

# **Three Asian Associations in Britain**

by

**John King**

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## Contents

Foreword by John Rex	1
Introduction	6
Tablighi Jamaat and the Deobandi Mosques	14
Progressive Youth Organisation (Tower Hamlets)	41
The Indian Workers Association	61
Conclusion	81
Notes and References	87



### Foreword by John Rex

This report by John King, while an extremely interesting addition to the literature on immigrant and ethnic minority associations in Europe in its own right, should not be seen in isolation from the context in which the research was carried out or from a preceding monograph, *Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Mobilisation in Britain* which I wrote at the time Dr King was beginning his research. The political and intellectual context of the research was a growing feeling among our European colleagues that national identity and the structure of the nation state itself were being brought into question by the emergence of immigrant associations, presenting new identities at odds with those of the nation, and developing networks across national borders. My monograph therefore discussed the meaning of the terms 'Identity' and 'Mobilisation' theoretically and then looked at the forms of identity and mobilisation to be found in Britain's ethnic minority populations as a whole.

On the question of the possible clashes between minority identity and national identity, I suggested two things. The first was that for the vast majority of migrants holding several identities simultaneously was quite possible without the individuals concerned being disturbed psychologically or tragically caught between two cultures. No doubt there were some casualties in the process like those on the one hand who lost any clear sense of who they were (the case of Identity Diffusion), and those on the other who clung desperately to one identity at the expense of all others (the case of Identity Foreclosure). The vast majority, however, held multiple identities within their group and were quite capable of handling new identities in their land of settlement. Such new identities were not, however, simple undifferentiated national identities. I suggested that there were nationalist identities aroused in time of war, identities based on status groups and classes and their strategies of closure, as well as what I called the identity of citizenship based upon a set of agreed values in an open democratic society. Nationalist identities and class identities sometimes appeared as threatened because they were based upon Identity Foreclosure, but it was often recognized that it was perfectly normal even in a hypothetical state without any immigration to have a multiplicity of class, cultural and regional identities coexisting within a nation. Moreover, such coexistence was rendered possible by the existence of shared values of equal citizenship which had arisen in the struggle for democracy. As I saw it,



it was no more difficult for ethnic minority people and their cultural identities to operate within this system than it was for those with diverse class and cultural identities.

The concept of mobilisation which I used suggested a wider field of enquiry than merely that represented by the study of associations. Immigrant ethnic minorities and their children could be thought of as 'ethnies' which were both communities within which individuals felt at home and associations organised for particular purposes. But it would be absurd to see the ethnies as a formal body with a constitution and an executive committee of some kind. Just as classes emerging in the process of class struggle are never wholly and nicely formed but exist as ideal and ideological concepts in the minds of their more articulate members and as sentiments in the hearts of the masses, so ethnies contain within them kin-groups, village groups, patron-client groups, cultural and religious organisations and ad hoc associations, while at the same time existing as reference points of ideology and sentiment. Quite clearly, too, where more or less formal associations are formed, these might be primarily concerned with promoting or preserving cultural or religious identities or may be concerned with the problems which the group has to deal with in promoting its members' interests and dealing with the wider society.

A separate question from the above is that of how far the associations and other structures of an ethnies remain independent and how far they are merged with, supported, manipulated and controlled by the agencies of the society of settlement. It was very obvious from the evidence reviewed in my monograph that ethnic mobilisation was deeply affected by the incorporative and controlling mechanisms of British society. This was not, however, a wholly sinister development, since, in a democratic society it was quite possible that the main society might be willing to set up mechanisms through which minorities could fight for their rights. Furthermore, I recognized that quite often ethnies formed alliances with indigenous groups and individual ethnic minority members might well pursue their interests through indigenous organisations.

Dr King presents here the report of a study of three 'associations', the Tablighi Jamaat (or Mission Society) and its associated mosques, the Progressive Youth Organisation in Tower Hamlets, and the various Indian Workers Associations and his report has its own introduction and conclusion which speak for themselves. A word or two might, however, be added about

the way in which what he discovered in this study relates to the categorisations and the problematic of my earlier monograph.

Clearly there is a significant difference between the Tabligh Jamaat and the other two organisations. Clearly Tabligh is more concerned with the preservation of a particular identity, that of Islam, while the other associations are better understood as dealing rationalistically with the problems which confront their members. I should, however, like to make the point that this does not mean that it puts its members at odds with British society or that it is well described by the often hostilely used term 'fundamentalist'. What the Tabligh does is to send out missionary parties to local communities to encourage and foster adherence to a religion and a way of life. To a Western liberal, some of the values which it seeks to reinforce may appear deeply conservative, but perhaps not more so than the family-oriented values of many British Conservatives and of Christian Puritan groups. Living by such values does not present a structural problem for British society; it is a problem of what I refer to elsewhere as the culture of the private communal domain.

Tablighi, moreover, has little in the way of political aspirations. If anything it encourages its members to avoid political extremism, to be good citizens and to help to promote good community relations. This is a far cry from the implications of terrorism and extremism which often attach to the word fundamentalist. Clearly the Tabligh Mission is traditionalist and conservative. Perhaps it would be best if it was described as such and not grouped together with other more militant organisations which seek to transform society.

The Tablighi Mission, though in origin an Indian organisation is important throughout Europe and may well play a part in defining the attitudes of Muslims towards integration there. One may ask, however, how representative it is. The majority of South Asian Muslims in Britain are not Deobandis, as the clients of the Tabligh tend to be. They are Barelvis whose Muslim religion is deeply impregnated with Sufism, and with local customs. Barelvis played the leading role, even though they were supported by Deobandis and others, in the protest against what was seen as Salman Rushdie's attack on Islam, but in general the mystical tendency of their religion turns them away from politics. The other important Muslim organisation in Britain, the Jamaat-i-Islami, working through the U.K. Islamic Mission, is often also called 'fundamentalist'. In fact it is far from traditional, believing not so much in the literal interpretation of the scriptures, as in the interpretation of those scriptures, and their application to the modern world, by their founder, the



Maulana Maududi. This form of Islam, better called 'militant' or 'Islamist' rather than fundamentalist, does present structural problems in that it does preach the idea of an Islamic state. It is interesting, however, to notice that it has not pushed this idea in Great Britain and has notably failed to support the proposal of the small Muslim Institute for a Muslim Assembly.

To move from the study of Muslim organisations like the Tabligh Mission to studying organisations like the Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO) amongst Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets, or the Marxist inspired Punjabi based Indian Workers Association (IWA) is to move right into the modern secular world of democratic politics, capitalism and class struggle. Talking to their representatives one finds little emphasis on separate cultural identity. The PYO particularly is concerned with political, social and economic rights in exactly the same ways as one would expect to find in any leftish working class youth group. So also if one looks at the programme of the IWA in Southall or the Midlands, one finds nearly the whole emphasis placed on what are essentially British political issues.

It is true, of course, that the IWA, whose members are more middle aged and of the actual immigrant generation, are more likely to be involved in questions of homeland politics than are members of the PYO. They have to say what they think about the Indian Congress Party, about the various factions within Indian Communism, and, above all, since so many of their members are Sikhs, about the issue of Khalistan. All this involves a tug away from purely British politics and towards a more Indian political identity.

The IWA, however, can never be a purely Indian identity organisation, because it is connected with a universal ideology, that of Marxism. It is impelled by this to remind its members of their international working-class identity and to seek out forms of alliance with the British trades union and labour movement. Such tendencies are very strong amongst the IWA leadership, though they, as well as their members, have been made aware by painful political experience that the best way to get the British unions to act on their behalf is to have an effective union within the union which forces the union as a whole to protect Indian worker interests.

Another dimension of difference between the IWA and the PYO, however, is that of their degree of independence. The PYO, like other minority organisations, flourished most when it could rely on government funding. Some sections of the IWA, on the other hand, did try to avoid any such

dependence and were, as a result capable of following a more independent line and more militant tactics.

Whether as part of the incorporated race relations establishment or as independent organisations, both these associations placed very high on their agenda what they called the fight against racism and fascism. The final question which I would ask, therefore, is whether or not this emphasis means that these organisations are against integration or threatening the national identity. In fact what they are threatening are racist definitions of national identity and racial and ethnic discrimination, and perhaps it is precisely the racist definition of national identity which leads to the sense of unease at the presence of immigrant ethnic minorities.

I would not myself deny that there might in principle be problems in Europe if the culture and the political aspirations of any particular minority were fundamentally at odds with the political culture of the societies of settlement. Even this, however, is hardly likely since, unlike European settlers overseas in an earlier age, the immigrant minorities we are discussing are glad to have the jobs and other economic opportunities which immigration opens to them and have no aspirations to political domination. What does stand in the way of integration, however, is that most European nations see themselves in racial or closed cultural terms and are unable to envisage those who have different colour or sharply different cultural characteristics as sharing in their nationhood.

What the evidence presented here clearly suggests is that ethnic minority organisations are forced to fight against racism. That fight will go on until White people in Dewsbury or Tower Hamlets or Smethwick do actually begin to feel that despite their colour, culture and religion, Asians and Blacks have a valid claim to be British and an entitlement to all the rights that pertain to Britishness. The PYO and the IWAs may be thought of as trying to bring such a society into being. Looking at the matter from a sociological point of view it would be wildly optimistic, however to suggest that they will be successful in the next generation. They may turn out to be the standard bearers of a new and truly multi-racial, indeed multi-cultural society.



### Introduction

This report on three ethnically based British organisations is a response to the question put by Rémy Leveau and Riva Kastoryano of the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI) in Paris, at the inception of the present project in 1990, concerning the relationship of host societies to ethnic communities in the context of the new Europe. That question is, in essence, to what extent does the presence of allogeneous minority populations constitute a challenge, which may even become a threat, to the cultural integrity of the nation states of which Europe is composed? (Leveau and Kastoryano 1990) And will there not be further challenges, of a kind perhaps as yet only dimly perceived, to the supra-national Europe towards which the states of Europe are each in their own way progressing? As Europe moves tentatively in the direction of complete freedom of movement within its frontiers, with correspondingly stringent immigration controls at the points of access to the European space, the question arises, what will be the status of immigrant populations, and what will their relationship be to groups of non-European origin which have acquired European nationality? Will pressures arise within Europe that spring from international links between ethnic groups which perceive that they face common difficulties in their relationship with the European entity? All these questions are made more urgent by the size of the allogeneous populations within European countries, and the permanent nature of those populations.

Leveau and Kastoryano have pointed to the need to investigate the ways in which ethnic communities form groups and associations - their 'forms of solidarity' - and the demands which they make, that is to say the issues on which ethnic communities, as mediated by associations and groups which they have formed, mobilise themselves. At the local level, these demands may take the form of claims for specific cultural or religious concessions, for example, religious instruction or the demand for religious schools, or the attempt to set up mosques. At the national and European level, demands made to national governments by allogeneous groups now carry with them the implication of demands made at the European level, as the progression of European unification gives every aspect of national politics and administration in each of the twelve nation states of Europe a pan-European dimension. The politics of immigration, the legal status of immigrants and their descendants, electoral

rights and citizenship are all issues which arise at both the national level at present and the European level in the future.

The present study is concerned with an investigation of the issues which prompt ethnic communities to mobilise, and the question of how ethnic populations perceive their identity. That leads on to the question of whether the identities of ethnic communities could conflict with the national identity of the wider community of which they form part. It is this possibility of clash which constitutes the potential challenge to the cultural identity, and indeed to the national identity, of the national communities in which the ethnic communities are embedded. The modes of organisation of the ethnic communities in the context of groups with religious, cultural and political aims will serve as an indication of the priorities of ethnic communities, and of the elements which make up their differential identities.

At this point a note of methodological caution should be sounded. There exist marked differences in the preferences shown in Britain and France for various kinds of programmes and policies in the field of ethnic relations. This project was conceived in France, and is predicated on French presuppositions. But John Rex, in his paper 'The Concept of a Multi-cultural Society', has pointed out the centrality of the concept of goals in policy-oriented research. The key to an honest approach to policy oriented research, according to Rex, is a principle enunciated by Gunnar Myrdal: 'Sociology cannot declare one moral standpoint to be morally preferable to another. All it can do and what it certainly should do is to make its value standpoint or the state of affairs which it is taking as desirable, clear and explicit' (Rex 1985: 2). Rex goes on to point out that 'a new goal has become widely accepted in British race relations, namely that of the multi-cultural society'. And he further describes the multicultural society as 'a society which is unitary in the public domain but which encourages diversity in what are thought of as private or communal matters'.

This present survey is conducted in the light of the broad consensus in Britain that a multi-cultural society is possible and desirable. Observations have therefore been made of the ethnic groups which have been contacted in the light of the desirability of multi-cultural coexistence. The consensus on the desirability of multi-culturalism is one which has remained largely unaffected by the persistent view, held by some politicians of the right in Britain as well as widely espoused at the popular level, that a possible policy for Britain is a crude integrationism, that is, that ethnic populations are welcome in as much



as they are willing to assimilate to the host society and to abandon inconvenient elements of their own original identity. As Barry Troyna puts it: 'Being British in this version is instead of, not as well as, being an ethnic group member' (Cashmore and Troyna 1990: 8). It is also one-way: acquisition involves loss.

It must be stressed that Britain's multi-cultural policy orientation stands in contrast to the prevalent orientation in France, where the desirability of assimilation of ethnic communities has up to now been a view shared by both government and by the leading anti-racist organisations. On the other hand, the resurgence of violence by youths in the suburbs of French cities where ethnic populations are concentrated, together with the obdurate reluctance of the Muslims of North African origin who make up the bulk of France's ethnic population to abandon their own ethnic identity, have begun to give rise in France to the idea that assimilation may not be an easy matter. And it is for that reason that French sociologists have begun to turn to the question of how to cope with the question of ethnic identity, rather than continuing to expect it to dissipate in the face of the technocratic management of the economic issues facing ethnic populations, combined with the presentation to immigrants of the advantages of France's secular society.

It will, therefore, be obvious to the reader that this survey has been conducted in the hope of identifying ways in which the activities of groups and organisations within ethnic communities can work to reinforce the key elements within an ethnic identity, essentially operative within what John Rex describes as the private domain, while at the same time avoiding a challenge in the public domain to the mainstream national and cultural identity of British society. British identity is itself, of course, of a diverse and multiple nature, an issue illuminated by John Rex in the context of the theoretical paper on ethnic and political identity in Britain contributed to the present study (Rex 1991). The activities of ethnic organisations are conducted within the context of the multiculturalism which seems increasingly likely to become an intrinsic part of the nature of both British and ultimately also of French society, and is an unavoidable consequence of a world in which developments in both transport and communications mean that there is not merely contact but also a permanent intermingling of populations.

It should also be said that the concern that there may be a potential clash of identity between ethnic groups and host societies, and that tensions may arise from the disparity between the demands and objectives of ethnic groups on the

one hand, and those expressed within the accepted political spectrum of the host community on the other, constitute an issue which has been thrown into sharper relief by the imminence of a greater degree of European integration. If national identity may be challenged, called into question, or even ultimately diffused by the contiguous presence of alternative ethnic identities associated with allogeneous communities within nation states, that challenge may seem more urgent at a time when the various European national identities themselves are facing some degree of submersion in a broader European identity. It is interesting that in the political context, those who most fear the apparent dilution of national identity by competing ethnic identities, are also those who most fear the mingling of individual national identities in a broader European whole. From the opposing point of view, both processes can easily be regarded as enrichments, rather than impoverishments, of Europe's traditional national identities.

Moving to the question of the criteria employed in the choice of organisations selected for examination in this survey, it should be said that they have been limited for reasons of practicality to three, and that they have therefore been singled out on the basis of representing aspects of immigrant activity which seem *prima facie* to be representative of the range of concerns displayed by ethnic organisations within the Asian ethnic communities. The three organisations selected are the Indian Workers' Association, the Tablighi Jamaat movement, and the Progressive Youth Organisation. The most clear cut of these is the third, which is a small secular and anti-racist organisation based in the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets in East London, with a membership drawn from a specific ethnic group in a delimited geographical region. The PYO has defined aims, concerned with maintaining the self-respect of its members in the face of the social problems they face, together with maximising their opportunities for self-advancement within the host society. In addition, the PYO fosters links with the host society through some of its sporting and cultural activities, and is also interested in the European perspective.

The other two organisations are more diffusely organised, though clear in their aims. The Indian Workers Association is in theory not based on a narrow ethnic group, but in practice its membership is almost entirely Punjabi and very largely Sikh. It is concerned with trade union and employment issues as well as with immigration and community concerns, and has been subject since its foundation to splits and recombinations arising out of the diverging



political allegiances of its leaders as well as out of personality clashes. In its current manifestation, there is a national IWA centred on Birmingham, and a locally based regional group in Southall, in West London which maintains its independence and sets different priorities. The national organisation has many of the characteristics of a left-wing activist group, and reflects the communist background of many of its active members. It takes and publicises a strong line on aspects of international affairs. The Southall group, on the other hand, has evolved into a group dedicated to issues of community concern, and has followed its leader into a broad identification with the Labour Party. In addition, other regional groups of the IWA, for example the group in Huddersfield, are also reported to continue to stand apart from the national organisation. This survey will look both at the Southall-based local IWA and at the national organisation.

The third organisation, Tablighi Jamaat, is also part of a complex network of activities, which in this case is located within the Muslim community, broadly conceived, and is examined here in the context of associated Muslim institutions. Tablighi Jamaat itself is an international Muslim missionary organisation, with its headquarters in India, whose international vocation is to remind born Muslims of the principles of a faith from which they may have been inclined to fall away. Tabligh is not associated with any particular national or ethnic group, and is properly more a religious than an ethnic organisation, though its Indian origins do give it some special links with Indian Muslims. Its common language of operation is Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, also spoken by many Indian Muslims. In Britain, the organisation is based on a central establishment in Dewsbury, Yorkshire, which acts as a nucleus for the missionary activities the organisation undertakes within Britain, as well as maintaining links with Tabligh in other countries. There is also a school in Dewsbury, where pupils may undertake the first five years of the seven year course of instruction which leads to a knowledge of Islam on the level required to be an imam or a teacher. But Tabligh's missionary activities are carried out with the help of a network of mosques which are sympathetic to Tabligh's ideals, and in addition to looking at Dewsbury itself, this study will also look at a mosque in Birmingham which is associated with Tabligh activities and is in some respects part of the interface between the Tabligh movement and the Muslim population.

Within the activities of these three very diverse ethnic organisations, the present study will attempt to distinguish between three broadly different

spheres of activity. First, there are activities in which the ethnic organisation concerns itself with issues which are also exercising the host community. (We shall call these category one activities). The Indian Workers' Association is central in this respect. IWA has a resolutely left-wing standpoint, and has run campaigns on issues concerned with political issues concerning the left. In the past, IWA has been active in struggling for better working conditions for its members, and for better representation of the ethnic community it represents within and by the mainstream trades unions. IWA has also joined other organisations of the left in campaigning against the poll tax, and for improved health and education provision. Its national chairman, based in Birmingham, is a left-wing trade union activist, while the chairman of IWA Southall has been selected as a Labour Party parliamentary candidate. PYO in Tower Hamlets, though completely identified with the Bangladeshi ethnic group, also concerns itself with some issues which are also relevant to the other communities of the locality, including the native-born community of British descent.

Secondly (category two), there is a diverse sphere of activities which concern the ethnic group as distinct from the host community, but relate to the interface between the ethnic community and wider society. These range from straightforwardly anti-racist activities, to cultural concerns, and to links with homeland politics. If the first group of activities are shared between the ethnic organisations and the host society, the second are uniquely associated with the ethnic communities. Anti-racist activities are most specifically displayed by the PYO, which makes no bones about the need to protect Bangladeshi youth in the context of Tower Hamlets from the hostile actions of National Front members and other extreme right-wing activists. However, the IWA is also concerned with combating racism and makes this part of its explicit platform. Cultural activities and the link with the homeland, which both IWA and PYO are concerned with, may not at first sight appear to be related to the interface, but are in fact part of the process of maintaining the separate identity of members of the ethnic communities. This is perceived as necessary by organisation leaders, with the aim of protecting members of the community from the lack of self-respect and the collapse of personality which results from failing to be aware and proud of one's ethnic identity in the face of hostility from mainstream groups or individuals.

Thirdly (category three), there are activities purely within the private domain, which are entirely internal to the ethnic groups, and do not play a part in the balance between ethnic communities and the host society. This applies to



some aspects of cultural activity and of the concern with homeland politics. But within the range of organisations studied, this applies especially to the approach to Islam adopted by the Tabligh. Tabligh in Britain quite explicitly eschews any mission to preach Islam to communities other than the Muslim-born groups which have come to Britain as immigrants. Tabligh opens its doors to all Muslims, even though not all Muslim groups and communities are equally welcoming to Tabligh, and it would not exclude British converts to Islam from its scope. But it makes no attempt to convert the unbelievers. On the contrary it restricts its activities entirely to Muslims. In addition, Tabligh is insistent that it takes no view on any political questions, and that it seeks no publicity. Tabligh's propagation of Islam, from the point of view of the host community, is quasi-clandestine, an activity which takes place wholly in the context of the ethnic community, quite out of view of the host society.

