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8 AUG 1997

**ASIAN CHILDREN AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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For Sehr and Omair  
and Abbu and Ammi  
With Love

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic study of Asian children who attended Cherrydale School, a mixed comprehensive in the south of England. It is concerned with the first generation of Asian children educated in Britain and is a study of their lives at home and at school. The main focus of this thesis is an exploration of the circumstances in which Asian children negotiate their way in different cultures. This study reveals the complexity of their lives which defies simple explanations. It describes the different ways in which 'race', class and gender combine to produce marginality for Asian children. A study of one single factor would not have given a holistic picture of their lived experience.

The field work for this study was undertaken between 1987 and 1990. It draws on the children's, their parents', peers' and teachers' views on education and schooling. It represents different perspectives. To have ignored either the home or the school would have provided an incomplete picture of the world in which these teenagers live.

Chapter 1 outlines the main theme of this exploratory study. It introduces the unique position in which Asian children find themselves in Britain in the late 1980s.

Chapter 2 surveys the existing literature in the field. As there is very little previous ethnographic research on Asian adolescents which takes into account their home and school experiences, I have referred to a wider body of literature which includes anthropological

and ethnic/'race relations' studies.

Chapter 3 is about methodological issues. It includes an account of the initial problems of negotiating access, and continuously renegotiating access throughout the duration of this study.

Chapter 4 is about Asian parents' world. It is based on matters concerning the parents' past and present which have a direct influence on their children's lives.

Chapter 5 establishes a link between parents' education, their employment and their hopes for their children.

Chapter 6 looks at children's accounts of their homes and schools, and the effect of gender on their experiences. It also looks at their relationships with their parents, teachers and other members of their communities.

Chapter 7 is based on the effect of parents' occupations on children's aspirations including their employment opportunities and their hopes for the future. It also explores the effect of gender.

Chapter 8 underlines the connection between gender and spatial constraints at home and at school among Asian boys and girls. Their relationships with their white, African-Caribbean and Asian peers are also discussed, as are the different images they adopt.

Chapter 9 is concerned with Asian children's experiences of racism, their descriptions of "good", "bad" and "normal" teachers, their positive and negative experiences of school.

Chapter 10 looks at the ways in which the school as an institution responds to the presence of Asian children. It is based on interviews and discussions with several mainstream and ethnic minority teachers.

Chapter 11 concludes the thesis by drawing together the main findings of this study and discusses possible similarities between the circumstances of Asians living in Cherrytown with those living outside it. More research is needed in the area of home and school based studies. This chapter makes some concrete suggestions for further research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1

#### Asian children in Britain

Asian children lead interesting and intricate lives. They are poised at the intersection of ethnically and socially diverse cultures at a time of great change in British schools and in British society. From quite early in their lives, while still at primary and middle schools, Asian children learn to attempt a delicate balance between matters concerning their homes and their schools. Their parents belong to that generation of migrants who for historical and economic reasons chose Britain as their place of residence and employment. Many Asian parents belong to encapsulated communities and subscribe to the myth of return to their places of birth, albeit in the far distant future. Their children, placed psychologically and spatially in a different world, experience different realities.

School teachers are not fully aware of the situation facing many Asian teenagers who need to create as manageable and harmonious a balance as possible in their lives. This is sometimes made difficult by the competing demands made on the children's time and resources. Asian children's passage through their school years raises interesting questions. How do they make sense of their world and of different aspects of their daily lives; what do they make of their peers', teachers' and parents' views?

Asian parents are not fully aware of the different demands which the school makes on their

children. Most Asian parents did not go to school in Britain and know very little about school processes. They are not aware of the different sorts of pressures their children experience. This study attempts to look at the ways in which Asian children negotiate their way among the sometimes conflicting perceptions and demands of home and school.

For several reasons the generation of British Asians to come of age in the late 1980s is a generation worthy of serious study. In terms of ethnography, Asian children are an under-researched community. Fragments of their school experiences have, until now, been looked at mostly in reports of their academic achievement and of their experience of racism. A holistic study of their life experiences at home and at school might yield some answers to the question raised above.

The present study is therefore exploratory. My central aim is to bring together Asian children's experiences and set them alongside their parents' and teachers' views. Such a three dimensional account has not to my knowledge been attempted in Britain before. It requires a considerable amount of time and patience. It also requires a willingness to cross the boundaries between home and school when necessary, as well as those between the parents' past and their children's future in order to focus on individual children's perceptions. To be able to do justice to three separate groups of informants it is necessary to step back, record, describe and analyse the data around emerging themes in a manner which renders Asian children's lives more accessible and opens up the field to further exploration.

Implicit in this thesis is the constant presence and negative power of racism whose potential for mutilating many young people's life chances has been widely acknowledged. This thesis has focused also on other experiences which Asian children and their parents shared with

me. These include -issues connected with migration and the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. The effects of different socioeconomic positions on Asian children's aspirations have also been studied.

In attempting to convey the nature of the chasms between home and school, as experienced and described to me by Asian children, I am concerned to show that school forms one but not the only form of education children encounter. School undoubtedly undertakes the more formal tasks of teaching and learning, but parents begin to educate their children long before children set foot in school. Children learn about their linguistic, cultural and religious heritage outside school. Peer group interactions and experiences in society at large play an important part in continuing that education. The substantive chapters in this thesis are concerned with exploring the part parents, peers and teachers play in Asian children's lives. These when viewed together draw a fuller, less fragmented picture of education than would be given by a study of school alone.

It was my intention initially to study white, African-Caribbean and Asian students, both boys and girls, in a secondary school and at home. However, the sheer amount of time required to carry out a study at school and in different homes made it impossible to study different communities in equal depth. Mainly because of the constraints of time therefore, this study focuses on Asian children whose parents migrated to Britain from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. I did not seek to deliberately exclude African-Caribbean or white children and their parents, informal conversations with whom, I had hoped, would form a background to the study of Asian children. It was felt important to include their views as African-Caribbean and white students were present in almost all classes with Asian students. I chose to study Asian communities because I share a similar ethnic background. I also felt that I could make a contribution in this area because I could negotiate access to

many of the parents both linguistically and culturally.

## 1.2

### Setting the scene

This, then, is an ethnographic study of the home and the school experiences of a group of Asian children who attended "Cherrydale" school, a mixed comprehensive in "Cherrytown" in the south of England. Although the significance of the connection between these two spheres of children's lives has been widely acknowledged, ethnographic studies of children's and young people's experiences have up to now concentrated mostly on the school aspect.

This study takes account of economic, social, cultural and religious factors which have, in Asian parents' own terms, shaped their lives in Britain and which in turn constitute the home background of the children under study. It incorporates the perspectives of these children's teachers as well as the manner in which the children's background is perceived by their African-Caribbean and white peers and their mostly white teachers. School based data were collected over a period of two years between 1987 and 1989, mainly through detailed interviews supplemented by participant observation. Data from parental communities were gathered from a sample of 50 families over a period of two years ending in 1990, during which a minimum of two visits were made to each household. The research draws heavily on open ended and exploratory interviews with at least one parent and in many cases both parents of all the Asian children in the study. These lengthy home visits were carried out in many cases after school based research data had been gathered about individual children. The study also draws on data collected from the teachers in Cherrydale School. Some classroom observation is included in the research where it throws light on the information gained or interpretations suggested by the interviews.

The main focus of the study, however, remains on Asian children. This research was carried out with a view to drawing as detailed a picture as possible of the day to day realities of their concerns and preoccupations. Although parents and teachers are of interest in their own right, their primary function in the thesis is to help illuminate the children's experiences.

### 1.3

#### In search of a theory

When I began this research, I entered the field with an open mind and without wishing to prove the salience of one particular theory over others. This is not to claim that I had no presuppositions or interests, or to deny that several hypotheses were formed and tested during the research period. While remaining open as far as possible to the participants' interpretations of their own experiences, I wanted to study the connection between the children's experiences at home and at school. Detailed field notes based on informal conversations and interviews carried out in school and in Asian children's homes showed again and again the difficulty of fitting all the emerging evidence under one all embracing theoretical model. It is not easy and it may not even be possible to find a model which takes account of structural forces in society and successfully links that to the micro-analysis of interaction in a small community, without dismissing new insights from the field and without discarding data which does not fit into one pre-determined theory. In trying to make sense of all the data, I realised that I was often attempting to fit a one dimensional theory on to three dimensional data about children, their parents and teachers. While collecting data and during its analysis, the effects of social class, 'race'/ethnicity and gender were present simultaneously. If the data had to be reduced to one theoretical concept, "marginality" would be best suited as it would cover the most and discard the least of my data. The grounded theory embedded within the main body of the data emerged as a

statement which captured most of the experiences of Asian children. This thesis is about how 'race'/ethnicity, class and gender combine to produce marginality for Asian children in a secondary school.

The present study hopes to include as honest and rounded a representation of the field work based data as possible, including any contradictory accounts which emerged. It was not the intention of this enquiry to fit all the data into a neat non-conflicting pattern, otherwise it would in my opinion fail as an ethnographic study. It is an exploratory study which hopes to open the field to further investigation. I have tried as far as possible to step back so that those being researched remain at the centre. Those people whose opinions and experiences inform this thesis are often themselves highly articulate. If this thesis succeeds in defining Asian children's, their parents' and school's views in the very words and images conjured by the informants, it will have succeeded in transmitting some thoughtful insights to the reader directly from the field. If it manages to underline the complex nature of daily life for a group of ordinary Asian boys and girls in a secondary school, it will have opened an important area of research.

#### 1.4

##### A note on terminology

Whenever a Punjabi, Urdu, Sylhetti or Hindi word appears in the thesis, an English translation is provided in brackets immediately following the word, for example: **maahol** (atmosphere).

I have used the term "children" throughout the thesis as teachers and parents referred to the 13 to 18 year olds in school as "children". Many children referred to their peers as "children" as well. During the field work, teachers and children referred to the classes as



"years". This use has been maintained in the thesis so that third year students for example are referred to as third years. Although the term "South Asian" describes the ethnicity of people from the Subcontinent more accurately, I have used the term "Asian" for brevity and also because of its current use in Britain. Whenever the data suggests a particular point in relation to a specific group among Asians I have pointed this out in the text. Within the thesis the use of the term "ethnic minority" is an inclusive term for African-Caribbeans, Chinese and Asians. More specific terms are used whenever they add to the description. The use of other terms like "black" is made when other researchers' work or the census is discussed where those terms have been used. Each family has been assigned a number which appears whenever a reference is made to any member of the family. The data for the present study were gathered with the understanding that identities of persons and places would remain anonymous. All names have therefore been changed to preserve confidentiality.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE SURVEY

#### 2.1

##### Introduction

In reviewing the literature for this study it was necessary to adopt an inter-disciplinary approach. I have drawn upon anthropological and 'race relations' studies when looking at the parents' generation. School based educational research and ethnography were used for data on children and their teachers.

The literature survey below is divided into four sections and draws upon the main outcomes of previous research. The first two sections review existing literature covering the home aspect of Asian children's lives, drawing together the main themes which run through research conducted on the parents' generation. The third section is about the research done in Britain on the social world of Asian children and young people. The final section is about school based research on ethnic minority children. It reviews those ethnographic studies of secondary schools which look at the combined impact of 'race'/ethnicity, social class and gender on the lives of young people. The main area of deficit identified is the paucity of ethnographic research combining the home and school aspect of Asian children's lives. To the best of my knowledge, at the time of writing there is not a single piece of published research on Asian communities in Britain, which has attempted an ethnographic account of both the home and the school or has sought to capture children's, their parents' and teachers' views. This is an attempt to look at this three dimensional, under-researched

but rich field-

## 2.2

### Asian Communities in Britain

Asian communities have now been in Britain in many cases for over three decades. They have settled wherever they could find employment and where they could see further opportunities for themselves. As most Asian men from the Subcontinent came to Britain as economic migrants long before their wives and children came to join them, the generation of Asian children being schooled in British cities is still in many instances the first to be educated here for most of their school years. The present study is concerned with this generation.

#### 2.2.1

##### **Migration and settlement**

Most of the existing literature on Asian communities can be roughly divided into two inter-related groups. There is a growing body of anthropological literature which concentrates on the cultural aspect of Asian communities and looks at their process of migration and settlement in Britain. Its fieldwork was carried out in various geographical sites in Britain and in the Subcontinent (see Khan 1974, Anwar 1979, Helweg 1979, Shaw 1988, Werbner 1990). Then there are studies by academics interested in the ethnic/'race relations' aspect of the consequences of migration to Britain of Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Kenyan and Ugandan Asians. These studies focus on local political, employment and housing issues (see Dahya 1974, Robinson 1986, Eade 1989, Solomos 1992). In different ways both contribute to our understanding of the issues facing British Asians today. There are more studies on the Indian, particularly the Sikh, communities and on Pakistanis than on Bangladeshis. The answers which informants provided about their reasons for migration are

heard to this day from those who came to Britain from the Subcontinent.

Helweg (1979) writing about Gravesend was interested in finding out in terms

...both emotional and theoretical...why these immigrants left their homes in the Punjab, and why the situation has become so strained in contemporary Britain for all concerned.

(p. xi)

He looked at the situation facing "Gravesindians" and explored various dimensions of the Sikh culture which were transmitted to Britain. Some of the findings about the Sikh community are true of other groups of people from the Subcontinent as well, such as the concept of *izzat* (honour) as it affects both individuals and families.

The Punjabis are deeply concerned about their *izzat*...as evaluated by three different audiences: (1) villagers in Punjab, (2) Punjabis in England and (3) the English host community.

(p. 11)

These three reference groups are important when studying Asian communities. For the rural migrants who came to Britain, particularly after their wives joined them, the opinions of fellow villagers in the village and in Britain act as deterrents to sudden change in behaviour and attitude. In order to be considered respectable they must be seen to behave in ways which are approved of by their extended families and social peers. This is done by attempting to retain ancestral cultures in different forms. In practical terms, one of the ways in which this is achieved in small communities is through gossip, mentioned by more than one researcher studying Asian communities (see Jeffrey 1976, Helweg 1979, Eade 1989). How such a seemingly trivial activity as gossip emerged from the field in the present study as a regulating social force, particularly in the lives of Asian girls, is one of the issues discussed in the following chapters. Social pressure and obligations to the family lead people to buy land "back home", to send money to support relations who might be in need of financial help, or simply to gain more *izzat* or prestige locally. They directly affect parents regulating their offspring's behaviour so that they behave in a culturally acceptable

manner, and family honour is not tarnished. In religious Sikh, Muslim and Hindu-families, their religion also plays an important role in defining the ideal form of moral conduct, even though the two generations' perceptions and experiences of religion may differ.

In the present study carried out during the late 1980s, all the families had been united, the Bangladeshis being the last ones to become so. This had implications for their children's experience of schooling and length of stay in British schools. Families often had different views about migration, and women and men typically differed in that women were on the whole more nostalgic about visiting and returning "back home" than their husbands. The reasons for this, and other matters which concern Asian men and women, are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

### 2.2.2

#### **Encapsulation**

Asian communities and particularly Pakistani communities have often been portrayed as "encapsulated" communities within Britain, for example by Khan (1974) in Bradford, Anwar (1979) in Rochdale, Shaw (1988) in Oxford and Werbner (1990) in Manchester. Encapsulation has been described as an ethnic force which causes individuals to conform to the value system of their own community. It is at its strongest where ethnic communities' commercial, social and other day to day needs are met from within the ethnic enclave, for example by Asian-run shops, travel agents, banks and so on. This was re-entrenched for a generation of Asians who found greater ease in their dealings with people with whom they could use their own community languages. Following their own value systems and living within closely defined ethnic boundaries also protected them to some extent from racism. For encapsulation to occur, it is important that the kinship ties within which a person has been socialized are maintained. So strong is the tendency to conform, partly re-

established through within-kin marriages, that individuals have much to lose in the way of prestige if they deviate from the cultural norm.

Although this is true of many migrants from the older generation, studies of one generation in considerable depth can give rise to a static view of culture which is sometimes portrayed as a value system transferred en bloc to the next generation. Shaw's (1988) work based on data gathered about Pakistanis in Oxford is an example of the tendency among some social anthropologists to present an unchanging picture. One of the main contentions of the present thesis is to question this essentialist and static view of culture. When two generations are studied together, differences and change tend to become more noticeable. Younger Asians try to negotiate their own way in a manner which was not available to their parents, whose experience of adolescence was so completely different from their own. Their parents for example, never experienced compulsory schooling within a multi-faith and multi-ethnic urban environment, as members who were visibly and culturally identifiable.

In cultural studies on South Asians, a great deal of interest has been shown particularly by women researchers in arranged marriages and dowries (Ballard C. 1978, Shaw 1988, Werbner 1990). These play a significant part in the present research too. Contrary to what might be experienced by more affluent Asian young women, dowries were seen as a burden by many poor working class families in the present study. In relation to East African Sikh women, Bhachu (1985) has contested the view that dowries are oppressive. However, Bhachu acknowledged the role played by the economic standing and the social class position of the family. The stark choice in some families between their daughters having to earn money to collect dowries or carry on with further education, has not to my knowledge been explored in detail by researchers in Britain. It played an important role in the options open to some of the girls in my sample. Bangladeshi and Pakistani families

where fathers were unemployed were particularly vulnerable. Such parents could not afford to give their daughters many household items as "gifts" or "presents" (see Werbner 1990), particularly when they did not have brothers or sons who were economically secure. The question of dowries raises fundamental questions about gender and the role of education. It also raises questions about economic stability within Asian families in the late 1980s in a climate of economic recession in Britain.

### 2.2.3

#### **Myth of return**

Many studies of migrants from the Subcontinent either begin or end by highlighting the informants' avowed intention to return "back home for good". Dahya (1974), Khan (1974), Anwar (1979) and Helweg (1979) have all found that for a variety of complicated reasons, the moment of final decision was indefinitely postponed by many families even though elaborate plans were made to return. Some instances have been quoted in the literature of families who returned "back home" and then ran out of money in unprofitable business ventures and had to return to Britain. Many studies have found, and the migrants frequently claim, that they did not come to settle permanently in Britain in the first place. According to Dahya (1974):

The immigrants come with the firm intention of returning home where they hope to enjoy the fruits of their labour in retirement...(They) consider themselves to be transients and not settlers. However, this is not to imply that the immigrants, or any significant number of them, will in fact return home.  
(p. 83)

A considerable amount of literature exists on how chain migration developed and whether or not it was a "push and pull factor" (Cohen 1974). The myth of return also endures unabated when there is political instability in the countries where the families originated. Thus paradoxically the politically and economically unstable situation "back home" gives a greater persistence to the myth. It gives people an excuse for not returning "back home"

yet. They wait and hope things will improve one day. The moment of final decision is postponed repeatedly and this inevitably causes some families to straddle two worlds psychologically. Talking of these two worlds Anwar (1979) wrote:

Even if he thought he had come permanently there are kin and friends in Pakistan who cannot follow him because of the migration restrictions. By definition, then, the Pakistani migrant is a person whose network of relations cannot be located in Britain alone.

(p. 219)

The converse that such migrants cannot be located in Pakistan alone either, is not as fully developed in the literature. This tendency of straddling two worlds was also found by Alam (1988) to be the case among Bangladeshis and by Helweg (1979) in Indian families. It is not just a Pakistani phenomenon. The present study acknowledges the symbolic power and sustaining force of the myth of return in the lives of rural migrants. It was very much present in the data gathered, though the force with which it was articulated varied from family to family. Its relation to each family's social and economic standing within its own community, and the way the myth affected children was paradoxical. This will be explored in subsequent chapters. The myth of return is not the main focus of the present study, but it is crucial to acknowledge its persistence even during the late 1980s. It indirectly and subconsciously plays an important part in the way some children from Asian families perceive their long term future. The economic situation faced by each family also defines the way in which its younger members, particularly the young men, visualize their future roles and the contradictions those roles imply.

Bangladeshi communities have not received the same degree of attention from researchers as Indian and Pakistani communities (see Peach 1990). In this respect Alam's (1988) paper is an informative and rare account of Bangladeshi men who have settled in Britain. There is no parallel study of Bangladeshi women. According to Alam there are two distinct social status groups in Britain. There is a difference between those men who were urban dwellers



and those who were rural dwellers in Bangladesh - mostly in Sylhet - before their migration to Britain. The former, because of their better education and professional training, are better equipped for life in urban Britain as compared to the latter, who are less educated. Bangladeshi families in the present study in Cherrytown fall in the second category described above. There were very few educated Bangladeshis in Cherrytown and they did not associate with rural migrants from Sylhet.

