bangladesh/West Bengal divide. A Bengali school ran for two to three years without help from the Council, running weekend classes for adults and children. It was dependent on financial help from Sylhetis in the restaurant business, but closed through financial difficulties. There were new plans to start Bengali classes if premises could be found. In Leicester, where the Bangladeshi population is a little over 2,000, Bengali classes are run by the Bengali mosque, by the city council-funded Bangladesh Youth and Cultural Association, and by the Bengali Community Education Project, funded by the council. In Coventry, the response from the Council has been that funding of language schools is outside policy. However, the community points to the funding of Clearview College, an Afro-Caribbean initiative, as an independent supplementary school. But towards Muslims, it is believed, 'the attitude of the City Council on funding is that if you don't ask, you don't get, and even if you do ask you don't get it'.

One feature of language teaching in Coventry for Muslims, then, is the predominance of Urdu. After partition, Urdu was declared the national and official language of Pakistan, almost all education and official business being conducted through that medium. Thus, although most Pakistanis in Britain speak a dialect of Punjabi as their home language, many regard Urdu as their mother tongue. Literacy in Punjabi is not being encouraged among Muslims because the Punjabi taught in schools is in the Gurmukhi, not the Urdu, script. In a similar way, many Muslim Gujarati speakers want their children to read and write Urdu for religious purposes, alongside or instead of Gujarati.

Five or six years ago Urdu teaching in schools was restricted to lessons during dinner hours. Now that community languages are provided in many schools as part of the mainstream it has encouraged far greater take up at GCSE and 'A' level, although there is disquiet among teachers as to whether the community language will be recognised as a qualification for higher education and within the job market. Within Coventry there has been little acceptance of the need for trained interpreters, existing employees fulfilling this function on a goodwill



basis. Employment-related interpreting courses will be valued when the function as such is recognised as a primary rather than a subsidiary one.

One of the criticisms of the operation of Section 11, which funds the language posts both within schools and within support services, is that it has taken away from the local authority the responsibility for building provision out of mainstream budgets, leaving anything for ethnic minorities as a supplement rather than an integral part of local provision. There are no city council policies in existence for multicultural education beyond a willingness to fund activities to meet service needs. It is in this context that strategic decisions about meeting the needs of linguistic minorities within black communities are easier to avoid. Seventy per cent of the schools' Asian population may be Punjabi speaking, but continually meeting majority needs among ethnic minorities fuels bitterness, paralleling as it does the non-response to minority interests more generally within the wider community. Punjabi language instruction in the Gurmukhi script does not meet the needs of the 10 per cent who write Punjabi in the Urdu script, let alone cater for Bengali and Gujarati speakers.

English as a second language (ESL), based within community education provision, benefits from being centrally coordinated. Courses are available at FE colleges (including two courses for women only at Henley College), but it comprises essentially a city wide network of community daytime classes based in schools and directed mainly at mothers living in the immediate areas. Every school in the Hillfields area, for example, now has a class. It was interesting that there had been a request for a further class for Muslim women only in the Eagle St area, suggesting that the provision still left gaps, despite often modest take-up elsewhere, and indicating the need to investigate requirements in greater detail as they related to locality, hours, or childcare considerations.

The only English language class existing that was specifically for a Muslim group was that held for Bangladeshi women at Eagle St Play Centre. There were a number of Bangladeshi women attending classes at Sidney Stringer School, and Muslim women attended classes at Stanton Bridge, Holbrooks, Frederick Bird and Radford. Sidney Stringer provides classes for men and women every morning and has

always been regarded as an English language centre. Classes organised by the Industrial Language Unit had been suspended until a new worker was in post to work with bilingual unemployed people. There were Muslim men attending these classes and the class for men only held at Frank Walsh House, but this too had been suspended. Although there are some mixed classes for men and women, we found that English language provision for men was the greatest gap. One problem was that language skills have not been seen by men as an important factor in employment terms.

Language teaching within the community, both mother-tongue teaching and English language classes, plays a vital role in terms of community development. Within the groups there are high levels of support between students. The essential next step is provision to take forward those who want to move from language development to acquire further skills, or to become more involved in community activities.

#### Education: changing the learning environment

Another area in which community development has taken place in Coventry is through the work of the welfare officers of the MGSS and through the home school liaison scheme within the community education programme. For the parent link workers their own personal development is an important strand. One Muslim woman who had been a parent link worker said that visiting both Sikh and Muslim homes for the first time gave her a new confidence and an insight into Sikh culture. She continued to be involved with the school, operating a crèche for the community English classes at the school, and teaching embroidery within the school.

Those working directly with schools in the inner-city areas are confident that there has been a major improvement for Asian, and with them Muslim, children. They see the system of English as a Second Language and welfare support provided by the MGSS and the parent link system supported by the Community Education Project feeding back into children's self-esteem as they see their parents come into schools and their community festivals celebrated. The view of the school authorities is that there are now greater opportunities for issues to be 'discussed and debated' with parents. There have been efforts in



the last few years to improve parental involvement within the schools. There are still gaps: few Bengali parents come into schools for open evenings, for example (the lack of interpreting facilities is a contributing factor). Many schools would say that they are aiming to provide a positive multicultural curriculum, taking and using what the children bring to school, and in John Gulson School the aim is to provide a bilingual curriculum. The point which should not be missed is that a very unequal power relationship between school authorities and parents can only change with the development of a strong community.

Many heads would like to see the possibility of more outreach work, which would identify community needs and enable full community educational programmes, but for those schools which are not designated as community schools, resources are stretched, and there is uncertainty and fear that under LMS funds will go to existing community education networks.

#### Advice provision

Temporary provision and withdrawal has been something of a pattern in provision for ethnic minorities in Coventry, as it has depended on (often short-term) external funding. Frequently services have appeared and disappeared without evaluation, as was the case with the Asian Resource Centre and the Asian Welfare Centre, both offering advice and information. Clearly there is an overwhelming need for advice and information within the Muslim community. Anyone with educational or professional status within the community is called on for help with passport and visa applications, benefits, tax and poll tax returns, schooling and all the other numerous points of contacts with bureaucracy.

The 1988 Social Security Act requiring claimants to be 'actively seeking employment' and the requirement for long-term unemployed claimants to complete a lengthy form have increased the need for advice provision. A very large amount of work coming into the family centres is for benefits advice. Some of this was being passed on to the Foleshill Advice and Information Centre, and some to the money advice team at the Citizens' Advice Bureau. In neither of those advice centres was the funding secure. As one Asian worker said: 'Where will my clients go if

my post goes?' At the Ramgarhia Centre people were continuing to go to the centre looking for advice, although the community programme funded post which made the advice service possible had disappeared. The provision then disappearance of a service creates its own problems.

Two of the nine and a half paid posts in the Citizens' Advice Bureau, which had some 20,000 enquiries a year, were filled by Asian workers with community language skills. Both these posts were within the money advice team, which had no secure long term funding. The CAB needed, we felt, to recruit at the earliest opportunity advice workers with bilingual skills to their core staff and to publicise their availability. Although its location in the city centre might discourage unaccompanied Muslim women, the neighbouring CRC was used by Muslims for casework assistance by Muslim workers, and there was a great demand for the Asian workers in the bureau. It would be disastrous for the level of staffing to fall, and indeed we felt the bureau needed to extend its outreach sessions into the Hillfields and Foleshill areas, which were at the time covered by a single short morning session at the Foleshill Community Centre.

Wood End Advice Centre had no Asian language skills, calling on the Ethnic Minorities Development Unit when interpreting help was needed. The Foleshill Information Centre, adjacent to the Foleshill Family Centre, was well used by Muslim clients for advice on benefits and welfare rights. In one week, out of a total of 115 clients at the centre, there were thirty-eight Muslims, eleven of them women. The centre was very much understaffed and, as neither of its two workers spoke Bengali, it did not see Bangladeshi clients, despite the considerable number living along the Foleshill Road, and in the Churchill Avenue area. A Bengali working with Bangladeshi women put it this way.

No one knows about benefits unless they hear about it from here or there. I know people who are living in rented accommodation, who are paying everything, general rate, water rate and high rents. They are paying so much here and there just for lack of advice. Some men need help too. For example, the wife is going through some sort of illness. He cannot understand his children, they are going through some sort of behaviour problems.



### Social services

Coventry social services's race equality policy statement adopted on 31 March 1988, declared that the department would develop consultation with black and ethnic minority communities through individuals and groups, and encourage the development of community self-help initiatives within the black and ethnic minority communities. When we approached a senior social worker in the Foleshill district team about contact with the Muslim community, the first response was: 'You will probably find we are not doing enough.' This was a sentiment echoed by many agencies, often as though it were not clear how to improve matters.

For social services, the interpreting service available through EMDU had improved contact with the Asian community. The Foleshill Family Centre pointed to the numbers of Asians coming through the door as rising steadily in the 1980s and now forming 51 per cent of enquiries. Yet many within the community pointed to the dearth of Muslim social workers in the city, and the fact that there were no Bengali speakers. Given the poverty levels among many Kashmiri- and Bangaldeshi-speaking families in Foleshill and Hillfields, the levels of illiteracy in the communities, and lack of contact with services generally, this seems to be more important than the social services teams believe. There has, for example, been concern for many years among those in schools who have contact with Bangladeshi families that social services backup for Bangladeshi families has been inadequate.