None of these three levels of activity on the part of ethnic groups seem on the face of it to present a challenge of any real kind to the majority identity. The first sort of activity, relating to issues with which the host society is also concerned, actually reinforces the links between ethnic groups and the host society rather than producing an estrangement. This is the case with the IWA even though their activities are actually directed in many ways against the consensus of the British establishment and certainly against the present Conservative government. The IWA's position is opposed to some British views, but aligns itself quite precisely with the views of other groups within British society. It could also be mentioned that there are other Indian groups, especially involving business people of Indian origin, whose aims are more sympathetic to right-wing British views. Thus the spectrum of positions represented by ethnic groups corresponds more or less to the mainstream spectrum.

Turning secondly to the PYO, this Bangladeshi organisation's anti-racist preoccupations and activities are also hardly likely to present a challenge to British society, which is itself, at least formally, committed to opposition to racism. What the PYO is seeking to present is an autonomous initiative to match anti-racist initiatives extended towards the Bangladeshi community. It provides a version of self-originated help which reinforces such assistance as is provided by concerned state agencies. On the other hand, PYO activists reiterate that state and local government adopt a negative attitude towards them, and do not really offer any effective help. At the political level, they are critical of the Liberal Democrat local authority in Tower Hamlets.

Institutionally, they are most mistrustful of the police. Nonetheless, PYO is concerned where possible to work cooperatively with state-directed activities, and again is not intrinsically in opposition to them.

And thirdly, the inner-direction of Tabligh's activities cannot be said to constitute a threat, unless in the self-fulfilling light of the belief that Islam itself in some way represents a threat to 'western society'. The question of why Islam is perceived by some in the West as a threat is not a simple one. Historically, the concept of a threatening Islam may extend in the long term as far back as the Crusades. In the short term it is probably traceable to the stressful relationship between the West and the Islamic Republic of Iran during that state's early years of existence from 1979. Much of the concern that Muslim populations may represent a threat from within comes from the perception that Islam is a menacing factor in international relations. As a geopolitical concept, the perception of a threat of Islam may spring from a western fear of governments which will either deny the west scarce resources, such as oil, or make the western countries pay a high price. Islam looks impervious to western influence, and may threaten the security of regimes with which western states have been able to deal. All these considerations which spring from the relations between states colour the view of the citizens of western states to allogeneous Muslim populations within their frontiers, and they may well contribute to the view of Muslims held in the West. All these concerns came to a head, in Britain, but especially in France, at the time of the Gulf War, when it was believed by some that Muslims would in some unexplained way act against the interests of the western states in which they live.

Meanwhile the fear of confrontations within has caused stirrings of alarm, and not all Muslim organisations are as quietist, it should be said, as is Tablighi Jamaat. The demands of Muslim families in some social areas, and especially in the field of education, formulated in some cases by the shapers of Muslim opinion, have caused concern. And demands for changes in British attitudes, and even in the application of the law, which arose in particular in the context of the Salman Rushdie affair, have given rise to the perception of Muslim minorities as a threat. What is at issue is the boundary between the public and the private domain. Meanwhile, a calm examination of these areas of confrontation will show that no central element of British identity has come under threat, and that the concern about the effect of Islam has something of the characteristics of a 'moral panic'. Muslims have observed that publications



can be suppressed, and ask why that principle cannot be extended to the one publication which has caused them such offence. They are also aware that there is a blasphemy law, and have sought unsuccessfully in the courts to establish that it can be applied to outrages of Islamic sensibility as well as to affronts to Christianity. There is no evident aspect of the activities of Tablighi Jamaat itself which seems to present the slightest threat to the integrity of British life.

The methodology of this survey has been to elicit information from the leaders of organisations and activists within them through extended recorded interviews. A questionnaire was prepared at CERI by Riva Kastoryano, which I quote in an appendix to this report. However, the questions have served as a framework for interviews which have fluctuated between a structured and unstructured nature. While an attempt has been made to elicit all the information required by the prepared questionnaire, in each case somewhat adapted for the particular group or organisation under investigation, it has been extensively departed from in the search for additional or unexpected information. In that sense, the method has veered towards ethnographical observation.

Finally, in this introduction, I would like to cite the Moroccan novelist and social commentator Tahar Ben Jelloun, writing in fact about France and its North African immigrants, but in terms which are relevant to the general issue of the social coexistence of minorities. He writes: 'The message here is clear. Successful integration means harmony, mutual respect and tolerance, and one cannot dispense with this basis. Those who sincerely want to become part of the fabric of . . . society to the extent of blending in without losing their souls, know that mutual respect is essential. However the resistance does not always come from them. It comes from those who are afraid of the future. . .' (Ben Jelloun 1991).

#### Tablighi Jamaat and the Deobandi Mosques

Tablighi Jamaat is an international Muslim missionary and teaching network, which transcends frontiers and includes Muslims of many nationalities within its ranks. Its aim is to bring Muslims back to the knowledge of what it regards as the true elements of the faith. It addresses itself entirely to Muslims, and makes no attempt to preach to the unconverted. The movement does have a certain ideological orientation within the range of Islamic movements, as we

shall see, towards the simple and puritanical ideas of Deoband, as distinct, for example, from Bareilvi ideas on the one hand, or from the even more rigorous views of Jamaat-i-Islami on the other. The origins and orientation of the varying versions of Islam which have their source in the Indian subcontinent will be discussed later. However Tabligh studiously maintains an open mind and welcomes Muslims from any background if they are interested in establishing relations. That is an idealistic view, and Tablighis are not always as welcomed as they are welcoming. Nevertheless, as Francis Robinson puts it: 'The Tablighi Jamaat of Delhi, along with the Jamaat-i-Islami, form the two great Islamic movements generated in twentieth century South Asia' (Robinson 1988).

Tablighi Jamaat, 'The Missionary Community' is how the movement is popularly referred to in Urdu. The founder of the movement, Maulana Mohammed Ilyas, preferred to call it Tahrik-i-Iman, 'The Faith Movement' (Haq 1972: 45). In Arabic, the movement is called 'Jama'at at-Tabligh', that is, 'The Community of the Message' (Kepel 1987: 178). The movement is often called simply 'Tabligh', by members and sympathisers, and for convenience that is the name we shall use here. The aim of the movement is to address itself to Muslims, reminding them of their faith and recalling them to it. And with its international links and its chain of authority, it is reminiscent of the Sufi orders, the 'tariqat', after which it was to some extent consciously modelled by its founder. The British centre was set up only after consultation with India and permission from Tabligh's central leadership.

Tabligh originated in India, and its centre is still there. The founder died in 1944, and was succeeded by his son Yusuf. Inam al-Hassan succeeded to the leadership in 1965. Maulana Mohammed Ilyas, was born in 1885 into a family dedicated to religious observance and practice, and his life experience set the style for the movement which persists into the Tabligh as it manifests itself today. He was brought up partly in Kandhela to the north of Delhi, with his mother's family and partly in Nizamuddin, just south of Delhi, where his much revered father was active as a teacher until his death in 1898. Ilyas led a life of strenuous piety. 'Zeal for religion,' remarks Mohammed Anwarul Haq of the young Ilyas, 'was ingrained in his nature' (Haq 1972: 82). Ilyas received his sufi indoctrination as a young man from Maulana Khalil Ahmad, a shaikh of the Sabiriyah branch of the Chistiyah tariqa, and then went in 1908 to study at Deoband, India's leading Islamic university and the centre of the Deobandi school of Islam. He married a cousin in 1912, and performed the



pilgrimage for the first time in 1915. Then, after the early death of two of his brothers and an episode of bad health he retired once more to Nizamuddin to teach in 1917.

Ilyas began to feel at this time that, rather than teaching students who came to him, his life's work was to bring the impoverished and ignorant inhabitants of Mewat, a region to the south-east of Delhi in which his father had also been interested, back to a full understanding of Islam. He began what was perceptibly an early form of the Tabligh movement in 1925, encouraging his students and colleagues to travel in groups through the country they intended to proselytise, talking to the inhabitants as they went and discussing religious matters with each other. And he began to elaborate the system of rules and precepts which governs the Tabligh today. Gradually Tabligh activities began to spread, into other parts of India and then after partition into Pakistan, and round the world, wherever there are Muslim populations. Today, the movement still follows the pattern of activities for members laid down by Maulana Mohammed Ilyas, combining strict observance of religious exercises with ceaseless travel in the interests of keeping alive the faith and gathering believers back into the fold.

In Europe Tabligh is well represented in Britain, France and Belgium, and round the world it has a presence in some ninety countries, Muslim and non-Muslim (Kepel 1987: 178). Morocco is a country where Tabligh is active, and Moroccan Tablighis are active in Europe, and maintain contacts with Britain. The mosque in rue Massaux in Brussels, and the chateau at Villemain near Paris are centres of Tabligh activity (Dasseto and Bastenier 1988: 217). In Britain its centre is at Dewsbury, a small Yorkshire town some 12 kilometres south of Leeds on the river Calder, which has steadily declined in the latter half of the twentieth century from the position it once enjoyed as a centre of the Yorkshire woollen industry. In a population of some 50,000 there are about 4000 Muslims, mainly Pakistanis and Gujerati Muslims from India. The Muslim population is concentrated in one location, and virtually all the inhabitants of Savile Town, a small, self contained area one kilometre from the centre of Dewsbury, are now Muslims. A public house on the corner of South Street and Savile Road, which leads back to the centre of Dewsbury, has become a private residence, closed for lack of custom though its name is still blazoned on its wall. Meanwhile shops in Savile Town cater entirely to the needs of the Asian community, though much English is spoken among the younger people. The infants school population is totally Muslim, and the

school population of adjacent primary schools is up to 85 per cent Muslim, which was a factor in a celebrated dispute between white parents and the local education authority in 1987 (Naylor 1989).

The Tabligh centre is the Markazi Mosque, that is, the 'Central Mosque', at the end of South Street in Savile Town, where there are also three smaller mosques directly serving the community, including the Islamic centre and mosque in South Street itself which occupies a non-conformist church built in 1875. But though local Muslims go to the Markazi Mosque for prayers if they wish, and while there are some thirty local children enrolled at the school associated with the Tabligh centre, the Tabligh establishment stands apart from the Muslim community of which it is the spatial centre. Tabligh is an entirely masculine institution. Its responsible officials and the pupils at the school are entirely male. The movement follows the pattern of male dominance prevalent in Islam, where men have a specified position within the religion, within society and within the family.

The mosque itself is a large and impressive four-square building, presenting a wide frontage with imposing glass doors, topped by a stately green dome and the tower of the minaret. The mosque is built on the classic pattern of the great mosque at Medina, one of the two holy cities of Islam, in Saudi Arabia. In its interior, the room for prayer is a vast rectangular open space at the rear, with the 'qiblah', the niche which points in the direction of Mecca, in the centre of the long wall facing the door. Offices and rooms for meetings occupy the front part of the mosque, opening off a transverse corridor leading to right and left from the entrance hall. There is a room for the Imam to rest and study, and a room reserved for visitors, Tabligh members in transit in the course of missions across the country, or visiting from India or from other countries where Tabligh is active, any of whom may be spending a period of rest, work or study in Dewsbury.

Across the courtyard from the mosque is the 'madrassa', the Tabligh school, where there are some two hundred students. The school is another foursquare building, which from the exterior is architecturally undistinguished. But inside the building another large open space serves the students and visitors to Dewsbury as a refectory, and during Muslim holidays and Tabligh gatherings as a place for visitors to rest. In the fasting month of Ramadan, students and visitors spend their day there. Students and other visitors sit on the carpeted floor, chatting and drinking tea, while members of the movement come and go. Next to the school, a playing field with soccer goalposts is used for the



pupils' recreation. In this school, students begin at the age of thirteen the seven year course of study of the religion of Islam which will equip them to be Imams or teachers. The last two years must be done at other Tabligh centres in India, where a final two years of study will equip a student to enter the religious life, serving a community as teacher or preacher. The brightest and best students may go on to advanced study.

Students come to the 'madrasa' in Dewsbury, which has an international reputation, from across Europe, and from as far away as the United States, Canada and the West Indies. European students have come from Muslim communities in Norway, Denmark, Belgium, and France. There are French speaking Moroccan students from immigrant families in France at Dewsbury, who will learn Urdu in order to follow the courses of instruction, and Classical Arabic to read the Quran and the great collections of the Hadith, as well as English, and will be adding these languages to the French and Moroccan colloquial Arabic which they already know. If the school in Dewsbury was able to offer the complete seven year course of religious studies it would be regarded as a university. Meanwhile, within the school, the younger pupils are offered, in addition to religious instruction, tuition in standard British school subjects: English, mathematics, history and geography.

The effective head of the Tabligh establishment in Dewsbury is Mohammed Ishaq Patel, who has been a naturalised British citizen since 1956, and who works at the Markazi mosque as full-time professional. Ishaq Patel came to Britain from Gujerat in northern India. He rejects the idea that he is the leader of British Tabligh, and explains that the movement is directed by a 'shura' council, which takes collective decisions. Ishaq Patel is an intense and sincere man, who dresses in the characteristic brown and white garments common to many Tablighis, with a greying beard which fringes his chin. Tablighis who live within the movement rather than in society tend to wear characteristic dress. An observer of British Islam says this about the Tablighis' appearance and behaviour: 'They are polite courteous and well-behaved, and can easily be spotted in the streets. they wear a cap, a beard, a long shirt which goes below the knees, and a pyjama or trousers which is shortened to be above the ankles. They might also wear a jacket or sneakers' (Raza 1991: 14). The school pupils all wear garments of an Asian style, depending on their country of origin or the community which provides their background. In the streets of Savile Town outside the Tabligh centre, the dress of northern India and Pakistan is mixed to a greater or lesser degree with western styles of dressing, with the younger

men wearing wholly western clothes. In his office in the 'madrasa' building Ishaq Patel explained how it was that the movement came to Britain, and what its aims are (Patel interview).

Ishaq Patel rejects to some extent the use of the word 'movement' to describe Tabligh, since the organisation is in his view no more than a body of Muslims who are concerned to carry out the duty every individual Muslim owes to the 'umma', the Muslim community, and to humanity at large. Muslims believe that after the lifetime of Mohammed God will send no further prophets to convey his meaning to men, and therefore the work of prophecy has passed to the community of Muslims as a whole. That duty is to preach the truth of Islam to mankind, for the benefit of humanity as a whole. The founder Mohammed Ilyas believed that it was his duty ceaselessly to preach the truth of Islam to the people of Mewat, who were nominally Muslims but were ignorant of their faith, and to give them the opportunity of 'observing the lives of the learned and pious, listening to their discourses on the life of the Prophet and his Companions and other religious matters, and also learning to read the Quran' (Haq 1972: 111).

Tabligh imposes six principles on its adherents, and tries to inculcate those principles in the Muslims with whom it comes into contact (Haq 1972: 143) (Patel interview). These are as follows. The first principle is faith, or 'iman'. The believer must make the declaration of faith in Arabic, the 'kalimah', which must be memorised and pronounced correctly as a demonstration that its significance as a divine command has been understood. The second principle, 'namaz', that is, 'prayer' is the principle of obedience to the prescription for prayer laid down by Mohammed. The third principle is that of 'ilm', or knowledge and 'zikr', remembrance of God. A believer must acquire sufficient knowledge of God and of the faith to sustain him in everyday life. Definite set texts in Urdu are prescribed, and the believer should also be able to read and understand the Quran in Arabic. As to remembrance, or 'zikr', particular prayers must be recited repeatedly at prescribed times of day. This recalls the 'zikr', or repetitive incantations of the sufi orders, and though Tabligh does not itself include sufi activities an individual Tablighi may also be a member of a 'tariqa'. The fourth principle, 'ikram-i-muslim' enjoins that Muslims should show mutual respect towards each other. The fifth principle is that a Muslim shall examine closely the sincerity of his intentions. This is known as 'ikhlas-i-niyyat'. No act shall be undertaken except in the sole intention of pleasing God, and a Muslim shall not take into consequences any



other results his actions might have. Finally, the sixth principle, 'tafrigh-i-waqt' is that a Muslim should remember that each member of the community shall be willing to devote his wealth and his strength to the service of God. It is the duty of every Muslim to call others to religion, and in particular within the Tabligh, it is the duty of Muslims to undertake missionary work. There is also a negative injunction. Tabligh members are to abstain from wasting time in unnecessary talk, futile action, or unlawful deeds, deeds that is to say prohibited by Muslim religious law.

Anwarul Haq quotes Ilyas's own concise formulation of the six principles: 'To a Muslim, faith and life based on faith means holding firmly to 'kalimah' and prayer, regularly observing 'zikr', learning its virtues and excellences, fulfilling duties and obligations, respecting the rights of fellow-Muslims, seeking the pleasure of God, following in the footsteps of the prophet and going from door to door, city to city and country to country for the sake of the faith' (Haq 1972: 145). Haq also quotes another set of more practical injunctions, laid down by Ilyas at an early meeting in Mewat in 1934, which cast light on some of the attitudes of Tabligh today. These principles were: 'Article of faith; prayer; acquisition and dissemination of knowledge; adoption of Islamic appearance and dress; adoption of Islamic ceremonies and rejection of non-Islamic ones; seclusion of women; performance of marriage ceremony in the Islamic manner; adherence to Muslim dress by women; non-deviation from Islamic beliefs and non-acceptance of any other religion; protection and preservation of mutual rights; participation of responsible persons in every meeting and convention; pledge not to impart secular instruction to children before they have had religious learning; pledge to strive and endeavour for the preaching of religion; observance of cleanliness; pledge to protect the dignity and respect of one another' (Haq 1972: 110).

The first Tabligh groups came to Britain in 1956, and those visits once begun continued on a regular basis up to the early 1960s. By that time there was already a substantial Asian community in Britain, which included considerable numbers of Muslims. Two names mentioned in connection with bringing Tabligh to Britain are Maulana Yaqub and Hafiz Patel. Tabligh was run on an organised basis in Britain from the start, and saw its function in the context of the development of Muslim society in Britain as a barrier against the materialism and the predominance of worldly ambitions which pious Muslims believed would overtake Muslim immigrants living in western society as their prosperity increased and they began to reap the economic rewards of their

migration. Even from the early days of the movement's activities in Britain it was run on an organised basis, and the global leadership in India was aware of what was being undertaken. In the course of the work of their internal mission to the Muslims who had settled in Britain, travelling groups of Tablighis would stay at sympathetic mosques, and at holidays and festivals large gatherings would sometimes take place. However the size of the gatherings, and even the number of travelling missionaries, began to overwhelm the small mosques of the 1960s, which were mainly converted houses.

Permission was sought from the Tabligh leadership in India, the elders of the movement, to set up a purpose built centre, and consent was given. The advice which came from Nizamuddin was to find a place in which there were many Muslims already established, and where there was already a degree of familiarity with the Tabligh movement and with its aims and methods of operation. Dewsbury was selected as suitable, and the land on which the mosque stands was bought in 1972, from a private vendor. Construction began on the mosque in 1977, and the building was completed in 1980. The 'madrasa' was completed two years later in 1982. Many local Muslims and Tabligh sympathisers from further afield came and gave their labour and their expertise voluntarily to complete the building, while local labour was also brought in. The project was financed by contributions from individual Muslims, some of whom made gifts and others provided Islamic interest-free loans. There was no funding from Muslim governments or from Islamic banking or financial institutions. Tabligh supporters say that care is taken in accepting donations. Money would not be taken, for example, from a business person with a life style seen as doubtful from the Islamic point of view.

There are various activities at the mosque, some of which relate to its functioning as a mosque, and others arise from its position as the Tabligh centre. In its role as a mosque, naturally the primary function is the daily prayers, to which local people as well as Tabligh members and residents are welcome to come. The local community particularly joins in the prayer on Friday, when a Muslim is especially enjoined to pray in a mosque if he can. In relation to Tabligh, the mosque serves as a venue for the regular 'shura' council meetings where tabligh strategy is discussed and practical issues are decided. In particular, the governing council meets each Thursday. On a regular basis, travelling missionary groups are given their itineraries at the mosque, and returning groups report on their activities. Ishaq Patel describes



this as briefing and de-briefing. Visitors come from elsewhere in Britain, and from Europe three or four times a year when special gatherings are held.

Activities at the 'madrasa' are entirely devoted to its function of educating religious students. Its official title is 'Jaamia Talimul Islam', that is, 'Centre for Islamic Education'. There is no education specifically provided for local pupils, though local children are not barred from becoming students on the same terms as the students who come from farther afield. There are currently some thirty students from the local community among a student body of about two hundred. However, the Tabligh centre does not see it as its role to educate local Muslims. The centre's duty is to educate Muslims who will take wider educational and missionary duties, and will serve not just Dewsbury but the whole United Kingdom and the world at large. There are therefore no school classes aimed at ordinary students, though there is some Arabic teaching to enable Indian and Pakistani Muslims from among the community to read the Quran more easily.

The impact of Tabligh springs from the application in practice of the ideals to which it subscribes. Its intention is to produce a more pious Muslim community, and it must be said one which is conscious of its own identity and is less likely to relapse into the secular ways of the surrounding non-Muslim society. However, Ishaq Patel and other Tabligh members are at pains to stress that the organisation is concerned entirely and exclusively with religious matters. It is also a principle which is reiterated that Tabligh takes no explicit interest in politics and takes no view on political questions. This applies both to British politics and to homeland politics in India and Pakistan. That is a point which is frequently made. Tabligh would not support specific political candidates or political programmes or parties.