Most of the studies on Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian communities discussed above are concerned with understanding and explaining the cultural aspects which have highlighted the role played in Asian families by kinship networks, **biraderi** ties and extended family systems. (**Biraderi** may be defined as a large patrilineal kinship group whose members mostly belong to the same caste or **zat**.) These studies elaborate on the notion of cultural reproduction. The recurrent themes both implicit and explicit in most of the studies are the myth of return, encapsulation and exclusion from the majority white communities. These themes were echoed by Asian parents in the fieldwork for the present research and will be developed further in the relevant chapters. In almost all the studies mentioned so far, the impact of migration on the parental generation who came to Britain having been brought up and socialised within their cultural norms outside Britain, forms the main reference point. The migrant parents are portrayed as the generation who experienced many hardships and made many sacrifices as newcomers facing a different cultural tradition in a new country. Such hardships are magnified if that country has a colonial history and the parents were alive when their countries of origin were still under British rule. Many migrants were not made to feel particularly welcome in Britain (see Humphrey and Ward, 1974).

The political and structural aspects of the migration to Britain of people from the Subcontinent have not always been developed explicitly in all the studies mentioned above.

Lawrence (1982) raised this as a major criticism especially with reference to Khan (1979) and Catherine Ballard (1979) whose anthropological studies of Asian communities, according to him, fail to situate the individuals in a broader political and historical context. Of Khan's account of the Mirpuri migration to Britain after the construction of Mangla Dam which displaced many families, Lawrence writes:

There is nothing in her account...which makes migration to Britain a necessary response to 'displacement', except for her comment that 'there has always been a tradition of migration from Mirpur'...She says nothing about the source of that political instability or about the cause of the 'general unemployment' in the country ...Indeed she only seems to mention these things because of her feeling that they will discourage people from returning 'from life in the west'.

(p. 112-3)

#### 2.2.4

##### **Asian communities and local politics**

The second group of studies are those which deal with the wider ethnic/'race relations' aspect of the presence of Asians as a minority in Britain. Rex and Moore's (1967) interpretation of the reasons for migrant workers' occupation of dilapidated houses in "twilight zones", as being a reaction to racial discrimination practised by local authorities, was challenged by Dahya (1974), who studied Pakistani ethnicity in Bradford and Birmingham. According to Dahya, immigrant workers can be seen to be operating within their own terms of reference, that is, saving to return and invest back home, and they should be studied with that in mind. According to him, in their earlier days of settlement Asian men deliberately chose cheap housing. Dahya did not rule out the possibilities of these workers' residential mobility being hindered in the future when their terms of reference might change, or they might want to move out of the ethnic enclave and begin to interact with the wider community.

Robinson's (1986) research on South Asians and East African Asians in Blackburn is an interesting study by a geographer influenced by sociology. He examined the forces which affect the behaviour of Asian immigrants within a social, economic and residential context. His study is unusual in that it highlights, among other factors, the prevalence of conflicts among different groups of Asians and their differing views about their lives in Britain. He also widened the debate by including the majority community's attitudes towards Asians, and identifying the prevalence of discrimination against Asian communities. He felt that the relatively recent Asian presence in Britain had given British society a renewed opportunity to demonstrate to a newer group of migrants that it is no longer a "racist or discriminatory society and that it does not see these groups only as an obsolete input to processes of industrial production"(p.205). Robinson's suggestions have a direct bearing on the future of Asian children in Britain, even though he was researching their parents' generation. Working class Asian parents place a considerable trust in the British education system, which they hope will deliver their children from some of the hardships they endured.

Werbner (1990) drew on her research experience in Manchester and discussed the harsh circumstances in which Pakistanis live. They have to negotiate a niche in the highly competitive economic and political sphere with as much dignity as they can muster. Her book, anthropological in nature, is unique in that it succeeds in showing the impact of wider socioeconomic and political forces on the strategies adopted by a local community for its cultural and economic survival. Her study is also able to demonstrate how the local political and historical situation of a city can define the options open to its inhabitants. What may be possible for a Pakistani family to achieve in Manchester, because of the unique history of that city, might be impossible for an identical family in Leamington. The position in which Asians find themselves in the present study is similarly closely connected to their local political and historical circumstances.

The concept of ethnic leadership has also been studied by researchers (see Anwar 1991, Eade 1991, Josephides 1991, Werbner 1991). Socioeconomic class and the ownership of wealth and influence emerge in Werbner's (1990) work as important status endowing factors in Pakistani communities. Werbner found that some of the University students who had come to study in Manchester stayed on in the city to become the local elite. In this way they contributed to the Asian communities' progress and positive self-image in the city. The Pakistani community leaders in her study were educated, articulate, bilingual men. This was certainly not the case in the present study of Cherrytown. The local representatives of different Asian communities were mostly not very well educated shopkeepers who had been chosen by some of their male **biraderi** members to be their spokesmen. Rival **biraderi** members supported different individuals, so that there could well be more than one leader representing each community in Cherrytown. Asian women did not participate at any stage in this process. The children who spoke to me would never turn to these local community leaders for advice or help. Yet it was these leaders whom the local councillors and education officers purported to consult about the needs and demands of their communities. Most of the children and their parents did not know which Asian individual represented them to the local council and only one family in my sample knew a leader personally. In any case, even if Asian parents and their children had turned to them, it is difficult to say how effectively these leaders might have been able to intervene. This is not the first time that the representativeness of the "leaders" has been questioned by researchers (see Khan 1974, Helweg 1979, Eade 1989, Werbner 1991a). The vast majority of the Asians who came to study at the University in Cherrytown did not stay on. Those educated Asians who graduated locally did not associate socially or politically with rural migrants and their families. In this sense it was a city self-consciously divided along social class lines.

Eade (1989) studied local Labour party politics and the issues of representation among Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets. His book highlights the tension between the older Bangladeshi men and the younger generation of men who wish to assert themselves politically. This is a very important area of enquiry both for local politics and for the impact that can have on the relationships between the older and the younger generations in Asian communities in the future. In Eade's book Asian women do not feature in this struggle for power sharing, though Southall Black Sisters are mentioned. Perhaps because he is a male researcher, Asian women's views were not so easily accessible to him; or it may be that Bangladeshi women in East London actually did not participate in the arena of local politics. Eade does not explore this in detail. Werbner (1992) studied the position of women and of young people male and female, both culturally and as regards their power relations as compared to older men in a traditional society. She showed that in charitable fund-raising ventures, older Pakistani Muslim men's ascendancy was threatened by young men and older women, who became the focus of attention within their local communities. Such politicization of local issues did not occur in Cherrytown. Most of the young Asians I spoke to felt they had to "keep quiet in front of elders."

More recently, researchers have turned their attention to the class position of Asian entrepreneurs and the relative degree of success among different economic groups (see Werbner 1990, Rafiq 1992, Srinivasan, 1992). There were self-employed small business owners in the present study who claimed they were not doing badly themselves; but none of the shopkeepers wanted their children to follow in their footsteps. Further analysis of such assertions will be discussed in the following chapters.

In the studies discussed above, not all researchers have taken account of different power relationships between the "encapsulated" migrant communities and the majority white

population. Robinson's (1986) study of Ugandan Asian and Pakistani settlers in Blackburn is one of the few studies that locate the settlers' experience in a predominantly white country and openly acknowledge the existence of racism. It is also a rare study in which both class and linguistic cum cultural differences among different Asian communities are discussed openly, as are issues to do with demography and social mobility. The suspicion, lack of trust and disunity he observed between different Asian communities living in Blackburn illustrates how important it is to realise the differences between the various South Asian communities who all perceive their ethnicity differently, even though they may be seen as a uniform body of "Asians" by the uninformed observer. (Sometimes even fairly well-informed observers often make only one distinction: between Bangladeshis on the one hand and all the other Asians on the other.) This is an important point because during the present research in the late 1980s, all but one of the mainstream white teachers at Cherrydale School saw all Asian students as a homogeneous group.

It is difficult to predict whether with the passage of time younger Asians may begin to bridge the chasms between the various Asian communities, and may come together on issues which cause a similar concern to them. This may not happen until they feel sufficiently rooted in Britain. It may be that the bridging of the chasms among Asian communities in Britain may occur alongside bridging those between Asian communities and other communities, including the majority white communities. Such a coming together may occur as a response to white racism or it may not happen at all. It is difficult to say.

To sum up then, this second group of studies emphasises the political situation within which local communities can be situated. Severe competition for diminishing resources during recession in Britain; a need for establishing status within both the sending communities and (to a lesser extent for the parental generation,) the receiving communities;

a high level of "risk taking" to quote Werbner (1990); and a need for political representation are themes which emerge from the second group of studies mentioned above. The majority of these studies too are mostly about the older migrant generation. This means that the issues identified by these studies are likely to have some influence on the lives of the children I studied. Although the local educational, political and economic situation will affect the data gathered in the present study, significant points of contact with other studies emerge from time to time, and will be discussed at appropriate parts in the subsequent chapters.

## 2.3

### Research on Asians as parents

There are a small number of published studies which have looked specifically at Asian parental perspectives in Britain. The principal ones are discussed below.

#### 2.3.1

##### **The effect of social class**

It has been found that parental social class and their attitude to education in general affect parents' degree of participation in their children's schooling. These studies include Bhachus' (1985a) account of Punjabi Sikh parents' educational strategies, and Joly's (1986) account of the opinions of Mirpuri parents in Saltley, Birmingham, about their children's schooling. Bhachu discussed the competitive nature of the Punjabi Sikh parents, and tried to show how that is directly related to their children's motivation to succeed at school. Bhachu claims that Sikhs easily accommodate variations in different class positions without inhibiting social interaction amongst themselves. She attributes this to the egalitarian nature of Sikh ethnicity. She differentiates between "urban interventionist" parents who get their children into good private schools, and "rural non-interventionist" parents who cannot use the

education system to their own advantage in a similar fashion. (Both "urban" and "rural" refer to the parents' origin in the Punjab.)

Bhachu does not elaborate upon the interesting problem inherent in the situation as described by her, namely when egalitarian tendencies clash with competitive tendencies within the Sikh communities. It could be argued that in practice there cannot be an egalitarian outcome for the younger generation of Sikh children, as the difference between the actions and intentions of urban interventionist and rural non-interventionist parents would secure different outcomes for their children. It could also be argued that the philosophical and moral theory of Sikh egalitarianism does not translate easily into practice where Sikh children's education is concerned. Had Bhachu been able to study the educational and career outcomes of the interventionist and non-interventionist families, she might well have found differences to the benefit of the former. In my study there was a vast difference between parents' verbally expressed keenness for their children to achieve academically at school and their actual practical role as facilitators in that process. It was a far more complex scene than the one Bhachu reported.

Joly (1986, 1987) looked at the ways in which Mirpuri parents react to their children's education. Joly's sample reflects the working class composition of the Mirpuri communities in Birmingham. Parents wanted their children to do well at school and their religious and cultural background affected their attitudes to their children's education. Muslim Mirpuri parents wanted the local education authority to take account of their religious and dietary needs. They were also objecting to the planned merger of two single sex schools in Birmingham. In the present study there was no demand for another single sex school for girls. On the contrary, although there was a single sex school not far from the mixed comprehensive school where the present study was carried out, many Muslim girls were



attending the mixed comprehensive rather than the single sex school.

Ghuman (1980) studied 40 Jat Sikh families. He found that middle class Sikh parents were more dissatisfied with their children's schools than the families where the head of household held manual and unskilled jobs. Parents protested about the lax discipline in school and insufficient homework. Ghuman and Gallop (1981) also studied 30 Bengali families in Cardiff, which included both Muslim parents from Bangladesh and Hindu families from India. Muslim Bengali parents, because of their own lack of formal education, showed less active interest in their children's education than the more educated Hindu Bengali parents. These studies about parental attitudes have made a contribution in an area where there is still a need for more research. It has to be said however, that the fieldwork for these studies was carried out only within the parental communities. Children's own perceptions of their situations were not studied alongside those of their parents'.

### 2.3.2

#### **Asian women: mothers and daughters**

It is reasonable to expect that there should be a correlation between the education, social class and status positions which Asian women occupy in their own communities and their expectations and experiences of work in Britain. The impact of that background on children's, particularly girls' schooling has not been sufficiently studied in Britain either by feminist writers or by others interested in theories of cultural reproduction. Brah and Shaw's (1992) study referred to the mothers of young Muslim Pakistani women in the labour market and the possible connection between daughters' tendency to follow in their working mothers' footsteps. Afshar (1989, 1989a) studied inter-generational attitudes of Pakistani women in West Yorkshire. Her work highlighted the culturally conflict-laden world of young women vis-a-vis their mothers' value systems. Hutchison and Varlaam (1985) studied

Bangladeshi mothers' concerns about their children's schooling. The present study sought to include data collected from mothers and fathers. The majority of Asian women (Muslim, Hindu and Sikh) in my sample saw themselves first and foremost as mothers and housewives, even in cases where they were in paid employment. One reason for this attitude may be that these mothers were comparing motherhood with the mostly menial occupations they held. They were also keen that their daughters be given an opportunity to study beyond compulsory schooling (see also Tomlinson and Hutchison 1991). Bangladeshi mothers in my sample tended to prefer early marriages for their daughters, but they were also more financially dependent on their children.

In recent years there has been a shift in focus on Asian women's issues by Asian women writers which seeks to challenge "the image of Asian women as impotent in defining their identities and social roles" (Bhachu 1991). Parmar (1982), Warrier (1988) Bhachu (1988, 1991) and Brah (1992), have raised the issues of gender and employment in the lives of Asian women. This is an important factor which must be taken into account when studying the connection between Asian girls at school and their mothers' occupations. However, the empirical data gathered for the present study showed the prevalence of traditional roles among Asian mothers irrespective of ethnicity and religion. This, as the following chapters will show, is a reflection of the mothers' upbringing and the opportunities they had for self-development. The situation would most probably be very different for those middle class Asian women who are professional workers in full-time or part-time paid employment (see Gifford 1990), those who are twice migrants, or those who are currently in professional and vocational training. Such women were not present among the mothers of Cherrydale School's Asian population. It may be that when the generation I studied becomes parents of teenagers their attitudes towards their own daughters may become more like those described in the above studies, especially if they are offered educational opportunities their

mothers never had (see also Bhavani 1994, Owen 1994). Most of the Asian girls in my sample said that they did not want to get married immediately after leaving school. The vast majority of the girls said that they wanted to carry on with further studies. This is discussed in more detail in the chapters on children.

## 2.4.

### Asian children and cultural ties

It is one of the main contentions of this thesis that the exploration of the lives of children being educated in Britain can provide evidence which challenges any essentialist view of culture. The lived culture as experienced by the parents' generation can be seen as the "idealised" culture which younger people reinterpret according to their own experience. It is something they may accept, reject or alter. While discussing teenagers in British secondary schools, it can be argued that because of the spatial and temporal differences between the adolescence of the two generations, any simplified version of the one supposedly "authentic" culture must be put in doubt.

#### 2.4.1

##### **The social world of Asian children**

In terms of the present study, it is important to point out that the anthropological studies discussed earlier have not focused on the relationships between parents and children, although some have touched on this issue. Some writers like Helweg (1979) engage in a tentative discussion of the choices and conflicts which face the second generation of Sikhs as regards approved career choices, transmission of religious values and the role of arranged marriages in bonding families together. He was mainly interested in studying the perspectives of Sikh parents and sought first and foremost to understand the older generation's value system. The earlier studies of this period are implicitly preoccupied with

notions of assimilation and integration. Hiro's (1971) book is an exception to this. He spoke to Asian young people across the country and felt that they were attempting a cultural synthesis. They were neither completely anglicized nor totally captivated by their parental culture. He reported that positive contact between Asian and white adolescents was not very frequent, with gang warfare occurring in the aftermath of Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speech. This abrasive encounter with racism was causing Asians to maintain a separate cultural identity.

The limited literature specifically focusing on the social world of Asian children in Britain captures the complexity of their situation. Anwar (1976) used the survey method and single interview schedule to explore sources of conflict and tensions in the lives of Sikh, Muslim and Hindu girls and boys, aged between 13 and 21 from nine areas in England and Scotland. The study explored the views of parents, children and professional "experts" to

examine the cultural contrast experienced by young Asians...focusing mainly on the sources and types of stresses, tensions, and conflict this contrast produces, and their consequences.

(p. 8)

Among the causes of tension between children and parents, were matters to do with freedom. Young people in the Asian community thought that English people of their own age had more freedom than they themselves had. They were convinced that their own children would have more freedom than that allowed to them by their own parents. It was found that Muslim families were most strict. It was also found that there was a shortage of leisure facilities for children and for girls in particular. More Asian young people aspired to professional careers than achieved them. A significant number of both parents and children mentioned racial discrimination. There was a high level of perception of unfair treatment, most clearly expressed and more poignantly felt by the more educated Asians. There was widespread criticism of Asian organizations for not recognising and meeting the

needs of Asian children, and more than a quarter of the respondents reported that they did not know about such organizations. The research ended with several recommendations, and was obviously set up to bring about positive change in the attitudes of welfare workers and other professionals and to facilitate policy changes. Although the study is not able to portray the full range of the subtleties of response from the field because of the methodological limitations of the survey method, it does touch on important themes which sometimes recurred in my research. Unlike Anwar however, I did not set out specifically to look for inter-generational conflict.

In another study which set out to study Asian children and young people Taylor (1976) studied 67 boys who reached school leaving age in Newcastle between 1962 and 1967. They were between the ages of 15 and 21 at the time of the study and they included Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. When questioned about their future plans, 31% of the sample thought they would remain in this country while 37% thought they would return to India, Pakistan or Africa; 27% did not know. Taylor could not explain what he called "the three-fold paradox" described below.

It is that those young men who had come to England young, those in work who had the better jobs and those who were more successful educationally were more in favour of returning than those who had not these apparent advantages for settling in England.

(p. 199)

A possible reason for this paradox in the case of relatively more affluent Asians emerged in my conversations with Asian parents and children. In my sample those people with the best apparent advantages for staying in England were also those people with the best advantages for returning "back home". Conversely those with apparently least to gain from staying in England were those who would find it most difficult, if not impossible, to return and settle to a decent standard of living "back home". Those families which had an economic base in Britain as well as back home, that is those who owned their own homes

and extended-family owned businesses in both countries, were facing genuine choice. With the choice came an attendant conflict caused by having to make difficult migration-related decisions. As compared to these few relatively affluent families the majority were not so placed. They had no choice but to remain and struggle where they were. The specificity of the myth of return in relation to parental ties with Britain will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis.

Taylor found little inter-generational conflict in the matter of religion though he found a great deal of difference of opinion among the various religious groups, with Muslims of all generations most likely to conform to tradition. He also found that those children who disagreed with their parents, as for instance in the case of secret girl friends,

went about their transgressions discreetly, without open defiance, so that either way there was a minimum of conflict with their mother and father.

(p. 124)

We are denied any glimpse of the girls' opinions and so we can only make a guarded judgement about what was claimed by the young men. Taylor draws a distinction between the Asian young people's lack of political assertiveness as against the "increasingly militant attitudes reported among young West Indians in England" (p. 217). Taylor did not interview any local West Indians himself though he was referring to research undertaken by others. Although he reported that several Asian boys quoted white boys as their best friends, as they did not live in the same areas it is obvious that these were mainly self-reported school based relationships, not verified by the researcher through actual observation. Taylor's study reported a greater degree of friendship between Asian and white boys than any other study. The children in my sample were on the whole not as financially secure as those in his study; also they were on average a younger population being mostly between the ages of 13 and 18. The differences in my findings may reflect, at least in part, the difference between Britain in the mid 1970s and the late 1980s. In Taylor's study more Asian boys

tended to stay on in full-time education. He found that Asian boys did as well if not better at school than a matched group of white boys from five secondary schools in Newcastle.