This need for finer distinctions in identifying clients is particularly important for meeting targets. Performance review, which was to be introduced to the social services department in 1990, was to include an indepth review of progress made in implementing a policy of racial equality. Account must be taken of, and means be found to discover, possible imbalances of service provision within communities. Success in meeting a target that 3 per cent of clients receiving day care, home care and mobile meals are to be black, the target for 1989/90, may hide the fact that nothing changes for Muslims, for example. A survey in Leicestershire highlights one aspect of the need: it showed that only 37 per cent of elderly Asian men surveyed could speak English and only 2

per cent of elderly Asian women. In Coventry, too, there was a particular need for services for elderly people in appropriate languages.

Progress may equally be made in increasing the number of black new users of services for those with mental health problems or physical disability. Yet here there are difficulties in gaining an accurate picture of the real problem among even the larger Asian community, let alone among Muslims. The register of chronically sick and disabled people is unlikely to give a reliable indication of the level of demand; only 2.5 per cent of the total registered in Coventry were Asian. At the end of March 1989, of the 595 chronically ill or handicapped cases in the department, 4.5 per cent of the total were from the Asian community. Even allowing for the youthful nature of the community, this is low.[2] There was, then, an urgent need to discover the extent of disability and mental health problems among Coventry's Muslim population.

### Social and health projects

It was not within the terms of our study to evaluate further how far social services were reaching Muslim families, although it was clear that, within the broader categories of 'Asian', gaps could be hidden. It would require more extensive monitoring to illuminate the gaps that might emerge among the broader ethnic categories. We do know that there were no Muslims attending the group run by Panarghar Women's Refuge at the Foleshill Family Centre, although Panarghar workers were uncertain as to why this should be the case. There have been Muslim women using the refuge itself. Unfortunately, this is a service which is crippled by inadequate funding, and which is able to meet the needs of only a small number of women. The need for a support service through which women can communicate problems and reach complex decisions about their lives is far greater than that met by the present levels.

The Mothers of Handicapped Children group was a self-help group meeting once a week at the Cornerstone Family Centre, and it included one or two Muslim families. It provides another example of an initiative which for maximum effect would have sponsored similar groups, or fed back into the way services are provided by agencies. The group was started some eight years previously with the help of a social worker



from the child development unit, and its members had been successful in their aim of providing mutual support and making contact with professionals, inviting speech therapists and physiotherapists, for example, to give talks. But their own human resources were stretched simply by meeting on a regular basis; it was tragic that the initiative should remain unsupported and so limited in its effect – group members might themselves have become educators. There are many Muslim families with disabled children who have no such support. The group itself recognised that issue: 'We would like to help others but our hands are tied.'

The Sahil project for women under stress, newly funded in 1989, runs the risk of suffering from similar limitations. The funding was for a coordinator, to work with volunteers and to train them to counsel women. The five day centres, which can cater for mentally ill women, are 'so white it's frightening', in one worker's words. What those who have initiated the project would have liked was a day centre for Asian women and a telephone counselling line. It was important that in the planning stage of a community resource for the Muslim community in Coventry, careful consideration should be given to how existing initiatives such as these could be used to more effect by Muslims. This had implications particularly with regard to the location, management and design of community provision for women.

The importance of a Muslim community centre in filling a gap in day-care provision had long been part of the vision for a community centre, particularly with regard to meeting the needs of the elderly. The Muslim health visitor at the Windmill Road Clinic pointed out that Muslims were not generally attending the elderly groups at health clinics. After prompting from social services, Age Concern in Coventry had embarked on a campaign to increase affiliation of all ethnic groups. It had recruited a Muslim member to its executive committee, but there was uncertainty as to the next steps. The organisation had no staff knowledge of minority communities, and had no strategy to identify gaps and target services by employing workers with that knowledge and with community language skills, although a strategy was being developed to include a race dimension.

There are benefits an agency such as this could offer the community. In the case of Age Concern, there are foundation grants for elderly

groups, a way into more major funding through Age Concern England, use of its holiday bureau, and so on. There was a move to translate information leaflets through EMDU some years ago, but this has not been carried further by either side. Greater thought should be given to the use that could be made of information material in community languages prepared in other parts of the country.

The larger agencies and authorities only too often demonstrated a similar lack of a clear-sighted strategy towards ethnic minorities, and towards the issue of meeting the needs of minorities within those communities themselves. Within the health authority there has been a recognition of the need to move towards a proactive rather than a reactive approach to health provision, yet some elements of an effective strategy have been missing. Some health professionals believe that, while there has been emphasis on social and economic factors in health, black and ethnic minority issues have been avoided.

Officers responsible for multicultural health education feel that initiatives will fail unless the issue of communication between clients and professionals is tackled. Often cited with disbelief was the discontinuation of the interpreting service in the antenatal clinic in Hillfields, later transferred to the psychiatric unit at the Walsgrave Hospital. In March 1988 the report of the working group on multicultural health care was presented to the district team of the health authority. It regretted that funding had not been found to continue the pilot interpreting scheme on a permanent basis, particularly given evidence that the service was equally necessary in other areas, such as the outpatients department. The report also included recommendations for the provision of an interpreter service on a city wide basis across acute and community services. A health authority planning department spokesperson we contacted said that 'several people whom I have spoken to with regard to your enquiry are aware of this report but appear to be unaware of any action taken following this meeting'. A list had been circulated to all departments of those people who could speak any language other than English, and some of these had been acting as interpreters when called on, against the strong opposition of some within the health services. The notion that such a list could help to meet the need is shown up in many cases as derisory. For example, the two Bengali speakers in this list were working in specialist departments



within Walsgrave Hospital, hardly in a position to provide an interpreting service. There was only one position which had an official, and that a part time, interpreting role: a clerical post at Broad St Clinic. Of three staff members considered able to meet the needs of the Asian community, one post holder at least expressed great reservations at her ability to work effectively within the Muslim community. Another, a Muslim health visitor based at Windmill Road Health Centre, we were told 'can relate to any problems that women in the Asian community have and tends to provide a service in this field'. In fact this is a mainly white area, and few Muslims attend the clinic.

Following the recommendations of the multicultural health working party report, the policy adopted was to develop a strategy of health promotion for all, and then to incorporate a community development approach to health promotion. A group was set up to look at health information in the light of its sensitivity to community needs. Funding for multicultural health education was wholly inadequate: an annual budget of £9,000. Furthermore, while contact has been made with some black groups, it was acknowledged that 'they don't know any Muslims to get the information out to' and there was no contact with the Bengali community at all, although the level of need which exists was recognised. Yet health visitors and others have considerable contact with Muslim women's groups. The fact that this cannot feed back to and link with the work of the health education department must point up the lack of coordination, and sensible use of existing knowledge and experience. One officer felt that it was crucial that there was no single spokesperson for equal opportunities issues in the health authority.

One example of wasted effort was found in the use made of work done in the course of an urban aided project, developed through the community nursing unit. The post, which was funded between 1983 and 1986, had as its brief to develop health education in Hillfields and Foleshill with reference to the young, the elderly and ethnic minorities. The post holder's first activities were to engage in basic community work, door-knocking, asking people what they wanted, and making contact with Asian women through ESL classes. Several of these were Muslim groups. One important group which the project worker identified, and with whom she established a programme of work, was non-health professionals who were encountering health issues in the

course of their work, but who had no training in the area. At the end of the project, among the needs identified were the need for a resource and information centre for health workers, the need for health advocates, for link workers and the need for interpreters. She was never asked to present either a final report or an evaluation. Not only the analysis of intensive field work, but the data and the contacts appear to have been lost to the health authority. If this is not the case, there is little evidence of use being made of the very substantial information and experience obtained through the project.

Only too often assumptions are made that contact with ethnic minorities can be made through 'mosques and temples'. It is not always appreciated that the mosque does not have the same social function as the *gurdwara* or temple; it has purely a religious purpose, and women rarely visit the mosque even for prayer. Those working in community and preventative health care talk of the Muslim community as particularly hard to contact. Even when there was a Muslim health visitor at Broad St Health Clinic, she recalls it was particularly difficult to get Muslim women to come into the clinics. Here, the lack of effective community premises through which contact could be made is critical, particularly when cultural pressures and lack of adequate receiving structures discourage people from coming out to the services. Health education is one particular example where bringing a service into a 'safe' environment could feed back into a more effective take up within the mainstream. It is not that this principle is not recognised, rather that resources have not been forthcoming to pursue it. The plans which existed in 1989 to establish a women's health centre at the Walsgrave Hospital, well outside the city centre, could be made only with a complete lack of understanding of the fact that such a location would exclude many of those women living in the inner city.

#### Youth work

The Foleshill district policy guide promoted the need to encourage sporting and recreational activities. The action sport programme has been operating since 1982 and has opened up many previously underused facilities. City-wide coordination of youth work is through a community education officer, and the education committee had recently



approved the appointment of a full-time youth worker for the Foleshill area. At the time of the study, the problem of lack of coordination had also recently been receiving the attention of the Foleshill local management group.

The policy indicated in the Foleshill district plan for extending the services of the leisure services department into other community meeting places has not been pursued. The result of this is that Muslim young men use private clubs quite heavily for sports and leisure activities. One young man said he would go once a month to the Indian Community Centre, particularly if there was a show on, 'but they don't like Muslims there'.