However, it should be said that there are recorded instances of Tabligh apparently taking a concern in local matters with a political dimension. In the 1987 school dispute in Dewsbury the point at issue was basically the right of white British parents to choose the school their children should attend, with the aim of selecting a school without an overwhelming majority of Muslim pupils. In his book, *Dewsbury, the School above the Pub*, Fred Naylor, an official of the libertarian group PACE (Parental Alliance for Choice in Education), who advised the white parents in Dewsbury, records a visit to Savile Town and a meeting with figures whom he takes to be Muslim leaders of the local community, including Mohammed Ishaq Patel. However, he also remarks that the visit was unannounced, and it may well be that Tabligh

people became marginally involved more as a result of their reluctance to turn their would-be interlocutors away than as the consequence of a desire to express an opinion (Naylor 1989: 94). In conversation, Ishaq Patel asserts that Tabligh has no view as an organisation on the establishment of schools, but that as an individual he sees no reason why the state schools should not be able provide for the needs of Muslim children, if the will exists. Failing that, however, he would incline in favour of separate Muslim schools.

On the issue of conflict between Muslims and their non-Muslim British neighbours, Ishaq Patel is positive that what Tabligh does actually conduces to harmony between the Muslim community and the wider British community within which it finds itself. Muslims who follow the programme laid down by Tabligh will present the face of a correct Islam, worthy of the admiration of non-Muslims, which can only conduce to mutual respect. Attempts at an ecumenical approach by Christian religious leaders have not in the past been met with much sympathy by Tabligh who believe that the truth of Islam excludes any kind of attempt to find common ground with other faiths. On the other hand, it is stressed that Tabligh wants Christians to be good Christians, just as it wants Muslims to be good Muslims. If this ideal is achieved, friction between the adherents of the two faiths will be dissolved. To fit in with the society in which a Muslim finds himself springs from the principles enunciated by Maulana Mohammed Ilyas. A Muslim will also be concerned to help his neighbour, whether that neighbour is a Muslim or a non-Muslim, and will look to the needs of the victim in a conflict, again irrespectively of religion.

Tablighis are sometimes described as Muslim fundamentalists, and that is a concept which has alarming overtones for some members of British society. Ishaq Patel dismisses the charge. He equates the concept of fundamentalism with that of extremism, and explains that it is no part of Tabligh's intentions to promote extremist ideas. What Tabligh wishes to do is to bring out the true faith of Islam, free from the accretions which it has acquired over the years, which has been according to Tabligh's standpoint obscured from view. True Islam, according to Ishaq Patel, has the characteristic of flexibility rather than rigidity, and can accommodate itself to coexistence with the host society in Britain. Islam is flexible, and adapts itself to circumstances, and the idea of a rigid religion with unalterable rules is imposed on Islam by hostile observers.

A Tablighi sympathiser and occasional activist unconnected with the day to day activities of the Tabligh centre, but familiar with Tabligh and its presence



in Dewsbury, provides an alternative picture which in some respects expands and amplifies the view given by Ishaq Patel. Mohammed Ali, who lives in Leeds, some kilometres north of Dewsbury, is in full time employment in a responsible but non-managerial position with British Rail. Nevertheless, he has found time to become involved with Tabligh activities. Mohammed Ali was born in 1933 in Kerala, in South India, to a local Muslim family. His mother tongue is Malayalam. The indigenous Muslims of Kerala are long established, and are linked by descent to Indians Islamised by Arab traders in the early years of the Muslim era, some of whom settled on the Malabar coast. He came to Britain in 1956, after living with an uncle who was in business in Rangoon, in Burma, following his father's death. He was educated and learned English and Urdu at school in Burma. He is a family man with adult daughters. Mohammed Ali recalls being interested in Tabligh in Burma in his young days, but became an active member of the movement in Britain in 1965.

Mohammed Ali recalls the Tabligh centre at Dewsbury when the mosque was a small temporary building and the present mosque was in the course of construction. In the past he has been assiduous in taking part in Tabligh activities, and has travelled for the Tabligh both in Britain and in Europe, but has not been so regular in his attendance recently, in the last two years or so, partly because of the pressure of other activities. However he has been a regular if less frequent visitor to Dewsbury. In Europe, he took part in a Tabligh mission across Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Czechoslovakia, staying in mosques, contacting Muslims and talking to them, and performing the Tabligh duties of bringing Muslims back to the essentials of their faith. Mohammed Ali bears out the suggestion made by writers about Tabligh that members see one of the purposes of Tabligh activity as the opportunity the members have to discuss the faith with each other while they are travelling or working together. He says:

Unless you go with the Tablighi Jamaat and experience yourself, it is very hard to put it across. We don't seek anything, and they don't give us anything. Just talk about religion, Islam, or about our duties, our duties to neighbours, our duties to friends and families. That's all we talk about. And there is no ill feeling, there is no bad talk. Which makes Tabligh a very old, devoted movement.

Mohammed Ali explains that while travelling in Britain for Tabligh the Tabligh groups will stay in local mosques, but that they will seek out mosques which are sympathetic to the Tabligh's ideas. These will tend broadly speaking to be Deobandi mosques. Local Muslims will explain to a visiting group which mosque is connected to which school of Islam, and which will welcome Tabligh visitors. Deobandi mosques are particularly connected with Tabligh. Mohammed Ali explains:

There is the Deobandi and there is the Barelvi movement, but the Deobandi movement is with Tablighi Jamaat, and we know the mosques there, and if we do go to different towns, these are the mosques where we go and stay. If I have to pray I will go there [to the Barelvi mosque] but if I have to go with Tablighi Jamaat, there are mosques which are available, so we don't have to irritate an other people. Religion doesn't teach you to irritate people. If they want to come, then welcome, and they can stay. But if they think that our stay is causing them any difficulty or problem then we don't bother. You see otherwise our aim in Tablighi Jamaat, the movement, which makes self-sacrifices for the benefit of our soul, has not the right way then.

Mohammed Ali explains the process of becoming involved with Tabligh: 'I started in Burma. Different learned people used to come to Rangoon, from Pakistan and different places. As I said I was with my uncle and I was a student. As I didn't have to work for my living, I had plenty of time. And Rangoon is a different place. You have all your speeches in different streets. There they have tables laid down, and all sorts of decoration, and there were loudspeakers and the learned people come at night, and there was already information, at so and so place there will be a speech about Islam, and that's how I got interested in that. And I used to go to different villages in Burma, [where there were Muslims]. Of course I didn't know anything about Tabligh then, I just went with the people, you see, and that's when I got first involved with Tablighi Jamaat. But after coming here [to Britain] in 1956, of course I didn't know anything about Tabligh at the beginning, there were hardly any mosques, hardly any schools, the contact was very limited. I had some friends, but my friends were English people, nice people, so I was cut off completely, more or less. And it was the first time of freedom in life, meeting people, going around, so I wasn't bothered about Tablighi Jamaat or anything, I was just bothered about making friends. But fortunately I came down to Leeds in



1961, and started on the buses. And I was always interested in doing things for people. . . . In 1965, really, we started going to Tablighi Jamaat, because some students came from Pakistan who were involved in Tablighi Jamaat, and they are the people who said, let's go to Dewsbury. I didn't know there was a movement until then. So we started going to Dewsbury, and then going to Leeds, to different houses, preaching, and inviting them. And the first mosque we had here near the university was a house converted . . . . And I was very much with the Tablighi Jamaat until about 1988, but for the last three years - I don't know the reason - I don't make regular trips, if someone invited me in Leeds to go to some place I would, but not to other towns and cities, though I used to go regularly, during Ramadan, go and stay out. . . . It gave not only spiritual guidance, but I felt a sort of pleasure and easiness when I go, because I was involved in so many things at that time, and complete relaxation, forget about everything. . . .'

Mohammed Ali conjectures that his less active involvement with Tabligh was the result of the other activities in which he has been increasingly been involved. If the British leader of Tabligh, Ishaq Patel, was able to theorise that a Tablighi should practise charity and concern for his neighbours, whether those neighbours might be Muslim or not, Mohammed Ali demonstrates that commitment in practice. He is a classic 'joiner', and has given himself energetically and unselfishly to community activities, on behalf of the wider British community as well as the Muslim community of his neighbourhood. In the Muslim context, he is the chairman of the Leeds Muslim Commonwealth, an umbrella organisation in Leeds which tries to bring together different segments of the Muslim community to provide a forum in which issues can be discussed, and in which the whole Muslim community is encouraged to participate, though that is not always, as Mohammed Ali comments, an easy aim to achieve. His home is in Headingley, and he has been active in efforts to build a mosque for Muslims in the northern part of Leeds.

In the wider British context, Mohammed Ali takes a sustained and responsible interest in community affairs. He is a lay visitor for the West Yorkshire police authority, and a member of the police forum, and also of the transport police forum. He is also deputy chairman of the regional transport authority's passenger committee in West Yorkshire. In his neighbourhood, he is a committee member of the Headingley community association, and acts as the association's 'contact officer', receiving and drafting letters on the association's behalf. He is also the coordinator of his local neighbourhood

watch scheme. He describes himself as an inveterate writer of letters to newspapers, and is a convinced and determined campaigner for an integrated transport service, both in the local region of West Yorkshire and in Britain as a whole.

In some respects, Mohammed Ali is not a wholly typical Tabligh sympathiser, since his interests obviously extend deeply into British society, and he does not typify the somewhat withdrawn concentration on religion more characteristic of the Tablighi posture. In another way, he is atypical, since he clearly takes an interest in British politics. And he also admits to having taken at the time when the Salman Rushdie affair was coming to a head an active interest in the politics of the relations between British society at large and the Muslim community. While the strongest condemnations of Salman Rushdie came from the Barelvi community of Bradford and elsewhere, and it was they who organised the notorious book-burning of a copy of Rushdie's 'Satanic Verses' in January 1989 for the benefit of press photographers and reporters, nevertheless Mohammed Ali, as a Deobandi, played a leading role in coordinating the campaign against the book in Leeds, and arranged for coachloads of demonstrators to go to London to join the mass demonstration against the book in London. He has written to newspapers opposing the nature of the American involvement in the Gulf crisis.

Mohammed Ali believes that Islam has something to offer British society, in the shape of a model of manners and social behaviour which the British could do well to emulate in some respects. He is philosophically critical of the western liberal concept of freedom, and suggests that in a society in which women are in moral danger, and in which frightful behaviour such as child abuse occurs, true freedom is not being enjoyed. He attaches the idea of freedom more firmly to the idea of living in a society which enables the individual to live a quiet and calm family life, in the awareness of a certain background level of social certainty and security. He also places great value on the ideas of thrift and providence. This of course is a model of society which in his view Islam can provide. But Islam is a model for others to emulate, in this view, and others need not adopt the religion. In this view western society has faults, but also has advantages. On the other hand, Mohammed Ali is not wholly optimistic about the ability of the Muslim young to withstand the attractions of some of western society's less desirable aspects.

Tabligh activists extend their work in Britain throughout the country. As Mohammed Shahid Raza puts it in his recent book, *Islam in Britain*: 'They are



spread all over Britain through the mosques and are well organised' (Raza 1991: 14). One of the mosques which gives its hospitality to Tablighi visitors and where local people carry out Tabligh activities is the Saddam Hussein mosque in Birmingham. The Saddam Hussein mosque, on the junction of Birchfield Road and Trinity Road in Aston, is a Deobandi mosque, whose basic constituency consists of Gujerati Muslims of Indian origin, either from India itself or from Gujerati Indian communities which had become established in Africa. The Kazi family, which took a leading part in founding the mosque and continues to play a central role in running it, came to Britain from Johannesburg in South Africa, while the one of the two young Imams of the mosque is from a family which has come to Britain from Zambia. The Saddam Hussein mosque recognises links with a handful of some four or five other mosques in Birmingham, which are also Deobandi, though do not necessarily serve a similar Gujerati clientele. There are also Deobandi mosques in Birmingham whose home community is Pakistani. There is no hierarchical structure between the group of mosques (July 1987).

The relationship between Tabligh and Deoband has been alluded to, but not discussed in detail. Deoband is the name of India's major Islamic university, situated in Uttar Pradesh in the district of Sahranpur, some 140 kilometres north east of Delhi, which is, as Francis Robinson puts it, 'now regarded by many as the most important traditional university in the Islamic world after al-Azhar in Cairo' (Robinson 1988: 4). Deobandi Islam is austere in its concentration on the essentials of the faith, and its insistence, introverted in some opinions, on the personal development of individual Muslims. It shares with other Indian manifestations of Islam the Hanafi legal school's interpretation of the scriptures and traditions. The founder of the Tabligh movement, Maulana Mohammed Ilyas, studied with Rashid Ahmed Gungohi, one of the two founders of Deoband, in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Ilyas was with Gungohi when he died in 1905 and remained devoted to his memory (Haq 1972: 82). The difference between Ilyas and the main stream of the Deobandi movement lay only in Ilyas's missionary instinct. 'A student of Deoband, he became disillusioned with the introverted Deobandis and wanted to project Islam in an extroverted manner', according to M.S.Raza (Raza 1991: 15). Naturally, then, the link between Deoband and the Tabligh movement remains strong.

Meanwhile, Muslims are often less than keen on what they see as a tendency by non-Muslim observers to divide up the Muslim population into a number of

different and even potentially antagonistic camps. The general view is that Muslims are united by the basics of the faith, which they all hold in common, and that is much more important than ways in which differences set them apart. On the other hand, there is antagonism, particularly between Deobandi and Barelvi views of Islam. These two are partially conflicting interpretations of Islam which arose in India in the latter part of the nineteenth century under the British occupation. The founder of the Barelvi school, Ahmed Reza Khan, was a contemporary of the founders of Deoband, but was strongly opposed to their repudiation of many of the elements of conventional Islam in India.

In his recent 'Islamic Fundamentalism in India' M.I. Agwani writes: 'What distinguished them [the Barelvis] from the rest was their zeal against the fundamentalist creed preached by the Deoband school' (Agwani 1986: 79). Deobandis feel that the Barelvis take from popular Islam too great an emphasis on the role of Mohammed himself, and that they venerate the Messenger of God if not too excessively then at least in the wrong way. They also reject what they regard as spiritual mediation, that is, the veneration of sufi saints and 'pirs', and the belief that there are those who may have a special access to God and may interpret God to man. They also deplore the popular customs and practices of the Barelvis, including the commemoration of the anniversaries of saints, feasts and devotional music, 'qawwal', and the belief in quasi-magical practices connected with the healing of disease and countering adversity. All this, the Barelvis on the other hand are determined to defend.

In the context of modern Britain, Deobandis and Barelvis play down their differences, as do other Muslims, such as the Jamaat-i-Islami, the strict and more overtly political group associated with the Pakistani teacher and leader Maulana Abul Ala Mawdudi. In the face of the greater contrast, between Islam and the ambient non-Muslim society, unity is perceived as a more valuable modality than diversity. In spite of all this, the followers of Deoband are quite distinct. M.S.Raza, writing from a Barelvi standpoint, comments: '[The Deobandis] . . . follow strictly the Ulama of Deoband and their interpretation of Islam. They have their own mosques and lead quiet lives. The Deobandis do not show the high veneration for the Prophet that the Barelvis do. Islam is a personal and not a social religion for them' (Raza 1991: 13).

The foundation of the Saddam Hussein mosque arose from the ambitious plan of a group of Deobandi Muslims in Birmingham to set up a purpose built mosque in the northern part of the city which would serve an existing local



constituency. The community which was in due course to establish the Saddam Hussein mosque had already set up a 'house mosque' in Aston, at 23 Arden Road, as early as 1967. A survey of attenders at Friday prayers at this mosque in 1987 shows a majority of Indians and those giving their origins as East African, who are again very likely to be Gujeratis of Indian origin, with none from Pakistan. These predominantly Gujerati Muslims, with their frequently East African origins, were not the only Muslim community taking root in Aston. A quite different Muslim community was simultaneously developing, and this manifested itself with the foundation in 1983 of a Barelvi mosque with a predominantly Pakistani and Punjabi clientele (July 1987). Neither community, however, would feel at home in the other's mosque, although as a number of Muslim informants explained, any mosque may be visited on occasion for prayer. It can be conjectured that the apparent predilection of the Gujerati Muslim community for Tablighi Jamaat and the Deobandi persuasion may be explained by the missionary nature of Tabligh. The East African Gujerati community, isolated from its Indian roots, would have been visited and influenced by Tablighi travelling missionaries. By 1975 some members of the Gujerati Muslim community in Aston had decided that there was a need for a larger mosque, since the arrival of families and a second generation of Muslims meant that the community had expanded in size.

There was an effort to raise funds within the United Kingdom, but with an estimate made in 1976 that the cost of the mosque would be half a million pounds, there seemed little prospect of successfully raising sufficient money. Trustees were elected to take on the responsibility of raising and safeguarding money for a mosque, and in particular two individuals were designated to approach the embassies of Arab countries in the hope of raising funds. These two were Hazratnia Kazi the current President of the Mosque Committee, who is the father of the current Chairman, Ahmed Kazi, and his colleague, S. Patel. There was no response from approaches to Saudi Arabia or to Libya. However, thanks to the good offices of Dr Syed Aziz Pasha of the Union of Muslim Organisations in London, Hazratnia Kazi and S. Patel were introduced to the Iraqi Embassy in London, where they found a more favourable reception. The Ministry for Islamic Education in Baghdad was the source of the funds which were in due course channelled to Birmingham, for the construction of the mosque on a site where planning permission was granted. Saudi Arabia's reluctance to provide funds probably arose from two considerations. First, the Saudis had already contributed handsomely to the

building of Birmingham's Central Mosque, and secondly there would be a degree of ideological tension between the Deobandi community of Aston and the Saudi authorities, which in principle support and fund Jamaat-i-Islami.

The building, designed by a British firm of architects, Edmunds, Gooding and Miller, was completed in 1988, and prayers were said in it for the first time on April 28 1988, the 51st birthday of President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Unhappily however, the mosque remains to this day partially incomplete. The reason for the late completion and unfinished state was basically Iraq's lack of available foreign exchange to continue to pay for the building during the Iraq-Iran war of 1980 to 1988. There was also a hiatus in relations between the mosque committee and the Iraqi embassy due to the appointment of a new ambassador. Difficulties also arose with builders contracted to do the work. The final cost of the construction of the mosque was two million pounds. While the main areas of the mosque were completed, the kitchens and other utility areas remain unfinished, as do planned ladies' areas. The mosque excludes women from prayers, and ladies' areas would only have been used in any case for special occasions, when women would be permitted in the mosque balcony, to hear a special lecture, for example. Even if the ladies' facilities were completed, it is unlikely that women would be permitted to use the mosque at times of prayer. Though some mosques do permit women to attend, the Saddam Hussein mosque's responsible officials believe there is a theological justification for their exclusion.

Ahmed Kazi, the mosque committee's Chairman, is an energetic and concerned man in his forties who devotes his full time efforts to the mosque at the moment. In theory the post he holds is not a full time one, but as a skilled worker in Birmingham, a lathe turner by trade, Ahmed Kazi is currently unemployed. Ahmed Kazi is tirelessly concerned about the welfare of the mosque and its efficient functioning. He looks after the physical upkeep of the building, and organises the maintenance of the mosque, some of which he is able to carry out himself, in addition to his role as a community leader and a major decision making figure within the mosque. He travels a good deal making wide contacts on the mosque's behalf. He has close relations with the local police, since security at the Saddam Hussein mosque has been a sensitive issue, especially since the Gulf crisis began in August 1990. In addition to his devotion to the mosque and to Islam, his second devotion is to cricket, where he is a regular player and active member of the Birmingham Civil Service cricket team, for which he takes the responsibility of arranging fixtures.



Ahmed Kazi speaks about the primary constituency of his mosque, and about its theological orientation: 'Broadly speaking they are Indians, from the state of Gujerat, most of them are from, and gradually we've seen an influx of the people from the country of Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and we've seen the Asian Africans. The majority of people who come to this mosque follow the theological teachings of the university of Deoband. There are some people who follow the other universities. Farouq Mohammed [an imam at the mosque] is also from Deoband, the imams of this particular mosque would all be from Deoband, Bahauddin [the other imam] as well. The majority in the Aston area, we would say about seventy per cent of the people are of that following, of the Deoband teaching'. But Ahmed Kazi, in common with other Muslims, deprecates the idea that the difference between Deobandi and Barelvi Islam should not be made too much of: 'Unfortunately, lack of education in theology has created what is termed a big split, and some people would take it that this is all a very big split. In fact from those who are learned in the scriptures and read the various books on theology, you will find that it is very minor'.

As to the actual attendance at the mosque, he continues: 'There are a number of people of the Barelvi following that come to the mosque, because they live nearby and the mosque is near for them, they would read all the prayers with us. Sometimes if there is a function that is held by the Barelvi sect then they would go to the function of the Barelvi mosque, but otherwise they would be here reading their prayers'. The Barelvi mosque, Ahmed Kazi explains, holds more festivals and celebrates more special occasions. However, he expresses tolerance and understanding of an alternative style of worship, and explains that though Deobandis do not celebrate anniversaries and festivals, such events do have a function in reminding people of their religious duties and acting as a peg to which to attach pieces of religious teaching. The inclination of Muslims to one school or another is formed by their background, however, and is not influenced by the availability of a particular type of mosque. 'We'll find that people will be inclined to a particular theological school before any mosque comes about. And you will find that even if the Deoband mosque is in the vicinity and there are Barelvis, some of them may not attend this mosque but would make the extra journey to attend their mosque which follows their teachings, but this only appears because of the lack of education and lack of understanding'.