To the best of my knowledge, the only empirical study of Asian adolescents ever conducted in this country which took account of gender is Brah's (1979) unpublished doctoral thesis. She was interested in the link between home and school to some extent, though she mainly focused on studying marriage, family and selected aspects of the education system. Brah was also interested in the 'race relations' situation prevalent in Southall during 1975 and 1976. Brah studied Asian, mostly Sikh children and compared their attitudes with those of their white peers. She interviewed 50 respondents and their parents and used questionnaires to collect data from 300 boys and girls from white and Asian backgrounds. She depended on class teachers to distribute the questionnaires. She used factor analysis to make a comparison of cross-ethnic and inter-generational effects of continuity and change in the lives of white and Asian children, taking account of attitudes to teachers and parents. She compared the second generation Asian adolescents' views about marriage and family with those held by their counterparts who had been in Britain for less than two years. These were then set alongside answers obtained from white adolescents. She was wary of previous research which perhaps unintentionally represented Asian children as torn "between two cultures", and especially those studies which tended to

consider the Asian family as almost a pathological case, and the parents' generation as the root cause of the pathology. The correlation between certain problems faced by Asian youth and the factors outside the age system might tend to be underplayed, or ignored by those holding such a view.

(p. 23)

The factors she referred to include the historical context relevant to the arrival of Asians in Britain and also factors which affected interaction patterns between different ethnic groups. According to Brah both of these locate Asians in Britain. Some of Brah's findings also emerged from my sample. She found that Asian parents, particularly mothers were

more strict about their daughters' behaviour than their sons'. She also found that only a small number of Asians in her sample had adopted an anti-school stance; most placed a high value on educational qualifications. Brah found considerable ethnic polarisation in Southall and also found differences in the value system of the two ethnic/age categories. Second generation Asian adolescents differed significantly from teenage migrants who had been in Britain under two years.

Brah found Asian parental attitudes to range from "orthodox" to "radical" depending on their pre-migration experiences. White respondents were more inclined towards individualism and Asians towards family and religion and their age/gender status in the family vis a vis their parents. Asian girls felt that there was a greater degree of "social non-conformism" among Asian boys than themselves. White male respondents saw their male teachers as more individualistic than female teachers, while girls reversed the views. Asian teenagers saw their white teachers as more "cosmopolitan" than their white peers did. Brah found that with a very few exceptions most Asian young people were happy with the notion of an arranged marriage. In relation to school Brah found that Asian parents from middle class backgrounds were more likely to be critical of the education system. They were aware of the inconsistency between their class and ethnic position and were therefore better able to exploit their class position to the advantage of their children. This is a consistent finding in the literature so far.

Brah's study takes account of the historical dimension of the presence of Asians in Britain and is set in the climate of political unease caused by the racist murder of Gurdeep Singh Chagga in Southall. It is a pioneering study of a difficult subject matter. It might arguably have been advantageous if the researcher had been able to actually observe the school ethnographically so that what the young people asserted could have also been tested, if



necessary modified or extended through first hand observation, and perhaps redefined and reformulated by the young people themselves. Brah did not quote directly from any interviews of these children's teachers, nor did she collect data on school processes which would have presented a wider picture. Nevertheless, apart from her work, no one else in Britain has to my knowledge ever attempted to incorporate within a single study, parental views as well as school aged Asian children's views.

## 2.5

### **Ethnic minority children at school**

The general view which studies carried out in Britain on children from ethnic minority backgrounds have given rise to, is that Asian children, with the exception of Bangladeshis, are on average, performing better at school than their African-Caribbean peers and at least as well as their white peers (see for example the Rampton Report 1981 and the Swann Report 1985). This notion has not gone uncontested (see for example Tanna 1990). It can be argued that quantitative studies can be interpreted more sensitively and questioned more deeply with the help of detailed and finely textured information based on ethnographic data. Assuming that the claims about differential achievement of different ethnic groups are correct, ethnography could help explain this differential achievement. But it might do more. It might also cast doubt on the categorisation used by quantitative research. It may be the case, for example, that Bangladeshi children appear to do worse because they are from predominantly working class backgrounds, and that if their achievement is compared to that of Indian and Pakistani children from identical social class backgrounds, the supposed ethnic difference may disappear. By posing crucial underlying questions about how events unfold in school, and the extent to which children from different ethnic minority backgrounds experience home and school differently from their white peers, one might be able to throw some light on the issues facing young people in British schools.

Eggleston et al (1986) published their study a year after the Swann Report using questionnaires to obtain information about students. Without wishing to detract from the genuine merits of the study, it can be argued that the very construction of a questionnaire already presupposes a considerable understanding of the area under study. To draw up questions on important issues assumes that the researcher knows reasonably well in advance which issues are important for the informants. This was something I could not have assumed. The data I obtained about the myth of return, the pressure imposed by the dowry system and the different experiences of spatial freedom experienced by Asian boys and girls were not something I could have presumed to be present beforehand and placed in the questionnaires. Although the study by Eggleston et al (1986) contains an ethnographic study of two schools, by Cecile Wright, it has been viewed critically by some (see Foster 1990). Although it can be said that without the inclusion of ethnographic data, it would have been a very different kind of report and would not be as informative about school processes, Wright's study appeared as a free-standing chapter. Its implications for the interpretation of the quantitative data in the rest of the book are not explored in any detail.

### 2.5.1

#### **Ethnographic studies of secondary schools and the effect of social class, gender and 'race'/ethnicity**

Pioneering ethnographic studies of British schools such as those of Hargreaves (1967) Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981) concentrated on researching different aspects of children's (in the earlier studies, boys') culture and interests. These studies were in a sense following the pattern set by the classic anthropological studies such as those by Malinowski (1922) and Evans Pritchard (1940) who used participant observation to gain insider knowledge about their informants. Whyte's (1955) Street Corner Society and Becker's (1963) Outsiders,

looked at the strange and exotic nature of deviant male cultures and led the way to the use of ethnography of deviance within schools and beyond. In various studies of the anti-society and anti-school cultures, socioeconomic class has consistently emerged as a significant variable.

It was not until surprisingly recently that researchers began to include girls as a matter of course, and even then it was sometimes difficult for them to study girls in their own right. Griffin (1987) felt that she had been trying unsuccessfully to fit analytical frameworks originally applied to boys, such as that developed by Willis (1977) in order to study girls' cultures.

I tried in vain to fit the young women's experiences into this 'gang of lads' format but their lives were far too complex.

(p. 218)

McRobbie (1978), Deem (1978,1980), Spender (1980), Delamont (1980,1983), Stanley (1986) and Weiner and Arnot (1987) are just a few among a growing number of researchers who have emphasised the need to focus attention on girls. By the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, researchers such as Sharpe (1976), Griffin (1982, 1985, 1987) and Wolpe (1988) had begun to look at the way school processes and prepares boys and girls for their separate roles in later life. There was a growing interest also in the period of transition from school to the domestic/work life outside school in the lives of young women. Wolpe (1988) has shown how working class girls and boys collude with the lower expectations society has of them, and how schools and other outside influences reinforce gender differences in subtle ways. Her book emphasises the need to look very carefully at gender roles and social class and at the connection between family responsibilities and the need and availability of paid work for both men and women.

The effects of social class dominated sociology of education in Britain up until the 1970s.

Now it is acknowledged that gender and social class interact with one another. The difference between boys and girls is different in different social classes. Boys and girls from different ethnic groups, I shall argue, also experience different realities. The present study will explore this further with particular reference to Asian children.

Sharpe's (1976) work with working class girls discussed the way in which limited opportunities available to a previous generation of women were re-enacted in the lives of younger women. She drew attention to the lack of role models in the lives of girls besides that of the mother and wife. According to her, "it therefore makes sense to make their priorities love, marriage, husbands, children, jobs and careers, more or less in that order." Bisseret (1979) studied the subtle ways in which individual identities and histories are deeply affected by class and sex. McRobbie (1978) argued that teenage girls are preoccupied with elaborate notions of romantic love. Writing about gender relations in secondary schools researchers have stressed that researchers and policy makers should consider wider issues. According to Wallace (1987):

...gender identities and the role of the domestic sphere are an essential part of the process of social reproduction) rather than something to be 'tacked on' when considering women.

(p. 247)

It is only to be expected that the inclusion of girls in ethnographic research will add a new dimension of analysis which will be "complex", to quote Llewellyn (1980) and Griffin (1987).

If the girls belong to an ethnic minority group, it would of necessity add another layer of complexity. In many studies where social class and gender were taken into account 'race' did not receive serious attention. Riley (1988) has remarked on the invisibility of black girls from literature of school based studies.

Girls at school are assumed either to be non-existent or just pale reflections of the male pupils. Black girls are doubly invisible.

(p. 223)

This theme of invisibility will be further explored in later chapters of the present study. In the past when girls were studied, they were all white. Examples of such studies are those carried out by Stanworth (1981) and Measor (1984). This may be a matter of geographical coincidence in the selection of places where fieldwork was possible for the researchers.

Wright (1987) sought to study gender in multiracial classrooms. In that sense her work attempts to tackle different perceptions of the same scene which take account of pupils' ethnicity. She has argued that

Studies on gender and classroom interaction which have failed to give some consideration to the participants' race (or ethnicity) as an important variable run the risk of either projecting too simplistic or distorted a picture of classroom dynamics.

(p. 184)

Wright's (1986) detailed ethnographic account of formal and informal interviews and observations of informants, while defining the role played by ethnicity in young people's lives, does not take account of the students' social class as she was more interested in racism per se. Her more recent study of primary school children (1992) is an important contribution to classroom ethnography, especially to the study of Asian and African-Caribbean children's presence in class. But again, she does not take account of social class, even though gender and 'race' are considered.

Ideally an ethnographic study of children and their families should be able to look simultaneously at the effects of social class, gender, and 'race'/ethnicity, or it should at least acknowledge their simultaneous existence in the daily lives of school children. Reeves and Chevannes (1981) have reminded us that it is important to recognise the working class position of the vast majority of students from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Among the very few ethnographic studies of secondary schools which attempt to focus simultaneously on different aspects are Mac an Ghail's (1988) and Gillborn's (1990) studies. Both studies set out to look at the experiences of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Mac an Ghail focuses on the different forms of resistance among Asian and African-Caribbean young people who had succeeded within the school system and draws a picture of alienated youth as far as the young men are concerned. Mac an Ghail had access to these young people's homes but he did not draw upon that data to explore young people's world. He was a member of staff in one of the institutions studied but he did not draw upon staff room ethnography to enable his readers to obtain teachers' perspective, particularly those accounts which contradicted or challenged young people's assertions. The linguistic and cultural diversity of the young people is not explored in this study. The students Mac an Ghail studied seemed more politically aware in their own analyses of their lives than the students in my sample. The children in my study were very articulate about a whole range of different experiences which will be explored in later chapters.

Gillborn's study documents the experiences of children from different ethnic backgrounds and although the study was conducted in a mixed comprehensive, certain sections of the school's student population do not receive the researcher's attention. Among these are Asian school girls' experiences, who we are told were present in the school. The study draws attention to Asian and African-Caribbean boys and their experiences of conflict and racism at school.

## 2.5.2

### **The influence of home and school**

Within the context of home and school studies Taylor (1981) emphasised the need for a detailed, in-depth investigation to study school performance and family background. She also suggested that a study should be carried out to explore

in what ways colour and ethnicity affect the attitudes of teachers and conversely to look at the attitudes of pupils to teachers and their perceptions of home and school differences, especially on the issue of differential expectation and aspiration...

(p. 241)

It was conceded by Taylor that such matters would be "extremely controversial and hazardous" and would thus only be possible on a "smaller scale." Although she was writing specifically about African-Caribbean children, her suggestions are of equal value for the study of other groups of children and young people, such as Asian children whose experiences inform much of the present study. Equally important though, it could be argued, is the need to look at the difficulties and encouragement parents' own experience provides for their children during their time at school and afterwards.

In her review of literature in the area of home and school relations, Tomlinson (1984) has pointed out that historically in Britain " 'normal' home-school relations have never been particularly harmonious" (p. 21). She goes on to highlight the extra sensitivity which is required by (white) teachers to deal with ethnic minority students and their families, and argues that teachers are prone to look at material disadvantage when viewing ethnic minority children rather than disadvantages connected with racial discrimination (see p. 118). She argues that schools need to be more aware of their ethnic minority students' cultural diversity and respond positively by adopting more radical home-school policies.

The lives of school children at home and at school have been discussed and explored

separately in the past. The significance of the connection between these two spheres of children's lives was emphasised as long ago as 1963 in the Newsom Report and 1964 by Douglas. Then a little later following the publication of the Plowden Report (1967) and contributions on the topic by various academics (see Blyth 1967, Taylor 1967, Craft 1970, Morgan 1989), the subject has remained in public view in Britain with differing degrees of both public and academic interest. Parental choice has become a familiar political notion in the 1990s. How far the notion can lend itself to actual practice will no doubt be the subject of continued debate and research for several years to come. Many researchers (Ghuman 1980, Taylor 1981, Tomlinson 1984, Brar 1991, among them) have drawn attention at the need to look more closely at the connections between home and school. Children's academic achievement has often been explained in terms of their home background. Most researchers who have studied children and young people from ethnic minority communities have tended to focus almost totally on in-school experiences, and this too mainly or only in terms of academic outcomes (see Little 1975, Mackintosh et al 1988, ILEA Studies 1967, 1990).

It was concern about the under achievement of children from ethnic minority communities which led to the setting up of the Rampton Committee. The Rampton Report (1981) was a preliminary report concerned solely with the educational attainment of African-Caribbean children; the Committee then went on to explore other ethnic minority children's needs as well, producing the final Swann Report in 1985. In its summing up the Swann Report did not suggest any radical change from those practices in existence at the time. Very few pages of the Swann report actually quote what children feel about their situations during their school years and how they think they can be helped in practical terms. Ethnography seems the best way of studying children's and young people's school experiences directly in order to discover what constitutes that experience. The alternative would be to make a



priori assumptions about what happens in schools. The Swann report makes insufficient use of direct research on parents' teachers' and students' opinions about the education system in Britain.

After Swann, although the debate between the "multiculturalists" and the "anti racists" has dominated academic discussion (see Verma 1989, Gilroy 1990, Sarup 1991, Rattansi 1992), teachers' opinions about ethnic minority pupils have not been systematically studied across different local education authorities. The Swann Report draws attention to the link between teacher expectation and the self-concept of pupils of different ethnic origin (see Chapter 2 annex B). There is also some reference made in the Swann Report to the prejudicial attitudes of some teachers, but there is very scant ethnographic evidence of within-school and within-class teacher interaction with ethnic minority students which proves beyond doubt the existence of overt racism. However this is not confined to the Swann Report. Where such evidence has been presented (Wright 1986, Troyna 1991, Gillborn and Drew 1992) its validity is hotly contested (see Foster 1990, Hammersley 1992, Hammersley and Gomm 1993). And yet we know that racism exists. What is difficult is to ascertain how widespread racism is, or what its effects are. We do not have enough empirical data about the role of racism within schools as compared with racism outside schools. This says something about the difficulty inherent in obtaining convincing evidence in this difficult area. Racism can take subtle forms and overt, unsubtle racism is less likely to occur in the presence of a researcher. In the present study individual children's and their parents' experiences of racist incidents have been documented in the relevant chapters, and one of the rare instances where classroom observation actually captured what may arguably be an example of teacher racism is analysed in detail.

In some of the discussion which followed in the wake of the Swann Report, doubts were

raised about the wisdom of direct comparisons between different groups of children. Researchers concerned about the educational achievement of children in schools have continued to focus on the collection and analysis of public examination results for children from different ethnic groups. Brewer and Haslum (1986), Plewis (1987) and Nuttall et al (1989) have all conducted mainly quantitative studies. But most of the studies, whether they were psychometric studies set up to measure ability and IQ or studies using standardised tests to measure attainment in Maths and English, have made similar questionable assumptions. In her review of existing research on ethnic minority children in British schools between 1960 and 1982 Tomlinson (1983) argues that:

The researchers have usually decided...that what they were measuring was the comparative ability or performance of minority group children and (largely urban) indigenous children. The assumption behind the studies is that the experiences of the different groups of children within the education system are roughly similar, and fair comparison is therefore possible. This is, in itself a dubious assumption.

(p. 27)

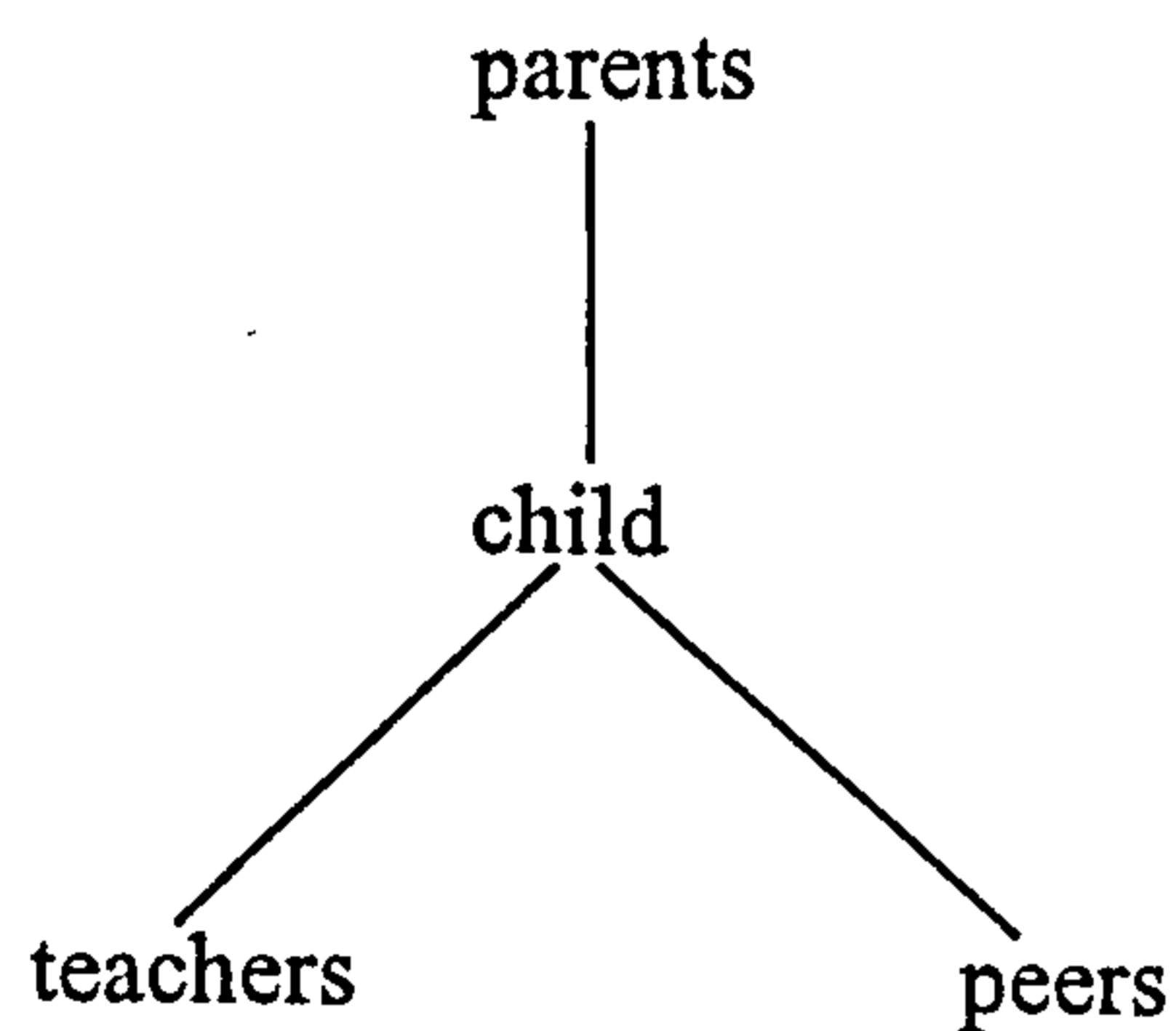
Children's experience of schooling is affected by significant factors such as social class, 'race'/ethnicity and gender. The fine differences in the perceptions held by children, parents and teachers can be discovered through ethnography.

### 2.5.3

#### **Ethnography of Home and School and Asian children**

When talking about home and school simultaneously it is necessary to spend time and effort on studying both the school and the home aspect. In existing ethnographic works concerned with the education of Asian students, more time has been spent on studying the school. Even in the very rare instances when home is taken account of in the studies of children from ethnic minority backgrounds, such as James' (1974) study of Sikh children, a valuable and sensitively written account of the background of Sikh children, the interaction of these two spheres of children's lives is not sufficiently developed from the

point of view of the children or in children's own words. The home is described as a background to the school. The reader is not invited to share the participant observer's accounts of what the children made of their peers, parents and teachers. Within classroom based ethnographies and school based ethnographies the emphasis is on pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher interactions. If we took parental perspectives into account it would become possible to complete the picture. It can help to give a fuller understanding of the negotiation processes involved for the young people concerned. If the young person is placed at the centre in every instance, a picture emerges with the child in the middle and peers, parents and teachers at different points of the figure.