We found a reluctance to go into the city centre at night for fear of attack; the Mercia Club and the Cross Chipping Centre were frequently quoted for their weight-training and snooker and pool facilities. The Foleshill and Coventry Baths are also used. Playing areas in Memorial Park and Sidney Stringer School are used for cricket and football. The gap lies in provision for teenagers who cannot afford to use private clubs and for young girls and women of all ages, who suffer particularly from lack of exercise and recreational activities. Women cannot go out and walk in parks, and Muslim men appear to use the parks to a lesser extent than Sikh men.

Leisure services initiatives for young people in the city centre and in neighbourhood centres has focused on arts provision and social skills, and work has to date been largely with white young people. The project opening in a converted building near the Belgrade Theatre in early 1990 for media and video workshops seemed likely to bypass Asian, particularly Muslim, young people, unless there was some publicity targeted at those groups.

Youth work within the school environment has increasingly taken into account the need to redress imbalances of provision. But, in common with other services, the issue of Muslim take-up has often been avoided. There had been an Asian girls' group at Stoke Park School, but this had been attended mainly by Sikh girls, a pattern difficult to break as friendships tended to run along community lines. The community education team had realised that in concentrating on redressing the balance between black and white, and in looking to

provide a service for Asian girls, they had not addressed the fact that they were not attracting Muslim girls.

At Barr's Hill School, where community education had been at a very low ebb, there was an attempt to expand provision. A questionnaire sent out to all children showed that there was considerable demand for a separate girls' group, and for sporting and youth activities of all kinds. There were plans to put on a dressmaking class for young girls, but many girls were unable to attend after school hours, while the youth service would not fund activities during school hours. Despite its awareness of the issues, Barr's Hill was still having problems in moving away from a white emphasis in its community provision. One project, which it was hoped would redress the balance, was going forward for urban programme funding. It was for an Asian Women's Foundation course, aiming to fill gaps in vocational and non-vocational training. There was a possibility that this could be located in a community centre, and it provided an example of an opportunity which might be picked up by a Muslim development worker.

### Outreach

A central contradiction is that increasingly agencies have community dimensions to their work, but not the skills nor the time to engage in the essential groundwork of community development. Indeed, there are lamentably few posts within the mainstream in Coventry that can make the necessary link into the community. Obvious and effective examples are those within the community education project and the welfare office posts in the MGSS. Only one of those posts was held by a Muslim, and there was recognised difficulty in finding Gujarati and Bengali speakers.

Within service departments, workers in posts which have a community dimension, and which may require community language skills to work with Asian communities, are often isolated, lacking management understanding or support. Workers have to look in two directions: to their senior officers and to the community. These posts have been established essentially to interpret council policy to the community. Black workers' roles have been seen in terms of departmental rather than community needs. Without viable structures within the community itself, the expression of community needs will continue to be muffled,



and often mediated through one or two individuals. It is interesting to note of the Hillfields community team, which works in a developmental role for the Afro Caribbean community, that its strong liaison with the City Council has given rise to feelings that it may be operating as a buffer against the expression of community demands.

This need for a link between the Muslim communities and the service providers, while recognised within the education service, has to a large extent been masked by the reliance placed on a range of individuals within the community itself, some of whom have heavy professional responsibilities already, some of whom are wives of professionals. Anxious to help their communities in any way they can, the assistance of such individuals is abused thoroughly by the system as they are brought in as voluntary interpreters, case workers, care assistants. Within posts, job descriptions are stretched as they take on extended case work for Muslim clients. All workers in this position who we spoke to saw the lack of support from supervisors and colleagues as one of the most demoralising aspects of the situation. Sometimes this means simply that where their line manager has no experience in the field, such workers have no-one to refer to and frequently operate effectively as their own boss.

Outside the work environment, individuals are called on in the evenings and weekends, often to work in areas in which they have no training. The story is repeated time and again: 'I have sat and cried with my clients'; 'Sometimes I have gone to my supervisor and just cried'; 'So many times I have gone home so exhausted I could only sleep'. At best this is a system where the experience and skills acquired in a voluntary capacity are later used in paid employment. However, only too often individuals are being turned down for jobs that they feel they have been doing for years because they are 'unqualified'. In this way we found stress within the community is transferred to a handful of individuals to an often intolerable degree, while the issue of the way in which services are failing the Muslim community remained unresolved.

## Chapter Six: A MUSLIM COMMUNITY CENTRE

The failure of the attempt in the 1980s to provide a well-funded, effective community centre for the Muslim community in Coventry owed much to the factionalism already embedded in the community, given new life in the competition for resources. An important component of that history was an official response that might at best be construed as an attempt to make sense of divisions within the Muslim community. On the other hand there were clearly problems for the City Council, which supported a funding bid for a major resource opposed by what was considered the most influential Muslim group in Coventry. A constricting adherence to bureaucratic technicalities was to flourish in a situation that never produced a clear and unequivocal response to the moves and countermoves within the community.

### Early demands

The original vision was for an Asian community centre on a site on the Foleshill Road. In early 1983 Muslim groups endorsed and supported the application for an Asian community centre. This project foundered in the first instance when funding was refused, and subsequently when Muslims themselves put forward objections to a common centre on the basis of cultural differences. However, the shift from a demand for an Asian centre to a single application for the Muslim community was not a smooth one. Indeed it was to come adrift as old factions and rivalries within the Muslim community regained strength.

In August 1983 a single Muslim representation was set to meet the City Council's Labour group. At the last hour differences surfaced between individuals that were not only based on personality clash, but linked into conflicting affiliations with Pakistan's internal party politics, and with political rivalry in Coventry. A group of Punjabi and Kashmiri Muslims, and some East African Muslims, met separately in October and November 1983, and on 4 March 1984 formed the Muslim Community Centre Association at an open public meeting.

As early as October 1984, leading members of the Pakistani Workers' Association declared their opposition, characterising the MCCA as a 'break away group which had no backing in the community'. Despite



warnings from the CRC that there would not be money for two schemes and that a 'grant will not be available unless the project is seen to have the support of the Muslim community generally', reported in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* of 15 October 1984, an application was made in August 1985 in the name of the Federation of Muslim Associations for a Pakistani Community Centre. The president of the federation, which had been formed that month, was on the committee of the Pakistani Workers' Association and the vice-chairman was the president of the Islamic Brotherhood. A letter from the Islamic Brotherhood of the same date gives a clue to opposition by the mosque committee: it pointed out that the promoters of the Muslim community centre were the same individuals who as a group had organised against the Islamic Brotherhood.

Although later objections were in terms of location of the building chosen by the MCCA for a proposed community centre, the lines of conflict were drawn at a much earlier stage. There may well have been very real difficulties about the proposed location, but the real disadvantage for both the Pakistani Workers' Association and the committee of the Islamic Brotherhood was a bid by certain groups to break through existing lines of status and influence in the community.

#### Bid for funding – the story

The first bid for urban programme funding was made in June 1984. The evaluator's report of November 1984 was most positive, arguing for maximum support for the project, despite opposition from various factions. However, following the City Council's annual review of policy in December 1984 and its review of the inner area programme, as a social scheme with ongoing revenue commitment, the Muslim community centre bid, along with others, no longer conformed to policy. It was therefore not included in the 1985/6 submission of council-sponsored bids.

An application for reduced capital and revenue costs was resubmitted for inner area programme funding in August 1985, when unsuccessful bids were being reconsidered. By the end of 1985, when it was clear that the bid was going forward, conflict within the community was increasing and the City Council was beginning to follow several rather

confusing lines of action. On the one hand, once a building had been identified, the urban programme team worked on the existing MCCA proposal, specifically in relation to planning and other procedures. On the other hand, a team of officers from education and social services was designated to work with the Muslim community to achieve a harmonious solution to its problems. Indeed the following press statement was issued: 'The City Council will only make money available to a project which is truly representative of the whole community and all the groups within it.' In the light of this, the Federation of Muslim Organisations made it clear that if the project was left solely in the hands of the then organisers, the mosque would make objections to the planning proposals and would take its objections to the highest level.

In June 1985 the MCCA had found what they considered to be suitable premises, the former Methodist church on Stoney Stanton Road, and, in face of a higher bid, had secured it with a deposit raised through community loans. In a letter of 3 March 1986 from an officer of the urban programme team, it was made clear that no decision had yet been made by the Department of the Environment on funding for the project, and it would not be given until May 1986. It was pointed out that this was after the 31 March deadline, when the deposit would run out.

What this letter did was to warn the MCCA of the dangers of losing the deposit, or the purchase price, should a grant not be forthcoming. What it did not do was warn of the dangers of losing the grant because of the placing of the deposit or the full purchase of the building. This was to have vital significance for the association.

The warning not to prejudge the Department of the Environment's decision was justified. By May the MCCA had heard that the DOE had deferred the application on the grounds that no suitable premises were available for the project. It is hardly surprising that the MCCA was astounded by this news. As was pointed out in a letter of 6 May 1986 to the director of education, it was well known that a deposit had been paid and that planning permission for the building had already been granted by the City Council. Furthermore, an appeal had been made on behalf of the MCCA in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* of 5 April 1986, asking 'all Muslims living in Coventry to lend as much money as possible, so that we can buy the church. The money will be



refunded as and when we get the money from the urban aid grant'. For fear of losing the building to a higher bidder, the Methodist Church had been purchased with further community loans of £30,000 and a bank loan of £25,000. The letter pointed out: 'These loans have been given in good faith and can only be returned on receipt of a grant.' There is no evidence to doubt that good faith; but there was good reason for the MCCA's concern, as some individuals had loaned up to £4,000.