Regular attenders at the mosque are about 80 per cent Gujerati Indians, or African Asians of Gujerati descent, while on Friday the proportions are reversed, as between Gujeratis and non-Gujeratis, since many Pakistanis and others who live in the neighbourhood will come for the Friday prayer who on other days might not pray at all, or pray in private. The Saddam Hussein mosque is a fine building, so is that a feature which attracts worshippers? Ahmed Kazi: 'Besides being handsome, also it's a purpose built mosque, and it does attract a lot of people, even the passing motorist or a chap going to work anywhere. It does attract people. The other reason we think we attract people at this mosque is that we provide a good service, keeping the place clean, ensuring that there is enough heating and ensuring the water is always hot, if they come to any particular prayer, there will be hot water and there will be clean towels for them. We find that those three things attract a lot of people'.

Tablighi Jamaat plays a significant role in the way the mosque functions. Ahmed Kazi explains that Tabligh visitors come regularly to the mosque in the course of their preaching and educational tours. Tabligh groups come to the mosque at regular intervals, roughly once every two weeks. They take part in teaching and discussions of Islam with local people. They are given hospitality in the mosque itself, which has washing and toilet facilities to enable visitors to stay. In addition, Muslims from the regular community at the Saddam Hussein mosque itself will sometimes go out on Tabligh tour of other areas, as part of the regular process of travel, discussion, and exchange of ideas which Tabligh is concerned to promote.

Bahauddin, the young imam of the Saddam Hussein mosque, is 29, and was born in Zambia, coming to Britain as a child with his family. He offers an account of Tabligh's activities: 'Every mosque involves itself with Tabligh. Tabligh in the sense that. . . Let me give you an example, you know how the Jehovah's Witnesses go from door to door and preach their beliefs, so they [Tabligh] do it in a similar way. But they don't go exactly to every man's door. They visit Muslim brothers, and they say to them come and join us and say prayers with us. This is the main thing, of the Tabligh. They try to inculcate that [people] must come to the mosque and say their prayers. It's purely voluntary, it's not an organisation in terms that you would see some kind of organised. . . There is an Amir, he is the head of the Jamaat Tabligh. For England he is in Dewsbury, [and internationally in Delhi]. And what they do, they are sort of elected heads to represent the people. And what they do is



they stress the importance of those people doing the work of the Tabligh that they must preach. . . They mainly concern themselves with those brothers who do not attend a mosque locally or who seem to have strayed further away from the religion, and they work on these people to try and bring them into the mosque.'

Ahmed Kazi believes that the closeness which develops between worshippers within the community of the mosque conduces to good relations within the community, even as between Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslims who lead a full religious life will, he says, show a good example of being 'good to your neighbour, good to your community, irrespective of colour, creed or religion. People say, we are segregated and we do this. . . It is not, it is the way we have been brought up that has caused this problem of, 'Oh he's Christian, he's white, he's black, he's yellow, he's so and so'. In the basics of Islam there is no importance of that, the importance is to coexist peacefully, to help each other in human nature's way, so that the bond between one another should be good all the time. Especially in one's needs and troubles, ailments and sickness, that bond should come then as well. That is always part of what you should impart to your fellow human beings'.

Does the ordinary attender at the Saddam Hussein mosque feel more identified with the Gujarati Muslim community as the result of his mosque attendance and the closer identification with Islam which prayer brings with it, or does it help him to relate to the wider community? In the words of Ahmed Kazi: 'The main thing is that if he makes the effort of learning about what he should do as a human being, no matter what his religion tells him that he should do, the knowledge would make him a better person, that he would integrate with everybody around him, and also say, 'yes, although I am originally from Gujarat, I am a Muslim, but also I am British, and I am also proud to be part of the community around me'. He shouldn't look in the narrow context, that 'Oh, I am a Gujarati, I shouldn't associate with him, he's a Pakistani, or he's a Bengali, or he's a Christian'. We encourage in this particular mosque, and especially on Fridays, we have invited Father Richard Hunt to attend the prayers, and one or two of our Imams have gone across, but on Fridays when the rest of the congregation see this English person coming, in his traditional Christian cloth, standing at the back, and being part of the prayer, surely it teaches them as well that they should have the tolerance which they may have lacked through lack of knowledge, so it's also important that community leaders and mosques take a little bit of a leading step'.

Imam Bahauddin makes this comment about the extent to which Muslim British residents have a feeling of British identity. 'The Muslims who live in this country feel they are British. They have all the rights that any British person does have. But when it comes to the religion, why should it make a difference that because he believes in Allah and in the holy prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), that it should be said to him that 'you are practising something else which does not make you British?' I think that's wrong. It's up to every individual, if you look, for example, in Great Britain, you have atheists, that don't believe in any sort of religion, then you have Christians, then within the Christian sect you have the Catholics and the Anglicans and so forth, then you have Muslims, then you have Hindus, then you have the Sikh, . . . and everybody practises their religion. If this way of thinking of the people implies that why don't they leave their religion and forget their mosques and forget their prayers, well I think that's wrong, because everybody has to believe in something. . . So in that respect, why should it bother anyone that Muslims practice their religion?'

The majority of the Gujarati community of Aston are British passport holders, and their residence in Britain as their chosen country of settlement is effectively of a permanent nature. Ahmed Kazi gives a clear statement about his feelings on the potentially divided loyalties of Muslims in Britain: 'I think a lot of people feel that because you originally come from a particular country, or your parents, that you should feel slightly inclined towards that particular country as well, because that was the original mother country for you, and although you live in a new home as far as your grandparents are concerned, a new country for them but the original country for you because that becomes the new country for you, then you should be proud to be attached to both. You'll find that a lot of Asians would stick to this idea that they should be proud to be part of the culture they live in, as well as attaching themselves to what we would term the mother country. . . I have never been to India or Pakistan, and I can claim my rights in both places, but more so for India because the majority of my ancestors are from India, and that link of family connection binds one to the mother country'. He also believes that Asian immigrants should make the effort to learn English. On the other hand, if Indian nationality laws were altered in a way that made it easier to hold dual nationality, he believes this would be welcomed among the members of Aston's Gujarati community who were originally Indian. Community members, especially of the older generation, take a strong interest in homeland



affairs, stay in touch with families, and send money, but as time passes British affairs are beginning to take precedence.

Bahauddin agrees that people take an interest in the politics of their homeland. But he also feels that British affairs start to be important to members of the community.

I think they stress more on what is happening within the country they live in. For example, if a Pakistani lives in Britain, then he is going to look at the situation here. But I think that first and foremost they are going to look to this country. Housing, employment, poll tax, you name it. In every household in Britain they all discuss the Gulf problem. This bombing of Ten Downing Street, it's the news, every one is talking about it.

The mosque also gives a certain amount of day to day help, in the zone of relations with British officialdom. As Bahauddin observes,

Of course, we help them. I myself have done that before. Mr Kazi is into that. Also other people who attend the mosque who have a good knowledge, or maybe who are well versed, or maybe they can speak fluently, they definitely help the other people, who are not so fluent in English. It is a great help to them as well, because [lack of English] . . . is a big barrier, that's what they feel like, so when they have somebody to penetrate this wall for them they feel comfortable and they feel more relaxed, and it helps them to fit in with the community. Not only the community but with the country, it makes them feel part, . . . to be British.

There has been some alteration in the way in which Muslims perceive their own identity, and their relationship to the British community, as the result of the political crisis in the Arab world which began with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the Gulf War of 1991. The mosque has been subjected to some trivial attacks. On the issue of whether Muslims can still feel fully aligned with British ideas under such circumstances, Ahmed Kazi comments: 'I think that recently they've become hampered in it, . . . because of all the crisis in the Middle East, and people using their religion to enhance themselves . . . has created a problem, and people say, I am no longer considered British, because my religion is put forward in front of me, first. A lot of them feel afraid, 'why should I be attacked, or why should I be insulted,

because I believe in a different religion?'. People are concerned that they may be perceived in a different way by the native British rather than having themselves changed their views, and in Ahmed Kazi's view the media has not helped by seeking out apparent tensions and exaggerating them, while some politicians have picked up similar issues. Bahauddin does not feel that the Gulf crisis has much affected the everyday life of the Muslim community. His own inclination is not to become involved in politics, though naturally he recognises the interest in the situation is intense. Some local Muslims, he believes have a feeling that what is happening in the Gulf is unjust to the Muslims. He does not believe that a wedge is being driven between Muslims in Britain and the native British population. But he does see some distinction in attitude developing between the Muslims and the majority community. There is, however, fear of hostility among the Muslims, though Bahauddin believes it is only a minority of the British who actually feel hostile towards Muslims.

Ahmed Kazi sees a clear difference between older generations and the young, who are either born in Britain or do not remember their original countries: 'The difference is that they don't think about the countries abroad. They think everything in Britain, everything has got to be British, the way of life, the way they go about things, there is everything British. With a little bit the Indian way of living, that's all it is, . . . even the style of dress would be everything copied from the British. But if they were coming to pray they would probably change. . . But their main heart would be in the British style, it's the country they live in. Although the culture would be there'. Young people do not in general want to learn Gujarati, or Urdu, adds Ahmed Kazi, though he himself was taught both languages during his South African childhood. There are however exceptions, and there was a gratifying response to the offer of Arabic classes at the mosque, which young people saw not only as a way of reaching a better understanding of Islam, but also as a key to bidding for good jobs in Arabic speaking countries, presumably in the Gulf. The mosque does not produce any publications, but would use by choice English and Urdu as its means of communication.

Meanwhile, Ahmed Kazi concedes that younger members of the community are statistically under-represented in the mosque's attendance. There may ultimately be a problem in finding enough people to take responsibility for running the mosque. For the next five or ten years the problem will not arise, but after that a situation could arise where the chain of tradition might be



broken. A particular problem for this Deobandi mosque may be that it is reluctant to enter very far into social life outside the sphere of worship. Other mosques have mixed too much politics with their religion, in Ahmed Kazi's view, though social activities are a way of linking the younger generation to the old. The mosque may also act in a limited way as an advice centre for members of the community, at least in the sense of directing them to the proper sources of advice and help. Bahauddin also believes that education in religious affairs at a young age helps to bind the younger people to their religion and to the mosque.

The mosque also encourages parents to take an interest in their children's education, and to attend parents' evenings. A local attempt has been made to start a Muslim school, and Ahmed Kazi conjectures the community would be divided evenly on the issue. A main purpose of a separate Muslim school would be 'to protect the girls from the English style of schools, from the openness'. Ahmed Kazi's own feelings on the issue are ambiguous, as he personally attended a mixed school and says he would still incline more towards that approach, if concession can be made on the issues of halal food and religious education. But he sees the other point of view, and feels he is beginning to appreciate more the argument for separate Islamic schools. He believes the issue of Islamic education should be approached slowly and carefully, and that groups of parents who want to rush into the establishment of separate Muslim schools should think over the issues involved carefully. That view is shared by Bahauddin who feels that if Muslim requirements are met, education in state schools is acceptable to Muslims. He does not worry about religious education about other faiths, as he explains, a Muslim should know about other religions, and especially about Christianity.

In conclusion, it should be said that the overall impression of contact with the network represented by the Deobandi mosques and Tablighi Jamaat is that its predominant emphasis is on an introspective concern with Islam, as a social religion affecting aspects of the lives of the British Muslim community. Its role is 'da'wa', the call or recall of Muslims to their faith. As regards the relationship of the mosques to the Tabligh organisation, the mosques stand as a relatively static network, fixed in space, which serve to focus local communities of Muslims sympathetic to the mosque's Deobandi orientation. On the other hand, the Tablighi Jamaat is dynamic and mobile, with its itinerant groups of preachers moving from one place to another, carrying both the doctrine they preach and a constant current of information from mosque to

mosque. Tabligh turns its back totally on politics and almost entirely on social affairs. Tabligh spokesman stressed that in its moral aspect their teaching enjoins Muslims to have a concern for all humanity, and not just their coreligionists. The mosques, on the other hand, as well as teaching moral concern, have a dimension of social involvement, taking limited but practical steps to help members of the community to relate to the British community at large, and expressing concern about the racial antagonism which is often felt by Muslims.

Most of the activities which Tablighi Jamaat and its Deobandi 'customers' are involved in fall firmly into what was described in the general introduction of this study as category three activities, namely activities designed to reinforce the internal coherence of an allogeneous group within the community. Meanwhile at the level of the mosques there are some activities which are aimed towards easing the relationship of Muslims with the majority community, and some emphasis on measures conducing towards a greater sense of citizenship in Britain, both of which would fall under category two. With their proscription of political activity, and their relatively aloof stance towards social affairs, category one activities, those which form part of broader patterns of action in which groups and organisations within the mainstream of British society also take part, are on the whole absent. This could be contrasted with the approach of Jamaat-i-Islami, which explicitly calls for the establishment of Muslim states for Muslim populations, and for Islam to organise itself to ensure the welfare and survival of Muslims where they are not in the majority (Ahmad and Ansari 1979). However, Felice Dassetto, looking at Tabligh from the European point of view, suggests that it would be a mistake to underestimate the organisation, and that it reacts and responds to a number of different environments, namely 'the exterior social and political environment, the religious environment, and the environment constituted by its more or less potential membership'. Dassetto continues: 'Our hypothesis is as follows: the Tablighis have established a complex organisation capable of managing simultaneously all connections with these multiple environments' (Dassetto 1988: 11). Gilles Kepel, meanwhile, commenting on Tabligh activities as he has observed them in France and in the Maghreb, sees Tabligh as a channel through which Muslims may pass to other and more active roles: 'In reality, the movement is an 'airlock' or a 'sieve': once reislamised by Tabligh, those who have a goal of becoming more



than just a 'praying machine' distance themselves and look for some activity which is intellectually or politically more rewarding' (Kepel 1987: 208).

However, it is hard to see what could be interpreted within the quietist programme of Tablighi Jamaat and the Deobandi mosques as working against the interests of broader British society. On the other hand, if the distinction between the public and private domain is narrowly interpreted by members of mainstream British society, then there could be points of strain. It was in the context of the Salman Rushdie affair that the majority community believed that the terrain of public agreement on the ground rules of social behaviour was being invaded by Muslim ideas. At the same time, Muslims felt that their private space was being encroached upon, by the majority community's insistence on upholding a very abstract good, the right to freedom of speech, against a very real and practical harm to Muslims. To take an issue which has caused less immediate passion but is if anything more pervasive, there are aspects of the way the Muslim community organises the position of women in the family and in society which some members of the majority society believe encroach on rights and duties applying to all citizens and which lie within the public domain. If the promotion of multicultural coexistence is an ideal, the interface between the public and private domains will need to be a field for research.

A problem could be the attitude of a majority community in which some members at least are determined to perceive problems in coexistence with a visible minority where none may in reality be. In June 1991, a policy document, prepared for senior police officers by London's Metropolitan Police Central Staff Policy Unit, was leaked to the Independent newspaper. According to the Independent, the policy unit warns that Britain's image as an increasingly tolerant multi-racial society may be hard to maintain. A survey of racial attitudes last year, according to the police document, found that 35 per cent of Britain's population did not want to live in a community where, as the newspaper puts it, 'ethnic traditions and beliefs coexist'. The police document refers to an 'increasing assertiveness in both a domestic and international context' of Britain's Muslim population. It adds that 'the potential for disorder should not be overestimated'. It should be added that the police document is not necessarily saying that Muslims will themselves be responsible for disorder. It adds: 'The Muslim community represents a highly visible and easily accessible target for racist or supposedly nationalist thuggery'. But it is the visible presence of Muslims which on any analysis may give cause to

trouble, in the view of the Metropolitan Police Force's policy analysts (Independent 17 June 1991). But in the last analysis, Tablighi Jamaat and the Deobandi community are a peaceful group whose only misdemeanour may be their visibility.

#### Progressive Youth Organisation (Tower Hamlets)

The Progressive Youth Organisation is a Bangladeshi group, based in Tower Hamlets, a local authority area of the East End of London, which includes Whitechapel and Spitalfields. These are historic areas which have been in the past the focus of previous waves of immigration, including notably the Jewish immigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Jews were followed by Cypriots, and preceded by Irish immigrants. The tradition of immigration into Whitechapel and Spitalfields was begun as long ago as the seventeenth century by the Huguenots, Protestant Christians fleeing from Catholic persecution in France. The traditional economic activity of the area, the garment industry, or 'rag trade' has passed from one community to another. If the area is in a sense 'hospitable' to immigrants, the other side of that coin is that Whitechapel and Spitalfields have been historically the focus of racial aggression, in which white racist groups, either informal groups of local origin or more formal racist organisations from outside, have systematically harassed immigrant communities. The demonstrations and counter demonstrations in the East End in the 1930s, which pitted the fascist followers of Sir Oswald Mosley against Jews and their liberal supporters, will be well remembered.

Today, Tower Hamlets contains a concentrated and self-contained Bangladeshi community, half of which, following local estimates, is composed of persons under the age of 25 who were born in Britain. Within that community the PYO, one of a number of Bangladeshi organisations, is a locally based group. The PYO is small and autonomous, with about three hundred young members of whom up to a third are girls and young women. It is run by a small leadership group, who place a strong emphasis on consulting the membership and on decision making by committee. It came formally into existence in 1979. It has the twin aims of anti-racist action and self-improvement for the Bangladeshi community. In contrast with the other two groups covered elsewhere in this study, it is on the one hand not part of a broad and spatially extended structure like Tablighi Jamaat and the fraternal



community of Deobandi mosques which provide the static structure within which Tabligh's peripatetic missionaries are able to work, and does not have the historical depth of the Tablighi Jamaat. Meanwhile, on the other hand, it does not have the social complexity of the Indian Workers Association, with its separate branches and diverging manifestations, which we shall discuss in the third part of this study.

Bengalis began to arrive in Britain in the late 1950s and the 1960s. They now constitute a discrete ethnic community, heavily localised in East London, but there are also Bangladeshi groups in the Midlands and the north, and Bangladeshis are also spread throughout Britain as restaurateurs. According to Social Trends (1991), which derives its information from the Labour Force Survey of 1986-1988, the Bangladeshi community as a whole numbers now some 108,000 people. The period of large scale Bengali migration into Britain was the 1960s and early 1970s (Eade 1989: 26). This was the same period which saw a major immigration of Pakistanis, but in contrast the Bengali community did not have a well-settled pre-existing basis on which to build. At the earlier stage immigrants were predominantly male. In more recent years the emphasis has been on the reuniting of families, with the result that the imbalance between men and women in the Bangladeshi community has decreased. A high percentage of Tower Hamlets total population is now of Bangladeshi origin, and of Bengali language and culture. The figure is locally estimated at about 40 per cent of the total, some 50,000 people.

Bangladesh itself, the country of emigration of the Tower Hamlets Bangladeshi Community, came into existence as a country only in 1971 as the result of the war in which the country won its independence from Pakistan. The term Bangladeshi is used to refer to the nationals of Bangladesh, or of matters pertaining to the country. Concerning events before independence, the term Bengali is more apt, referring to the inhabitants of East Pakistan, as Bangladesh previously was, who are of Bengali language and culture. The Bengali language and the cultural background of Bangladesh are shared with the Indian state of West Bengal, whose capital is Calcutta. However, it is religion which broadly divides independent Bangladesh with its new capital at Dhaka from Indian West Bengal. The rural areas which became East Pakistan at the time of the British partition of India in 1947 were predominantly Muslim. The population of modern Bangladesh is 85 per cent Muslim, with a Hindu minority. Meanwhile, Calcutta and West Bengal are now predominantly Hindu, though with a Muslim minority. Bangladesh is a predominantly village

economy, and is extremely poor, though that impression is exaggerated by the fact that many villagers live virtually entirely outside the money economy.

The history of Bangladesh has featured extensive population movements, and a 1973 estimate suggested that from 1961 onwards a net 150,000 people left the country each year (Nyrop 1975). The principal destination was India. In that context the scale of emigration to Britain has not been large from the point of view of the country of emigration. In addition, most emigrants to Britain have come from one area of Bangladesh, the province of Sylhet in the east of the country, bordering on the Indian states of Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya, while others have come from the nearby provinces of Comilla and Chittagong. The original impetus may have come from former Indian Muslims from Assam, who moved to Bangladesh in 1947, and may have had earlier British connections (Alam 1988: 27; Wahhab 1989: 6). One route out of agricultural low income, for Bengalis from the provinces which provide the source of emigration, has been seafaring employment. This has resulted in the settlement of Bangladeshi communities along the seafaring lines of communication to the east and west of Bangladesh, so that there are Bangladeshi communities in Singapore and Hong Kong as well as in London and the Gulf. Since the first migrants became established in London's dockside areas, the process of chain migration has ensured the continuing flow of migrants from Sylhet to Britain (Carey and Shukur 1985).