These significant others sometimes interact with each other, and sometimes do not. The young person at the centre interacts with all. The aggregate experience of the young people under study can thus be looked at through their self-reported and observed relationships with their teachers, peers and parents.

## 2.6

### Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on parents' generation. This was done by drawing upon anthropological and 'race'/ethnic relations research in Britain. This was followed by a review of available literature on Asian children and young people including school based

research. Ethnographic studies which took account of class, 'race'/ethnicity and gender were also reviewed. So far apart from Brah no one else seems to have attempted to explore Asian children's and parents' views within the same study, and Brah's work was not ethnographic.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1

##### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodological aspects of a pioneering study of Asian children, their parents and teachers. It begins with a general discussion of ethnography as the most appropriate mode of research available for opening up a subject which has not so far been much explored. It discusses particular methodological problems encountered, together with an account of how access was negotiated and maintained during data collection. The possible effects of my presence and personal disposition as a researcher on the data generated are also considered.

#### 3.2

##### Ethnography

The significant role which ethnography can play in helping us understand and explore school processes, social relations and different cultural contexts is now well established. Ethnography enables the researcher to access informants' explanations of their own realities by allowing them to voice their interpretations of and concerns about normal everyday events. Ethnography seeks to explore the meanings which informants give to everyday incidents instead of assimilating them into the researcher's pre-conceived notions about those realities and concerns. With the help of open-ended informal conversations, semi-structured and unstructured interviews and long term meticulous observation, it becomes

possible to generate data which is guided by the informants themselves. Even if the perceptions presented to the researcher are not taken at face value, they are the primary source of evidence which can be scrutinized in the light of further evidence and other conflicting accounts. This increases the chances of arriving at more accurate and rounded interpretations. It is sometimes even possible through these means to see the differences between people's avowed intentions and actual actions or accounts. A survey questionnaire used on its own does give information, but its answers are defined within the boundaries set by the researcher. If a questionnaire is followed by observation and further analysis the researcher can question the assumptions behind the questions he or she had asked in the first place, and even learn something about the limitations of the method. Ethnography enables the researcher to gather evidence informally from different sources and from different perspectives. It becomes possible to generate and analyse data which is not one dimensional. The more complex and unknown the territory the more fruitful this open ended method of enquiry becomes. Among the main rewards and challenges of embarking on an ethnographic study is the exciting possibility of unpredictable findings.

Ethnographic studies are influenced by interactionism to varying degrees and often rely on participant observation to collect data (see Blumer 1969, Woods 1983, Walford 1987). The present study is no exception. Although ethnography has been criticised for lack of precision due to an insufficient use or absence of quantification, for being subjective and for its unreproducibility, it has been argued that ethnography nevertheless opens the field to analysis in a way that other methods do not (see Hammersley 1990). The main emphasis in ethnographic studies is on how people define their realities. Their aim is not theory-testing but generating insights which are new for the researcher though often taken for granted by those involved in those settings. They succeed in decoding the previously hidden worlds of those who are being studied. The present study is concerned with exploring the

inner world of Asian children, their experiences within the education system, their hopes, fears and aspirations. These accounts are set alongside those of their parents and teachers. It was felt that in an exploratory study of this kind in a field without a previous record of research, ethnography would be useful in helping to focus on the most fruitful issues.

The novelty of early ethnographic studies of schools in Britain (see Hargreaves 1967, Lacey 1970) lay in highlighting the process of schooling by concentrating on the inner workings of the institution. Since that time numerous studies (for example Woods 1979, Ball 1981, Burgess 1983, Wolpe 1988) have been carried out in schools each focusing on a different aspect of the school. The present study began its course within a comprehensive school and then grew outwards to explore some aspects of a section of the parental community. Ethnographic studies of schools and the accompanying or subsequent research biographies of the ethnographer (see Burgess (ed.) 1984, Walford (ed.) 1987) emphasize the need for a high degree of reflexivity (see Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). This entails the cultivation of self-consciousness on the part of the researcher. According to Hammersley (1983):

We are part of the social world we study...This is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact.

(p. 15)

It is important for the researcher to be aware of the ways in which his or her personal attributes might affect the response of those being studied. By making the process of gaining access explicit the reader is provided with the background to the research which in itself is an integral part of research. This chapter will deal with this aspect in some detail.

### General background of the study

I was interested in undertaking an ethnographic study of a secondary school and its parental community. I wanted to study children old enough to be articulate about matters concerned with home and school and I chose 13 to 18 year olds. I felt that younger children would not by and large be as self-aware or as willing to be critical of parents and teachers.

I was not able to use any Open University contacts to gain access to Cherrydale School as it was not located near the University. I was not helped directly by the local education authority either to choose the most appropriate school or to be introduced to it through two of the senior officers whom I approached at the initial stages of the research. Thus access was completely self-negotiated. I tried to gain access to two other secondary schools in Cherrytown before approaching Cherrydale, the school which I eventually chose. This had an unplanned advantage in that by the time I approached Cherrydale, I had in effect rehearsed negotiating access within a school, something of which I had no previous experience. For research purposes Cherrydale School had the advantage of being a mixed comprehensive, and of having a diversity in its student intake in terms of both social class and ethnicity.

I had myself lived in Cherrytown for two years at the time I began the present research. While I was in the process of getting to know the town I took up a part-time community education post. This enabled me to talk informally to several parents. This factor more than anything else guided the final choice of Cherrydale, which was gaining a reputation of being a popular local school. Cherrydale, unlike another Cherrytown school, which was discussed frequently in the local and national media, had not been researched before, and was therefore, I felt, probably more likely to be unselfconscious about its inner workings.



(Further details about the school can be found in Chapters 4 and 10.)

### 3.4

#### Validity, reliability and the researcher's role

In terms of finding out about children's perceptions and parents' feelings and teachers' attitudes, how reliable was I as a "research instrument" ? How valid were my findings? What were my strengths in the field and what were my weaknesses? Given my background, my gender and ethnicity, the manner of my introduction to school, and later to children's homes, what were the kinds of things I could and could not observe reliably? The answers to these questions will affect the validity and reliability of my findings.

A school allocates a description to people according to the post they hold in it. Someone who does not undertake any teaching therefore is an unknown specimen, not easily placed in the school's scheme of things. This is especially true of teachers' attitudes, not so true of ancillary staff and non-teaching staff, nor of children who might be curious, but are neither as well-informed about the school's categories nor as anxious about the researcher as teachers might be. My initial entry into Cherrydale School, negotiated after an hour long interview with a deputy head, was eased somewhat by the disclosure that I had once taught in a secondary school. This acted as a passport to entry. The passport did not have to be shown daily. I managed to negotiate an open entry into Cherrydale and spent approximately two and a half days per week in school over a period of two years. As a non teaching researcher within the school, in and out of classrooms, staff rooms and playground, I was someone teachers could use. Outside the classroom I was sometimes almost a counsellor to whom they could 'moan' from time to time, mostly about school politics. Within the classroom, I was often treated as a sort of helper who was expected to assist the small group I was sitting with. This was the least I could do without becoming an unwelcome

visitor. Not all teachers found things for me to do, however, so that I could often observe the children without being interrupted. I was able to observe teachers' and children's general attitudes towards the school, for instance teachers' expressions of uncertainty in the face of the then new national curriculum or the children's sense of loss when one third of the staff left school during the first four terms of this research. If there was a child in class whose background I knew something about, I was often expected by the child to intervene on his or her behalf. This was not always possible.

My ethnicity probably made it difficult to observe any incidents there may have been of open or deliberate racism within the classrooms (though one possible incident is discussed in Chapter 9). It was however, for the same reason, almost certainly easier for me to obtain information about Asian and African-Caribbean children's experiences of racism than for a white researcher. Only on very rare occasions, could I detect anything of a racist nature in some conversations I overheard in the staff room. Most of the information about racism came to me through the children. These included white children's reports of some individual teachers' unfairness towards their peers, particularly Pakistani and African-Caribbean boys. Asian children made me aware of the subtle but hurtful forms racist humour can take, as well as of more direct forms of racism which they had to put up with on a regular basis, such as comments on the girls' clothes. I have no reason to doubt the children's accounts.

Asian children whom I visited at home and met at school, moved in and out of at least two worlds. I was the only adult on the scene who knew something about them which their teachers and parents did not know. I was able to detect contrasting attitudes in the same individual in two different settings. I could also use the knowledge of one place to obtain information about the other, or to try to understand the reason why children kept quiet about issues they knew quite a lot about. This is discussed in greater detail in the chapters

on children. Five children visited me at home after they got their examination results. I felt that I must have made the right moves to have obtained this kind of access. Asian children frequently told me they could talk to me about things which they could not discuss with their teachers, even their community language teachers.

### 3.5

#### On being an Asian woman researcher

The data presented in this thesis were connected in different ways to my personal characteristics. The research worked on different levels simultaneously and was affected by my age, sex and ethnic origin and my status as a researcher, as well as by more intangible characteristics like my manner of approaching people. Although my physical characteristics remained constant throughout the research my status varied in relation to the person with whom I was interacting. With some people it varied over time as I was taken increasingly into more confidence. My manner may also have changed, without my noticing, as I gained in experience and assurance.

Asian parents knew me as someone younger than them who had daily access to their children and their children's school. They realised that I was bilingual, and that I could be trusted with some confidential family matters. I was asked to help some families and was seen as a resource for information about how the education system, social services, housing and health departments worked, and how they affected Asian families, particularly Asian women. Generally there was disbelief when I said I did not know about many things but I could try and find out who the families should refer to. It was a relief when the deference in which I was held by some families turned in time to informality and I was no longer seen as an 'expert' but more just as the children's friend.

The teachers' responses to me varied and were somewhat contradictory. My status as a researcher who was never formally introduced to the school by the headteacher or any senior member of staff considerably diminished any potential threat I may have posed; at the same time my sex and ethnicity, that of a Pakistani woman was a source of curiosity and suspicion in some cases. During our early acquaintance, as he later admitted, one senior teacher for instance was convinced that I was checking the school out because my relations and Asian friends were probably thinking of going there. He, like many other teachers, assumed that I was married and thought I was not old enough to have teenage children. Apart from a few teachers my presence in the staff room began to be taken for granted after about a term. With the passage of time some teachers treated me as a confidant to whom they could let off steam about how bad things were for secondary school teachers. On the whole in research terms, I do not think I was seen as a threat by the majority of the men teachers. My presence was simply ignored by most of them. I was sometimes sent on errands to fetch books from the staff room, or to accompany children to the library to help them choose books for their project, neither of which suggests that I was regarded with awe. Teachers knew perfectly well that I was powerless to change anything for them, yet there were instances when my presence in school was useful for teachers on an individual basis. I was able very early in the research to maintain good working relations with some younger white teachers who were openly friendly right from the start and seemed to treat me as just another adult in school. I was particularly close to the African-Caribbean and Asian teachers who worked in the school on a part-time or full-time basis. They told me openly about their marginality within the school, probably because of my ethnic background; and as all except one of them were women, I suspect also because of my sex.

Many teachers saw me talking with children during lunch breaks and after school. They could easily see me out of the staff room windows. Some teachers were very conscious

about the close relationships I had with children. I was able to talk in Urdu and Punjabi with some children, particularly with some disruptive children. This brought uncertain expressions to some teachers' faces. Similarly when some teachers learned that an African-Caribbean girl who was having trouble with her parents came to see me at home over one week-end, and that on another occasion I had been invited home by a regular truant who happened to be white and lived on a council estate, there was considerable unease because I absolutely refused to divulge confidences. Not all teachers treated children as equals in their interactions. Their relationships with the children were very different from mine.

The children at Cherrydale School who were throughout the research its main sustaining focus and a source of tremendous inspiration, were the force which kept the research going through some of its difficult phases. I was able to befriend children from different social and ethnic backgrounds and felt reasonably comfortable in their various worlds. I was friendly with "deviants" and truants as well as with those boys and girls who proceeded to study for degrees at Universities. Some of these children have continued to keep in touch with me. I was able to negotiate access into a group of teenagers who were experimenting with drugs. I knew their peers who wrote poetry and songs in their spare time, and who did not associate with those who admitted being tempted by joyriders' activities. Asian children also saw me as I appeared to their parents and as I appeared to their teachers. In that sense they knew me better than their parents or their teachers had the opportunity of doing.

While the teachers may not have told me things which they might have told a male researcher or a white researcher, there is much less danger of Asian parents editing things out of their accounts. The reason is that most of the parents accepted my wife/mother persona as a homely non-threatening image. To ease access I sometimes took both my young children with me on home visits, neither of whom were of school age. Also, I was

not of the same kin, did not live next door to the parents, did not regularly socialize with their friends and was not likely to spread gossip against them. Some parents had thought it fit to call me home even though culturally "shameful" things had happened to their children, which their community did not always know everything about. This said something about how I was perceived by the children. Consequently, when the parents confided about matters which an Asian mother/wife would normally not be told, as for instance their off-spring's negation of home culture, it was done expressly to seek sympathy from someone who would not pass moral judgements on what they perceived to be their failure as parents.

### 3.6

#### Access

The data I was able to collect was directly linked to the way in which access was gained and sustained. This is described below.

#### 3.6.1

##### **Negotiating access to Cherrydale School and to teachers**

The process of negotiating access is itself research. By undertaking any kind of negotiation the researcher gains evidence about where power really lies. Also what the researcher is and is not allowed to access tells a lot about what is perceived to be important, to be a problem, a source of pride or embarrassment. The relationship of power changes as negotiations proceed. The researcher is mostly dependent on the goodwill of the teachers.

One pattern of access is described by Walker (1980):

To gain access to the school you need to first approach the Local Education Authority; to gain access to the staff, you need to approach the Head; to gain access to the pupils you need to approach the staff. Each fieldwork contact is thus sponsored by someone in authority over those you wish to study.

(p. 49)

Things worked differently for me in the field. I gained entry after a long probing conversation with the deputy head who was responsible for pastoral care and to whom I just happened to talk on the telephone when I first contacted the school. She introduced me to the head of third year who, perhaps by chance, perhaps not, was then the only non-white mainstream teacher. She was African-Caribbean. She introduced me to the children in a third year form. These children were then dispersed into different classes and subjects in the following years. This fortuitously extended my access to dozens of children from different social and ethnic backgrounds and to their friendship circles extending from the third year to the sixth form. When it came to everyone else I had to introduce myself anew. It surprised me considerably at the time that no one seemed to know who I was, particularly the senior members of staff who, I was told, had been consulted before I was first allowed to visit the school. All the initial and subsequent negotiations took place in informal conversation. My greatest sense of relief during that period was caused when my much dreaded unrehearsed, adlib speech to all the school staff about the present research remained unuttered. Within the school I did not belong to any clique and was seen as discreet. Most teachers tolerated me with mild amusement, though attitudes varied from department to department. The history department was most approachable and friendly. I could get away with asking many open questions without feeling that I was trespassing in forbidden land. I felt safe there although I have never taught history, nor was I ever taught the syllabus the children were following.

With the passage of time, teachers on the whole seemed either to forget why I was there or to have become indifferent to my presence. They did not hold a particularly high opinion of academic research. It was not considered a serious activity but was perceived half humorously as a kind of fruitless hobby. Those who asked me questions about research rarely waited long enough for me to answer them. I was accepted as a visitor who was

spending time in school in a voluntary capacity. This does not mean that information was not withheld from me. Withholding significant information from the researcher in certain circumstances can be teachers' prerogative and it can be exercised by people in authority within an institution or by those who feel that their loyalty to the institution should take precedence over the interests of research.

The other related point is an obvious one. What the researcher does or does not gain access to, determines the nature of the data. The school would not tell me anything about the distribution of ethnic minority pupils in different classes according to their ability. The official line was, to quote one teacher, "we treat everyone in the same way". Yet staff room talk betrayed some heads of years' unease over decisions about individual children's placements. I was not given access to the detention book which, according to the children, was kept somewhere in the annexe where those who were excluded from lessons were sent. None of the teachers mentioned its existence. I could never hope to attend a regular senior staff meeting nicknamed "the fortnightly KGB" by two junior teachers. The nature of the discussions and the agenda for these meetings were not shared with non-senior members of staff; nor were the minutes displayed on the staff notice board. Even though some senior members of staff were very friendly to me, no one shared the contents of these frequent meetings. They happily let me tape our conversations together about general school matters, such as issues about the uniform, but I could not prevail upon them to elaborate on specific matters about children from ethnic minority backgrounds. The school was conscious of not having the kind of intake which another school in Cherrytown had, and which, it was argued, gave that other school better examination results. This fact was always mentioned to me by heads of departments, rather than more junior teachers. I could not gain access to individual pupil records, which were held by the heads of year, though I did try very hard. I was allowed to be present at parents' interviews as a spectator, perhaps because



knowledge gained there was considered by all teachers to be public knowledge anyway. I was also able to attend full staff meetings and some governors' meetings.

There were some teachers who were very open on an individual basis. On the whole, teachers in Cherrydale School wanted to talk about their achievements and disasters before their thoughts could be brought to bear upon the subjects which I was interested in exploring. Some rehearsed their arguments with me before broaching sensitive topics with senior teachers. This happened at least twice in connection with discussing promotion prospects. The school had a policy of interviewing parents prior to their children starting school. Staff of dubious allegiances, who might express critical opinions about the school, were reportedly not asked to perform this duty. The school's only non-white, full-time teacher was not allowed to talk to a future parent in an interviewer's capacity, because, according to her, he was a University lecturer and a governor. Although this upset her she had no one to tell this to except the researcher. Such incidents eased my access to the inner feelings of some of the teachers concerned.

Some teachers were thinking of leaving the teaching profession altogether and were able to talk to me. Informally my advice was sought on numerous issues, like community education, parental involvement and school initiatives for getting better publicity for its fund raising events. At times I felt that I was being informally trained as a public relations person for the school. One of the teacher's quotations from my field notes illustrates this.

Nawaz said you went to see his Dad. I don't suppose he said anything about the sponsorship form?

(Mr Bland, PE teacher, field notes)

Nawaz's father owned a restaurant and could be a useful patron for the school. He hardly ever came to school; the assumption here was that maybe I could kill two birds with one stone, combine a home visit with a school visit and bring in some money for the school.

Some difficulty arose at the beginning of the second year of research, when one third of the full-time members of staff left and were replaced. Just as I felt that I was getting to know people, the composition of the school changed. It was jokingly called "the mass exodus" by one member of staff. Most of those who left moved on to other schools, rather than leaving the teaching profession. It was rumoured that it was due to the lack of effective leadership and support from the headteacher. It is difficult to say whether that was true, and if so, was the only reason. It took me another term and a half to develop even a nodding acquaintance with new members of staff. A continuation of trust built on one year of relationships from the previous year could not be taken for granted.

Among the people I came quite close to were three heads of departments, two heads of years, the head of the sixth form, two probationers and four other teachers. This includes four women and eight men. Among the non-teaching staff, the woman who ran the sixth form canteen and one of the caretakers were invaluable sources of informal information.

In terms of general access to the school, I am not sure quite how the information gathered might have been different for a white researcher or an Asian male researcher. If it was a man who liked sport, he might have had more opportunities of joining male members of staff in their cricket teams on warm summer afternoons. This may have given him greater opportunities of collecting informal views from other cricketers. Women teachers did not have an equivalent gender specific sport or social club which I could have joined.

Most teachers did not seem to mind my presence. Only one teacher took formal steps to stop me from attending her lessons. She asked the deputy head to write to me requesting that I do not carry on with observations because my presence distracted children from conducting science experiments. Among other teachers there were four who in more

informal ways did not let me observe their lessons. These teachers did not openly refuse to let me go to their classes but always made last minute excuses about why it would be most difficult on that particular occasion. This seemed to happen repeatedly week after week till I finally stopped asking. All five, interestingly, were teachers who had been identified to me by children either as racist or as ineffective in their classroom discipline. It is possible that they were conscious about their short-comings and felt uneasy about letting me observe their lessons. Although I do not have any reason to doubt the children's claims, I did not have the opportunity of testing them. It could also be said that some white teachers would not talk to an Asian researcher about many issues concerning Asian children. The teachers who refused access are perhaps only the tip of an iceberg of "polite" non-cooperation.