This was a signal for withdrawal by the local authority from the MCCA. The file copy of that letter contains a brief note: 'No reply.' On 9 May a formal letter was sent to the MCCA announcing the Department of the Environment's decision and pointing out: 'It is an established condition of the Inner Area Programme that grants cannot be given in retrospect and therefore the purchase of premises is no longer a valid part of your application.'

A further file note of 5 June 1986 states that the 'current bid for Inner Area Programme finance is effectively dead' and 'any suggestion that new bids for Inner Area Programme finance might be being framed with a view to the refurbishment of the Methodist church site in Stoney Stanton Road would result in a complete refusal to negotiate on the part of the mosque based faction. Any hint of life in this site is prejudicial to a bringing together of the two factions.' The Council should have been quite explicit about this view to the MCCA itself; there is no evidence that this was the case.

The MCCA had already been told that the decision of the Council's policy advisory committee was that it was unable to proceed further with the scheme until there was agreement within the community. This was a separate issue. From this point on, the City Council and the CCRC concentrated on the search for ways of uniting the factions and starting again with a fresh application. But the two groups were still far apart: the MCCA, its centre at the old Methodist church formally opened by the Pakistani ambassador on 19 July 1986, was unlikely to give up its building; the opposition group agreed to meet with the others to discuss the principle of a centre, provided 'the Eagle St site should never be on the agenda'.

The situation became more critical for the MCCA as an application for funds for renovation and running costs was deferred on grounds of lack of unity. At the same time, attempts by an officer of the education

department and the MCCA solicitors to show that the building was owned by individuals with no deed of trust, and therefore was not legally held by the MCCA, was refuted by the City Council's solicitors. In a letter of 20 November 1986, the MCCA was despairing:

It seems clear from your letter that whatever method we would have used to secure the property you would not be prepared to accept what we have told you. It implies that had the property been bought by an ordinary individual of the community for later selling to the charity you would still have held this against us. It is obvious that some method had to be used to secure a premises if this project was to materialise.

At all the time, it would seem, it is not appreciated that we clearly distinguish, totally separately between those who have loaned funds and the general membership of the Association.

There is no reason to doubt that the association believed it needed to secure a building in order to qualify for funding, or that the appeal for loans to buy it on the understanding that area programme funding would be forthcoming was made in good faith. When it was evident that such funds could not cover retrospective spending, the association found itself caught in a bureaucratic nightmare.

When a year later the MCCA applied again for funds to meet the cost of the building, a letter from the Department of the Environment of 31 July 1987 ran: 'The Muslim Association already have their own facility at the Methodist Church in Stoney Stanton Road, purchased with their own, (or members) funds . . . So the questions arise as to why they require a new centre after only 12 months, and further why are UP funds necessary.' The letter added that if the building was sold, the DOE would expect the total price of the sale to be put into the new project: 'Urban aid funds cannot be expected to bail out, by whatever roundabout methods, individuals that have put money into the existing scheme.'

Clearly this was a bureaucratic nonsense. The inflexibility of the DOE's regulations had put the MCCA in a no-win situation, something openly recognised at the time by council officers and members of the community. It was the duty of the Council to have



offered assistance at the earliest stage in coping with the profound confusion of DOE regulations that require both a building to be available and a purchase to be made after receipt of a grant. The very use of the term 'bail out' by the DOE, implying that the association had attempted to obtain benefit in some underhand way, indicates a negative rather than facilitating approach by the DOE. Despite apparent attempts to resolve the issue in joint meetings with MPs, the MCCA and Coventry City Council officers, that approach remained unchanged.

The tone of the City Council's department of economic development at this stage demonstrates the frustration with the DoE's line. Proceeds from any sale, it was explained, would be required to cover all outstanding debts. Furthermore, a letter of October 1987 from the director of economic development to the MCCA agreed what it termed 'the nonsense of not being able to obtain a grant without a building and not being able to obtain a grant once you possess a building'.

Towards the end of 1987 the DOE and Coventry's economic development and planning department were again involved in attempts to bring the community together to make a single submission. The Federation of Muslim Organisations had meanwhile pulled further away, firming up its own position by submitting an application for a centre in early 1988 in the name of the Pakistani Cultural Centre Association, which shared membership with the Pakistani Workers' Association. For its part, the MCCA remained adamant that it would not discuss issues with the Pakistani Workers' Association, although it was prepared to discuss with the Islamic Brotherhood.

There can be little doubt that, however provocative or difficult the circumstances were felt to be, this refusal to communicate with the 'other side' was a major error on the part of those running MCCA affairs. A second error of judgement was the early decision of the MCCA to manage its affairs through its executive officers, rather than through regular and full committee meetings: this operated to prevent communication not only with the committee as a whole but with the wider membership.

This was one of the factors in the loss to the MCCA committee of its original Gujarati and Bengali members, pushing those communities further into looking for separate solutions, while the apparently irresolvable financial problems had caused an internal rift within the

association itself. There was also a group that increasingly felt it should talk to the Pakistani Workers' Association. These differences of view found expression in dissatisfaction with the management of the Association's affairs. The MCCA had adopted a constitution on 31 August 1986 which called for an AGM in September each year for election of officers and presentation of accounts. No such meeting had taken place in 1987, but on 22 September 1988 certain members of the committee called an AGM, complaining that no accounts had been presented in the last eighteen months, and elected a new committee which effectively excluded many of the former trustees.

The dispute over whether this was a legal meeting continues to this day. The dispossessed faction, largely a group of older generation Kashmiris living in Foleshill, around Station St East and Queen Mary's Road, accounted for a large proportion of the money loaned. They claimed that not only had it been agreed that the model constitution be adopted for charitable status and tax relief only, but also that in July 1986 the MCCA had agreed that the committee as it was then constituted should run the building until there was a resolution to the grant issue. This group also claimed that once the conflict between the two groups had emerged, the majority trustees had been persuaded by the police community liaison officer to stay away on 22 September from what would be simply a rally. The charity commissioners indicated satisfaction with the AGM and the new committee, but the details of these events continued to cause enormous bitterness within a certain section of the community, who felt that the police and Council officers were partisan. The police, for their part, felt that they were not in a position to be neutral at that juncture. Once advice had been received from appropriate authorities that the meeting was constitutional, it was their duty to provide the circumstances in which such a meeting could take place, bearing in mind that threats to public order had been made.

One major point for the authorities to learn must be the need for clarity of communication. Whether or not ambiguity had been intended when the Council offered advice on procedures for funding a community centre, the message received was at the very least open to interpretation. Such ambiguity has been an outstanding feature of communications with and within the Muslim community. Its result at the end of 1988 was a new and problematic split which was to reemerge



in September the following year, fuelling bitterness and feelings of anger and powerlessness amongst that group, and adding further dimensions to the dividedness of the community. For many of those who loaned money in 1986, often substantial sums, the shared vision and motivation to work for a community centre became eclipsed by an overriding goal: seeing their loans repaid.

### Defining the community

When the MCCA put through its first bid for urban programme funding, some officers, notably at the regional office of the DOE, pointed to the changing nature of the demand over the years (originally for an Asian centre), and its chequered history, as reasons in themselves for caution. Yet that history had been one of the interplay between the communities concerned and the funding authorities themselves. It is necessary therefore to look more carefully at that interplay of demand, response and counter-response. What must also be reappraised is the appropriateness of the notion of stability to the development of communities; community centres and other resources provide an environment in which conflict can be explored and sometimes be accommodated. Account must also be taken of the fact that 'stability', or the lack of it, is affected by factors external as well as those internal to the community, although discussion frequently takes place as though this is not the case. The delay in response to the expressed need for a community centre in Coventry undoubtedly created further division and conflict.

It is relatively recently that politicians and service providers have moved from a perception of an ethnic minority 'community' to a recognition that the reality is one of many communities. Despite this, in Coventry there has been a reluctance to move beyond a recognition of 'Asian' and 'Afro-Caribbean' in the targeting and monitoring of services. This is not just because such definitions are relatively easy to deal with logistically; there is a sense in which these categories present no unwelcome national, territorial, or religious distinctions, with their overtones of sectarianism. Linguistic need was recognised, and to a certain extent cultural norms and values were acknowledged, in terms of making services accessible. On the other hand, there was a belief that

constraints should be imposed before the process was taken too far. The opportunity to examine the overall needs of one community presented by the feasibility study was a new and important departure; the subsequent decision-making process would be the important next step.

### Official attitudes to community centres

Distrust of funding community centres that do not serve 'the whole community' was reinforced in the mid 1980s by a lack of commitment to the concept of community centres themselves. An early response to the Muslim project from the director of education was in the following terms:

I do not think we should put public funds into promoting the interests of any religious groups or organisations. Sectarian divisions will be accelerated should we do so and the life experience of both the minority and majority community would be narrowed rather than broadened . . . The whole project is shaky, it would establish precedents and raise expectations of a host of other religious minorities which could not be fulfilled. It would generate sectarianism, draw scarce resources from categories of needy groups and intensify, not reduce, harmony.