Sylhetis are clearly distinguished from other Bangladeshis and Bengalis. Their Sylheti dialect is well demarcated from literary Bengali and from other regional dialects. An urban Bangladeshi from Dhaka, and even more so a Bengali from Calcutta would regard the Sylheti people as rural and unsophisticated and their speech as rude and uncultivated. The ability to operate in the correct Sylheti dialect of Bengali has been a criterion in the use of interpreters for which the British authorities have not always appreciated the need. A standard Bengali speaker may have an attitude towards Sylheti speakers which is often less than helpful. PYO leaders explain that press coverage of the Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets in the early 1970s in which 'mainstream' Bengalis were encouraged to give their views of the Sylheti immigrants were a factor in increasing the determination of young Bangladeshis to organise themselves in order to be able to represent their own case. The highly localised regional origin of the Bengali community in the country of emigration may partially account for the cohesion and defensiveness of the Bengali community in Britain.



The community is spatially delimited and introspective, and its circumstances are relevant to the nature of the organisations which have come into existence within it. Stan Carey and Abdus Shukur have provided a study of Bangladeshi life in East London which takes a perceptive view. In their origins, the Sylhetis who came to Britain were not from the poorest sections of the population in Bangladesh, the landless labourers, but come from small landowning families. This was also the background which had provided the seafaring Bangladeshis of earlier years. The relationship of the Bangladeshi community with the homeland has altered over the years. The Bengali community, in common with other Asian immigrants, initially subscribed to what has become known, in Mohammed Anwar's phrase, as 'the myth of return': the more or less sincerely held belief held by immigrants that they would in due course return to their country of origin. That belief was eroded away during the 1960s and 1970s. The established community in London today is a homogeneous one, with few high-status members. With the arrival of wives and families, the original imbalance in favour of men is diminishing. The community tends as the result of these factors to be egalitarian and is inclined towards cooperation and self-help. Meanwhile, the Bangladeshis of Tower Hamlets face a continual problem of racial harassment, which has the effect of limiting their housing and employment options within the borough, since they face difficulties in certain areas and on certain housing estates (Carey and Shukur 1985).

Employment for Bangladeshis was at first limited to the garment industry, the staple economic activity of Spitalfields which has passed from hand to hand with successive waves of immigrants. Many of the firms are still owned by Jews or Cypriots, but there is increasing control by the Bangladeshis. There is a retail and service sector which caters for the needs of the Bangladeshis themselves. This comprises shops and services, including cabs, travel agents, video and music shops, and some financial services. Another field of employment is the restaurant industry. Centred on Brick Lane, this has adapted itself from a sector of the retail industry, when the cafés were aimed mainly at a Bangladeshi clientèle, into an enterprise aimed at a white clientèle. This has formed the basis of the national 'Indian' restaurant industry, which extends throughout Britain, where most of the owners and employees are in fact Sylhetis. However, employment opportunities have been severely restricted, and without the education which Bengali youth leaders feel the

local authority is failing to provide for the community, young Bangladeshis will not be able to stretch their ambitions wider.

Leisure activities for Bangladeshis are as limited as are work opportunities. Rest and relaxation at home is linked to the popularity of imported videos. In spite of the transformation of the restaurants of Brick Lane into an 'export industry' there are still cafés and social clubs where men play cards and talk. Younger men sometimes use local leisure facilities such as pubs and pool clubs, in spite of the social and religious sanction against alcohol. Women, on the other hand are largely restricted to the home, especially women of the older generation, though a few younger women work and many shop and visit friends. There are some Bengali newspapers, and a cinema where Bengali films and other Asian films are shown, and an increasing number of cultural events which may bring visiting performers from Bangladesh. The extremely limited range of leisure facilities for young members of the Bangladeshi community was one of the stimuli for organisations like the PYO, together with the limitation of educational opportunities, blamed by activists on the low estimate of the potential and abilities of Bangladeshi pupils by teachers. Meanwhile a difficulty which arises in connection with leisure again relates, as with housing, to the prevalence of racial harassment. The possibility of encountering hostility limits the places where it is possible for young Bangladeshis to go. Here again, the circumstances of the community influence the activities of Bangladeshi groups, which try to provide the young members of the community with leisure facilities while protecting them from danger in the streets.

John Eade has studied the political situation of the Bengali population of Tower Hamlets, in his book, 'The Politics of Community: the Bangladeshi Community in East London' (Eade 1989). He explains that the 1981 census showed that Bangladeshis had become concentrated in Tower Hamlets to a much greater extent than elsewhere in London. Unofficial estimates of their numbers made by local activists in the early 1980s ranged as high as 24,000. At the end of the 1980s, one pressure group claimed that Bangladeshis constituted half the population of the Spitalfields Ward, an area of high concentration of Bangladeshi immigrants to the north of Whitechapel Road which includes the old market areas. During the 1970s, as John Eade puts it, 'the impact of poor environmental and housing conditions, industrial decline and rapidly increasing proportion of Bangladeshi settlers was felt most acutely in Spitalfields . . . The area could be seen as a particularly dramatic



illustration of 'inner city' decline evident elsewhere in London and other British urban centres' (Eade 1989: 29) Housing and education were and are today major concerns of the Bangladeshi population, with its young age profile. 'The Bangladeshi population in Spitalfields was highly mobile, predominantly young and largely located in different sector of the housing structure from white residents' (Eade 1989: 28).

Social action in Tower Hamlets relating to the Bangladeshi Community began when the Tower Hamlets borough council took the decision in 1975 to support what was described as an 'area deprivation research project', in conjunction with the Greater London Council and the Home Office. The terms of reference of the project were as follows: '(i) to coordinate and bring forward local authority programmes, (ii) to carry out action programmes to meet the special needs of the area, (iii) to improve communication between the residents, local authorities and statutory agencies, (iv) to involve the public and mobilise their active participation, and (v) to carry out research in order to learn lessons of general application (Crawley 1979, quoted by Eade). John Eade notes that this project was 'more successful in mobilising local participation, encouraging the establishment of community groups, and promoting debates about local 'needs' than in introducing local authority programmes' (Eade 1989: 30)

It was in this context that a group of young Bangladeshis came together to set up the Progressive Youth Organisation, with the aim of providing a focus for Bangladeshi young people, who were perceived as being at risk in the streets. The founding group believed that the young Bangladeshis needed an organisation which could help to create a coherence among the younger members of the Bangladeshi community, enhance their sense of identity, and help towards attaining educational success and gaining access into the world of employment. The PYO's Annual report for 1988-1990, as of June 1991 the most recent publication, gives the following account of the PYO's origins: 'The roots of the Progressive Youth Organisation go back to 1973 and originated from a group of young people who were then involved with the United Welfare Association, an educational and cultural organisation. As more people became involved the need for a formalised organisation was recognised'. Extensive quotations from this report will follow.

In 1979 the PYO was born and registered with the Tower Hamlets Area Youth Committee. The organisation steadily grew to become one of the

strongest formed groups in Spitalfields. Over the years PYO has been actively involved in youth work not only in the immediate area but also in Tower Hamlets as a whole, nationally and internationally (PYO 1990).

A PYO activist and former chair of the organisation, Ayub Ali, who is a social worker in Tower Hamlets, explains that the PYO in the earlier 1970s was not a formal organisation, but was already a visible group of people who had come to know each other through shared attendance at adult education classes. But the spur to the formal establishment of the organisation was the death of Altab Ali, a Bengali youth killed in a racial incident in May 1978.

Ayub Ali explains in interview:

When Altab Ali was killed, there was a huge outcry in the community, and the youth in particular decided to mobilise the community by forming themselves into various youth groups, and it was at that time that PYO decided to formalise its structure, and it was in 1979 that they adopted a constitution and got a committee, and since then it has been operating on that basis. Very little has changed, basically [it continues to] fight against racism, help young people with educational, recreational facilities, so that they are able to develop a sense of Bengali identity and be proud of it. Work for educational development, promotion of education within the community, a strong emphasis on education. PYO sees education as a vehicle for social change, for the individual as well as the community as a whole. So there has been a strong emphasis on education.

Who were the PYO activists? Ayub Ali explains:

What we have been doing right from the beginning has been emphasising that individuals who are involved with PYO, who came from a non-academic background, one not in universities and colleges, and then decided to do community politics, and these were people who were working in the rag trade, but because of a practical necessity they were drawn into community politics, but we realise that we don't have all the skills and knowledge that we had in order to be effective community workers, so some of us who were involved at the beginning decided to improve ourselves. And this is where I think I fit in, because when I started to be involved with PYO I didn't have any qualifications



whatever. And I decided on attending evening classes and a few other colleagues were involved at that stage.

The PYO report goes on to detail the vicissitudes of funding and support which set the scene for the organisation's present beleaguered position. Labour lost control of Tower Hamlets in 1986 to the Liberal/SDP party, now transformed into the Liberal Democrats. The result was the withdrawal of grants, and the ending of a period of proliferation of Bangladeshi organisations which the availability of support grants had made possible. Other organisations were set up during the same period as the PYO, including the Bangladesh Youth Movement, the Bangladesh Youth Front, the Young Muslim Organisation and Bangladesh Youth Approach. The Federation of Bangladeshi Youth Organisations was an federal group coordinating the agendas of the individual groups. Many Bangladeshi organisations have now ceased to operate because of the withdrawal of funds, and the PYO is one of only a few which remain. The umbrella organisation known as THARE, Tower Hamlets Association for Racial Equality also continues.

The PYO report explains:

In the mid 1980s PYO was funded by both the ILEA [Inner London Education Authority] and the Tower Hamlets Inner Area Programme [THIAP] and employed five full time staff along with part time workers. In 1987 the THIAP funding ceased and three staff were made redundant. Despite this the organisation continued to grow and expand its activities. In 1988 the PYO moved into new premises at the Davenant Centre, where along with the five night per week youth club it has developed and sustained many innovative pieces of work. The demise of ILEA, our main sponsor, may prove fatal to the organisation. Tower Hamlets Education Department has declined to take over ILEA's role, and has withdrawn the core funding needed to maintain the premises and infrastructure.

The prevalence of racial harassment, threats, and of actual attacks in Tower Hamlets has been a theme which recurs in all studies of the situation faced by the borough's Bangladeshi community. The need for solidarity and concerted action against the threat and the reality of racist attacks was one an important impetus to the setting up of the PYO. That situation has changed little in the twelve years of the PYO's existence. A police report covering 1990 suggests

that in that year 289 racial incidents were reported in Tower Hamlets, which resulted in 30 arrests (Guardian 27.4.91). A dissatisfaction with the attitude of the police is one of the concerns of the organisers of the PYO. Ayub Ali believes that the situation in Whitechapel at the present time is potentially explosive, and that there is the potential of urban disorder centred on Brick Lane of the kind previously seen in Toxteth and Brixton.

The essence of the problem, Ayub Ali feels, is the existence of a young and systematically disadvantaged non-white proletariat which is being antagonised and criminalised by the activities of the police. Ayub Ali explains about the anti-racist work and other activities of the PYO: 'Community development work in conjunction with other institutions, fighting racial attacks and institutional racism, campaigning against discriminatory policies of the local council. Sports activities, recreational activities for young people who otherwise don't get anything from the local state. A bit of self help and community development'. The aim of the PYO, and its conception of its role as the rescue of young Bengalis from the dangers and difficulties which surround them is set out by the PYO report: 'These young people have the difficult task of trying to grow up in a diverse culture with pressure to conform and succeed in many different and often opposing spheres. They face racism and deprivation as well as the temptations of inner city life, i.e. crime and drug abuse. Violence and crime are on the increase as the pressures increase. The authorities and the media are well aware of the situation but seem unable to reverse the trends. The few resources are often ill-targeted and the social workers rarely have the understanding or commitment to work with the youth'.

The PYO is also conscious that antagonism between young Bangladeshis and the police is leading to potential problems, and attracted over a hundred professional participants to a conference on the young members of the community 'at risk' of care orders or other legal proceedings concerning them. The PYO report comments: 'Factors of deprivation, racism and the failure of the educational system to meet their needs has resulted in this situation. The organisation had been aware for some time of the street scene that had been developing, the concern within the community and agencies such as Tower Hamlets Intermediate Treatment (for young offenders) who have been collecting data on incidents of police caution and similar court records. The PYO was alarmed at the lack of response from statutory agencies such as the Intermediate Treatment department, who did not have the cultural



understanding or connexions, or the Bangladeshi organisations who did not have the experience to respond to this new and alarming situation'.

A central feature of the PYO's activities is its youth club, providing a place for young Bangladeshis to come after school or college, and allowing them to have a place in which to relax, in which they feel at home, and in which they do not feel menaced by their surroundings, and hopefully avoid as much as possible of the risk of getting into trouble. Into unstructured sessions of music and table tennis, youth workers introduce activities and projects, including discussions of issues of concern such as politics, religion, sexual attitudes and the dangers of drugs and Aids. A particular concern of the PYO is to be able to reach out to young Bangladeshis who have not been attracted to come to the club. The ideal is that such young people should be contacted by an outreach worker. However, the PYO is not now able to do as much of this kind of work as its organisers would wish. The report explains: 'The young people themselves are attempting to shape their lives and that of the community. Much of the work is concerned with enabling them to voice their opinions and influence the rapidly changing situation. The cafes, pool clubs, street corners, music shops playgrounds and local estates are the places where the work is carried out. Some of the places are territorially owned by the young people and outsiders are not welcome. Others are tucked away in the back of mini-cab offices or similar establishments. In these places the young Bangladeshis can be themselves. It is important that the PYO has a presence in these places so that contact can be maintained and when difficulties arise workers are on hand to help. Unfortunately the need for workers in this area is immense and the PYO's stretched resources can sometimes only observe and react to crisis'.

Another section of the PYO report concerns the work which the organisation has been able to do with girls and young women, a concern which the organisation prioritises, recognising that limiting its scope to boys and young men is not appropriate in the changing circumstances of the Bangladeshi community in London. Girls need help in coping with the more emancipated circumstances in which they are inevitably going to find themselves in some aspects of their lives, they are demanding more autonomy which may bring clashes within the traditional family system, and they may even find themselves 'at risk' in much the same way as the young male members of the community. The PYO's management posed two questions to itself about how work could best be done with young women. These were, first:

Given the cultural restrictions and the domination of male workers how could the work develop inside PYO premises and with no senior female support?.

The other pressing question was:

How could the work be developed with young women rather than girls? Experience showed that it was difficult to target over 12s, and this group had the most need.

The problems were solved by approaching existing social agencies working with women, and a girls section holding separate meetings was successfully started in November 1989 after some earlier experiments. The report has this to say on the need and the response: 'Over the past year it has become evident that a small but growing number of young women have been playing truant and hanging out on the streets, these young women are rebelling against their parents and their culture. They are isolated by these actions from their community and in danger of getting into situations that they cannot handle. [Social workers are] developing strategies to meet this need and also looking at new and alternative ways of working with young women. . . This work will become more necessary in the future as young Bangladeshi women demand more autonomy. This can be seen in older British Indian and Pakistani communities.

The PYO believes it is appropriate to address young people as a means of influencing the Bangladeshi community as a whole. This is the case for two reasons. First, the young people who have been born in Britain are often the effective intermediaries between the Bangladeshi community as a whole and British society, and secondly, the future of the community lies in the hands of the young. On the first point the PYO report says: 'In the past years need and resources have dictated that most of our energy has been directed to youth work. Help and advice previously given directly to adults now is given via the young people who often bring family problems to the workers who help them to deal with the situation either themselves or by referral to a more appropriate agency. Young Bangladeshis often are the negotiators for family and community. Their familiarity with the English language and institutions makes this appropriate and as a result young people are more active in community matters than is usual in our society'. Secondly, the PYO is deliberately fostering leadership among the younger generation: 'Where appropriate, work



is developed with a specific group, and this may lead to offering a residential experience. Recently we have been working with young people who show leadership potential. At one residential [session] these young people spent time identifying young people's needs in their community and how they could respond. This group along with young Bangladeshi part time social workers are now meeting regularly as a support group. The potential of this group's impact on the Bangladeshi youth scene in Tower Hamlets cannot be [overestimated].

The themes of the PYO's origins and its fields of activity are taken up in interview by the organisation's current secretary, Shafiq Islam. Shafiq Islam is 32 (June 1991), and came to Britain in 1970 as a child. He is a social worker in the area. He comments: 'The important thing to remember was, if you look at the struggle, from the early seventies . . . towards the late seventies, that was a decade where there was a culminating period, if you look at the racist backlash by the national front and the British Movement, skinheads roaming down Brick Lane, and terrorising people. So that is the period which gave rise to voluntary organisations like the PYO: people getting together, and basically, initially it was a self-defence organisation. That came to a peak in 1978. After that, we as the PYO, as a group of people, mainly young Bangladeshi men in their early twenties, or probably in their teens, got together. And that was the primary objective, to defend the community against the racist backlash. That was the primary objective, nothing else. Gradually what we started to do is to look at the other needs that we had, mainly the young people, but also the community at large. We started to look at the educational training, employment, social needs and welfare and so on. Then we started to concretise the organisation, and the constitution formed and so on, and we started to look for some sort of basis, in the form of premises. Then we started to run advice sessions, especially for people who were unemployed or homeless. There was a lot of immigration work . . . and people informally, with no training whatsoever, gradually got into it, and began referring cases to professional organisations and solicitors'.

In the first instance, the PYO was run by its founder members on a completely voluntary basis. Then, however, a relationship with the then Labour-controlled local authority began to develop. The current PYO chair, Abdus Salam, aged 34, who has been in Britain since 1969 and who was himself one of the founding group, takes up the story. The earliest meetings of the group which became the PYO took place at Abdus Salam's own flat in the

neighbourhood, with a group of people who came together to discuss their common concerns and principles, with voluntary contributions towards the expenses which were incurred. The meetings were held in other paces round the neighbourhood, including shops and workshops owned by Bangladeshis. Abdus Salam comments: 'Initially it was absolutely voluntary. We ourselves paid money from our own pocket to buy stationery etcetera, before 1979. By 1979 we became registered under the youth service, so they used to give us some funds in terms of the leisure activities, and social and educational activities, and then like the community as a whole [we were] . . . taking part in campaign work against racism and to get equal rights and shares from the local authorities and so on. So we developed a federation, the Federation of Bangladeshi Youth Organisations [FBYO]'. John Eade describes the complex factional struggle for leadership within the Bangladeshi Community which took place in the early 1980s, in which the FBYO played a part (Eade 1989: 35). That process, which involved both the loyalties and links which members of the Bangladeshi community had brought from home, as well as new alliances forged in Tower Hamlets, took place at a different level from the PYO's day to day activities. However, it was connected with the process of attracting funds from the local authority.

An important move for the organisation was when it took over the premises it occupies today, in the Davenant Centre, a refurbished historic building in the Whitechapel Road. From 1979 until 1989 the PYO had its base at the Montefiore Community Educational Centre in Tower Hamlets, and in the earlier 1970s ILEA took a financial interest in the voluntary sector in Tower Hamlets, providing grants for activities which it judged fell within its scope. Some seven or eight distinct organisations joined together to form the FBYO, which collectively proposed a deal to Tower Hamlets Initiatives, looking for funding for their activities and to pay full-time staff. When the Montefiore Centre was closed, the PYO was one of a group of organisations which took the decision to occupy premises at the Davenant Centre, a building controlled by a trust which was formed to own and run the building, purchased and renovated by the GLC (Greater London Council) before its demise. The Davenant Centre has a management committee on which the PYO is represented. But it has now been made clear to the PYO that it must continue to pay the agreed running expenses or it faces eviction. In this way the withdrawal and phasing out of the various grants which the PYO enjoyed from ILEA and the GLC, both London-wide bodies which were abolished in the



1980s by the Conservative government, and the curtailment of support from Tower Hamlets, which changed political control from Labour to the Liberal Democrats in 1986, now face the PYO with a grave problem of sheer survival.

At this stage in its history, the PYO fulfils a community need, and if it were to succumb to funding difficulties it would be missed. Meanwhile, Shafiq Islam and Abdus Salam return to the theme of the importance of the organisation's educational and anti-racist activities, which continue to be as much the main thrust of the organisation today as they were in the PYO's earlier days. It is the relationship of Bangladeshi youths to the police, which prompted the recent conference on Bangladeshi youths 'at risk', which concerns Shafiq Islam: 'The most recent trend, over the last five years, is the mass incrimination of young Bengalis, especially Bengali boys in their teens, who are being stopped and searched. The 'sus' law, the old 'sus' law, which used to operate in Brixton and Handsworth and Tottenham, is being operated here now. Young Bengali boys are being continuously and consistently stopped, searched and arrested, for no apparent reason. And we are dealing with lots of cases. . . ourselves and other voluntary organisations. . . , the injustice of the police, the judiciary and so on'. There have been some changes, though improvements in the relations with the police have been largely limited to what Shafiq Islam dismisses as the cosmetic provision of community liaison facilities. Abdus Salam adds: 'I do not personally think, structurally, there is any change in terms of the local government policies or the immigration policies. To me it is the same. There are some superficial changes in terms of local authorities, training and jobs, to some extent, but there is not much change. Although we are fighting from 1970 to 1990, but we are marching in the same place in terms of principle. . . It is very difficult to combat racism in institutionalised [form], this is very problematic'.