I learnt almost by chance that it is good for one's image in school to be seen talking to someone higher but not too high in the school's hierarchy, or alternatively, to be on good terms with someone who was held in high regard by teachers irrespective of their seniority in career terms.

Phil's OK isn't he? I think the school's really lucky to have him. You're on the right track if he's on your side.

(Mr Saunders, English teacher, field notes)

Phil was not on "my side", but I did not say so openly. It was just fortunate that I happened to know some people whose conversations with me in the staff room seemed to put me in a favourable light. I did not especially seek them out; it was just the way relationships developed.

Access can work both ways. A researcher too can be used as an instrument of access by the teachers. I was told that each time a lunch time had to be got through and a guest was around, one particular deputy head would bring the guest into the staff room and foist him

on the first person he met. Teachers who knew what was going to happen escaped from the encounter by making polite excuses and doing other things. One day something similar happened to me. The deputy head's action was frowned upon by junior teachers. One teacher sympathised with me because I was seen as a novice and an unsuspecting victim.

He (deputy head) claws you away from your peace and quiet and swings you into the pudding like a strawberry. Terrible!

(Terry Dalton, Art teacher, field notes)

Many teachers had escaped when they saw a particular PGCE tutor coming; later two of them came together to find out what exactly the subject of the conversation was and how I had coped. The PGCE tutor was going to send two students into these teachers' classes.

I formed different relationships with different teachers. With some I was very informal and we were on first-name terms. With others it was a more distant though cordial relationship; I had to be formal in addressing them. This is in itself data as it indicates the nature of the relationship. I have used the same way of referring to them in the thesis as I used in the field, thus some teachers are quoted by their first names and others by their full names and titles. This does not capture the subtle variety of different relationships but it goes some way towards indicating a basic difference between them.

There were altogether six individual ethnic minority teachers who taught at Cherrydale School between 1986 and 1989. These included African-Caribbean teachers of English and Asian community languages (Urdu and Bengali) teachers. Chapter 10 will deal in more detail with the situation faced by these teachers, but as far as access is concerned, I found it quite easy to talk to teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds. For instance I was the first person to know that Lizzie Knight, the African-Caribbean head of third year, was going to resign. Because she sometimes used me as a sounding board, I felt morally obliged to try to persuade her to stay for the children's sake despite the neutrality I ought to have

shown as a researcher. I was sympathetic and available for African- Caribbean teachers to talk to and ended up spending far more time with them than I had the opportunity of spending with the Pakistani and Bangladeshi peripatetic community language teachers. I had previously assumed that I would have a closer interaction with Asian teachers because I could speak their language and because I belonged to their culture. This highlighted the importance of shared time spent together in the field for the purpose of collecting data.

### 3.6.2

#### **Negotiating access to Asian parents**

The situation concerning access to parents was in most ways very different. Again, however, the role adopted by the researcher has an implication for the collection of data. It has been argued that women researchers have an advantage over men when it comes to gaining access to some settings (see Khan 1974, Brah 1979). This was certainly true in the children's homes. Within the Asian communities the effect of gender was very noticeable. I managed to gain access into the lives and homes of both boys and girls because of being a woman. It was a distinct advantage. It would have been impossible for a man to gain entry into young Asian girls' homes in the way I managed without having to think twice about it. Asian men researchers like Anwar (1979) and Ahmed (1980) have conceded as much with respect to work undertaken in Britain and in Pakistan. No such problems exist for a woman researcher with respect to Asian boys. No one raised any questions about how or why I had befriended their son.

The only problem was that in some cases fathers found it difficult to talk to me directly. Their wife would have to be present to enable a conversation to take place. It was not socially acceptable for a younger Asian woman to talk alone to an older Asian man to whom she was not related. Age also had something to do with it. A very old father would

not have to abide by this rule. In many cases fathers would be present for about half an hour and then leave me with their womenfolk to carry on the discussion. Any queries they had would be expressed by the fathers on a subsequent visit. In four traditional Muslim families, where the mother was away when I visited and I really wanted to meet the father, I had to take my husband with me, and the conversation took place through him. The father did not look directly at me but looked at my husband while he talked to me. In all other instances, mothers were present in the house during the home visit and such a situation did not arise. Asian men, especially Muslim men, sometimes avoid eye contact with women who are not close relations. This is done as a sign of respect towards them. Within the school setting fathers said they felt more comfortable talking to men rather than women teachers during parents' evenings.

Mothers said they felt more at ease with me than they would have done with a man. The women in the Asian communities could relate to me because they saw me in the wife/mother role. They saw me in shalwaar and kameez which they themselves were wearing, speaking their language, belonging to their culture. One of the indications of my having observed all the culturally correct rules was the ascription of a kinship name. I was never called by my first name by the parents, both as a sign of respect and as a symbol of acceptance. Instead I was assigned an honorary family relationship with reference to the speaker, and was referred to mostly by fathers as **Baji** (sister; respect laden term) or mostly by mothers as **Behen** (sister; affectionate term denoting equality). Elderly parents and grandparents called me **Beti** (daughter). There was sometimes a certain risk attached to this familiarity. Two Asian boys who took me home seemed to me to be dismayed at what they saw as their parents' uncritical approval of me. As a consequence, perhaps, I lost them as confidants, though I gained unconditional entry into their homes and to their parents. They were truanting on a regular basis and they may have been afraid that I would report them

to their fathers. They need not have feared, but they were not to know, never having come across an Asian woman researcher before. I never regained the degree of friendship I had shared with them over nearly one and a half years prior to the two visits. This raised for me the nagging question which remains unanswered to this day. Why had they called me home? Had they tested me and found me wanting? In their opinion what should I have done that I did not do?

Many parents, over two thirds of them, asked me to keep an eye on their children at school. There was an assumption that I would report misdemeanours, that I would intervene in the school on their behalf, that I would guide their children, help them with their difficulties, and maybe even come and teach them at home. There were other obligations which surrounded my home visits, and which unearthed other needs in the communities; there was no possibility of my simply going to a home, gathering data on school related matters alone and then disappearing from sight. One family, for example, hoped that I might be able to accompany a family member to the doctor's surgery. I am not sure whether similar expectations would be held of non-Asian researchers or of an Asian male researcher. Khan (1974) mentioned a great deal of closeness with the Pakistani family, particularly the young mother in whose house she was a lodger. She attributed this to her role as a woman researcher. Some of these non-research involvements pose no threat to the research, whereas others do. Even where some action on the researcher's part would risk damaging the research, sometimes in extreme cases the researcher can feel an obligation to intervene. In one instance I talked to a mother quite openly about solvent abuse and about local counselling services for young people should she ever need help. I knew that her son's new friends in the neighbourhood were experimenting with drugs.

I was seen by some parents as someone, besides the children, who could be taken into

confidence about family matters. This also indicated the position of dependency in which parents who cannot read English really are, not just in matters relating to their children's schooling, but in life generally. I did not find it difficult to communicate with those Bangladeshi and Indian parents whose first languages I did not share; in this case those languages were Sylhetti and Malayalam respectively. Except for two Malayalam speaking families who could speak English, these parents spoke to me in a mixture of Hindi and their own language. The prevalence of Hindi films in Asian homes as the most common leisure activity means that nearly everyone can speak a version of that language which is accessible to an Urdu speaker like myself. In very rare instances mothers got their children to explain things to me if they felt I had not understood them. Interestingly, with the exception of some Pakistani boys most of the Asian children chose to talk to me in English. Parents also related to me because I was seen as a fellow Asian and was expected to be aware of the shared experience that would entail in Britain.

My dress code also affected my access to Asian parents. While carrying out this research I often wondered if Asian women researchers are, and have to be, more self-conscious than Asian men about the clothes in which they present themselves to the field they are researching. Certainly women researchers have tended to discuss dress more often (Khan 1974, Delamont 1984). I wore traditional Punjabi clothes when visiting the children at home. With both mothers and fathers it was obvious that my initial access was eased by such a presentation. If I had gone to their homes as I often went to the school, then I might have been seen as too "westernized" and therefore most probably a different, more distant kind of access would have been granted to me by the parents. There was one way, however, in which I did not conform to the typical Asian "married woman" image. I did not wear any gold jewellery, a fact noticed without fail by mothers. It would have pleased them if I had worn long gold earrings and bangles and a locket at the end of a chain. I was



quizzed about it on many occasions. They genuinely wanted to know what my mother had given me when I got married. My usual way out was a promise that I would indeed dress up especially for them on a suitable occasion. I felt it was inappropriate to wear gold jewellery during my field trips. When I was subsequently invited to family weddings and innumerable social events in the Asian communities which I could not attend because of other commitments, it all became difficult and embarrassing. None of this would have been an issue for a non-Asian woman researcher or an Asian man.

It took more than one visit to make people feel at ease and comfortable with me. Only then did they begin to unwind. I visited each family at least twice and some many times. With some families I have formed lasting relationships. My relationships with the parents as they developed in most cases, were more like a series of long conversations with a friend or acquaintance, than an interview with a researcher. Many of the parents did not seem to mind my taping conversations once they had got to know me well. By being available and by not rushing them and appearing to have endless time for them, especially with the very busy mothers, I managed to tape lengthy conversations which I found very useful. They brought the whole background of the conversation alive later.

### **3.6.3**

#### **Negotiating access to children**

I was given my first guided tour as well as subsequent tours of the school by the children at my own request, so I saw it from the children's perspective. I learnt very interesting facts this way over a long period of time. I was informed of the five ways in which they could sneak out of the school unnoticed by the teachers. I learnt of the six places where they could hide if they wanted to avoid a class. I was regularly offered cigarettes by Asian and white boys and I learnt where the pupils could smoke "safely". Had I been a smoker

I would have had to give in to the temptation of smoking with them. It would be fair to say that within the context of a secondary school none of the above mentioned instances are extraordinary. What was apparent quite soon was that all children I got to know had done, to quote one Asian girl, some "naughty bad thing" some time at school.

By the time I left Cherrydale School there must have been very few children who did not know me by sight, though it took nearly two whole terms for some whose lessons I was in regularly to stop questioning me about the purpose of my research. The most common question asked, mostly by white working class boys, who often wished they were working for money instead of "working for teachers", (Nathan, fifth year, field notes) was what exactly my daily wage was. One fourth year boy, who later adopted me as a friend, initially told his friend that I was being paid by the Government. Why else would I spend whole lunch breaks "larking about with (him)?" (Daniel, fourth year, field notes.) Interestingly only Bangladeshi and Pakistani girls felt I was "doing it for free" (Zara: 17). African-Caribbean boys and Asian boys mostly felt I was doing it because according to a generally held opinion among children "you must like this school. Don't know what you see in here though!" (Khushwant: 26, field notes.)

Initially boys were far more friendly with me than girls. This was an unexpected experience. Boys were openly curious and uninhibited, willing to initiate conversations, willing to walk with me to the bus pushing their bikes alongside. This was generally true of white and Asian boys. Of the 21 Asian and white boys I got to know fairly well, by the end of one year, 15 would fall in the friendly category. It took me longer, more than a year, to make friends on the same level with African-Caribbean children. Of the seven African-Caribbean children all were reticent to begin with and very warm and open later, once I had been "checked out" (Sally James, fourth year). I could not see any measurable

difference in these children's response which I could base on gender. African-Caribbean girls were just as confident and as socially skilled as African-Caribbean boys. Asian girls were most watchful. Although I was met cordially by the latter, I was under surveillance. I learnt later when they began to trust me, that more than anything else to quote a fifth former my "gossipy ways" were on trial. I was trusted only after I had been proved not-guilty. There was evidence of the girls having discussed me at some length.

We didn't actually decide to do it. We all just had to make sure you were not a tell tale.

(Saira: 38, taped conversation)

I had to be "checked out" (Mala: 20) as a matter of course. Without this procedure I was not considered safe to talk to.

The checking out happened in a variety of different ways. The most difficult one was, being offered sweets in class in the middle of an English lesson and under the table. At the time I felt intuitively that to accept them and be found out by the teacher would cause friction. I also knew that by refusing to eat a sweet in class I would distance myself from the child who was half attempting to make me an "insider". In this particular instance when it first happened to me, I found the largest sized boiled sweet in my mouth which I could not suck without being caught in the act by the teacher, nor could I swallow it. I could not throw it as there were at least thirteen pairs of eyes fixed on me. Some other ways of checking out non-teachers or outsiders to the children's world were:

- a) Pretending to fight or even actually hitting a friend in the corridor and seeing whether I would tell them off or not, or whether I reported it to a teacher.
- b) Offering me cigarettes in school.
- c) Hiding my jacket or bag to see if I reported it. I had hoped that the tape recorder was not in the bag which was being mercilessly hijacked. My headphones suffered from immediate disappearance. They were returned anonymously next day slightly damaged.

- d) Winking at me the minute the teacher's back was turned.
- e) Scribbling my name on tables.
- f) Chuckling in class looking at me when the teacher's back was turned.

The boys told me they "teased" their women teachers more than men teachers, especially those "with squeaky voices" and "little voices". Unlike "proper" teachers, what was different about me was that I was in collusion with the children. I could not help smiling through it and had to look serious when the teachers turned around. Sweets were consumed in great quantities in the lessons of those teachers whom the children called "softies" or "puffalumps" (named after the soft shapeless dolls). They were never eaten in the classes of teachers who were considered to be "straight" or "stricties". In terms of student sub-cultures, I made it a point to try and relate to both those children who were disaffected in the school's terms and those who were keen to get on. Otherwise there would have been a danger of getting tagged early as someone who was interested in just one particular kind of children. That would have restricted my total experience of what it felt like to be a pupil at Cherrydale School.

It often amazed me just how much children knew. The indiscretions about teachers were related to me only by white children. One possible reason for this could be that culturally they could decode their teachers' situations more accurately than African-Caribbean or Asian children. They told me before anyone else, which teacher was going to be sacked because

He has a drink problem. He's henpecked because he lives down the road from my posh cousin and she (the teachers's wife) is awful, so he drinks.  
(Julie, white fourth year, taped conversation)

This particular teacher was indeed under treatment. It took six terms for one of the teachers to tell me this and only one term for the children. Children were quite curious about their

teachers' private lives.

You know Mrs Smith's stopped being feminist since she got pregnant. I bet her husband will make her stay at home.

(Kate, white fourth year, field notes)

I did not even know about this teacher's pregnancy or about her plans but as it turned out she did not return to Cherrydale. I was not able to discover whether she took up a job at another school.

Discussions between Asian children and myself mainly took place during lunch breaks, after school and in the children's free periods which were spent in the school library on wet days. None of the discussion took place in the child's home. This was through the children's choice, not mine. A safe neutral place turned out to be the community education centre to which I had unrestricted access because of the nature of my part-time work for the LEA. Fortunately, the centre was just ten minutes' walking distance from school. Although all the children had my home and office phone numbers, they only ever phoned me just before or just after their fifth year or 'A' level results and on three occasions before an interview for further studies after school. Five teenagers visited me at home during the summer of 1988 and 1989. They invariably stopped and talked to me if they met me in the shopping centre or elsewhere in the city. Four children made an appointment to meet me at MacDonaldis during school hours. The members of staff and their parents were not aware of these meetings. One teenager often met me in the then local Polytechnic cafeteria, which was not far from her home. In many cases discussions about school spread into other issues which concerned children. In several cases these conversations became retrospective and opened up their primary and middle school years at home and at school.

My access to Asian parents depended totally on my access to their children. The children took me home after school. Some invited me home when both their parents were likely to

- be in on a Sunday. Others took me home when one parent, mostly the father, was likely to be away. Some children invited me home for a meal. It depended on the children's relationship with their parents as well as their relationship with me. The school was almost incidental and had in these meetings an almost "by the way" sort of existence. I met and saw Asian children in different settings in different moods with different people surrounding them. I saw them at school, at their home, some at my home right at the end of the period of data collection, and I saw them in neutral territories, in parks, in the shopping centre and even on the public bus.

### 3.7

#### Methods used for collecting data

This research was conducted mainly through lengthy interviews and conversations with people individually and in groups. This was done alongside participant observation and in the case of teachers and children also through questionnaires. There were two kinds of questionnaires which were used for collecting information from teachers. One was open ended and the other was closed (see Appendix: 3A). I followed this with detailed interviews of eight mainstream teachers and all Asian and African-Caribbean teachers. The former included the head of English, the head of History, the Religious Education teacher who was also interested in pastoral care, and about whom children and teachers gave contrary reports, the PE teacher who also did a lot of "cover" work so that she knew many children, the CDT teacher about whom none of the children white, Asian or African-Caribbean had a good word to say, the careers teacher, the art teacher and a science teacher.

Some matters concerning the school's attitude towards Asian and African-Caribbean children could be checked by comparing one teacher's answers with those of another. By setting these within general impressions obtained in casual conversations with teachers in

the staff room, I could build a picture which was more accurate than the one based on questionnaires alone would have been. Every effort was made to introduce the topic for discussion among a group of teachers within a department where there was enough trust among the different members of staff and between them and me. This happened in two departments only and if possible these conversations were taped. They were full of anecdotes, some of which were about ethnic minority children, but most were about the teachers' professional peers and about the teachers' own immediate futures. This provided me with a further opportunity of cross checking my understanding of the school.

It was not appropriate to use questionnaires during my interaction with parents as I felt this would make them self-conscious, especially as the majority could not read and write in English and would not be able to understand what I wrote. Some parents could not read and write Urdu and Bengali either. The contents of our conversations were negotiable, so that they enabled me to gain access to parents on their own terms as well as mine. This meant that if some parents wanted to talk about unemployment or about their daughter's dowry I recorded those concerns when I wrote up my field notes as soon after the interaction as possible. I talked to the parents about their aspirations and expectations for their children. In this way I was able to take account of matters which concerned the parents deeply, even though they may not have appeared at first sight to be directly related to their children's schooling and education. This helped me to counter researcher bias as I let the parents set their own agenda. With the passage of time this proved to be invaluable, as it provided a fuller picture of the child's background. If I had talked to the parents only about Cherrydale School I would have made incomplete use of the opportunity of gaining access to the interconnecting threads which together weave the pattern of Asian children's lives in Cherrytown. I taped conversations with parents and children as well as with teachers. If someone objected to tape recording then I took down notes during the conversation. If that

proved difficult or inappropriate, as in conversations which occurred between some children and myself in MacDonalds, then I wrote it all out in detailed field notes as soon afterwards as possible.

The impressions and feelings which Asian children shared with me were collected over a period of nearly three years. They were verified through casual conversations, observation, detailed field notes, and later through detailed questionnaires and discussions which followed these questionnaires (see Appendix: 3B). Although the questionnaire sought to verify the information children wished to share with me, it failed to cover all the areas which interested the children themselves. It was useful as a baseline but limited in its scope. The digressions from it were often informative and illuminating and they provided opportunities to explore children's views about previous casual comments. This information was supplemented whenever possible with classroom observations. The latter were particularly useful when children invited me to their classrooms to share what it felt like for them on the inside. In one instance, for example, I was made to see and experience what it felt like to be taught a subject by a new, inexperienced teacher whom they compared with a previous, better teacher. Some children also kept diaries for me.

I tried to observe as many children in and out of classes as I could, and tried to discuss the problems they were facing, so that I could represent these notions and interpretations accurately. It was easier to see children experiencing problems in lessons which required practical skills, for instance drawing mirror images in maths or setting up an electric circuit in physics. In subjects like history and English which required discussion and writing essays, it was not always possible to detect which child was struggling. Asian children, particularly girls, were often quiet even though they could contribute to discussions.



Some of the general points I observed about children could to some extent have been tested against their teachers' assessments and test results. However, Cherrydale School did not let me have access to children's progress reports. I managed to obtain the public examination results for an altogether different project, three years after data was gathered at this school which took account of ethnicity and gender. On the whole, Asian girls tended to do better in public examinations than Asian boys.

### 3.8

#### Unexpected delays in the field

Visits to children's homes became, in research terms, long winded, initially unfocused and rambling excursions. They were emotionally quite demanding and time consuming. It took almost two years of persistent research to discover parental perspectives in a total sample of 50 families. On a practical level, it was not possible to go to a family and expect all family members to postpone everything and comply immediately with in-depth questionings about educational matters. There was a disconnectedness and a tendency among parents to digress and sometimes the tapes ran out before the research topic was even broached. Sometimes there were neighbours or other guests present, or there was illness in the family. There were often other more pressing issues present, like a father's impending redundancy. Families faced problems concerning housing, health and employment. As a visitor to the household in the capacity of a child's friend, it was just not possible for me to dismiss as irrelevant issues which were important for the parents. This highlighted the impossibility of brief and precisely focused communication between the researcher and Asian families. It was something for which I was unprepared.