The response of the evaluator of the project at the time was unequivocal: 'I feel that the comments of the Education Department are unhelpful, erroneous, and more importantly *demonstrate a gross and positively dangerous degree of misunderstanding of ethnic minority culture* which I found astounding coming from a department involved for so long and so intimately with ethnic minority communities.'

Scepticism regarding the value of community centres serving a 'minority' rather than the majority continued to be expressed in one form or another, as was the view that resources should not be duplicated. It is worth reemphasising that there is an enormous need for link work between the community and statutory services, and a need to provide a continuum between social facilities and health, welfare and education provision. The major burden of that link has been borne by a few service professionals and by individuals on a voluntary basis, at



enormous cost to themselves. Although this may appear to be economical use of resources, there is in fact considerable waste: without an enabling structure, individual skills can neither be shared by others within the community nor with service providers in agencies.

The City Council's policy that centres be self-financing was always applied selectively. In terms of the Muslim community there had been an assumption in some quarters that access could be obtained to Arab sources of finance and public donation. Indeed in the immediate past the Gujarati community had built its new mosque in Cambridge St in this way. But Arab funds are drying up, and money can no longer be transferred by Muslim businessmen out of South Africa, a major funding source. The reality is that the collection of funds is a slow process, drawing from the people themselves. It involves real sacrifices for a community, many of whose members are unemployed. Indeed, a recognition that the policy of self-financing as it had been applied was discriminatory in its effect resulted in a reappraisal and change of policy with respect to the funding of community centres.

Whatever change had taken place in local government thinking, the limited value placed on community centres by the Department of the Environment was indicated by the fact that in recent years it had been prepared to finance social schemes in exceptional circumstances only. Self-financing and income generation remain key to central and local government funding strategy. It needs stressing that the argument that pump priming only will allow other initiatives to receive funding carries less weight when the result is a pattern of short-term and piecemeal funding for a number of uncoordinated and understaffed projects.

#### Decision making on a Muslim centre

During the six years since the Muslim community first attempted to develop a community centre, and particularly during the latter years, there had been continued refusal to provide even repair and revenue funding for the old Methodist church. This ensured that the building became an increasing burden of debt for its management, and it was increasingly unable to carry out its original purposes. During this time there were very substantial efforts made by officers and members of the City Council and by the CCRC to resolve the question, including

meetings with DOE officers and MPs. In 1987 and 1988 particularly, efforts concentrated on achieving a compromise between the two parties. The CRC at one stage suggested a Muslim cultural centre with a separate training and resource centre established in the former Methodist church premises, loans being returned to the community once the CRC itself had purchased the building as development agents for such a project. Unfortunately, at various times the City Council appeared concerned with absolving its own officers of any incorrect procedure. This obscured some of the factors behind the bitterness within the community, or even an understanding of the mood of the community at all.

Behind the most recent efforts to reach a solution remained an unshaken belief that the MCCA had made a foolish error and should not expect to be 'bailed out' from public funds, an echoing of the DOE's line. This was expressed in a note from the director of economic development and planning on 13 October 1988:

The MCCA, despite advice from the Department of Economic Development and Planning, purchased the former Methodist church in Stoney Stanton Road with a loan from Lloyds Bank and a number of smaller ones from members of the Muslim community indicating that they would be repaid from Government grant. This is not allowed and the Association had been so advised before any purchase.

Yet examination of all the documents show that the only official communication to the MCCA that indicated purchase of the building before funding approval would prejudice funding came after the purchase itself. Council officers were well aware that purchase was going ahead at an early stage, and could not have ignored appeals in the press for loans from the community. The key letter is that from the urban programme team to the MCCA on 3 March 1986, which referred to the deposit placed by the MCCA to secure the Methodist church.

In the light of this information, I felt I should write and advise you that no decision has been received from the Department of the Environment approving or otherwise the scheme we have submitted and one is not expected before the end of March.



Even then, if the Department of the Environment approves the scheme, the City Council have to reconsider all the projects they have included in the submission as the resources available to them have been held down. In total there are £2.2 million of new schemes (including your own) against resources of £0.8 million. Obviously many schemes will not be able to be started. A final decision on new start projects is likely to be made in May 1986 . . . I hope this clarifies the position in which your scheme stands and assists you in your arrangements to meet the 31 March deadline.

This letter has been referred to as the key letter 'advising not to purchase'; yet there is no reference here to the fact that purchase of the building might prejudice a grant, simply an implication that there was a possibility of financial embarrassment if approval were not given. Any further advice against buying the building was given after the date of purchase.

The circumstances in which the application went forward for approval in 1986 and was deferred are open to criticism. It is evident that the Council's policy at this stage was that no funds would be forthcoming unless agreement had been reached between the two parties. It is equally clear that no such agreement was on the horizon. Indeed, although in January 1986 the Council was involved in looking at refurbishment costs, by February doubts about conflict in the community and provisional costings were communicated to the DOE. This was not made clear to the MCCA. Given the Council's continued involvement in the MCCA bid, including obtaining planning permission for the Methodist church, it is not surprising that the MCCA believed there were no real obstacles to obtaining the grant. It is not clear how far the nature of the application itself affected the decision. Explicit reference was made by the DOE in 1987 to the funding of social projects in exceptional circumstances only. It was the Council's responsibility to ensure much clearer communication, and to have offered more explicit guidance on the commitment that the MCCA was taking on.

After the rejection of the application in June 1986 on the grounds that a building was already owned by the community, the Council officers'

consequent action was based on the belief that the logical step should be to put the Methodist church on the market again. They had not understood the mood of the MCCA. Such a move, apparently logical, would have meant not just a loss of the deposit and interest on any other loans but a loss of face in the community. More importantly, it would have meant the loss of hope that something could be achieved through community effort and initiative. The evaluator of the project in 1984 had echoed the feelings of the project instigators themselves: certain individuals and groups were attacking the project purely because of 'sour grapes', an issue which had been taken up by the press. But, the evaluator continued, 'the facts are that the applicants have *acted* to fulfil the needs of the Muslim community. They have done everything to establish as broad and open a base as possible, and have set up their organisation in what I regard as a constitutional manner.'

Moreover, once the balance had tilted away from the MCCA, the Council's failure to provide even adequate revenue funds while looking for a solution was short sighted. The MCCA struggled to function as a community centre, providing activities with minimal resources. Even an application for exterior work was turned down in the absence of approval of a substantive grant. Revenue funding during this period could have assisted the development of the community and, given the strength of the Pakistani Cultural Centre Association in its closeness to the CRC, would have given the two parties more equal weight. That in itself might well have promoted within the groups a desire to work together.

#### New moves

The City Council has moved forward in its thinking about community centres since the mid-1980s. By the end of 1989 the education sub-committee had agreed a report on support for community centres. The basic definition of a community centre was agreed: it must aim to provide a programme of social, recreational, educational, or training opportunities for its members and users that promotes the pursuit of equal opportunities. Beyond that, the report recognised that there would be differences:



It is in the nature of community centres that each will wish to provide for a membership and for user groups either from the local neighbourhood, or from those in the city who share cultural values or backgrounds, or from those who have common activity interests. The consequence of this is that centres will differ from each other. Their constituencies will be of different sizes and of different social composition, and their capacity for self-sufficiency will vary accordingly. They will differ also in what services and activities they wish to provide.

It was also seen that the financial relationship would differ, from one where no assistance would be given to one where all costs were met. It was in this context that £70,000 was agreed in principle as mainstream revenue funding for a Muslim community centre. There was also a move forward from 1984, when concern was expressed about the effectiveness of centres, to a willingness in recent years to put substantial resources in terms of officer time to ensuring that problems are overcome through council advice and assistance. The creation of a community coordinator within the Council was designed to take this forward.

However, there is a real danger that advice and assistance through such posts becomes council control. One example of this can be seen in the Castlemere Centre, a Pakistani centre in Rochdale. Invested with importance from the start by council officers and politicians, the management became an arena for party political conflict. After accusations of financial mismanagement, the Council intervened, creating a new structure whereby it maintained direct management control. With management lost there is no sense of ownership by the community, and activities in the centre are very limited. What management committees need is training and support rather than control, and funds must be released for that purpose.

For the Muslim community in Coventry there is a lot of ground to recover. Within the city all groups tend to be isolated and even oppositional in their bids for resources. The Muslim community itself has been weakened by internal factionalism and dispute over the years. Many believe that the Council has played 'divide and rule' with the community, and are reluctant to become involved. There is a distrust of

community politics as a 'dirty game', in which it is difficult to become involved without sullyng name and reputation.

Continued insistence by the City Council on unity within the community failed to take account of the fact that caste, sectarian and political differences are a part of the legacy of south Asian history, in which the colonial system itself played a part. Moreover, in the development of communities in Coventry, new differences of perception will sometimes supersede preexisting divisions; it will not always be possible to have unity on goals within the Muslim community. In asking for that, the City Council and the Department of the Environment were proceeding from an untenable notion of 'community' which they would never seek to apply to the white population. Cooperation may indeed be possible between some groups, but it will be jeopardised unless the City Council is willing to listen to a multitude of voices.

Even in the setting up of the feasibility study, a small section of the community was taken as the whole. There were many groups, whether defined by gender, regional identity, or other factional interest, which were disenfranchised by the process, setting up new obstacles. A myth has been created that accreditation is obtained only through claims to represent 'the majority'. This needs to be dispelled. The notion of majority interest does not serve to meet the multiplicity of needs and demands. At the same time it breeds more factionalism as each group organises in an attempt to be heard in the only way that appears to be valued. By recognising diversity, greater unity should be possible. Organising within associations is not something that all members of the community engage in. Given the monopoly of community politics by elders within the community, young people in particular are disenfranchised by a process of communication that is channelled through 'leaders' of community groups.