At the same time the PYO leadership rejects the charge that it is itself being racially exclusive in providing a framework intended to help Bangladeshi youth. Shafiq Islam insists that: 'One thing I must add is that even though we as a black organisation in Tower Hamlets are trying to fight for the rights of the Bangladeshis, we are not exclusively doing that. We have membership from different communities, Caribbean, even white people use our facilities. And we would not like to alienate the traditional white East End community, who are working class and in many respects powerless. They are slightly better off than we are, but we recognise that it's very important to work in a harmonious way. Unfortunately the system, the media, and the present

leadership of the local Council is not allowing us to do that, but one of our objectives is to ensure that we in Tower Hamlets live and work harmoniously. It could be a utopian ideology, but this is something we would like to achieve. . . In many respects there are similarities amongst our lifestyle, amongst employment and education. White East Enders don't fare much better educationally, they didn't, because even the old ILEA has done very little for any working people'.

Housing is another subject of continuing concern, on the grounds that Bangladeshis are suffering from racist practices built institutionally into local government procedures. Ninety per cent of the families who have become homeless in Tower Hamlets are Bangladeshi, and many of these have been living in poor conditions in the kind of bed and breakfast accommodation which local authorities use as a stopgap measure. PYO officials feel that Bangladeshi families are offered the worst of the available housing by the Council. In addition, housing occupied by Bangladeshis is allowed to fall into disrepair, according to PYO observers. The allocation of housing has been a subject of particular complaint. In proportion to their numbers as a proportion of the population, Bangladeshis are made fewer housing offers. This is taken as evidence of racist practices within the appropriate Council departments. On the other hand, the PYO believes that it is as a result of its pressure, as well as the efforts of other campaigning organisations, that there are now Bengali speaking housing officers, as well as other social workers, which is improving the situation.

In terms of education, the current PYO leadership points to the increase in the number of bilingual teachers, including some who have come from Bangladesh. This is regarded as a step in the right direction but the PYO's attitude to this is ambiguous for a number of reasons. First, they believe that it may be more desirable for people from the local community in Tower Hamlets to be trained as teachers, which develops local talent. But second there is also a danger perceived by the PYO that mother tongue teaching in Bengali may be a distraction from the problem of underachievement in mainstream educational subjects. Bengali should be offered as an available language for study on the same basis as European foreign languages. Underachievement, not merely in languages but in other academic subjects, is a danger. Certain schools, the PYO feels, have a high proportion of Bengali pupils, and do not expect high achievements from their pupils. Some schools in Tower Hamlets are, it is alleged, causing failure by Bangladeshi children by expecting only the



lowest of academic achievements from them. It may be these same schools who are offering a not particularly demanding standard of teaching in Bengali. Teachers, head teachers and governors are dismissive of Bangladeshi children's abilities.

The PYO wants Bangladeshi children to be given equal educational opportunities. The allegation is made that Bangladeshi children achieve more in schools outside the borough, where they are not marked out as underachievers. The PYO activists are unimpressed by schools which may teach Asian music and dance, but seem unconcerned by the failure of pupils to achieve examination successes in GCSE subjects. The PYO, together with other Bangladeshis concerned with the council's youth service have begun a supplementary school for Bangladeshi young people in Tower Hamlets, to help with homework and give additional classes in academic subjects. This operates three days a week in a hall annexed to the Davenant Centre. The school is at the moment able to offer extra tuition in English, mathematics, biology, physics and chemistry, at GCSE standard and at A-level to about fifty pupils, as well as effective mother tongue teaching. The PYO acknowledges that some Bangladeshi pupils do go on to higher education, but sees this as the result of the efforts of voluntary groups like themselves, and of the determination of parents. But for the majority, low expectations lead to low results. Inability to communicate is a problem for some recently arrived Bengali speaking children, but even British born Bangladeshis who are native speakers of English suffer from poor teaching and lack of motivation.

On policing, housing and education, the obvious response by an organisation such as the PYO would be to take a political stand. Its leaders say that as a campaigning organisation they naturally do take an interest in politics, though as an organisation the PYO is non-party political and does not commit itself to the support of a particular party. The leadership is, however, very critical of Bangladeshis who have allowed themselves to become associated with the Liberal Democrat administration in Tower Hamlets. Bangladeshi Democrat councillors are variously criticised as dupes and stooges of a basically white political organisation. The PYO does not believe that the current local administration in Tower Hamlets is concerning itself with Bangladeshi needs and priorities. Abdus Salam and Shafiq Islam themselves admit to a personal leaning towards Labour. On the other hand they are also critical of the old pre-1986 Labour administration in Tower Hamlets, which they say was inactive and also unconcerned with local needs. At the national level the Labour Party

is criticised for having been associated with the introduction of strict immigration laws. The PYO leaders would welcome a Bangladeshi member of parliament, but are wary of some of the obvious pitfalls. For example, they say that any failure or inadequacy on the part of a Bangladeshi MP could reflect unfavourably on the community as a whole. In addition, the idea is rejected of choosing a black political candidate on the grounds of colour rather than ability.

Another issue of concern is religion. The Bangladeshis are Muslims, and the PYO treads a delicate line in respect of religion. A dismissive attitude towards religion could alienate older members of the Bangladeshi community. It would have a particular effect on the PYO's work with girls and young women if it was perceived as in any sense an anti-religious organisation. On the other hand, the PYO does not see it as its business to encourage religious observance. Its leadership tends to be secular in its attitudes, and it does not collectively organise any religious activities. Shafiq Islam: 'We neither encourage nor discourage people. Per se we don't undertake any religious activities, although we respect it. If the members want to have any religious celebrations we do that. We celebrate 'eid' with parties and that sort of thing. It is part of our culture and religion. If people want to, they are encouraged. But we do not dictate to them as to what they should do or shouldn't do in terms of religion. We try to be as secular as possible, but there are certain practices that we have to respect, in terms of the local Bangladeshi parents, the families the young people come from. There is a certain ethos that we must observe, in terms of the activities. We must not do things where we are going to get into direct confrontation with the parents, who are religious and would lose faith in us, therefore we don't want to go against religion. For example we do have music and discos and things like that, if the young people want it we do, but we are very . . . It's like walking on a tightrope actually, it's very sensitive, especially amongst Bangladeshi parents who are Muslim. There is what you might call a conflict between the young people and their parents. We don't conduct any religious activities, but we don't discourage them either'.

Abdus Salam adds: 'I have a different view. . . I personally try to tell young people that to respect one's religion is very important. Like if you don't respect your religion, you won't be able to understand other religions, like the Christian religions, the Jewish, etcetera. So I do talk with them about the significance of observing the religious activities, like the 'namaz' [prayer] and fasting and so on etcetera. So this is on the individual level, or sometimes



small group discussions. I feel it is my duty to raise their awareness of observing the religious activities such as 'namaz' and fasting and other things. But obviously I do not force them. It is up to them to decide what to do. . . . But I do not get on with them all the time. . . . Because there is a lot of difference between my understanding and their understanding. For example they want a mixed club, but we as a community organisation have close links with the community. So therefore the community doesn't want mixed activities, and we do maintain this standard, though we provide similar activities for the girls'.

The PYO's leaders have firm views about the desirability of preserving the Bengali identity of Bangladeshi youths. Shafiq Islam comments: 'On the whole, young people are going back to their roots. Young kids who were born and brought up here and rejected Bengali as their day to day language are going now to learn Bengali, of their own free will, not being coerced by their parents or pressurised by people like us. . . . So there is an amount of willingness on their part. If you ask my personal opinion, I would believe that people should be given the choice and that people should be encouraged to learn Bengali, because that is part of the culture. From our own experience again, we are not accepted by the white community if we become 'English', because we cannot change our colour, we cannot change our eating habits, and so on, even our religion, so therefore we are rejected. At the same time we are rejected by our own community, by our family and friends and society, so therefore it is very important. In fact I think our own culture, anybody's culture, plays the greatest role in their day to day life. The young people . . . the overwhelming feeling that we see is that they want to be regarded as British, as Bengali British. They want to retain their identity and culture, and at the same time they want to be treated equally, like any other British person, regardless. So that is the sort of messages that we get. If you look at their day to day activities they are no different from a white East Ender kid. . . . There is a lot of acceptance, by the young Bangladeshi kids, towards being British, and becoming part of the system. But at the same time we see they are being rejected by the system. That feeling of rejection, on which we hold regular sessions. . . . they are becoming politicised by their own experience. They have learned the hard way that they are not accepted'.

Ayub Ali also has strong views on the importance of preserving the distinct Bengali identity of young members of the Bangladeshi community: 'First of all they are Bengali, and they have a right to know what that means. . . . We

wanted to give our young people a positive identity so that they proud of themselves. . . . Unless you feel positive about yourself, you are not going to be effective in anything that you do. And if fighting racism is about fighting colonial attitudes and tendencies and so on, then one needs to know about oneself, because it is linked with history. You have to make a sense of your own origin and where one is coming from, and why one is in this kind of a mess that one finds oneself in. . . . It is an unhealthy thing for an individual not to be aware of and not to appreciate his own racial, ethnic and cultural origin. Now here our view is that no matter how westernised you are, how educated you are, how successful you are, you still remain a Bengali, a black person, in the eyes of the dominant culture. And if this is going to be the case, then you might as well know who you are and where you belong, rather than pretend that you have become an Englishman, because you are not going to be accepted. And it's not good for you anyway to be accepted as an Englishman because you are not: you have a different culture, you have a different background and so on. So that's on an individual level. On a wider community level, we felt that it is important that our youngsters are told about their past, about their history, about their origin, because we want a continuity. We don't want the Bengali heritage, the Bengali identity to be lost. So it is a combination of things that we felt, that drove us to this type of work initially. . . . It is becoming even more crucial and more important now, because we have seen . . . young people growing up in this country, going to local schools and so on, with the same kind of expectations as any other local kid. But still in the eyes of their white peer group, they are 'Pakis', and they can't make sense of it. . . . We feel that Bengali kids have a right to know who they are'.

And Ayub Ali also takes a theoretical view of the role of preservation of ethnic identities in the context of what is being attempted by organisations like the PYO: 'Until the early seventies the assumption generally in the social policy field was that you don't have to do much for the black and ethnic minorities, it's a question of time, gradually they will assimilate into the mainstream of society and everything will be fine, so the tendency was to do nothing. But that was proved to be an utterly misplaced assumption. Instead of assimilating into the indigenous culture and society, what was happening was that black people were developing their own communities and enclaves as a way of coping, because the indigenous society did not accept them. No matter how willing and able the ethnic minorities were in terms of taking part in the mainstream, the mainstream society did not encourage or welcome them. So



assimilation did not take place and there were conflicts developing. . . . But if you feel that you are going to be respected for what you are, that your culture and your ethnicity, your language, your history are going to be respected, then you will be much more willing to go and take part. . . . Assimilation is neither possible nor desirable. Why should people lose their identity? It is fundamentally racist, because what we are saying is that black people's culture and history are inferior, and therefore they should assimilate with other races. And that should be rejected'.

In summary, the major part of the activities of the PYO fall into what we described in the introduction to this study as category two, namely activities designed to combat racism, concerned with the interface between an ethnic group and wider society. The PYO's leaders are concerned that the Bangladeshis of Tower Hamlets, who have committed themselves to Britain in an irrevocable process of immigration, and whose children have known no other home, should get a fair share of social goods in the fields of housing, employment and education and should be fairly treated by the authorities, in particular by the police.

There is also a strong commitment to the preservation of the Bengali identity of immigrants, and of those young people who either do not remember Bangladesh or who were born in Britain. This is in a sense a manifestation of the category three activities of our classification, which are concerned with an ethnic community's internal affairs. But what the PYO leaders say about the preservation of Bengali identity makes it clear that the purpose is again essentially concerned with the interface between the society of the ethnic group and wider British society. If the bid for fairer shares of education, employment and housing, and for a more equitable treatment at the hands of the police, is an offensive strategy designed to counter racism, then the development and maintenance of Bengali identity is a defensive strategy, intended to minimise the damaging effects of slights and setbacks which members of the community may suffer. This differs from the way we have looked at the religious activities of the Tablighi Jamaat, which were internally directed. The higher level of religious awareness and observance which Tablighi Jamaat attempts to inculcate was seen by Tablighi Jamaat and by individual Muslims as good for its own sake. However, while there is certainly an element of seeing a developing awareness of Bengali identity as good in itself, it is something which is primarily viewed by the PYO activists as a means to the end of equipping young Bangladeshis to cope with what the

PYO's report calls 'the pressure of growing between two cultures'. Even the preservation of Bengali identity, therefore, takes on more of the character of a category two activity, relevant to interaction between the communities.

In the meantime, the PYO seems virtually unconcerned with category one activities, of a type which groups within mainstream society would also concern themselves. The defence and promotion of Bangladeshi interests is its sole concern. This is not to say that both leaders and activists on the one hand, and individual members on the other, may also mobilise on issues of more general social concern as individuals. PYO members clearly have political viewpoints within the British context, and are concerned with broader social issues. But they do not pursue these interests through the organisation. In terms of the potential challenge posed to society by a group like the PYO, it does not seem that the aim, which is essentially political though not party political, of obtaining a fair share of resources, runs counter to the interests of broader society. In terms of the distinction between the public and private domain, an organisation like the PYO is even less than the Tablighi Jamaat devoted to the maintenance of private practices, such as specific ways of regulating the relations between men and women, which wider society may claim are of public rather than private concern. Anti-racism is generally regarded as a matter for public approval rather than reproach. The PYO is explicitly opposed to the activities of racist bodies such as the National Front and the British Movement in Tower Hamlets, which is conventionally seen as a reason for public approval. And the struggle to obtain a fairer share of resources by the PYO would only be regarded as opposed to the general interests of society by such racist bodies.

### The Indian Workers Association

The Indian Workers' Association is a nexus of organisations, composed today of a number of separate bodies which each claim the name IWA, and admit to links of a greater or lesser degree of closeness with the other groups. The IWA's Southall branch has a large number of members, but for most of them membership implies little in the way of active commitment. Membership represents on the one hand the fact that most of those who are members have been helped in some way in their dealings with British officialdom and the authorities by IWA workers. On the other hand, membership of the IWA has become simply part of the process of affirming affiliation to the Sikh



community in Southall. Failing to join the IWA would until recently have been tantamount to an announcement that a person was no longer concerned with community affairs. In recent years, Sikh nationalist movements such as Akali Dal have to some extent taken the place of the IWA as part of the process of affirmation. In the Midlands, the membership of the national IWA is much smaller, numbering only a few thousand, and the number of activists smaller still. It is not the purpose of this study to trace the history of the Indian Workers' Association, which has been undertaken elsewhere, notably by Dewitt John (1969) and by Sasha Josephides (1992), but the organisation's evolution does bear on its present attitudes and activities, and to that extent a brief critical examination of its development is appropriate.

In its origins, which are themselves to a certain extent disputed, the IWA was an organisation founded and controlled primarily by Indians from the Punjab, who in turn are very largely Sikhs. That is the main body of its membership today. It was from the beginning strongly oriented towards left-wing politics, and most of its founding group were originally members of the Indian Communist Party, some of whom became members of the Communist Party in Britain. Today, some of the founding group are still communist sympathisers, though not all are members of the Communist Party. Others have migrated into the Labour Party. The IWA's original programme was twofold. It aimed to help newly arrived Indians with immigration problems, and it aimed to improve the conditions for Indians at their workplaces, taking an active part in trade union affairs in order to do so.

The IWA today has developed in two ways. The national IWA, IWA(GB), with its centre in the Midlands, has become a left-wing pressure group, which aims to raise the consciousness of Indian workers, to encourage them to strive to improve their working and living conditions, and to channel their support for left-wing causes. It has suffered an ideological split, mirroring the divisions of the Communist Party of India, where a left wing Communist Party (Marxist), CPI-M, split off from the CPI, and in turn itself divided into two factions, with the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), CPI-ML taking a more extreme stance. However the IWA(GB) split, which followed this Indian division, was after some years resolved in late 1990 by a reconciliation of the two factions involved, which in turn resulted in a merger that took place in early 1991. The present (July 1991) general-secretary of IWA(GB) is Avtar Singh Jouhl, a former foundry worker who is lecturer in trade union studies at a Birmingham college and a candidate for office in

NATFHE. Meanwhile the IWA in London, in Southall, which left IWA(GB) in 1960 very soon after the national organisation was set up, has separately evolved into an organisation primarily concerned with community welfare and questions concerned with residence and immigration, whose leaders and membership are oriented towards the Labour Party. In April 1991 the President of IWA(Southall), Piarra Singh Khabra, was selected as the prospective Labour Party parliamentary candidate for Ealing South, which contains the borough of Southall. Piarra Khabra is a retired schoolteacher who now works as a full time IWA official.

Southall became an area of Indian immigration because of its proximity to London Airport at Heathrow, which was the point of entry of most Indians, and also incidentally provided much local employment. Meanwhile it was the availability of industrial employment which drew the Punjabis, many of whom were Sikhs who are the backbone of the IWA's membership, to the Midlands. There is also an independent IWA in Huddersfield which is similar in its aims to the Southall organisation, and which, like Southall, is out of sympathy with the left-wing political concerns of the national IWA. But, in spite of their splits, all extant branches of the IWA share much in the way of a common history, and all have been concerned in the 1960s and 1970s with trade union affairs and with demonstrations against racism and discrimination. This study of the Indian Workers Association will be concerned mainly with the national IWA, IWA(GB), which is run at present from Birmingham, and with the IWA organisation in Southall, IWA(Southall).

The Indian Workers' Association in its modern form came into existence in the mid 1950s. Piarra Singh Khabra maintains that this was the real foundation of the IWA. He claims that the earlier Indian Workers' Association which came into existence in Coventry in 1938 was the result of an attempt by the London-based association of Indian intellectuals known as the London Majlis to enlist the small Indian working class in Britain in Indian community affairs and in left-wing politics. He cites the Indian communist intellectual Krishna Menon, then living in Britain as an expatriate as a prime mover. This early IWA, in Piarra Singh Khabra's view, has no organic relationship with the later IWAs set up in Southall and elsewhere. In the leaflet entitled 'History of the Indian Workers' Association' available from the IWA in Southall the actual date of foundation of the IWA is cited as 1956, though this is in fact meant to be the date of foundation of the Southall branch, which was pre-dated by branches in the Midlands. The document says: 'The IWA was established in



1956 in response to the white racism facing Asian workers in post-war Britain. Black Asian workers who had participated in the British Army and had fought in the Second World War and [against] the evil of Nazism found that Britain had excluded and omitted them from their history' (IWA 1989).

The IWA(Southall) document goes on to give an account of how the IWA sees the relationship of the various Indian communities to the British state, and of how IWA(Southall) sees its own role: 'The Asian workers who came here knew of their relationship with Britain. As Sikhs we were responsible for the security of the British Empire. It was that relationship which brought us here. We know the relationship of the Gujarati community with Britain. Britain used thousands of years of expertise on Trade and Commerce built up by the Gujarati community to open up its markets for them. That is why we are here. We know of the relationship between the Bangladeshis and Britain. It was the Bangladeshis, the luscars (sic), the merchant navy which transported British goods throughout the empire. That is why Bangladeshis are here in Britain today. But all that is continually ditched and distorted and excluded'.

It is not in dispute that IWA(Southall) was established as the result of local decisions taken in Southall in the mid 1950s, though former IWA official Vishnu Sharma gives a different date of foundation, with a founding meeting in March 1957. But in general a different view of the organisation's wider history is taken by other IWA figures. An account of the early days of IWA from the point of view of IWA(GB) is given by Saudagar Singh in the course of his dissertation for the certificate in trade union studies at Hall Green College, linked with Ruskin College (Saudagar Singh 1990), who traces early influences to the Indian intellectuals and students who were linked before the Second World War with the British Communist Party, including the noted intellectual R. Palme Dutt, and to Indians at home and abroad who were also committed to the struggle for Indian Independence. These were adherents of the Ghadar Party, the 'party of revolution', formed in Punjab as long ago as 1913, and of the Desh Baghat, or 'patriotic movement'. He writes: 'Between 1930-1940 some of the active workers and also some of the Ghadar Party returned back to India from America to pursue the campaign there. In 1938 one famous member of the Ghadar Party, named Rattan Singh, worked in Europe on the campaign. He went to live in Paris, France. He had to campaign very hard in America and Britain for what he believed in. As the governments of both countries had tough restrictions which made it hard for Rattan Singh to keep up his movement with the Ghadar Party and the Desh Baghat in the UK,

Rattan Singh couldn't communicate with his revolutionaries because of the restrictions on the Ghadar Party in Britain at that time. So he thought up the idea of working under the name of the Indian Workers' Association to make contact with his friends in Britain. This letter was written to Charan Singh Chima, and his friends Ujagar Singh Randhaw, Barkat Ali Khan, Babu Chima and Anant Ram, etc. had the meeting at 24 Henley St., Coventry on the 24th December 1938 to officially set up the IWA'.