Initially I had thought that a couple of visits would enable me to neatly categorize parents' attitudes to, and their expectations of their children and their children's schools. Field work

however turned out to be immensely more complex than that, especially for the first generation of migrant communities whose previous life in rural Pakistan, Bangladesh and India did not resemble in any way their life in Britain. I found again and again, visit after visit, that field notes were predominantly about parents' own histories and turmoils. They needed to communicate and locate themselves in time. They had to share and take stock of their situation with me. It almost seemed as though this was necessary before their child's present or future could be discussed. In order to remain rigorous in my field work I had to tease out after each visit the possible answers to the following sets of simple questions: What exactly did I want from the meeting? Was my role reactive or prescriptive in terms of the research, whose focus after all was the children? What did the parents set as their own agenda? How were the parents' concerns connected to the issues of their children's education? Where did parental concern for their children's education feature in their own scheme of things?

Finally I encountered problems and delays when trying to obtain basic, straightforward data held on the school's files. This was unexpected and consequently very frustrating at the time. I could not obtain a full list of all the students on school records until I was two thirds of the way into the fieldwork. If I had waited for the school to provide me with a comprehensive list by gender and ethnicity in order to proceed further, I would have wasted valuable time and perhaps waited in vain. I got round it by carrying on with the research despite this potentially serious handicap. As I befriended many children, they introduced me to their own friends. Besides this method I increased my circle of acquaintance with children by keeping track of all the new Asian children I met in each class. I estimated that there must be as many Bangladeshi children as there were Pakistani children in that school and that Indian children were in a minority. Thus based on a working knowledge from my day to day experiences of the school, I made sure that I included both boys and girls within

each ethnic group. I then realised talking to the children that there were not many Sikh children in the school and I thus actively sought out Sikh children and interviewed all of this tiny minority. (When I eventually obtained the full school list I discovered that I had greatly overestimated the Bangladeshi presence in the school. For details see Chapter 4.) After I had gained acceptance by over 50 different Asian children and young people aged between 14 and 18, I began home visits mostly on children's invitations. In terms of sampling I tried to maintain a balance in terms of gender. Other than that, the sample seemed to be self selected. In fact the snowballing effect was such that at some relatively arbitrary point I had to deliberately stop collecting data about children.

### 3.9

#### Ethical issues

Of paramount importance in any research of this kind is the issue of confidentiality and discretion. If I failed in this respect anywhere along the line, in the school or in the children's homes, the research would, I felt sure at the time, have ended then and there. Having to maintain a critical distance while trying to get participants' accounts of their own stories was not always easy. I have already described earlier in this chapter how parents, teachers and children all tested me for trustworthiness.

### 3.10

#### Generalisability of the data

It is hazardous to generalize from just one school, its pupils, and their parents. But there is no reason to doubt that the findings of this study may apply more generally within defined parameters. Given the socioeconomic background and the education of the Asian parents, the history of their migration and the typicality or "ordinariness" of their children, the main findings of this research could offer a provisional basis for future research in other

parts of the country.

### 3.11

#### Summary

This chapter discussed the role played by ethnography as a methodological device for generating and analysing data. The effect of the researcher in the field was also discussed. The chapter dealt with the issue of access. It also defined possible gains and losses in terms of the data collected, because of both the nature of the institution and the people under study.

The researcher's position as an enquiring guest in a situation can be best described as someone who has to maintain a delicate balance between enquiry, analysis, reflexivity and re-enquiry. A balance has to be struck between open curiosity and a sensitive, accurate decoding of the informants' messages. Access can never be taken for granted, and negotiation of access is never complete.

## CHAPTER 4

### ASIAN PARENTS AND THEIR TWO WORLDS

#### 4.1

##### Introduction

This chapter is based on detailed discussions with 50 Asian families. The children from these families attended Cherrydale School between December 1986 and June 1989. These children were in the third, fourth and fifth year, as well as the sixth form. There were on average 94 Asian children in Cherrydale School representing between 10% and 11% of the school population. The total number of children in the school during that period fluctuated between 830 and 850. Among the children I visited there were altogether 25 boys and 25 girls (see Chapter 3 for details about sampling). Further details about the children are set out in Table 4a.

**TABLE 4a**

##### **Asian children in the sample**

Ethnicity	Boys	Girls	Total
Bangladeshi	10	11	21
Pakistani	12	11	23
Indian	3	3	6
Total	25	25	50

In my sample there were altogether 44 Muslim families from Bangladesh and Pakistan.

There were six Indian families including two Sikh and four Hindu families. The religious groups to which the children and their families belong are represented in Table 4b.

**TABLE 4b**

**Asian children's religious groups**

Religion	Boys	Girls	Total
Muslim	22	22	44
Hindu	2	2	4
Sikh	1	1	2
Total	25	25	50

I was unable to obtain the school's own information about the ethnic composition of its population until 1988 (see Chapter 3). The information eventually provided by the school is shown in Table 4c. On obtaining the list it was possible to locate all the Asian children accurately only because they were identifiable through their surnames. (I knew that there were no Christian Asians in the school who might have had non-Asian sounding surnames.) In the event I interviewed nearly all the Bangladeshi children in the school, half of the Indians and over a third of the Pakistani children.

**TABLE 4c**

**Cherrydale School population**

Total children	844	100 %
Total Asians	94	11 %
Pakistanis	60	7 %
Indians	12	1 %
Bangladeshis	22	3 %

The gender composition of each group of Asian children in school is presented in Table

**TABLE 4d****Gender composition of all Asian children in 1988**

Ethnicity	Boys	Girls	Total
Pakistani	33	27	60
Indian	4	8	12
Bangladeshi	12	10	22
Total	49	45	94

As far as the children are concerned, the sample in Table 4a was as representative a sample as was possible. The entire field work within the Asian communities was dependent on the cooperation of the Asian families and the children from those families, and that evolved from the trust they placed in me. Given the families' and the children's willingness, and mindful of the need to represent different ethnic groups, every effort was made to include as far as possible, every child who was not, in terms of ethnicity and religion, in the majority category among Asian children. The number 50 mentioned above represents the total number of families visited, where I spoke to 24 fathers and 49 mothers. The first languages spoken in these families include Punjabi, Sylhetti, Urdu, Hindi and Malayalam. Apart from only two Malayalam speaking families who spoke to me in English (they could not speak Hindi and I cannot speak Malayalam), all the interviews were conducted in the parents' first or second language, which was always an Asian community language. This information is presented in Table 4e.

TABLE 4e

Languages in which the interviews were conducted with parents

Language used	Number of families	Ethnicity
Urdu	11	Pakistani Bangladeshi
Urdu/Hindi	2	Indian
Sylhetti/Urdu	18	Bangladeshi
Punjabi	17	Pakistani Indian
English	2	Indian

4.1.1

**Outline of the present chapter**

This chapter deals with Asian parents. The matters which are described here are those which were important to the parents and which they brought up in conversations even though I had gone to seek their views about their children's school. At the time they seemed to be digressions in conversations, but as this and the following chapters will demonstrate, there were interconnections between the kinds of things parents said to me about migration, their own schooling and their employment opportunities in their countries of origin and in Britain. These in turn influenced their expectations from their children's schools. In their impact on the children, these facts and experiences are themselves educational, in a wider sense than schooling. They affected the views children held about their own future in Cherrytown. This chapter which introduces Asian parents is followed by a chapter which will develop the theme of parents' education and employment.

The present chapter is concerned primarily with migration. Reasons for the parents' migration are outlined as they were related to me. This is followed by their accounts of how they made sense of simultaneously belonging to two countries. The effects of gender



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are explored wherever possible. The main outcomes of migration to Britain are linked to the growth of materialism in the Asian communities. This was explained in terms of property acquisition, dowry collection and investments "back home" in the countries of origin. The competition between different families on matters related to materialism is also noted. The chapter also draws attention to the implications of the rural-urban move and situates the study within the urban context of Cherrytown.

As would be expected there is a connection between parents' background and experiences and their children's views about school. There is also a connection between the level of parents' understanding of how schools operate and the kinds of school-based matters their children may or may not be able to raise at home. This chapter introduces Asian children's parents and their wider educational background by outlining issues which are relevant to the parents. It also explores parents' perceptions of their own situation in life.

An important discovery was that in many cases the same things can be said about the experiences of all the families in my sample, regardless of the country of origin, language, culture or religion. I will not systematically distinguish between Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in my account; I will instead draw examples freely from all groups for most purposes. However, whenever there are issues which are different for different groups, I will draw attention to these.

## 4.2

### General background of Cherrytown and the position of Asian communities in it

I shall give a brief background of Cherrytown in so far as it will situate the Asian communities and help to explain why the Asian communities within it found themselves in the situation they did. During the period of this research there was a balance of power

— in Cherry County. The Conservatives, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats together constituted a "hung council" with neither party in overall control. Public meetings and debates about education, housing, health and social services occurred regularly, especially near the time of the local government elections. The period of this research also coincided with the introduction of the Education Reform Act of 1988, which caused a huge amount of discussion and tension in local schools. There was talk of possible privatisation of the local hospitals, where some Asian parents worked in the catering departments and as hospital porters. Local industry was beginning to shed semi-skilled and unskilled manual jobs towards the end of the 1980s, which directly affected the families and the extended families of children in my sample. Some sectors of the city, like the tourism industry, were reaping the benefits of economic growth, but apart from a very few who owned their own taxis at the time, this did not affect Asian families directly. Asian owned shops might have benefitted to some extent, but this would mean predominantly those shops which were located in the busy main shopping area. None of the parents in my sample had such shops, though a few Bangladeshi owned restaurants were doing quite well locally at the time. The boom in the local housing market was still in progress and some isolated individuals who had invested in local housing within the Asian communities reaped the benefits. Several Asian families let their spare rooms to local students who were quite numerous during term time, as it was a University town.

In terms of the Asian communities, the city did not have any openly committed policy statements. Few members of the Asian communities, particularly the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities, held full-time permanent posts of responsibility and influence in any of the local authority departments. Members of the local Asian communities were in the process of deciding on better ways to lobby local officials to have their needs met in different areas. As far as meeting their own needs was concerned, there were three

mosques. These catered for the Barelvi and the Deobandi sects of Muslims (for a general discussion of these and related terms see Robinson 1988, Modood 1990). Initially there had been only two mosques where the **khutbas** or sermons were delivered in Punjabi/Urdu in one mosque and in Urdu with English translations in the other. The majority of local Muslim men went to the first mosque while most University and the then Polytechnic Muslim students went to the second one. Later, during the period of this research the Bangladeshi community set some rooms aside for prayers which catered for a Sylhetti speaking audience. The Sikh and the Hindu communities did not have a Gurdwara or a Mandir locally though they met in hired local community centres for their religious meetings, or they went to a nearby city on special days like Divali and Dasehra and on Guru Nanak's birthday. There was a church where local Asian Christians worshipped, where an Indian pastor led the prayers. There were a very few pockets of discrete linguistic groups of Asians like the Gujerati and the Malayalam speaking Indian and East African Muslims and Hindus. They considered themselves to be minorities among Asians and they were on the periphery of the local Asian communities. Further details about the ethnic minority population of Cherrytown as obtained from the 1991 Census are presented in Table 4f. The categories are those used by Cherry County and the Census itself.

TABLE 4f

Cherrytown population in 1991

Ethnicity	Cherrytown population
Pakistani	2042
Bangladeshi	510
Indian	1560
Black Caribbean	1745
Black African	593
Black Other	717
Chinese	859
Other Groups	2142
White	99935

(Source: 1991 Census)

The total reported figure for Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Indians in Cherrytown is 4112.

Within each Asian ethnic band the population is not uniformly divided for different age ranges (See Appendix: 4A for further details).

The following sections of this chapter will focus on field work based data within the local Asian communities and on the process of migration and settlement.

### 4.3

#### Pattern of migration and the myth of return

The typical pattern of Asian migration in Cherrytown is very like the kind of migration reported by Dahya (1972), Helweg (1979) and Anwar (1979).

Families pooled resources to send a capable member abroad. He would in turn help others...Emigration for many was a choice for survival, stemming from economic necessity.

(Helweg: 21, 26)

The immigrants left Pakistan in order to return home with money to buy land and build better houses and to raise their social status...They did not intend to enter into British society and become acculturated...economic reasons for migration were given by the majority of the respondents.

(Anwar: 21)

This was also found to be the case for the parents in my sample. In almost every family, men - whether single or husbands and fathers, came to Britain in the first instance and the rest of the families followed later. For some Sylhetti-speaking families from Bangladesh, the wives and children came many years later, as late as 1986 and 1987. The men in such families had come in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The late arrival of Bangladeshi women and children has been a national trend and has been reported by other researchers (Murshid 1990, Peach 1990).

Each migration was an "economic migration" (see Dahya 1974, Jeffrey 1976). In my sample none of the parents were political refugees. Neither was it a cultural migration, in the sense that the parents did not come with any desire to copy western styles of life. They migrated because there were better employment opportunities available to them in Britain than there had been in their own countries which were once British colonies. Their arrival in the 1960s and later was a direct outcome of the need for unskilled and semi-skilled labour in Britain, as Ballard (1987) among several other researchers has pointed out. (See Appendix: 4B for areas of Asian settlement in England and Wales.)

The parents in my sample came to Cherrytown because they were willing to work at the bottom end of the market, mostly in unskilled manual and semi-skilled jobs, and there was a gap at this point in the labour market which they could fill. This situation is not unique to Cherrytown. Rex and Moore (1967) and Werbner (1990) have noted what Shaw (1988) has also pointed out:

The only employment available to them was that which the white labour

force was unwilling to take up.

(p. 33)

Only one father, who had come to Britain as the youngest of three brothers, said he came here for "better education and a better future", but his economic situation forced him out of a college of further education and into employment with a bus company within a year. Some fathers came because their means of earning a livelihood was eroded in their countries of origin. One example of this quoted to me was the construction of Mangla Dam in Pakistan, which had caused two families in the sample to be displaced. Khan (1974) and Shaw (1988) have also mentioned this as a possible reason for some Pakistani men's migration to Britain. The countries from which the fathers and husbands migrated include India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. (See Appendix: 4C for areas of out-migration from the Subcontinent to Cherrytown.) For three fathers in the total sample, all of whom were born in South India, this was a second migration; they had come to Britain from Singapore. However it was the first migration for their wives, who joined them directly from India.

Most of the fathers I spoke to told me, as other migrants from South Asia have said to other researchers (see Khan 1974, Anwar 1979, Helweg 1979, Shaw 1988), that initially they had intended to return for good once they had saved some money and had raised their families' living standard "back home". By the time of this research however, they expressed mixed feelings on the topic of where they felt most "at home". Their nuclear families were now in Cherrytown. In nine instances extended families were also in Cherrytown. With the exception of some children from Bangladesh, the rest of the children had received their entire education in Britain. The fathers felt that they had simultaneously developed strong ties with Britain, while still remembering their own villages with affection. They realized this each time they returned "back home" for a visit. A few parents, seven out of 50, did express a wish to retire in the Subcontinent at some point in the future. Two out of these

seven were seriously contemplating a return, having sold the family business in Cherrytown during the time of the field work. Several researchers have explored reasons for people wanting to return "back home" for good. Besides Anwar (1979) who named his book thus, Dahya (1974), Jeffrey (1976) and Helweg (1979) looked at this issue of the myth of return as something the migrants from the Subcontinent took very seriously. Many migrants said that they would one day return permanently, but the moment of final decision was often postponed indefinitely.

The places from which migration took place are represented in tables 4D and 4E (see Appendix). The mean length of the fathers' stay in Britain was 23 years and the mean length of the mothers' stay 14 years. It has been noted by other researchers (see for example Taylor 1976, Ballard 1987) that migration does not occur uniformly from the sending country, but is concentrated in certain districts within it. In my sample, parents migrated from Mirpur, Gujrat, Jhelum and Faisalabad districts in Pakistan and from Sylhet in Bangladesh. Indian parents migrated from Jullunder in Punjab and Kerala in the south of India. It has been further noted by researchers, as has already been discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, that there are differences between rural migrants and urban migrants, both in terms of the resources they bring with them and in the way they adapt to their countries of settlement. Robinson's (1986) research in Blackburn and Alam's (1988) study of Bangladeshi settlers in Britain explore these differences. Alam and Robinson found that urban dwellers, particularly educated urban dwellers, were predictably at an advantage in exploiting employment and education opportunities for themselves. In my sample 48 out of 50 parents were rural migrants. This affected these parents' attitude towards life in Britain and their attitude towards their children's schools. The chapters on children will explore this further.

Parents visited their countries of origin from time to time. Sometimes mothers reported having been out of Britain for a period of as much as a whole year at a time. This happened in times of hardship in Cherrytown and this incidence was reported mostly in poorer families, or in families where an elderly relative was severely ill "back home". Mothers would take the younger children with them. Only in one case did the father leave Britain (for one and a half years) while the children stayed behind with their mother. He had gone to seek employment. He was able to do that only because his wife's brother was in Cherrytown during his absence to look after the family. There are many instances of varying degrees of interdependence within extended families especially in the case of close relations, as in the instance just quoted. What the children made of their visits to their parents' villages will be explored in later chapters. These visits were significant events for all concerned and they left lasting impressions both on the children and on their families.

#### 4.3.1

##### **Reasons for migration**

Every parent I interviewed belonged to the first generation of migrants and the conversation seemed to begin by "placing" me in his or her terms of reference. The methodological issues arising from the kind of access gained in this way have already been discussed in Chapter 3. The information I subsequently gleaned, which is reported in this chapter, was in almost every case accessed through what can be best described as conversational reciprocity. The information gathered by parents through these means acted as a prelude to further discussion about their children. It served many purposes, the most important one for the parents apparently being that of testing my response. The parents seemed to want to discuss their own situation before exposing their concerns about their children. This was contrary to my expectation, as I had thought it would be the other way round.



When people spoke about their real reasons for migration, two ideas were interconnected: their initial avowed intentions about improving their own life chances, and their expressed hopes for their now teenage children's future. The typical initial reason was concerned with domestic arrangements. For instance one father said he came:

To join my brother here. I had to help him with the business.

(Father: 10, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

Another example was a reaction to bereavement.

My father died. I was the eldest son I had to support my four younger brothers, so I came to work here.

(Father: 39, translated from Punjabi, taped interview)

Yet another kind of response was linked to the relative financial gain for manual work. I was told that the wage per hour for unskilled and semi-skilled work when converted into Rupees was at least three times more here in Britain than it was for similar work in India or Pakistan. Jeffrey (1976) and Helweg (1979) also found this to be a reason among the first generation of migrants. In some cases fathers admitted that they suspected long ago that they were being paid less here than the "white man doing the same job" but at that time years ago they felt they had no choice, with entire families waiting for the money to keep poverty at bay or to improve their standard of living. I was also told that if they were to arrive in Britain in the late 1980s, they would find themselves unemployed.

There were more jobs here for illiterate men once, and you got good money, say compared to what you could get in India. Now it is different. These days it would be hard...too hard (to find employment of the same kind).

(Father: 26, translated from Punjabi, taped interview)

This father was speaking of the ease with which he obtained paid employment as compared to the increasing difficulties faced by the younger generation of Asian men with qualifications. (This also portrayed his awareness of the current level of demand and the market value of manual labour.) He quoted the example of his two nephews living in London, one of them with a degree, the other with HNC but both unemployed. This was said to me in the presence of his children, who were attending Cherrydale School and who

were anxiously watching their father speak thus. There is growing research evidence to support the view that ethnic minority communities are justifiably concerned about employment opportunities for their children. (See Brennan et al 1990, Mirza 1992)

People also spoke of the *hakoomat* or "the Government" meaning the Home Office. Referring to the time they came here, some fathers said that in their experience immigration control was more relaxed when they came than now.