It was necessary for the Council to think how it would communicate in the future with the community, and to challenge its own taboo on community development, which denied the need to build the community in ways which would engender sufficient power to enable real partnership working with the City Council.

The view of the leader of the Council was that 'the Council's relationship with the [Muslim] community, contrary to popular myth, is a very good one'. Great weight was attached to the improved working



relationship between the groups within the steering group of the feasibility study. Closer relationship and new cooperation was indeed very welcome, but it sometimes appeared to have been forgotten that those individuals constituted only a very small section of the community. It would have been more accurate and useful to recognise that members of the City Council and its officers had no relationship at all with very large sections of the Muslim community. If that were accepted, it would be possible to look for real dialogue and consultation. Such a move might be difficult, it might engender further conflict and challenge the City Council's harmonious model of community development, but it is a necessary step.

The Council's draft equal opportunities policy declared an intention 'to review its arrangements for formal and informal consultation, with a view particularly to increasing the representation of disadvantaged people in this process. This will mean securing their representation on Committees with executive powers and on working parties.' The December 1989 consultation document 'Partners or Rivals' emphasised the role of the community sector. Assistance with funding applications, establishing criteria and policy objectives by which applications can be assessed, is all-important if what is being sought is a grassroots input into policy and planning. However, the important question of how to touch the grassroots remained to be answered. For example, one Muslim resident involved in consultation on environmental improvement in the Eld St area was cynical about his experience of resident participation. Levels of consciousness and involvement among the local population was low, he said, and people's attitude was that 'Even if we do go to meetings, our demands won't be met'. It is vital that the City Council be clear about what it intends by 'consultation'.

### Chapter Seven: DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES

We have seen that it was uncertain how far resources could be used to strengthen existing initiatives affecting the Muslim community, and to what extent a single multipurpose centre was the best option. In the Unitary Development Plan Issue Report, the following comment was made in relation to the Muslim community: 'Opportunities for groups to amalgamate and pool their resources are limited because of the differences between them, although it may prove possible in some cases.' The feasibility study served in many respects to explore this thesis, and it was necessary to pull together and describe some of the hopes and aspirations for a community centre for the Muslim community.

#### A community centre - its purpose

When the Muslim Community Centre Association was formed in March 1984 it was specified that part of its job would be to organise social and cultural functions on special occasions such as Eid, Iqbal Day, to organise evenings with artists, musicians, poets or scholars, to hold Mushai'ras and evenings of traditional music and song. This perception of a community centre as somewhere for social gatherings was the most widespread. Almost without exception, Muslims expressed the desire for somewhere spacious to hold wedding celebrations and large social gatherings. Other community centres are not always available, and hire of other halls, particularly in clubs, can cost upwards of £700 for the weekend, and to this must be added the cost of hiring cookers and equipment. Cheaper halls, such as the Foleshill Community Centre, when available, seat only about sixty people. This holding of large gatherings is seen as crucial to community life; where Muslim centres elsewhere have been designed to cater for about 200 guests, this capacity has later been judged inadequate.

The other commonly expressed needs were for daytime facilities for the elderly, access to sporting activities for young people, for mother and toddler provision and mother-tongue teaching. The applications from the MCCA and the Pakistani Cultural Centre Association went rather further than this. Their lists of purposes were virtually identical



and as well as amenities for social functions both listed the following: playgroups, recreation and sport; support for the elderly, lonely, those under stress and disabled people; Urdu teaching, English classes for adults, health education and training in skills for women; contact with welfare agencies, and general advice on welfare rights, housing and immigration; and a multicultural library and job introduction facilities. Both applications also envisaged the employment of development workers or link workers, at least one of whom would be female, and a youth/sports worker. The original MCCA application envisaged a worker to develop facilities for the elderly. The needs of disabled people were not specifically detailed in the job briefs of any of the workers, and this is something which needs to be considered carefully in the design of any centre and in the planning of activities.

It was difficult to assess even the potential effectiveness of the community centre at Stoney Stanton Road because of the lack of funding, although many of those who had used it were enthusiastic. From the early days it was used for daily Quranic and Arabic teaching for children after school hours. Advice sessions were held in the centre in 1986 when it first opened, but volunteers had difficulty finding spare time; it was also realised that trained advisers were required for effective advice giving. Intentions for its use were evident at the opening ceremony with a small multicultural book display, and some musical and literary events were held. There was for a time a youth club with pool tables. In the months before its closure, activities were limited to religious education, wedding parties and the use of the premises by the Muslim Girls' Association.

The agencies we spoke to see a community centre as a possible contact point with Muslims; there is ample evidence of opportunities that have passed the Muslim community by for lack of a similar resource. Although a liaison function was written into the original applications, such a concept of a community centre was not grasped by many in the community at large. This may be in part because it is not known how far agencies can help to develop activities and provision. It may not be recognised that Age Concern, for example, might be able to help to establish a luncheon club, or that outreach advice sessions by existing agencies could be held within the centre. It may also be because women, who have made the greatest use of the outreach available

through statutory services, were not involved in discussions on the development of centre facilities. Indeed the Muslim Girls' and Young Women's Association had made linkage with other agencies and the establishment of a network of volunteers central to its application for urban programme funding. Such a liaison function does need careful planning from the outset and must be in the design of the project. It was found that a clinic could not be held at the Ramgarhia Centre, for example, because there was no suitable space or basic equipment.

We found a similar lack of vision and drive in relation to training opportunities, although training needs were recognised. In its 1987 application, the MCCA had indicated that it intended to provide computer training and textile techniques, and there were attempts to obtain funds for training projects through Task Force funding. Task Force felt unable to respond without a secure parent project. Such training initiatives did not remain in the forefront of demands, nor was there any attempt to explore how far provision could draw on partnership funding, or staffing from other agencies, nor which parts of such a resource might be income providing. This is not so much an indication of need, or demand, but demonstrates rather the extent of demoralisation among those whose energy was focused in the mid-1980s on responding to community needs and was later dissipated in conflict. The need to resolve the burden of the debts owed by the existing community centre association was a continual drain on energy. Until money given as loans to the MCCA was repaid, there would be a substantial block on creative community action.

In 1988 the MCCA approached Coventry Task Force for funding for computer training and for a workshop for making tiffany style lamps to meet the demands of a local employer, and for garment making, a local company having promised machines for overlocking. Task Force felt unable to respond because of the dubious financial viability of the community centre itself. In 1987 there was contact between the technical college and the director of the Jamia Islamia. Extensive discussions took place about possible training programmes, and a package was put forward by the college based on those discussions comprising the following: basic home maintenance; DIY construction; office and administration skills for women; and graphics and word processing for women, with a view to the production of a newsletter. It



was envisaged that some of these courses could be located in the community, and that others would be provided at the technical college.

An approach was made to Task Force for funding; the response was that contact needed to be made with women's groups to confirm areas of need. A new approach was made early in 1989, and again the community centre's problems were cited as a reason for caution. However, the technical college was again asked to make contact with the community and to cost the courses. Task Force itself had no direct contact with Muslims since it was established in Coventry in July 1987. The expectation was not necessarily that the approach would come from the community itself, but 'that it is difficult for us [Task Force] to be proactive in such a disturbed situation'.

These approaches and proposals had not only been allowed to go undeveloped, but they had never been communicated to those who might have benefited from them. There are women's groups available which could readily be consulted, and there is an evident need for such provision among women who are unable to use college facilities because of lack of a suitable single-sex learning environment. There obviously are alternatives which could be established within the community. A project for catering training for Asian women located at St Barnabas Centre was put forward in the 1990/1 submissions to the DOE for funding. This project does not involve Muslim women but training programmes for Muslim women elsewhere in the UK have been successful. For example, both the Shama Women's Centre in Leicester and the Hackney Muslim Women's Council have successful overlocking and lockstitching training leading to a City and Guilds Certificate and employment.

One project that had an early emphasis on training was the Kashmir Youth Project in Rochdale, which now has workshops in motor mechanics, sewing, computers, art and design, electronics, and catering. Having established relationships with employees at an early stage, it has created real jobs. Although managed by the Kashmiri community, the range of activities, which have included youth services, language classes, information and advice, as well as the training component, has attracted most of the Asian community, not only Kashmiris. Having reached a crisis at the end of the its urban aid funding, the project has obtained

the approval of the DOE and renewed funding, also attracting income from British Telecom, the Prince Charles Jubilee Trust and others.

Many within the community are unable to see beyond the basics of alleviating the stress of daily life. The overwhelming priority is that there should be somewhere where identities can be explored and expressed, where social contact can be made freely and safely, within the boundaries of the Islamic way, providing a vantage point from which contact can be made with the wider community. As one parent said, expressing concern for her children: 'Give them a base which is firm and you can send them anywhere.'

This in itself is quite valid; indeed for many the most important need is somewhere simply for 'just a get together'. On the other hand, there are those who feel deeply that there should be no more missed opportunities. One person expressed it this way:

I would say that it is a total misapprehension to say that all that is needed is a place where we can meet and marry our children off, hold various functions and have a gathering of one sort or another. The real needs are a direction of resources. Muslim disabled do not have anywhere to go. If there was a community resource which had a liaison officer coming from the education department, coming from the probation office, not duplicating work, but encouraging from within, yes, we would have fewer kids running away from home.