Vishnu Sharma is another veteran IWA leader who played a leading role in the IWA's formative years in the 1950s in Southall and was displaced as President by P.Khabra in 1981. Vishnu Sharma is now retired, but worked in manual jobs and as a bus conductor before taking up posts in race relations organisations. He sees an organic link between the earlier organisation, founded before the war, and the IWA of the 1950s whose appearance was a response to the growth of immigration and the appearance of an Indian working class which the group of left-wing Punjabi activists who became the IWA's leaders decided to organise and mobilise. Vishnu Sharma gives an account of the earliest meetings of the IWA, based on his own meetings with two participants in the organisation's earliest activities, Charan Singh Cheema and Anant Ram, who was still living in Coventry in 1991. Vishnu Sharma looks to the earliest history of the IWA to dispute the closeness of the initial link with the Communist Party. Charan Singh Cheema arrived in Britain in 1938, according to Vishnu Sharma, and succeeded in interesting the twenty-five or thirty Indian residents in Coventry in the formation of an Indian Workers' Association. While he confirms that Charan Singh Cheema himself was a committed Communist, he reports that the IWA from the beginning was intended to spread over a broad political spectrum and to be able to absorb members with a variety of political conviction. Charan Singh Cheema was the organisation's founding vice-president, and the first general secretary was Kartar Singh Nagra, who was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and a member of the Congress Party.

Another early incident which is regarded by most IWA activists as a key development in the establishment of the IWA, and which links its earlier days to the struggle for independence in India, was the assassination of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, who had been governor of Amritsar at the time of the notorious massacre of Sikhs at Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar in the Punjab in 1919. O'Dwyer was shot in London while delivering a speech at Caxton Hall on March 14 1940 by a Punjabi Sikh whose name was Udham Singh, later known



as Shaheed (the martyr) Udham Singh. Udham Singh was connected as a friend with the IWA members, though he had not played a part in the organisation, and Charan Singh and others were at first accused of being involved with him in a conspiracy. The IWA mounted his defence, and collected money to fight his case. However, he was found guilty and hanged in July 1940. Support for Udham Singh was a centre for solidarity in the IWA's early days, and his name is still used as a rallying point. The IWA(GB)'s centre in Soho Road, Birmingham is known as the Udham Singh Centre. Udham Singh is part of the mythology of the IWA, and a reason why present day activists want to trace the history of the organisation back to the earliest activities in 1938.

However, the IWA became dormant during the war years, and lost much of its early impetus with the achievement of Indian independence in 1947. It was not until the early 1950s, when the tempo of immigration of Indians to Britain began to increase, that the IWA began once more to find its vocation. The original Coventry branch of IWA, and a London branch which met at Aldgate, were the only two branches of the IWA in the immediate post-war years. But in the early 1950s, branches were set up across the Midlands, in Wolverhampton, Leamington Spa, Birmingham and Nottingham (Saudagar 1990). Other accounts also mention the formation of branches in Nuneaton, Bradford, Gravesend, Leeds and Huddersfield (Josephides 1990), though according to Vishnu Sharma the Huddersfield branch did not come into existence until 1964. It was in 1958 that the various branches which existed at the time came together to form the first national organisation, which was known as the IWA(GB). Initially, this included the Southall branch.

A point which Vishnu Sharma is anxious to stress is that the IWA was intended from the beginning to provide a broad political platform. It is significant that founding member Charan Singh Cheema himself went from Coventry to Huddersfield in 1964, where he began a branch of the Indian Workers Association which again followed his broad approach, attracting as members and as activists members who were not necessarily communists or even left-wing. Huddersfield has emerged today as one of the two major independent IWA organisations, which stand apart from IWA(GB) with its more ideological concerns. In Southall too, the intention of the founders was to set up a broad organisation which would be capable of including Indian members of different political standpoints, and this, in spite of the communist inclinations of the leadership themselves, including in earlier days P.Khabra,

who is now fully identified with the Labour Party, probably laid the groundwork for the kind of pragmatic organisation which IWA Southall has now become.

The IWA in the 1950s and 1960s was a large-scale organisation, within the context of the Punjabi community, more so than today. It has been guessed that of some 200,000 Indians in Britain by 1965, three-quarters might be Punjabis. Extrapolating from today's population breakdown as presented by Social Trends (1991) a guess could be made that the Punjabi population of Britain today could be more than 300,000. Dewitt John estimates that in some branches more than half of the adult male Punjabis became members of their regional branch of the IWA, as the organisation spread across the country in the centres of Punjabi population (John 1969: 47). But IWA leaders were anxious to point out, especially in the context of their relationship with trade unions, that it was not a communist organisation, and that the vast majority of its membership were not communist party members (Josephides 1990). Nevertheless, the strong communist representation within the leadership of IWA(GB) led to strains within the organisation. According to Vishnu Sharma, non-communist members of the IWA, and even communist members such as himself who believed that the spread of opinions of the membership at large should be represented, were aware that the communists were dominating IWA decision making and were in fact making privately decisions which should have been made by the IWA's own committees in public. It was this which led ultimately to the decision by the IWA in Southall to go its own way.

The immediate cause was a difference of opinion between the IWA leadership in Southall and the more doctrinaire leadership of IWA(GB) at the national meeting of 1961 in Birmingham which led to the first split in the organisation and set the scene for the more diffuse organisation of today. It was at this time that IWA Southall withdrew from the national organisation, IWA(GB). Vishnu Sharma makes it clear that the communist dominated group which was completely in control of IWA(GB) was leading the organisation in a sectarian direction which he did not wish to follow, and that this was why he decided to take Southall out of the national association. Complicating the situation further, there is a branch of IWA(GB) in Southall, whose local leader is Harpal Brar, an associate of Avtar Jouhl who is widely thought to be influential in formulating the stand on international policy of IWA(GB). The split between IWA Southall and the national organisation, and the different direction in which IWA(Southall) has evolved date back to this split. Vishnu



Sharma points to the fall in membership of the IWA(GB) and its low membership today as a consequence of the national organisation's narrow political base, pointing to the relatively small membership of the IWA in Birmingham, out of a Punjabi population of perhaps 50,000. IWA(GB) puts its membership in Birmingham at 1600. Vishnu Sharma contrasts this with the membership in Southall, where he estimates the current membership in 1991 is some 11,000, while Piarra Khabra claims an even larger membership, of whom some 500 would attend a general meeting of the organisation. The overall Punjabi population in London probably exceeds 70,000.

Some commentators within the IWA have seen this split as paralleling a split between communist factions in India, where the CPI-M was going its separate way from the official CPI. IWA(GB) sources have suggested that the IWA in Southall wished to remain with the CPI, while the national leadership in Birmingham was inclined towards the CPI-M. IWA(Southall) has also been accused of having become a 'bourgeois' rather than a workers' organisation. This is probably a polemical interpretation, and Vishnu Sharma's account seems more likely to be correct, stressing as it does that he wished to preserve IWA(Southall) from the danger of driving away potential membership by an excessively ideological stand. In any case, this first split was followed by further splits in IWA(GB), which have hindered the organisation's efforts to expand and hampered its efficiency as a mobilising force.

In 1967, IWA(GB) itself split into two segments, at the IWA(GB)'s Leicester conference of that year. As Sasha Josephides explains, this split was related in a clear way to domestic Indian politics. We have seen that the Birmingham based IWA(GB) had tended to follow the lead of the left wing Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI-M. However the CPI-M in India split into two as the result of the Naxalite uprising in West Bengal in 1967, when the CPI-M did not support the peasants' movement in Naxalbari, and the CPI-ML came into being, formed by those Indian communists who did back the rising. The Birmingham based IWA(GB), under its charismatic leader, Jagmohan Joshi, who died of a heart attack while taking part in a demonstration in 1979, followed the CPI-ML, while a more cautious faction led by Prem Singh stood by the CPI-M. This split became national, and not only were there two national organisations, but also two separate branches of IWA(GB) in each of the areas where the IWA was active.

A split between two segments of the organisation based on support for one or other faction of the Indian CPI-M, might seem to be academic in terms of the

IWA's role in Britain. However, the split reflected the temperament and ideological slant of the IWA(GB)'s view of its role in Britain. Sasha Josephides describes the ideological disparity between the two groups: 'The analysis of Joshi's supporters regarding racism was that black workers, though their struggle against imperialism in their own countries and their double exploitation in this country [Britain] have become more aware. Black workers were therefore the group destined to lead the struggle, and once they were involved in the struggle white workers would join with them. The position of the other side was that black workers did not have a special role and the initiative for the struggle had to come from the white working class. An additional difference arising out of this one was that Joshi's group, because they saw black workers as having a special role, believed in forging alliances with other black groups; the other side were against this kind of alliance as they considered it a kind of inverted racism which would distance them from ordinary white workers, who they felt were the most important allies of all. The difference in these two positions was fundamental, and led to one group becoming concerned with black power issues while the other one was committed to a more traditional class analysis. The black power dimension is a fairly controversial one and the IWA had to tread carefully in defining what it meant by it in order not to lose Indian members. . . . Joshi's group also believed in defence committees (which the other group thought were suicidal) and they had a strong position against affiliating with CRCs or other government bodies or accepting state funding. The other group were more ambivalent on this issue'.

Finally, on the subject of IWA factionalism and splits, there was a further split within the Prem Singh faction in 1983. This arose out of the stand taken by the then president of the organisation, Naranjan Noor, who opposed the authorities in the case of a Wolverhampton schoolmaster who refused to allow Sikh boys to wear their distinctive turbans to school. Naranjan Noor persuaded the school authorities to change their minds over the issue, which resulted in considerable popularity with the membership of the IWA. The committee on the other hand took the view that Naranjan Noor should not have used the organisation to champion a religious cause. In the end, Noor took his supporters out of the IWA, creating a total of three factions within the national organisation. Noor's organisation, while it lasted, was of a markedly different character from all the other IWAs, in that it was explicitly Sikh. While the IWA is largely based on the Punjabi Sikh community in practice, members of



all the other groups insist on its secular character, and that it is in principle open to any person of Indian origin, or to their descendants born in Britain. The veteran Southall leader, Vishnu Sharma, is indeed not a Sikh but a Hindu Brahmin. However, Naranjan Noor's movement was making a bid for a new kind of Sikh adherence in competition with the nascent Sikh separatist movements which had for a long time been a factor in the domestic politics of the Punjab, but had been steadily gaining in support for the previous five years.

Falling membership and a resulting lack of the ability to act effectively is widely thought to have been the main reason why the national IWA factions decided to overcome their differences and to reunite. A long series of preliminary meetings and contacts were undertaken, and a committee to supervise the reintegration of the IWA(GB) was set up at a meeting in Smethwick on 9th June 1990. The decision was unanimously taken on that date by some 700 delegates to re-unite the national organisation. The text of a resolution which was passed, published in the IWA(GB) English language paper, is as follows: 'Indian Workers Association (GB) inherited the best traditions of the IWA formed in 1938. It was unfortunate that because of various factors a split took place in the organisation in 1967. It has now been realised that the challenges faced by workers of Indian origin in the struggle against Thatcherism, racism, growing fascist trends and many other forms of discrimination pose a serious threat to the organisation itself and to other working class organisations, which are working to defend and promote the interests of the working people against imperialism and for world peace. Moreover the rise of Sikh fundamentalism, aided and abetted by imperialism, has further worsened the situation. These forces are aiming their activities at disrupting the unity of the Indian workers and their cooperation with trade unions and other progressive forces. In short the fundamentalists are attacking the very basic principles on which the IWA was founded. Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists too have joined the fray in their nefarious attempts to divert the workers from their common struggle against racism, exploitation and imperialism. In view of these challenges, both organisations have decided to reunite and work for the fulfilment of the aims and objectives for which the IWA was formed' (Lalkar February/March 1991).

Naranjan Noor's splinter group of the IWA was reunited with the organisation led by Prem Singh, and ultimately the Prem Singh IWA(GB) and the IWA(GB) of Jagmohan Joshi merged. Prem Singh and Avtar Singh Jouhl

are president and general-secretary respectively. When the process was complete, the seal was set on the merger at a meeting in Birmingham on 16 February 1991, and at a Unity Rally on that day. A new constitution was promulgated, with the following section, setting out the IWA(GB)'s aims and objects:

The Association shall work to organise Indian immigrants and their descendants in Great Britain to:

Wage militant, consistent and uncompromising struggle in every possible way against racism and fascism in all forms.

Fight against discrimination based on national origin, creed, sex, religion or caste and for equal rights of national minorities in all fields.

Unite and strengthen friendship with other organisations of black people, ethnic minorities and with other progressive organisations and individuals who uncompromisingly oppose racism and fascism.

Fully participate in the Trade Union movement of the British working class for economic and social advance.

Promote the cause of peace, friendship and freedom of all countries and cooperate with other progressive organisations, national and international, striving for the same.

Support all economic, social and political struggles of the Indian masses against exploitation by monopoly capital, feudal and semi-feudal society in India, and for a People's Democratic India.

Support the mass struggle of the left, democratic and secular forces against authoritarianism, secessionism, religious fundamentalism, communalism and casteism and for the unity and integrity of India.

Publicise political, economic and social situations in India amongst its members and the public in general

Seek cooperation and unity in action with other organisations working for the same

Support the national liberation struggles of the Asian, African and Latin American people against neo-colonialist exploitation. Cooperate with other organisations working for the same end.

Support the national liberation struggle of the Irish people for an independent and united Ireland, the struggle of the Palestinian people for national self-determination and an independent Palestinian state; and the struggle of the people of South Africa against apartheid and a for a non-



racial South Africa based on the principle of one-person one-vote on a common electoral roll

Support all just struggles of the people of all countries against imperialism  
Promote welfare services, undertake cultural and social activities for the fulfilment of the above aims and objectives.

(Lalkar February/March 1991)

Turning now to the aims and activities of the IWA, Vishnu Sharma, a founding member of the modern IWA as it came into existence in the 1950s and a past president of IWA(Southall) formed clear ideas of the appropriate aims of an Indian Workers Association during the time when he was actively involved with IWA(Southall). For Vishnu Sharma, firm leadership and a broad and loyal base are prerequisites, as well as a physical base, in the form of an office where members can come to make contact with the leadership and the organisation's officials. First of all he looks back at what he regards as the major achievement of the IWA in the 1960s, and the one which has put the organisation on a firm financial footing, namely the purchase of the old Dominion Cinema in Southall in 1967. The freehold of the cinema was bought for £75,000 with £25,000 in contributions from members and now the IWA is the freeholder of the Dominion Centre, on the site of the cinema, which houses its offices as well as offices of the London borough of Ealing. He believes that this was an achievement which set IWA (Southall) apart from some other branches: 'That is the sort of leadership which we developed here. And I cannot see why in other towns those people have not been able to do that. And it was not because of the cinema. . . But the same thing they could have done there. But this was because of serious leadership and serious work, and active cooperation of the membership. And involvement of membership in the associations' affairs'.

Vishnu Sharma continues on the subject of how he sees the role of the IWA in modern terms: 'It could be a broad-based platform from which the Indians could organise themselves, and then they can fight against racism in this country, through an organisation, and [against] the very discriminatory immigration laws and then also the nationality law of this country, which is equally based upon racism. And apart from that there are numerous other problems, specific problems which Indians have, for example with their passports. Now they are campaigning for dual citizenship, because many countries accept the principle of dual citizenship, so that is also a very

important issue about which people are agitating although it has nothing to do with the British government: this is the demand which they are making of the Indian government that they should accept the principle of dual citizenship. And then of course they are not a separate trade union based on ethnic groups, but still there are thousands of people in this area [Southall] who are working in factories like Fords, and many others like Quaker Oats, and then the largest employer in this area is Heathrow Airport, where people are working, I feel that they are deeply exploited by various contractors and other employers, and certainly the Indian Workers' Association, in their own language, can explain to them, the principles of unionism and of getting together, within the folds of the existing trade unions, a) we will strengthen the trade unions, and b) we will put to those unions that they should not ignore the demands and difficulties and exploitation of Asians, as well, and they should equally fight for them. So these sort of things we can negotiate through the unions. Our conception in the IWA here happened to be that we were not merely a sort of organisation of agitators. We were doing at the same time the practical work. If at one side we understood the nature of these laws, at the same time we also understood how these laws are being enforced, and in certain individual cases how the law processes applications and requests. So we have been offering a very serious service to our clients, who happened to be mainly our members'.

Political activity is not stressed by Vishnu Sharma, and critics of IWA Southall say that it has abandoned political commitment. Nevertheless, the brief history of the IWA produced in 1989 by IWA(Southall) (IWA 1989) gives a list of the political involvements of IWA(Southall). In addition to opposing what was seen as racist legislation, such as the 1961 immigration bill, IWA Southall took a leading role in supporting Indian workers during industrial disputes in the Southall area. Notable landmarks were IWA's involvement in the strike in 1965 at Woolfe's rubber factory in Southall, one of the first employers of Indian labour in the area, and at Rockware Glass in Greenford, and at Chignall's Bakery in Hayes in 1966. In the later 1960s the IWA in Southall demonstrated against Commonwealth immigration legislation, and also against local measures which were seen as racist, such as the attempt as the proportion of Punjabi residents in Southall grew to attempt to maintain more racially mixed schools by bussing children out to schools in neighbouring areas. In 1973, IWA(Southall) sponsored a national conference on immigration issues. In 1981, IWA(Southall) coordinated the legal defence of those charged in connection with the rioting in Southall of that year. In the



1980s the IWAs calendar includes more events indicating growing links with other ethnic groups. IWA(Southall) also gave its support to CND, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. IWA(Southall) has also taken a stand against the Poll Tax.

At the same time, there are signs in those parts of its activities which the IWA leadership in Southall has thought it appropriate to record that IWA(Southall) is becoming more closely identified with some aspects of the political establishment, in both India and Britain. After the negotiations were successfully concluded for the transformation of the Dominion Cinema into the Dominion Centre for Community Programmes, it was in the Town Hall at Southall that the IWA found temporary accommodation. There were regular contacts during the 1980s between IWA(Southall) and visiting Indian politicians. And the growing connection between IWA(Southall) and the Labour Party was symbolised by the official opening of the organisation's new offices on the Dominion Centre site by the Leader of the Opposition, Neil Kinnock.

Piarras Khabra comments on the relationship of the Punjabi community and British society. He takes an optimistic view:

This country [Britain] has accepted that people from other races and cultures have settled here finally, and they are part and parcel of the community here. . . . Therefore it is willing to live with other communities live with other communities who are fully contributing to the progress of society here, in this country. Under those circumstances, we know that we live in a multicultural society, and [though] we are still at a disadvantage in the political system of this country, the economic system of this country, the educational system of this country, there is a strong current of thought that this country is going to stay multiracial, and all the other races which have settled here, they must be given an opportunity to fully participate, and to work at the same level as all the others, and enjoy equal rights in this country. This is a process for which we are trying to fight, but we are not going to do anything in any way which goes against the interest of this country. In any circumstances, India being a very old culture, the people being brought up in that culture, with the sort of background they have, religious, cultural social, they are not going to give up. At the same time they shouldn't give up because it would be a tragedy, if

you will disappear as a community, as a race, but this country is willing to accept a society which is multicultural, so therefore I think it is not even in the best interest of this country that this country should not stay multicultural. Otherwise, if it is not going to stay multicultural, there are going to be conflicts. Either you adopt a policy . . . that you put these people on the aeroplanes . . . send them back where they came from. But that's not going to happen. There will be resistance to that. There will be social conflict, which I think this country would never like to see happen. We fit in to that sort of situation, when at the same time we are able to contribute to the development of a new society, and I call it a new society.

Avtar Jouhl, as the general-secretary of IWA(GB), sees a less inviting prospect for the ethnic community which he represents: 'It is not us who don't want to feel ourselves that this is our home, and that we are British. It is the circumstances which make us feel that despite all we do, that we are still not considered British. And with the next generation, the situation in terms of harassment and all this, it is still the same. During the seventies they considered that if they adopt British culture, they will go to the discos, they will go to the bingos, they will speak English, they will be integrated into the society. But their experience after coming out of the schools, colleges, universities, is altogether what we experienced during the fifties, sixties, and even now. On the labour market a black person has got to be ten times better to have a job. . . . The experience when they come on to the labour market is bad, and when they go for lower grade jobs, or clerical jobs, or they apply for manual jobs, they are under suspicion. The person with a degree, a black. . . they are told, you are too good for this job. So it is a Catch 22 situation, and they have to struggle. . . . In the Labour movement as well: yesterday I was going through the results of the election in the T&G [Transport and General Workers Union] annual delegates: I couldn't find a single person of Indian and Pakistani origin's name, in the whole of the West Midlands area, to be a delegate at the Transport and General Workers Union. The response will be 'they didn't put their name to be nominated'. My answer to them is that they know even if they are nominated they will not be elected. But there is a difference with the younger generation. They are fighting more consistently for their rights. . . , and where the first generation wishfully think that they will go back, the second generation are considering that this is our home, and we



are here to stay and live, and they are fighting more consistently for their rights.'

Avtar Jouhl also tackles the question of identity. If the younger generation who are committed to remain in Britain are also struggling harder for their rights, why are they resistant to the suggestion of cultural assimilation? Avtar Jouhl comments:

It is a question of identity. It is a question of who they are. And during the 1983, in the Handsworth constituency, the Tories were saying, 'Labour calls you black, we call you Black British'. The question for identity is why in the 1980s and now in the 1990s, kids of Asian origin and of African origin, rather than being blanketly described as British, first they want to know who they are, their identity. They are identifying themselves with their culture. More and more want to speak their own language, in terms of their mother tongue, . . . about a thousand young men and women of Indian origin crowded the club, here, because an Indian group was playing, so it's a question of identity. They want to be known as Asian, they want to be known as black, and then British. They are putting their foot down, 'we are here, we are not going away anywhere' and they fight more vigorously than the first generation. Because the first generation had that experience, 'if I participate more actively in the trade union, perhaps I will lose the job, then I can't bring my family over here. . . '.