The Government liked us then! (laugh)...well, they let me come to work. Now I think they are fed up, so people like me can't come here any more.  
(Father: 14, translated from Punjabi, taped interview)

Sivanandan (1982), Miles and Phizacklea (1984) and Solomos (1992) have among several others discussed the implications of the tightening of immigration controls in Britain over the past three decades. Solomos (1992) has referred to:

Arguments about the supposed problems created by the arrival of too many black migrants have been used to legitimize legislative measures which have had the effect of institutionalizing controls on black migrants, thereby excluding potential migrants on the basis of the colour of their skin.  
(p. 7)

Solomos has shown how immigration politics were racialized as long ago as 1958 when Lord Salisbury objected to the coming of "the African race into Britain." (Guardian 3 September 1958, quoted by Solomos 1992 p. 13.)

How ordinary Asian parents interpret the changes may appear to be naive and simplistic on the surface but, as I shall discuss later, while conducting interviews I felt more poignantly the implications of what was being said because it was mostly being said in the presence of secondary school aged children. When home background is discussed it is not just the information given that one must consider; it is also the context in which it is given (such as the children's presence or absence) which forms the background picture. Obviously, for a researcher there is no guarantee that situations will arise which provide

evidence of felt and shared anxiety in parents and through them in their children; but this research worked on different levels simultaneously as this chapter will unfold and in rare though significant instances, such glimpses were obtained.

### 4.3.2

#### **The past and the future**

Having just spoken of their own histories and their own struggles, later within the same conversation parents often spoke about their reasons for staying on in Cherrytown, in terms not of their past but of their children's future. A typical response is:

Look more than half our life here is finished, now it is up to the children to get somewhere. They have opportunities to study which I never had.

(Father: 42, field notes)

In many parents' minds the past and the future were linked psychologically and now both were "true" reasons for migration. This pattern was repeated several times, thus leaving the onus of continued stay in England on hopes being built for the children's future.

There was a recurrent difference in the reasons fathers and mothers gave for coming here. Women came here to join their menfolk in **Pardees** or **Vilayat** (foreign land). Some mothers came happily while others did not. Two different kinds of responses are reported below:

You leave all your relations behind, your mother, father, brother, sisters, friends...all those who love you. It was so sad. I used to look out at the rain and cry. It is not easy to go away, so far away.

(Mother: 36, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

At first I was very happy I was going to get married and travel to **vilayat**. Then we were married. I had to wait twelve years to join him. It was not easy...and I used to think, God forgive me, I could as easily have got married to his cousin who never left his parents in Jhelum! Each time he came back he brought lots of presents. But it's not the same. Each time I had a baby he was here. I was there. Now I am here I am living for my children. They say education is very good over here.

(Mother: 28, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

Going abroad had a high status value in the latter mother's village (see also Jeffrey 1976, Helweg 1979, Ballard 1987). Her parents had not foreseen how long it would take the husband to feel economically secure enough to call his wife to join him. This family lost many years before being reunited. The interesting point to note again in the above quote is the shift from the past to the children's future. Another mother who came with her husband had this to say:

Oh it was good to be able to come here soon after we were married. We were lucky we were together. We were very poor though. All you see here (beautifully kept home) is the result of back breaking work. The children don't value it though. They are still young.

(Mother: 1, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

In the above narrations there is a definite and typical shift of emphasis from material betterment to the child's future, irrespective of the parent's previous harsh experience of work in this country. It is also an example of the typical attitude of valuing education. Allusions to hard work have been reported by several researchers. Werbner (1990) for instance found that people described having worked very hard to be able to afford to buy a house in Britain.

Not all mothers came willingly. By their own admission they had not been brought up to live in Britain. Also, they did not migrate to seek a livelihood in the direct sense in which their husbands did. This could be one possible explanation for a greater preponderance among women of deep nostalgia about the country they had left behind. They admitted that they felt much better if their parents or brothers and sisters later migrated to this country. Also when families went "back home", the women tended to spend on average more time there than their husbands did. I was not able to explore in greater detail the connection between parents' length of stay in Britain and their nostalgia for their countries of origin, but mothers who spent a long time "back home" on a visit came back with what one daughter called "the getting used to Cherrytown problem". This readjustment led at least

two women to suffer from physical illness symptoms, diagnosed as psychosomatic symptoms.

I get this bad headache whenever I come back. Must be something to do with the weather. When I go back to India, even in winter I'm fine!

(Mother: 26, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

I get these palpitations each time I come back. I can't seem to set my heart here again. What can I do?

(Mother: 7, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

The latter mother was on anti-depressants. Her own mother had died in Mirpur and her father was ailing. She said she felt guilty for not being with him during his last days. This expectation which she had of herself culturally made it difficult for her to come to terms with her return to Cherrytown, in what she saw as her father's hour of need. She was his only daughter, who needed to be in Cherrytown in order to be with her own children. Psychological stress of this kind was expressed more often by women than men, as it was women who felt they were supposed to be caring for the elderly at home. Seven of the homes I visited had elderly relations living in them. In a conversation I had with a local GP, she expressed serious concern about the higher level of stress related symptoms in Asian women as compared to other women of the same age group in Cherrytown. There is a growing body of research evidence in the sociology of medicine, carried out in other parts of Britain to support this impression. A recent CRE (1993) study conducted in Bristol found that Asian women's mental illness was intensified by the difficulties they experienced as immigrants. Among the 16 women interviewed it was found that:

All the women could point to the exact moment when their lives began to unravel. Often, 'it all began when...' a close member of their family died back home...

(p. 15)

Women yearned for the past in a way the men I spoke to did not, at least not overtly. This nostalgia took different forms. At one home I visited, I was offered some Pakistani sweets. There was a story attached to the hospitality.

You know how it is when someone returns from Pakistan. You go to fetch him from Heathrow. You always ask how things are in **Watn-e-Aziz** (dear country), whether people are prospering or not. You rejoice if the Government is doing good things...and if they bring any **mithai** (sweets) you offer them to everyone. You can buy **mithai** from Ambala here, but these are special. They come from home.

(Mother: 2, translated from Urdu, field notes)

One particular father explained what function India's just

"being there" served for him.

It's a place where you go to be healed. You can recharge your batteries there so that you can return here to face the **chakki** (grind, literally 'the mill').

(Father: 26, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

The question which naturally arose then was what sustained people in Cherrytown. After all, this is where they were living and bringing up their children. The predictable answer in every case was **daal roti** or bread and butter (literally 'lentils and bread'). That and social links within their own communities. Some fathers explained to me, in painful detail, that their lack of education combined with their lack of contacts with people who could provide them with work "back home", would not enable them to get a job in which they could earn more than

...a thousand rupees a month, if you are very lucky. Here we can earn that much in a day. My parents are still there so I must send money home...and I have responsibilities towards my (unmarried) sister.

(Father: 24, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

The economic and political aspects of this situation have been discussed at length by Ballard (1987) in relation to the situation facing Mirpuris. The father who spoke to me had migrated from Mirpur. The ties with Pakistan, India and Bangladesh are then both "spiritual" and financial. Financial pressures are taken on board because of cultural ties with dependants "back home". The cultures of all three countries emphasise responsibilities for one's relations. Some children I spoke to, especially Bangladeshi boys, (see Chapter 7) in whose homes such pressures appeared during this research to be the greatest, resent having to "earn money for people we've never even seen!" (Saghar: 19)

The anguish caused by the monsoons in the Subcontinent is repeated here for these British youngsters in a different context. Their situation will be described in later chapters which deal with children. The world the parents describe nostalgically thus has a deep inner reality for their children, even if it is not always a happy one.

### 4.3.3

#### **Making sense of two countries**

Asian parents found that they were inevitably living in two worlds.

#### 4.3.3.1

##### **"Back home"**

Most parents I spoke to expressed a great deal of attachment to their countries of birth. In 35 out of 50 families, parents described what they missed with nostalgia:

It is the warmth in the people and their happiness. Electricity only came to my mother's village last year. People lived in darkness and were still happy...That kind of innocence and warmth is hard to find here. We have more things (here) but we aren't happy are we?

(Mother: 1, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

Many reminiscences were childhood linked.

We were very poor when we were young. We played with children in the streets. Not with so many toys but we shared everything...and your friends' parents were your parents...no one treats my son as their own son here.

(Father: 5, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

With each narration it appeared that what was missed now was the quality of human interaction. It could however, be argued that with the passage of time the people who were no longer a part of the speaker's physical presence took on a new significance, and past events a new importance, so that these parents may be unwittingly exaggerating the warmth and love "back home". This kind of deep nostalgia has been recorded by researchers studying disappearing communities and it is not something unique to Asians (see Willmott

and Young 1962, Roberts 1971). What was interesting about some of the Asian children however, was that some of the parents' feelings could be traced in children who had not been to their parents' countries of origin during their teenage years, or for a very long period of time. They may have been repeating what their parents told them. They would in some cases call Pakistan and India for instance, "my country" although they were born and bred in Cherrytown.

The fathers who met me also spoke warmly of their countries of birth, but they were on the whole, as one of the fathers commented drily "more realistic than women" (Father 16, translated from Urdu). What he called "realism" could probably be explained in terms of his struggle for making a living as compared to her dependence on him. The kind of view written below was expressed in different words by 15 out of 24 fathers I interviewed.

If I were to go back I could only find a cleaner's job there. How much do you reckon I would earn in a week? There is no going back job wise. It is a question of earning your keep as best as you can isn't it?

(Father: 48, translated from broken Urdu and Sylhetti, field notes)

In another father's view it was sentimental and unrealistic to keep "talking about something that can never be." (Father: 14, translated from Punjabi, field notes.) However, it may be that women talked more about their real feelings and nostalgia for their countries of birth most probably because they found it easier to talk to me as a woman, and because women are more open about feelings generally. Men were perhaps less ready to share their true feelings on this topic.

#### 4.3.3.2

##### **On being here**

There were families which tended to look ahead and which did not give the impression of looking back, for example one father told me that:



My father used to say once you leave and go away, you never come back-the same. Life is like that isn't it? My future is here, where else?

(Father: 32, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

This particular family, like one third of the sample, had come to terms with its situation. This is where they were living and this is where they belonged. The reasons given comprised factors like better housing, better health care, better education than they had left behind. Another factor which helped this family to feel more at home here than elsewhere was that of kinship patterns which this father was able to recreate in Britain, as all his brothers had migrated to Cherrytown from Pakistan. He had replicated patterns of human and social interactions for himself in a family which was fairly united. He felt a considerable amount of moral support, which (in this particular situation) he successfully transmitted to his children, more to his son than to his daughters. He had brought his oldest son with him when he migrated to Britain. His daughters had come later with the mother. The latter finding is not unique to him or indeed to this research, and has been reported by others (see Brown 1970, Helweg 1979, Shaw 1988).

I found some correlation between fathers' occupations and their commitment to their children's education. There were differences in the attitudes of self-employed fathers and those who were long term employees in factories, bus companies and the post office. This is developed further in the chapters about children's education, and in Chapter 5, and has to my knowledge not been reported by other researchers.

Most of the mothers I spoke to, irrespective of ethnicity, thought that the education system in Britain was very good but at the same time they expressed considerable unease over cultural differences.

Well there is this different culture here, different *maahol* (atmosphere)...and I must bring them up so they know what are our ways and...what were our elders' ways. And it is hard.

(Mother: 4, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

There was no doubt that some families did feel very isolated and encapsulated. Many mothers felt the strain of having to live in Britain and at the same time feeling the pressure to retain their own cultural and religious values.

Look Baji...well our culture is different and religion is more strict...and I can't talk English.

(Mother 11, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

There is very scant research evidence about Asian mothers' attitudes to their children's upbringing. However, Afshar (1989) who studied three generations of Pakistani women in Yorkshire has reported that they expect a lot from their children's schools and that their children have to take account of parental aspirations.

(Women) place an inordinate trust in the ability of the educational system to act as a means of delivering their children from the drudgery of poverty. Although in practice there is not enough evidence to support their optimism, women of all backgrounds, regardless of their own level of educational achievement, seek to promote their children within the school.

(p. 261)

I found this to be the case in the majority of the mothers I spoke to, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. (Also see Hutchison and Varlaam, 1985)

#### 4.4

##### Asian communities and materialism

One of the major criteria Asian parents gave for success was material and economic success. The prevalence of materialism in Asian communities comes as something of a surprise, until one sees it in the context of the reasons people gave for coming to Britain in the first place. For migrants from the Subcontinent it was economic hardship and the need for improving their economic status "back home" which drove them out of their countries of origin in the first place. I shall tackle this issue by exploring its outward manifestation in people's lives as well as their preoccupation with matters related to money-

based customs, as for example dowry. This was only mentioned by mothers and one had to be culturally sensitive to pick up allusions made to it. Dowries played an important part in the covert pressures on young unmarried Asian women to seek employment. But the pressures were covert, and Cherrydale School seemed totally unaware of the need to actively support such girls in their academic achievements so that they could obtain suitable employment at the end of schooling (see Chapter 7).

#### 4.4.1

##### **Property acquisition**

It has long been recognised by researchers that one of the first things which Asians did on arrival in England, was to finance the purchase of a house. This, often by joint ownership in the first instance, obviated the need to pay rent to a landlord. This happened even if the house was not situated in what was considered by society at large, to be a good, well kept area. Quite often in the early days of settlement it was only the properties in the run down areas which people could afford to buy at all, even through a pooled effort. In relation to Pakistanis nearly two decades ago Dahya (1974) found that:

The immigrants are...guided by their traditional criteria of status, namely, that as a tenant the immigrant has a subordinate status vis-a-vis the landlord and his kinsmen. In other words, the position of the tenant in Britain is broadly similar to that of a client in their traditional patron-client relationships back home...the immigrant's status as a tenant is a negation of the traditional values associated with the status of a 'free' person.

(p. 97-8)

In Cherrytown whether they rented or owned their properties was an important matter for Asian parents. The type of property, whether it was terraced or semi-detached, did not seem to matter. What seemed to confer more status, was rather the number of houses people owned. Second on the list of desirables was the area people lived in. If they had to rent a property, Asian families preferred Council houses to private tenancy. If they had to live in a Council house there was only one undesirable area, which I shall call the Lawley estate.

It had a bad reputation among Asian families and was considered to be particularly run down and not a respectable area in which to bring up children. Its Asian inhabitants were looked down upon with pity and derision by fellow Asians. The interesting point to note here is that the Asian communities at large felt more sorry for their fellow Asians who were living in that area than they did for the white communities. The main reason for this attitude is discussed below. This is an important issue to keep in mind if we are to understand the pressures on Asian children on whom it had an adverse effect. Those Asian children who lived in Lawley tried to conceal the fact from their peers.

The recurrent sentiment within the Asian communities was that they had migrated for the purposes of economic welfare. After several years' stay in Britain, for them not even to be a home-owner was a classic failure. Some families had left close family members including children behind. Some of the children over 16 could not join their parents in Britain. For some families to have been through all this and more and not to own the house they lived in was a source of social embarrassment. More recently, because of the change in the Government's housing policy, people had begun to pay towards the ownership of their council houses. Unlike some other cities like Bradford, Birmingham and London, where Asians have been forced to buy homes in derelict areas which were vacated by earlier immigrants, Cherrytown has not historically had run down estates. No area of the city is "predominantly Asian" to the near exclusion of white communities. When the price of properties rose in the 1980s Asian investors benefitted as much as anyone else. There was a growing demand for rented houses, so that families who bought properties ten or 20 years ago had a reasonable return on their investment. In such an environment, to be an Asian person and not to be a home-owner causes much pressure on the entire family.

However, to have chosen to come to live in Cherrytown in the 1980s left the newcomer

no choice but that of Lawley, as cheaper houses in other areas were very difficult to obtain.

We didn't know this would have happened to us, otherwise we would never have sold our small house in Bolton. We were all alone up there and our relations were calling us here so we came.

(Mother: 9, translated from Urdu, field notes)

Families in Lawley did not fit the typical pattern and felt constantly on the periphery of Asian society. They had closer interactions with the voluntary sector and the white communities than with those Asians who had been in Cherrytown for longer. On the whole the pressure for buying houses was felt most keenly by men, as this was perceived by them to be a man's role.

If you have a family the least you can do is to give them a decent home. There are so many restrictions if you live as tenants in a little old lady's house who always tells you that she hates the smell of onions.

(Father: 24, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

Another father who had lived as a tenant and felt strongly that living in his own home enabled him to give his children more freedom of movement.

You don't get asked to keep the children from running in the house when they are small and just won't stay still.

(Father: 35, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

Another father told me that he bought his home before he called his family over to join him because it enabled him to practise his "culture and religion in (his) own home in peace."

(Father: 3, translated from Urdu, field notes).

As soon as they could, Asian men tried to purchase their own properties. Some fathers may have had trouble getting places to rent from white landlords because of racism and long council house waiting lists. What I found in Cherrytown has also been found in other locations like Bradford (Khan 1974) and Gravesend (Helweg, 1979) and Manchester (Werbner, 1990). Some brothers would get together to buy a house in cash which they shared before one of them moved out to buy his own home. Some of the children I spoke to remember in graphic detail a period of living with other members of their extended

families, as well as its negative image in their primary school teacher's eyes. This is further developed in Chapter 6. If the fathers were strict Muslims they would not have been happy to borrow with interest on the repayments and also they may have had difficulty approaching banks and building societies. When a family faced economic difficulties, it would let a room to a lodger. In Cherrytown these lodgers were mostly white students. This helped the family defray the cost of the mortgage. If family business became a means of livelihood, the lower/ground floors of the properties could be converted into shops or restaurants or take-aways. The relatively wealthy families within the local Asian context, only three in my sample of 50, moved to another property, leaving the family business as a place to which they went out to work. The rooms above the shop or restaurant, no longer inhabited by the family, would be let to lodgers. The majority of the parents who were owner-occupiers (21 out of 50) owned only the house which they inhabited.

Not all the Asian homes I visited were lavishly decorated. Most were functional, though all had some religious symbols displayed in them. The Muslim homes had calendars and pictures of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and calligraphic inscriptions in Arabic from the Quran. Sikh homes had pictures of Gurus displayed over the mantle piece and all Hindu homes had a holy place, mostly an alcove for daily *pooja* (worship). Generally speaking, Bangladeshi homes were the poorest. I went to rented homes of families of four or five children where there were threadbare carpets and only two chairs, so I was in the difficult situation of being asked to sit in one chair, while the child's mother sat in another and an elderly father stood talking to me for over half an hour. To offer him my seat would have been an affront to his hospitality. There were five Bangladeshi families which fit this pattern. The three basic gadgets in all homes were a cooker, a refrigerator, and a colour television set. Given the choice between purchasing a vacuum cleaner, a microwave oven or a food processor on the one hand and a video cassette recorder on the other, most

families said they would go for the latter. Watching Indian films on video was the main form of affordable entertainment for the majority of Asian families. Only the wealthy families had fitted kitchens, which in the majority of cases, was the very last thing people acquired for their homes. Two reasons were given for this, when the topic of home renovation came up in conversation. First, it was considered to be rather expensive, and secondly, it was not a very important room in the house as far as the fathers were concerned. It mattered little to them that it was a room where the mother or the eldest sister spent most of their time preparing family meals. 12 out of 50 families owned their own cars. Of these seven used these cars for family business, that is, for moving goods into shops or restaurants. This means that altogether five families, ten percent of the sample owned cars only for their own leisure use. 11 families did not have a telephone.

Those people who felt their circumstances had altered, or those who felt they had become successful materially, put it down to sheer hard work and an inborn will to succeed in the face of any hardship.

When I first came here 20 years ago there must be about 15 men who worked morning to night and slept rough. I only had ten pounds in my hand when I first came and I have worked very very hard to be in the property-letting business. If anyone tells you that he owned four (textile) mills in Pakistan and had several servants there, he is lying. Why did he come here, if not to find a better future? Now of course it's all up to our children.

(Father: 1, translated from Urdu, taped interview)

These kinds of asides were common: little bits of information I was not actively seeking, so they were something I did not follow up seriously. They perhaps indicated a need felt by the speaker to share with me what he detected in others; a desire to glorify the past when the present seemed insignificant and arid by comparison. On the whole I found that financial burdens weighed heavily on the average Asian family because of the incongruous relationship between the cost of living, the jobs they had and their earning ability in relation to the average family size. Added to this is the issue of divided loyalties which exist among the Asians who live in Cherrytown but who feel that their roots are to some extent

entrenched in the Subcontinent. After meeting the cost of rents or mortgages and bills there were two other financial commitments which weighed heavily on most Asian families. The first was an overwhelming desire expressed by some parents to buy a small plot of land or a house in their countries of birth. The second was the cost of their daughters' weddings.