There was a real concern by many that the original vision had been dissipated, and that a project would emerge that was limited in its activities, in the exclusive control of one faction, or offering restricted access to women. At least one Muslim businessman saw the centre as an environment into which he could invite business colleagues, a properly run social centre, open seven days a week, capable of acting as a conference centre. His main hope for the centre, as a business person, was for liaison between the Muslim community and the business community. However, he said, this would not happen unless certain steps were taken:

I would see making a business plan out of it so that conflict hasn't got a chance to come into it . . . We must cut out all the



negatives before it goes further. There should be a solution within the communities first. Once this is sorted, the constitution should be stamped by all legal means.

### Finding a site

Located as it was in Hillfields, and close to the mosque, and the Jamia Islamia, the Methodist church was originally regarded by its purchasers as ideal premises. However, there is no doubt that for the very substantial number of Muslims who live in Edgwick and around the Queen Mary Road and Churchill Avenue area it was an awkward location. Of course, any premises will serve most effectively those in its immediate area – the young girls attending the Muslim Girls' Association meetings, for example, insisted that if the group was held in Edgwick they would not be able to go: they would not get on a bus. On the other hand, it must be accepted that the demand that a centre should be 'within easy walking distance' by its very nature cannot be fulfilled for everyone, wherever a single resource is placed.

There were some who found the Methodist church site suitable geographically, but were not happy with its proximity to the Eagle St mosque. Some expressed concern that activities at a wedding reception or festival might disturb the religious functioning of the mosque. There were others who were concerned by the press's confusion of mosque and community centre during the conflicts in September 1989 because of their geographical proximity, and were keen to make the distinction clear in the case of future problems. Others still wanted to ensure that the community centre's management was kept separate from that of the mosque, and felt that geographical distance would assist that. Then there were those on the original committee of the MCCA who had been pressing for permanent closure of the building; their opposition to the MCCA committee might discredit the building itself. But there was also some genuine feeling that the building was inappropriate and could not be successfully converted. Whatever the building's original merits, the conflict it engendered had already resulted in the rejection of the old Methodist church as a suitable resource by sizeable sections of the community, and even a new building on the site would have been likely to inherit the ill feeling that had plagued the old project.

In looking at alternative sites, one of the most important aspects to be considered, apart from locating it within the heart of the community, was its security. Both the Shama Women's Centre in Leicester and the Pakistani Centre in Liverpool are located in areas that are isolated at night, and therefore unsuitable after dark. The adverse publicity around Liverpool 8, where it was sited, seriously affected the development of the Liverpool centre. If possible, account should be taken of any foreseeable change of use of buildings around, and the effect this would have on the environment.

We considered the sites identified by the city architects as available for the building of a community centre, and noted that four of the six possibilities were rejected by them for technical reasons. We suggested that the two remaining alternatives might best be judged by consideration of the following issues:

- (i) any new project be clearly distinguished from those sites which historically associated with the present dispute;
- (ii) any site adopted should be explicitly distinct from, and preferably neutral in relation to, the premises of groups implicated in controversy;
- (iii) any site adopted needed to be acceptable to women's groups and not associated with areas of male control, while being equally acceptable to men's groups;
- (iv) the project should be sufficiently centrally located and accessible to the maximum number of members of all communities of interest, including those who already had their own accommodation.

### Whose centre?

When the Muslim Community Centre Association was formed, its declared intention was to avoid division within the community, and it chose its name accordingly, hoping to project an image of unity. Indeed one of its chief promoters was an East African of Punjabi origin, and there was a Gujarati and Bengali presence on the original committee. On the other hand, the promoters of the Pakistani Cultural Centre felt justified in promoting a centre managed by Pakistanis – the majority Muslim community. They had always said that it would be open to all Muslims to use, but were adamant that there should be Pakistani control and management.



The discussion that had taken place at city council level had confined itself to these two options. Yet the true perspective was a different one. Consideration was largely around two applications for funding. In fact there had also been applications from three other groups within the Muslim community for community premises and facilities: from the Hillfields Muslim Association and from the Zeenut-ul-Islam, both Gujarati applications, and one from the Muslim Girls' and Young Women's Association. The first was rejected as inadequately prepared, and there was no real discussion by the authorities as to how valid it was as a separate submission. The other Gujarati Muslim society has every intention of going ahead with plans for a community centre, the Zeenut-ul-Islam Centre, near its new mosque, with land expressly bought from the West Midlands County Council for the purpose. Their intention is to put up one big complex to be divided for three purposes: one for education, one for weddings and social occasions, and one for sports and recreation. The whole project is anticipated to cost over one million pounds.

When the CCRC explored the issue of a common facility, in the middle of 1988, both the Gujarati Muslim Society and the Hillfields Muslim Association declared that they could not agree to a single centre. They explained: 'Our members do not wish to place themselves in a situation where a recurrence of past problems together with its undesirable repercussions may be possible.' Although in the course of our research there was no uniform response by Gujaratis to the question of whether they would make an input into a joint centre, there was a lot of scepticism, linked with negative stereotyping of Pakistanis and memories of past experience of working together. They claimed that they had left the MCCA committee because of criticism of Gujaratis, and that some were saying it should be for Pakistanis only. There were also accusations that the committee of the community centre was guilty of the same lack of open management for which they criticized Eagle St mosque affairs. Certainly from the point of view of the Gujarati Muslim Society, this wariness had turned into the conviction that there could be no successful joint project with Pakistanis; fears that they would be laying themselves open to conflict were reinforced by the violent incidents outside the Muslim Community Centre in 1989. The view of the president of the Gujarati Muslim

Society was that 'we are completely separate country-wise, language-wise, culture-wise'. Even some of those involved in the original application for a unified Muslim centre were now saying: 'There can be no such thing as an all-Muslim community centre. The Council must plan for another community centre next to the Cambridge St mosque. There cannot be an alternative.'

There seemed little reason why the separate funding of the Zeenut-ul-Islam centre should not be viewed in a similar way to that of the Hindu Satang Mandal, which, quite separate from the Indian Community Centre, has had £70,000 to date through Urban Programme funding, part of a £500,000 project.

Despite the apparently firm proposals for a community centre attached to the Cambridge Street Mosque and to be managed solely by the Gujarati Muslim community, it is important that there should be a community centre managed by representatives of all Muslims in Coventry, including Gujarati Muslims. There are other subgroups, and a structure is required which would allow old divisions, along lines of ethnicity or otherwise, to be recognised, but which would be capable of adjustment over time. We noted that, among young people particularly, there are new definitions of ethnicity emerging.

In the immediate future, unless there are guarantees and safeguards for equal rights in the management and use of the centre, it is unlikely that Bangladeshis, or any other non-Pakistani Muslim group, will be able to use a joint centre successfully. There have been accusations by Bangladeshis that the MCCA itself has become largely Pakistani in tone; there has been talk of a Bangladeshi centre. The Pakistani Community Centre in Liverpool, catering to a similar sized community, excluded Bangladeshis from the management of the centre, although it was always said that it would be 'open for Bangladeshis to use'. The centre is used by Bangladeshis and other Muslim communities for marriage ceremonies, but exclusion from the administration has led to separate, less elaborate facilities for the Bangladeshi community.

Leicester's Bangladesh Youth and Cultural Samiti, serving the needs of some 2,000 Bangladeshis, is in a modest converted shop premises. It is not big enough for sports facilities other than indoor games, but it serves as a meeting place and advice and information point, and employs sessional workers for language teaching. Its members use the



Pakistani community centre, with its larger facilities, for gatherings but regard joint management of community facilities as problematic. The main task of a community centre is seen as bringing the community forward: this can happen only if the facility is truly accessible, and for this they feel independent resources are preferable.

Rochdale offers another example of a separately funded, small centre for the Bangladeshi community. The result of such separation in each case is an inferior resource for the Bangladeshi community; the advantage is real access and power. The solution within a joint centre for Muslims in Coventry would be for minority Muslim communities to have access secured through careful appointment of workers to the centre. For example, the appointment of a Bengali/Sylheti-speaking worker, consideration of space within the premises for use by Bengalis, and a real part in the management of the centre would secure Bangladeshi participation. Strangely, before it lent its support to the notion of a Pakistani Cultural Centre, the Islamic Brotherhood had declared itself in favour of a community centre management committee to which the different national and ethnic groups had the right to elect representation, thus ensuring a measure of power sharing, as had been the proposal for the mosque. The view of the CRC at the time was that this would be impossible to administer and potentially divisive, causing further factions. The alternative view was that committee members be elected in an open public meeting, and if this meant the exclusion of certain groups, this would be representation of the majority - 'the democratic way'. It is almost certain that such open elections as the sole way of electing a committee would lead to monopoly of the management and use of the centre by certain groups, and lead to further crises. For all parties to believe that they will have access to the centre, there must be participation in the design and deliberations at the earliest time possible.

Feedback from the feasibility report was the important first stage, in overcoming problems caused by starting the process of discussion of whole community needs with only a small section of the community. The question of representation, we felt, had then to be resolved in relation to a steering committee before any decisions were made on the composition of a management committee. The method of

representation on the management committee could be addressed by the steering committee once the shape of the centre itself was clear.