Avtar Jouhl also looks at the question of the degree of interest which IWA(GB) takes in Indian affairs, and at other international issues. He stresses that while the IWA(GB) does interest itself in international affairs, the primary task is with campaigning in Britain over issues which affect members here. 'The primary task of the Indian Workers' Association is in this country, is to fight against racism and fascism, then to organise its members and others to join the trade union and labour movement, that is the primary task. Then comes the relationship with India. But if a certain issue comes up affecting the lives of the people here, for example the Khalistani issue, and IWA saw it as very divisive for the movement against racism: that is one of the factors behind IWA opposition to Khalistan. Although the other factor is that Khalistan will be disastrous for the whole of India. But that is not our primary task. But for the kids who haven't seen India, in terms of daily life, they see their struggle and their fight here and not back home.'

IWA leaders of all persuasions may exaggerate the extent to which the issues arising out of their lives in Britain are uppermost in the minds of the younger people of the second generation, who may have been born in Britain or have been brought from India by their parents as young children. They do recognise however the strength of the pull many young people feel towards their own culture, and they acknowledge the importance of the maintenance of an ethnic cultural identity. When it is physically impossible for the younger people ever to merge fully with British society, because their colour will always distinguish them, young people continue to need the knowledge of their cultural heritage, in the view of IWA leaders in both Birmingham and Southall, in order to withstand any rejection they may suffer. Awareness of their own cultural background enables young Punjabis to preserve their self-respect in circumstances in which they may suffer from racism and discrimination which would otherwise be very undermining.

What emerges from an examination of IWA activities is a shared concern in both IWA(GB) in Birmingham and IWA(Southall) with a struggle against racism that is nevertheless expressed in somewhat different ways, and also a shared awareness of the importance of cultural identity. IWA(GB) has kept up the consciousness of the importance of trade union activities, and of introducing the Punjabi membership to political organisations in which it can share with British workers the search for solutions to common problems. On the other hand, as IWA(Southall)'s community work has continued, there is an impression that its commitment to the struggle of organised labour, conceived of in IWA(GB) circles as of primary importance, has diminished. IWA(Southall) appears to share little of IWA(GB)'s high-minded concern with leftist approaches to international affairs, but the feeling in London is that IWA(GB) cannot attract members because its interests are too abstract, and it plays little part in the day to day life of its ordinary members. The Shaheed Udham Singh welfare centre in Birmingham seems to be a response to that problem. There is also the clear political divergence, between the communism of IWA leaders such as Avtar Jouhl and his associates on the one hand, and the Labour affiliation of Piarra Khabra on the other. Avtar Jouhl is no longer a member of the communist party, but he still regards himself as a communist. Piarra Khabra, as an ex-communist does not regard that as a realistic standpoint today. In all, while at first sight the two institutions seem to have diverged beyond hope of reconciliation, many of their interests are still



similar. Much of the disparity lies in the leadership and in some personal antagonism.

In conclusion, it may be possible to offer an interpretation which will link both the activities of the IWA in its different manifestations, and the reasons for the underlying split between the IWA(GB) and the 'island' IWA in Southall, as well as the parallel 'island' organisation in Huddersfield which has not been studied here. Dewitt John offers an interpretation of IWA activities as an extension of a form of social relationship which is in any case strongly acceptable within the context of Punjabi society. We have alluded in passing to the forms of social organisation and the links which Punjabis brought from India to their new circumstances in Britain. John in particular draws attention to what he calls the phenomenon of 'ilaqa' groups, regional groups which generate continuing loyalties, and within which there develop hierarchical relationships and relationships of obligation. Those groups, which continue to exist, provide a primary form of linkage between Punjabis. A form of interaction within the 'ilaqa' group is mutual assistance, which John describes by the English term 'social work'.

John writes: 'The immigrants needed jobs, help in filling out forms for income tax, passport renewal and mortgages, and help in dealing with British officials, estate agent, doctors, and lawyers. Giving such help is known among Indians as 'social work'. It is one's duty to do social work if one is asked. As one immigrant put it, 'you must help a man if he comes to you with a form or wants you to go with him to the doctor. It is like giving instructions on the street; you would not refuse that. ... The immigrants preferred to approach friends or village-mates for help, so the bonds between 'social workers' and clients often reinforced village and kin ties. Doing social work was a way of winning influence within one's 'ilaqa' group. As time passed, however, social workers who were especially active and effective began doing favours for men who were outside their 'ilaqa' group' (John 1969: 53)

This concept of 'social work' is explanatory of some features of the IWA organisations. The IWA institutionalised a form of social interaction already conventional in Punjabi society. And since being in receipt of social work established a link and placed the recipient of the favour under an obligation, the performance of 'social work' by IWA activists confirmed them as the leaders of a group to which the community looked with respect and loyalty. The IWA in Southall has continued the tradition of 'social work' through to the present day. Piarra Singh Khabra, as president of IWA(Southall) continues

to play a personal part in these activities, and was most days at his 'surgery' at the Dominion Centre in Southall. His IWA activities undoubtedly stood him in good stead in his successful campaign for election in 1992 as Labour member of parliament for Ealing South, the constituency that includes the predominantly Punjabi areas of Southall. At the Udham Singh Centre in Soho Road in Birmingham, sadly damaged by a fire in 1991, IWA(GB) offers similar services to clients.

Meanwhile, if 'social work' was the cement which enabled the IWA to be built, those who did the construction were communist activists, many of whom had known each other in the Punjab. These were men with a very clear vision of how society should be moulded and in what direction it should be moved, and they had every intention of using their positions within the IWA in order to make a vehicle out of the organisation for the kind of social change they had in mind. Some, who believed that the welfare of the community and the wide membership of the IWA were paramount, objected to the degree of political manipulation which they feared was about to take place within the IWA. This led to the split, in which the ideologists took control of the national IWA, while the pragmatists retained their hold over Southall. A further consequence was the maintenance of membership on a mass scale in Southall, while membership of the IWA became more a minority phenomenon among the Sikh and Punjabi communities of the Midlands. Among the young Sikhs, some are becoming increasingly uninterested in community affairs, though they maintain some concern with the outward forms of Sikh observance and with popular culture. For other young Sikhs, Sikh nationalism has become a focus of their attention, with a concern for the Sikh struggle for ascendancy in the Punjab. It may be that this has a greater appeal than the rather bleak internationalism and the dogmatic philosophy of the left offered by IWA(GB) as its contribution to international politics.

In terms of the classification of IWA activities, category three activities, those which are concerned primarily with the internal affairs of the community or its maintenance, have lapsed in importance. After the great days of the Dominion Cinema in the 1960s and the emergence of the IWA as a cultural force, the IWA in Southall now leaves Punjabi culture to the market place, since videos and Punjabi music are widely available, as well as Punjabi reading matter. IWA(GB) has never been so concerned with Punjabi culture. Nevertheless, all branches of the IWA do profess some concern for Punjabi culture. The IWA(GB) also takes up positions on Indian affairs and Punjab



politics, which though they form part of the IWA(GB)'s general posture on international affairs, do also constitute an internal community concern. On the other hand, the community help which both IWA(Southall) and IWA(GB) perform at the Udham Singh Centre in Birmingham is clearly concerned with the interface between British society and the Punjabi community and is a category two activity, as is the raising of consciousness about racism and the active campaigning against racism, of both private and institutionalised varieties. That campaigning has been a feature of IWA(GB)'s activities, but IWA(Southall) has also been involved, in spite of its higher profile in community welfare.

But IWA(GB) is also very much concerned with goals which are shared within wider British society, though by minority segments of that society. The IWA's trade union activities, both those which it undertakes as an institution and those which fall within the private sphere of individual IWA members, are clearly category one activities, where the IWA shares goals with British groups. This also applies to the campaigning which the IWA does concerning international issues outside the Indian subcontinent. The IWA(GB) is explicit in its support for an independent Palestinian state, for a non-racist outcome in South Africa, and for an Irish solution to the Irish problem in the United Kingdom. In addition, it opposed United States involvement in the Gulf and takes a generally militant leftist stand on international affairs. These are activities in which the IWA displays concerns to which the British left also subscribes. Paradoxically, however, they are activities which some persons from right-wing and even moderate segments of British society might categorise as unpatriotic or in some sense un-British even when undertaken by British protagonists.

Whether these activities are incompatible with British citizenship when undertaken by Punjabis is matter of argument, but it does seem that ethnic groups must have the freedom to attach themselves to whatever part of the indigenous political spectrum they choose. Finally, the contrast is very striking between the left-wing activism of IWA(GB) and the almost complacent view of the current president of IWA(Southall) that an accommodation can be reached with some degree of ease between the aspirations of ethnic groups and the entrenched positions of British society. 'Social work' and political activism seem to have pulled the two halves of IWA apart to an extent where it is hard to envisage a reconciliation.

### Conclusion

The point of origin of this study was the assumption that an examination of the activities of organisations based within ethnic communities situated in the countries of Europe, and the issues on which those organisations mobilise, will provide a key to the elements which constitute ethnic identities, and a way of examining whether or not those ethnic identities present a challenge, or perhaps even a threat, to the social or national identities of the wider societies of immigration in Europe inside which allogeneous ethnic communities exist today. The existence of ethnically based organisations itself indicates that ethnic minority communities, for their part, perceive the majority community as a threat, or at least as a challenge to themselves. The question arises whether this is a reciprocal process. British society, or French society, may be a threat to the identity of individuals of Pakistani or Algerian origin who live within them. But are Pakistani, Algerian or other individuals, or the organisations which they come to form, a threat to the wider society? The answer may well be no, and the reason for that answer may be, among other things, that the relationship is asymmetrical, in a way such that the asymmetry affects inversely the reality of the threat and its perception.

For the immigrant individual, or his descendant who shares his culture, aspects of an individual identity which he has constructed or assimilated may be threatened by the European national or social identity with which he is faced. That identity prescribed by the majority has a normative quality, and offers an agenda which it is socially acceptable for individuals to follow. Thus an isolated individual from an ethnic community within an alien context provided by his new society, or a younger person swayed by the example of a peer group from the majority culture, may tend to follow the agenda set by majority society, and thus to abandon his own ethnic identity. On the other hand, ethnic minority identities are not normally accepted by the majority community, at least not in the circumstances which currently prevail in Europe, as holding the status of prescribing agendas, and therefore present no threat to the national identities of majority communities.

There are however qualifications which need to be made. Firstly, it is not self-evident that the identity of a minority community cannot become an agenda for a majority community to follow. And if a minority agenda were to be accepted it would transform and transmute the idea of national identity previously prescribed by the majority. Precisely this transformation occurs in



the situation where the power relationship between the minority and the majority community is reversed. In British India, and French Algeria, elements of British and French identity respectively became superimposed on the culture of those groups within the autochthonous society which sought to identify with the dominant colonial power. In present circumstances in European countries, and taking into account the perception of the minority communities as inferior in status, the situation excludes the possibility that their identities can take on any aspect of an agenda for the majority. On the other hand, there are, for example, individual converts to Islam in France and Britain.

Secondly, and more importantly for the problem at hand, the very existence of ethnic groups with their own identities, that is to say their own agendas for action, and systems of criteria for judgement, may be enough to bring about modifications in the majority identity, and thus minority identities may be interpreted as presenting a threat or challenge. This will occur when the accommodation of alternative agendas within society is itself something which is in itself rejected, as part of the majority agenda. If it is a part of the majority agenda to believe that society cannot accommodate alternative ways of life, then no allogeneous community, however innocuous its ways or modest its demands, can fail to be perceived as a threat. In the introduction to this report, it was pointed out that the broad acceptance of multiculturalism as a goal in Britain contrasted with the preference for assimilation in France. That preference for assimilation arises because of a belief in France that any minority community with an alternative agenda is in itself unacceptable, quite irrespective of the empirical content of the agenda represented by the minority ethnic identity. That unacceptability arises quite simply because it stands in the way of the direct relationship of the individual with the state, and potentially obstructs the full acceptance of duties in exchange for the conferral of rights. This, in the French view, contrasts with the British approach, where it is possible to admit alternative identities within a more elastic national framework. That said, it should not be lost sight of that populist British agendas do in fact call for the rejection of minority agendas.

This view, especially as it applies to the French situation, is put in a clear form by Gilles Kepel, in his book *'La revanche de Dieu'* (Kepel 1991), in which he attempts to account for the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism. The issue of accommodating Islam as a community in France, contrasted with the British experience, prompts him to this reflection:

'The communal structure of Islam in the United Kingdom has been facilitated by the British political tradition, which favours the collective absorption of immigrants settled in the country, as distinct from other traditions which favour individual integration, as is the case in France. These two approaches are no more than the extrapolation towards non-citizens of the historic directions in which each nation has respectively developed, in its respective relations with the populations living within the territory which it controls. In France, the absolute monarchy, followed by the Jacobinism of the Republic, 'one and indivisible', have expunged regional, linguistic or religious particularisms. In the latter case, an imbedded secular principle, which finds its most complete expression in the law requiring the separation of the Church from the State, has the effect of restricting the expression of religious faith to the private domain. On the contrary, the United Kingdom, as its name indicates, brings together in a federation nations, principally the English, the Welsh, the Scots, and the Northern Irish, who have retained a political identity. Furthermore, religious affiliation does not belong solely to the private domain: Anglicanism is the religion of the Crown, and the Anglican clergy is authorised to celebrate marriages recognised by the law, without the obligation of a civil ceremony (which is however imposed on the adherents of other faiths). The French term 'laïcité' has no real English translation'.

Kepel's view of French identity, as contrasted with the British position, may exaggerate the extent to which the French citizen as an individual, replete with his rights and conscious of his duties, stands in an organic relationship to the state, without intermediaries. In reality, this is an idealised view. But it does explain why the opinion prevails in France that a member of a minority community should shed his previous allegiances in order to enjoy full assimilation as a French citizen. In particular, the emphasis on secularism, as we may render 'laïcité', means that the French view is that a Muslim should confine his religious affiliation entirely to his private life. However, the notion of the French citizen as a pure individual who makes certain demands and receives certain privileges from the state scarcely stands up to an objective examination. The active Catholic faith of a growing minority of French citizens may legally be confined to the private domain, but in practice plays a determining role in the lives of its adherents. An increasing fraction of French schoolchildren are educated at Catholic schools outside the state system. Regional loyalties never died and are on the increase, with the Breton language and identity resurgent in the north west, and the somewhat more



artificial Occitan phenomenon in the south west of the country. A focus of loyalty external to the state which has played in the past a more important role in the lives of some French individuals than it does today is the Communist Party, while the great trade unions still play a leading role. All these considerations imply that the notion of the French citizen as the irreducible secular individual is to some extent itself a mythological part of the agenda which constitutes the preferred French national identity. However, though it is perhaps only that mythological element which is threatened by the existence of minority identities, the threat is nonetheless perceived as very real.

Returning to the role of ethnic organisations in the relationship of allogeneous groups to wider society, it seems clear that the formation of such organisations forms a logical part of the process by which individuals within ethnic communities adjust to the problems of living in the wider society in which they find themselves. Part of the process of the development of a social identity is the perception by the individual that he enjoys a recognised place in society. If majority society refuses put a value on an individual member of an allogeneous group which corresponds to his own valuation of himself, a possible reaction for the individual is to set up or take part in an organisation whose membership is drawn from the same ethnic community as himself, which among other things will serve as a framework in which the valuation necessary to the satisfactory establishment of a personal and social identity can be achieved. That is an implicit effect of the existence of ethnic organisations. Explicitly, organisations will undertake projects which are seen as conducive in one way or another to the amelioration of the position in life of the members of the ethnic minority communities. Meanwhile, from the point of view of this study, organisations present themselves as a useful tool for the study of ethnic identity and the relationship between majority and minority communities. Once formed, for the reasons that have emerged, organisations make explicit the elements of a collective ethnic identity, which is itself an agenda, by developing them as a programme of action, which can be observed and described.

In the introduction to this study, we have made the attempt to distinguish between three categories of activity displayed by organisations based within ethnic groups. These were, briefly to recapitulate, activities in which the ethnic organisation addresses concerns which it shares with wider society (category one); activities concerning the interface between the allogeneous ethnic group and society as a whole (category two); and activities whose goals are internal

to the ethnic group, concerned with its maintenance and self-regard (category three). We may go a stage further to postulate that all purposeful activities of organisations based within ethnic communities can be described as falling into one of these three categories. In terms of the possibility of a multicultural society, the desirability of which has been taken as an axiom of the present research, any of the three categories of activity could in practice include activities of a kind which could be an obstacle to the realisation of the desired goal of multiculturalism. For example, in category one, the ethnic group could have committed itself to the achievement of goals which it shares with a minority within mainstream society, but which society as a whole takes to be antisocial and undesirable. Or, in category two, the ethnic organisation may have developed goals which make unacceptable demands on majority society, in order to regulate the interface between the allogeneous group and society as a whole. Meanwhile in category three, while aiming to maintain its internal coherence and stability, an ethnic organisation may be promoting private attitudes or practices which are unacceptable to the wider majority.

If, in practice, none of the activities of the organisations which have been studied seem to present obstacles of this kind, this is an empirical conclusion, and could have been otherwise. The observation that there is no barrier to coexistence between the organisations observed and wider society is a conclusion from which it is legitimate to draw the inference that it is at least frequent that there is no clash between the interests of minority communities and society as a whole. On the other hand it is a conclusion which depends on the standpoint of the observer as well as on the phenomena observed. Though from the observational standpoint we have adopted the activities of Tablighi Jamaat in preserving the adherence to Islam of members of the Deobandi community seem benign, a committed Christian might choose to deplore the propagation of a faith he would regard as false. Or, in practice more likely, a liberal might well disapprove of those aspects of the social dimension of Islam which restrict the activities of women in various ways. In both these cases, the category three activities of Tablighi Jamaat might be held to conflict with the maintenance of the majority identity, if an element of that identity is the exclusion from society of either Islam itself, or what could be seen as the paternalistic attitude towards women within some Islamic communities. In addition to a difference of standpoint, there can also be a variety of views concerning the dividing line between public and private domain activities, which may also lead to differing conclusions. Similarly, the anti-racist



activities of the Progressive Youth Organisation could be seen, from an alternative standpoint, as unacceptable. The degree of criticism aimed by the PYO's leaders at police activities, or in other contexts the lack of police activity, could well appear unacceptable from the point of view of an observer who puts a high priority on the appearance of respect for established law and order. Thirdly, though the Indian Workers' Association (GB) supports causes which other left-wing organisations also espouse, there are those on the political right who would claim that its activities in this respect are unacceptable. The autochthonous British organisations whose standpoints are similar would also tend to be described by such observers as un-British.

The acceptability or otherwise, therefore, of the activities of ethnic minority organisations, and the extent to which minority identities appear to challenge some mainstream idea of British identity, diffuse though that mainstream identity may be in practice, varies according to the observer, and to the interpretation put on what is observed. What can be said at least is that there is a middle ground of opinion, from which it would be hard to view the activities of ethnic organisations as incompatible with the interests of British society. In addition, from that same moderate standpoint, the ideal of multiculturalism, as a way in which the psychological security and social endorsement of ethnic communities might be achieved, and which might serve as a preliminary to the actual normalisation of the position of ethnic communities within society in the dimensions of employment and social status, seems a possible one to achieve. There will always be extremist views from which dissent will be heard. But a goal must be to ensure their relative marginalisation. Perhaps it is hopeful that in Britain, there is a broad political consensus in the centre on questions of race, and no political force of any numerical significance which plays on racist emotions. In France on the other hand, the spring and early summer of 1991 saw an acceleration of racial conflict between members of ethnic communities and the state, combined with an ominous move from the political right to endorse views which have hitherto only been expressed by the explicitly racist National Front. It may be, on the other hand, too glib to link that observation to the proclivity towards multiculturalism on the one hand, and the insistence on assimilation on the other.

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## INTERVIEWS

- Abdus Salam (chair PYO) (recorded, plus informal conversation)
- Ahmed Kazi (Birmingham, April 1991, recorded)
- Avtar Jouhl (recorded, plus informal conversation)
- Ayub Ali (former chair PYO) (recorded, plus informal conversation)
- Darshan Tatla (recorded, plus informal conversation)
- Imam Bahauddin (Birmingham, April 1991, recorded)
- Informal conversation with IWA(Southall) clients and IWA(GB) members.
- Informal conversations with attenders at Saddam Hussein mosque
- Informal conversations with PYO youth workers and club members
- Informal conversations with students and others at Tabligh centre in Dewsbury
- Mohammed Ali (Leeds June 1991, recorded)



**90 Three Asian Associations in Britain**

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Mohammed Ishaq Patel (Dewsbury June 1991, unrecorded)

Piarr Singh Khabra (recorded, plus informal conversation)

Shafiq Islam (secretary PYO) (recorded, plus informal conversation)

Vishnu Sharma (recorded, plus informal conversation)