The final application for community resources had been put forward by the Muslim Girls' and Young Women's Association. The organisation was seeking to employ two workers to make contact with Muslim women in Foleshill and St Michael's, to offer advice, information, educational activities and training for women, to liaise with voluntary and statutory services, and to recruit and establish a network of volunteers to encourage access to statutory services, training and employment opportunities. The Council put forward to the DOE a submission for £21,000 capital funding and a small revenue grant of £17,000, its view being that this project would be accommodated at a later date within the larger Muslim community centre with separate management.

The association, on the other hand, was quite clear that it would prefer to have a separate building on a permanent basis. Its members felt that this was the only way women could have access five days a week. They cited the disadvantages of mixed centres where women are given exclusive use of the centre on one day a week. We spoke to other women who felt anxious about participating in a community centre managed by men, not for religious or cultural reasons, but because they were concerned about being caught up in political conflicts. Certainly if conflict were to break out again in any future centre, many women would stop attending. The Liverpool Pakistani Community Centre has lost its activities for women and girls through funding cuts. Now women visit the centre once a month for religious activities and for occasional cookery classes.

Developing health education and more general counselling would be difficult in a mixed facility. Among those who need the support of a centre are lone parents, often women whose husbands have abandoned them. This is a quite substantial and isolated group within the community. One woman described such families as 'a different part of society'; others are unable to offer assistance 'for fear they might destroy their own life as well'. People are worried about what the neighbours say: 'You don't have a peaceful atmosphere; everyone is disturbed.' It was this fear of gossip which caused most concern in the



prospect of a mixed centre: 'They used to say women gossip, but now men gossip more than women.'

The indications are that a separate women's centre would better meet the needs of Muslim women in Coventry. The Hackney Women's Council in north London started life as a voluntary group in 1981. It became a fully active project largely through the efforts of one woman, its present coordinator. Urban funded, they opened their own building in 1984, starting with a play group for under-fives. The organisation now runs English classes, dressmaking, numeracy and bookmaking classes. Hackney Borough Council's economic development unit provided fifteen computers and two word processors enabling RSA courses to be run. Staff from the hospital and health centre take relaxation classes. The senior worker is a Pakistani, working in a majority Gujarati area. But the organisation has ensured that it attracts all communities by employing women with all languages. They are able to provide advice sessions through community workers for each language group: Gujarati and Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu, and Bengali. The council is run by an all woman management committee. In Coventry the Osaba Project, an Afro-Caribbean project, offers an example of what a women's project can do in terms of developing employment training and childcare initiatives with the partnership of the social services and the economic development unit.

Initially, the Hackney Women's Council had to counter severe opposition from men's organisations, but eventually this died down. They have been able to mobilise resources for Gujarati, Arabic and Urdu teaching, and changed the policy of the Borough Council's leisure services so that it now provides sessions at the swimming baths for Asians only. They have also had successful trips abroad.

Among Coventry's Muslims there was also a group of women who would prefer to have integrated facilities for all Asians. This would have great advantages, and meet a wider set of needs. Muslim women have gained valuable experience in supporting their own structures and feel comfortable doing so, and at least one women's group has its own management committee. What is required is a nurturing and developing rather than undermining of that strength. For groups such as the Bengali women's groups, for example, the indications are that this development is more likely to happen in a women-only centre, and

it could be that within an Asian centre Muslim women would benefit from the confidence and developments in other communities.

The Shama Women's Centre in Leicester is based in a converted warehouse, developing from a women's group meeting in a school, and is now run a committee of which the majority are users of the centre. The majority of women attending are Muslims of all language groups, but the project manager is a Sikh, and Afro Caribbean and some white women attend as well as Asians. The centre has a very successful gymnasium and sauna, both free of charge. There is machinist training with a placement officer, and funding for computer training. The centre also runs a halal meals on wheels service funded by the social services. It also runs language classes and provides basic counselling facilities. The training component ensures that the centre is always busy and a there are all-day crèche facilities. The advantage of having a mixed centre is the sharing of backgrounds and cultures; the advantage of a women-only centre is seen as an escape from the dominant, and therefore disempowering, role of men. The Hackney Women's Council would echo this, and also point to the experience of the nearby Pakistani Centre where boys frequently hung around the gate harassing the girls.

The input of women into the planning and design of any resource was never on the agenda of the men who had promoted and worked towards a community centre for Muslims in Coventry. This was true in the case of the Muslim Community Centre Association and of the Pakistani Cultural Centre Association, although both expressed their intention to provide facilities for women. Many men expressed themselves as happy to welcome a female input into any future management structure, but some men clearly saw this only in terms of women maintaining their own budget for activities and accounting to a male management committee. Some women have themselves expressed doubts as to the way this might evolve in practice; even the Pakistani Workers' Association, for example, has no women on its executive committee although there is a separate women's section, and women are also involved in advice and voluntary work. As most Muslim women saw it, Asian community centres as they had been established in the past, were for men. One comment put this view clearly: 'It will be run by men and



men only. They have always had everything. Women, no, I can't see it. It would be best to have our own centre.'

#### A multidimensional response

The essence of Islam is that there is one community of believers under God. In this respect, the ideal is not different from a notion of Christian unity – but as with the Christian Churches, a variety of divisions have arisen and need to be taken into account. The simplistic concept of 'a Muslim community centre' is no more valid than the idea of 'an Asian interpreter' or 'white society'. In our introductory chapters, we have attempted to outline the key features that have shaped the development of a community among the Muslim population of Coventry, not the least of which has been the influence of the City Council and its policies for working with black and ethnic minority groups. As Jorgen Nielson has observed:

[There is] a longstanding dissatisfaction among members of the Muslim community leadership, who have felt that the structures of white British society are, at best, blind to the existence of a Muslim community in this country, or, at worst, ignoring it by insisting on what are, from a Muslim point of view, divisive concepts of ethnicity or assimilationist concepts of race. Thus, it is felt, Muslims are viewed either as 'Pakistani' or 'black', both of which views contradict the Muslim ideal of one united Muslim community, the *umma* (Nielson, 1987: 384).

However, he goes on to say: 'Of course, the question of whether it is possible to speak of "the Muslim community" in Britain, whether a plural form would be more correct, or whether the whole idea is mistaken, is not that straightforward.' Indeed, we have demonstrated that the assumption that there can be any composite, simplistic notion of community in the case of Muslims in Coventry, as indeed for any other community, must be a mistaken one. As we have seen, there are a variety of differing social, economic, gender and generational factors, which cut across the subgroups formed by linguistic and regional background, and the very differing perceptions of identity and multiplicity of need expressed within the community reflect this. The

issue, then is a multidimensional one, and a response was required which echoed this.



## Notes

## Introduction

- 1 The early part of the discussion in this section was developed in an article which drew on the findings of the study described here. See Ellis, J., (1991) 'Local government and community needs: a case study of Muslims in Coventry', *New Community*, Vol XVII, No 3, April.
- 2 See Young and Connelly's description of Social Services who rejected an ethnic dimension in services on the grounds that the societal aim was integration (1981: 69). Also Reeves (1989:21), in his study of race relations in Wolverhampton, describes the general Labour Party response to the argument of separate need in the allocation of resources as being 'some sort of concession to apartheid'.

## Chapter One

- 1 These points on early settlement come from notes made by David Kersey for a project on ethnic minorities in Coventry carried out by Warwick University Social History Department.
- 2 See City of Coventry, Unitary Development Plan Monitoring Report: Ethnic Minority Statistical Digest, November 1989.
- 3 See Coventry Education Department, Ethnic Minority Pupils in Coventry Schools: January 1988.
- 4 The reference is to the Adult Language Use Survey undertaken by the Linguistic Minorities Project in 1980 and 1981 to increase understanding of the patterns of language skills and use among adult members of linguistic minorities in a number of different urban settings in England. See Smith, G., Morawska, A., and Reid, E. (1984) *Languages in Coventry*, CLE/LMP Working Paper No.10.
- 5 *City of Bradford Metropolitan District: The future population of Bradford: 1988 Review*.
- 6 *City of Coventry, Economic and Planning Department: Annual Report, 1988/1989*.

- 7 Benington J., Bond, N., and Skelton, P. (1975) *Coventry CDP Final Report Part 1: Coventry and Hillfields - Prosperity and the Persistence of Inequality*, Home Office and City of Coventry Community Development Project, with the Institute of Local Government Studies.

## Chapter Two

- 1 This study, which was undertaken by an independent group of consultants, appears to have been caught up in political cross-currents in Coventry and was never widely circulated nor acted upon. *Fear and Crime in the Inner City*, Community Consultants, 1987.

## Chapter Three

- 1 For a discussion of these movements in the British context see Robinson, F. (1988) *Varieties of South Asian Islam*, CRER: Research Papers in Ethnic Relations, No 8, pp.5-6.
- 2 Similar disputes have taken place elsewhere. For example, there were accusations in Oxford between 1982 and 1984 that Wahhabis were trying to gain control of the central mosque and counter criticisms that the preaching of the Imam was divisive. See Shaw (1988: 149-153).

## Chapter Four

- 1 See *City of Coventry Careers Service, Destination of School Leavers, 1988*
- 2 *City of Coventry, Department of Economic Development and Planning: Annual Report, 1988/1989*

## Chapter Five

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