#### 4.4.2

##### **Jaheez, daaj, joutuk or dowry and marriage expenses**

Anthropological literature on Asian marriages describe "bride price" and "bridewealth" of some kind or another. Without going into details of the precise ways in which customs differ in different parts of the Subcontinent from North India to Sri Lanka or from Baluchistan in Pakistan to Chittagong in Bangladesh, **daaj, jaheez and joutuk** is taken together here to mean dowry and is defined as simply as possible. Other writers have elaborated on the ritualistic gift giving and gift taking (for detailed discussions see Karve 1953, Lewis 1958, Mayer 1960, Van der Veen 1972, Tambiah 1975).

Within the context of this study, dowry implies all those gifts, expenditure and financial commitments which the bride's family undertakes in order to have a socially respectable marriage. This in some cases includes the cost of the bridegroom's air fare if he joins his wife in Britain from the Subcontinent. Many communities have made the gifting and marriage ceremonies far more complicated and expensive than their religions require them to do. This is true of all groups, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. The outcome of social expectations, some handed down from one generation to the next, others re-established within the British context, mean that it is unheard of that a bride should leave her parental home without her share of gifts. For a whole variety of cultural and historical reasons, a simple unostentatious marriage is simply not the norm in Asian families. This was the case in the homes of the children I visited.



The main reason for bringing this subject into discussion at this stage is to look at its implications for the young people in my sample living in England. The first time the subject came up in conversation was during my second visit to the fifth home on my list.

If you are an ordinary English person, you can have an inexpensive wedding. You don't have to have **jaheez** (dowry), you don't have to buy your daughter a gold jewellery set, or give **joras** (suits) to her in-laws. We have to have these expenses, don't we? Very unIslamic...these are Indian customs aren't they...but there you are!

(Mother: 1, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

Asian families are under pressure to make dowries for their daughters. If they invested their hard-earned wages wisely, it would, they believe, get easier to raise cash in their middle age when they would require money to marry off their daughters. They could either sell off their house or give it to their daughter in lieu of **daaj**. The situation would change if sons helped with the cost of the wedding, or if there were more earning members of the family. Of the 49 mothers I spoke to, 21 spoke unprompted and anxiously of **daaj** as a worry. Again this was incidental information which I was not seeking actively. It could be the case that other parents also felt similar pressure but because I never asked them, they never told me their thoughts on the matter. It is reasonable to expect this issue to be a source of some concern in all Asian families, though the degree of concern may vary. Bhachu (1985) has discussed this with reference to East African Sikh women in Britain.

A marriage without a **daaj** is considered to be the least status-bestowing, since it reflects badly on the **izzat** (honour) of the family. I have never come across a Sikh woman who did not receive a **daaj**. This indicates that it is very much a dowry and not a trousseau because it is a gift that should be given almost compulsorily, without expectation of return.

(p. 134)

As Bhachu discovered, Asian young women in Britain earn and save for their own **daaj**. In a more recent article Bhachu (1988) has argued that far from disappearing the dowry system is expanding as British born and educated Sikh young women have increased qualifications, skills and earnings.

The matter of dowry is an issue of great social concern to parents in the Subcontinent and exists in all religions, classes and castes. However, Asians are not all equally represented in the labour market in Britain, thus increasing the burden of dowries on the working members of the family. Recent census figures (see Appendix: 4F) and labour force survey figures (see Jones 1993) show how on the whole Muslim women, particularly of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin, are under-represented in the labour market. This has implications for economic stability in those families, especially if that is combined with the over-representation of their menfolk at the bottom end of the labour market and in unemployment figures (see Bhavani 1994, Owen 1994).

One mother felt that:

It is a good thing schools are free in this country, otherwise we too, like our cousins (back home), would have to decide whether we want to spend money on dowry or on our daughter's school. If there is no *jaheez* how will she get married and who will look after her if anything happened to us?

(Mother: 2, translated from Urdu, field notes)

This mother was not typical in that she could easily afford the required dowry for her daughter and her financial situation was quite stable. In the majority of the cases I studied I found that the need to raise money for marriage did interfere with the education of some, particularly poorer Sylhetti and Mirpuri girls. This was to pay for bringing over a boy from the Subcontinent as well as to pay explicitly for dowry. Asian girls' perceptions of the matter are discussed in Chapter 7. The question of the choice between dowry and schooling does not arise in the case of sons. In one Hindu family there was a discussion about the girl's family having to pay a certain amount to the boy she would marry.

Mala will marry someone educated she says. It would depend on his qualifications. The better qualified he is, the more we will have to pay obviously.

(Mother: 20, translated from Hindi, field notes)

The assumption here, as in other cases, was that the girls would have a traditional wedding

(see Van der Veen 1972, Tambiah 1975 for further discussion). The age at which parents thought their daughters would "settle down" ranged between 17 and 21. In the family just mentioned above, the fact that the girl too could be "well-qualified" did not remove the concern about dowry.

This matter was never discussed while the daughter was in the room, but always while she was making tea or fetching something. It was considered impolite to talk of dowry as a burden, which it obviously was. It was just one of the things which had to be done. The matter of dowries was never mentioned to me by fathers, only by some mothers. It was in every case volunteered as incidental information on a second or a third visit to the family. This mostly happened in families where the girls were nearing what the family considered to be a marriageable age. This in itself varied from family to family. Mothers from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan all spoke about this. Mothers who did not have any young daughters yet to be married did not talk about it. By contrast with the present research, Bhachu (1988) does not see dowry as a burden but as a conscious preference on the part of the bride. She found that by choosing to save for their own dowries East African Sikh girls were asserting their cultural and ethnic roots. Bhachu also argues that they choose to collect dowries and are not necessarily under compulsion to do so. It seemed to me, however, on the basis of the data I gathered that dowries were seen as a burden, and not as something whose collection gave the young women and their families pleasure.

#### 4.4.3

##### **Cost of living here**

The cost of living and price rises in the face of impending redundancies was something Asian families shared with many others across the country. One of the mothers I visited had this to say :

It is the bills really...my telephone bills were so high that I stopped using it!  
We must keep it for emergencies.

(Mother: 49, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

People in the lower income bracket within the sample said that since child benefit was frozen, they had started walking more instead of using the bus as often. The heating bills were mentioned as being forbidding. People spoke of using the gas fire more often instead of heating the whole house. In some households there was talk of women going out to work because the families were finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. In the following family the father was unemployed and the mother was working in a launderette. She felt that:

Children want what their friends have. Unless you can sew children's clothes yourself...you can never stitch boys' clothes anyway...it would be impossible wouldn't it?

(Mother: 4, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

There is a great demand for sewing classes in Cherrytown. Women spoke of the cost of living because they were responsible for keeping the house in order, and in most cases for budgeting. In homes where women did not earn anything, they felt even more under compulsion to spend money wisely. This was especially true in large families where the eldest child was not old enough to be working.

#### 4.4.4

##### **Going back**

From time to time in most families, at the very least every eight to ten years, the whole family went "back home". At other times in between, only one, two or a few members of the family would go there. The reason for taking the whole family was mostly to attend a family wedding, to find a suitable husband or wife for one of the children, to visit ailing grandparents or other close relatives, or to combine the trip with Haj (Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia), after which the parents were joined later in Pakistan by their

children who flew directly from England.

Going "back home" was an expensive business.

It is not just the fare is it? You are expected to take a present for each member of the family...not just for your family but for all your in-laws. Not silly things like soaps and hankies but joras (suits), toasters and hair driers and things...expensive things.

(Mother: 13, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

Families going "back home" after a long time felt under pressure to show that they had made a success of their lives in the west. If they went empty handed it would prove otherwise. There were at least ten families who said they wanted to "go back" for a visit but could not afford the total expense so they never went together.

My youngest sister is getting married. I suppose my husband and I could go but who will look after the children here? We will have to share the expenses of the wedding...there is no way I could take my children, even if I wanted to.

(Mother: 39, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

In the event this family did not go at all, but instead sent a thousand pounds to help meet the cost of the wedding. I also came across two instances when an otherwise conservative family, which prided itself on looking after its womenfolk by not forcing them to obtain paid employment, allowed its daughters and mother to work on a temporary basis to help the family save enough money to go "back home". They reached a compromise by working in an all women's set-up in a lampshade making factory.

When we go back, we have to go in style. New shoes, new handbags, new slippers, new everything.

(Mother: 14, translated from Urdu, field notes)

These families, when they did go back felt obliged to make a statement about prosperity to their relations who were still "back home". Some children felt that their parents especially their mothers

go over the top, and where they saved money before, now they just spend, spend, spend.

(Naz: 1, field notes)

But the objects which were taken back with them had to have recognizable status value. What appeared to be ostentatious and unnecessary to some children was in effect an attempt on their parents' part, to persuade themselves as well as their relations, that actually on balance life had treated them well after all. Some families felt trapped in maintaining the display of affluence. There were also children who did not find their parents' attitude strange at all. These included both boys and girls, and in the main were those children who had extended families in Britain if not in Cherrytown. Their families had been the givers and receivers of expensive gifts within Britain.

In some families it was not considered sufficient that they should do well here. There was a sense of obligation and guilt if they did not provide monthly or yearly payments for families "back home". Dahya (1974) and Anwar (1979) have also found this in their research. In the absence of any welfare provision in the Subcontinent, **bhai chaara** (literally brother's help) is taken very seriously. People who have migrated here are themselves products of the same informal systems of mutual help. They cannot turn their back upon it without being made to feel guilty. The person who did not send any money "back home" and did not feel guilty was seen as a failure and as an ungrateful exile.

His brother-in-law helped him by sending him money from Qatar. Now his brother-in-law's daughter, you know Bano is getting married and he never even sent a **pai** (penny).

(Mother: 32, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

Social anthropologists have remarked on this custom of **lena dena** (Werbner 1990) or **vartan bhanji** (Jeffrey 1976, Anwar 1979) which goes back for several generations in the Subcontinent. Those who could afford it sent money home. 20 families openly talked about this to me. I saw the anguish and the increasing feeling of helplessness in poor Bangladeshi families in times of natural disasters during the monsoons in Sylhet. This found its way more often than not into children's conversations with me. There is a definite link between

these natural disasters and the time when under-aged boys went out to seek employment in restaurants in Cherrytown. At least four regular truants, all boys from poor Bangladeshi families, worked to earn extra money to send to their relations still living in Bangladesh. They were the oldest sons in homes where the fathers were retired or unemployed. Bangladeshi girls reacted in a different way. One teenager spoke with contempt about:

These Bengali men of dead consciences. They are just money making in restaurants and don't make a city-wide appeal to raise some money for poor Bangladeshis.

(Shama: 34, field notes)

This opinion was expressed by those sixth form Bangladeshi girls who had spent most of their school years in Britain and whose fathers were not self-employed and did not own their own homes. In that sense it was not a widespread view throughout the sample, but may well be typical of teenagers in particular circumstances. In the above instance Shama felt sad as a result of comparing the plight of Bangladeshis in Bangladesh and the relatively more affluent, much more successful restaurateurs in Cherrytown. Issues which specifically concern children will be discussed in the chapters on children. This instance is quoted here to highlight the uneasy connection between Cherrytown and Sylhet and its effects on different types of families. The boys were more under pressure than the girls because they were expected to contribute economically whereas girls' employment was, to an extent, optional. In the instances where girls did work, they did so to collect *jaheez*. If they were the oldest then they felt obliged to help their families.

#### 4.4.5

##### **Competition within the communities**

When Asian families reached a certain level of economic stability, that is they managed to buy a house and furnish it, then they began to socialize more confidently with other

families in similar situations. There began a sort of competition between them. This included local gossip such as who owned which car, whose son (never daughter, unless she was an only child) was seeking admission to a public school, who went (that is, who could afford to go) "back home" every year. Sometimes this competition included school achievements, but that was very rare. Competition could take a comical form :

She told me it cost them £15,000 to extend their kitchen. She told you the same too...funny thing is there is only one Asian builder here and he does all the kitchens because, you know, he speaks Punjabi. And he says he charges £3,000 for that kind of work.

(Mother: 13 of mother: 14 translated from Punjabi, field notes)

The younger generation usually dismissed all such talk as gossip, but girls more than boys felt that the reason for competition was in actual fact, jealousy or envy among the members of their parents' generation, which was in some cases handed down to the children. What was true to some extent was a tendency for people to follow the trend set by one "successful" member in the community.

If he (Father 1) buys a latest model car of course his neighbouring shop keeper (Father 2) must buy one too. If she gets her carpets changed, then of course her neighbour will have to do so too, won't she? They have to admire each other. I don't bother about things like that!

(Mother: 7, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

One interpretation of the above sentence, in the light of this family's economic circumstances and the context in which the remark was made, is that the speaker could not afford to enter the race. I found that words alone could be insufficient to portray full meanings. In such instances detailed field notes about the "body language" and the context accompanying each tape recording were very useful as already discussed in Chapter 3. The competition mentioned above is obviously not something which is true only of Asian families. Whatever the families said and felt about this tendency, it was a sign of families' setting down roots and socialising with more confidence, albeit only within their own ethnic groups.



## 4.5

### Local situation as experienced by Asian parents

Local circumstances are bound to affect the overall situation in which an ethnic minority community finds itself. Thus Eade's (1989) study of the issue of political representation has many aspects specific to East London's Bangladeshi community just as Werbner's (1990) study is in some respects specifically about Manchester. Some local circumstances in Cherrytown have already been mentioned in an earlier section, such as the existence of different mosques. There were also some local community organisations like the Pakistan Welfare Association and the Indian Association, from which local community representatives were chosen. All these representatives belonged to the parents' generation and were among the relatively affluent members of their communities. The local Asian community representatives, because of their own educational background in the rural Subcontinent, were not very knowledgeable about the workings of the British education system. In some County Council meetings these community representatives raised the issue of racism which they had experienced in common with other members of their communities. They were not as lucid about educational difficulties which the younger members of their communities were facing.

#### 4.5.1

##### **Racism and discrimination**

In Cherrytown, racism is a feature of the daily lives of Asian parents, and they talk about it unprompted. For example some mothers mentioned unpleasant experiences at the doctor's surgery. Two families mentioned arson attempts on shops owned by them. These incidents, according to the parents, were provoked by racial hostility. Other everyday incidents mentioned were those of white neighbours throwing rubbish over the fence into Asian homes, or white neighbours staring rudely if Asian children played noisily in their own

back gardens, or if visitors sat in the garden and talked in Punjabi or Malyalum. Parents also spoke about racism and discrimination in their work places.

In terms of the parents' daily experience, mothers spoke more often than fathers about how they felt their culture was not respected. One mother told me about her last trip to the hospital ten years ago;

Even the cleaners at the hospitals look down upon you and say..."see you next year!" I told her it was my last baby. I have two more children. She just stood and stared...and still said "see you next year!"

(Mother: 8, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

This mother with her broken English, a part-time cleaner herself, was incensed at the cleaner's attitude towards her but she told me she could not answer back cuttingly as she might have been able to in Urdu, and so she kept quiet. She said she could never forget things like that. She saw it as an affront. There were other parents who blamed the "bad" upbringing of some of the white children for the abuse they suffered.

Some children throw eggs at the window and puncture the tyres of the car. Then they come to get money for the doll (Guy) and I have to pay them. Otherwise I don't know what they will throw next. They are in Amir's class you see...The headteacher of my son's Primary school says why did we come to live in this area!

(Mother: 36, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

People who were living in Lawley believed that if they were to live in a "better" area, half of these problems would disappear. People who did not live in Lawley, however, also faced similar problems.

When these spoilt children have nothing else to do, they go around smashing our car's side mirrors. Two of my friends who have cars were saying the same thing. If you walk up the road you will find their mirrors cracked. Those cars (with broken side mirror) on this street only belong to Asian people.

(Father: 14, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

I did not check to see if the latter was indeed the case, though I did see two cars with damaged side mirrors parked very near this house.

For the families which recounted such experiences, these incidents were perceived as an individual problem and attempts were not made to find a collective solution. These parents belong to a generation that had not been taught or encouraged to fight racism, but rather to expect it and try to ignore it or to tolerate it stoically. They did not believe that the authorities, either the Police or any other, would support them. Their children on the other hand had totally different expectations and strategies for survival. These are discussed in greater detail in later chapters. Racism played a significant part in the total life experiences of these children who had to learn to cope simultaneously with the combined effect of racism, social class and gender inequalities.

#### 4.5.2

##### **Differences in culture**

By virtue of crossing over into a different country the parents I studied become a link between the cultures of two continents. These parents migrated into a more affluent society but they did not equate material affluence with cultural richness. None of the parents I spoke to felt that the western culture, which they understood to mean the way of living and the value systems prevalent among Britain's majority communities, was necessarily a better culture. They saw it as a different or an alien, or sometimes as a worse culture. They expressed sorrow at the way the elderly were not looked after at home by their children, and also at the increase in divorce rates and single parent families in Britain. The majority of Asian parents disapproved of what they saw as western promiscuity.

Everyone is different. We were brought up in villages, without shoes without knickers, but once you were a bit older, say seven or eight you were dressed up better. You always wore decent clothes because your parents' reputation depended on how you behaved, how you were brought up...here (in England) people really look after babies like anything, and when the baby becomes a teenager they let her go unguided! (sigh) That is when children need protecting even more. I can't ever understand it...it's the other way round in our culture.

(Mother: 3, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

This particular mother like all the mothers I spoke to, did not have any opportunity of discussing child rearing practices, or for that matter anything else, with anyone outside her own community. Teachers never visited any of these mothers at home. There was a very noticeable quiet deadlock between them and the wider community. Another mother who had been in England for 15 years said to me:

If you fall ill you go to the doctor, you have to wait a long time if you are not on time. If your child is naughty you get told off by the teacher. You don't get a minute to sit and think. You have to make the best of it. That's best. What else can you do if...you are illiterate?

(Mother: 17, translated from Sylhetti and broken Urdu, taped conversation)

This might have been the reality for many working class women in Cherrytown, not only Asians; however the self-consciousness about her illiteracy not only in English but also in her own language was something which together with other things separated Asian mothers from others. Such mothers desperately wanted their children to do well at school, even though they did not know how to enable the learning process to occur, as the chapters on children go on to show. Mothers like this particular mother had migrated from a society where many people are illiterate to a predominantly literate one. It would have been possible for such mothers to live in India or Pakistan or Bangladesh without feeling left out educationally, as those societies place a greater reliance on the oral tradition. Despite what such mothers said about their situations they could actually demonstrate in their conversations their ability to make connections between their inner worlds and what was happening outside them. An example of the kinds of things they said is given below:

The BBC has stopped Urdu and Hindi programmes here. They feel quite ashamed of us I suppose. There used to be an Urdu programme on TV. Now that's gone. Now even our Asian people don't give programmes in Hindi and Urdu. They have forgotten their own language overnight (laughter)...I am not expected to watch much TV !

(Mother: 35, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

If the parents I interviewed did not hold their own traditions, religion and culture in high regard they would be quite happy to become assimilated and integrated. If they adopted all

"western" ways, it would put an end to the conflicts in which parents found themselves, especially when it came to the education of their children. But their own culture and religion were considered by them to be very important. One Indian mother felt that:

All cultures have good and bad things, but you have seen many West Indian people. They were made to give up their own culture. Does that make them equally accepted to white people? Why should people be made to feel their culture is not good? I think there are some terrible things in English culture.

(Mother: 20, translated from Hindi, taped conversation)

This cultural juxtaposition caused Asian families much pain in some instances. This ranged from children being ashamed of taking their parents, especially their mothers, into school because of what their white peers would say about saris and shalwaar kameez, to the parents' feeling dismayed at their children's inability to write a letter "back home" in the parents' own language.

The school these children were attending was either unaware of such matters or simply not interested in bringing them to the fore or of providing a safe forum for talking about them. This in turn led to most children keeping their two worlds, their world of home and their world of school quite separate from each other. This too is discussed in the chapters on children.

The younger generation did question parental values. Extreme examples of this among families visited were boys leaving home to marry school friends outside the Asian communities. The majority of the children in my sample disagreed with their parents about relatively minor things like clothes, fashion accessories and hair styles. This is a common tendency among all teenagers and is not specific to Asian teenagers.

### 4.5.3

#### Going "back home" and the issue of financial security

Within the communities there was, for reasons outlined earlier, much respect for people who had succeeded in financial terms, because wealth conferred status. This among Cherrytown Asians meant that people who wanted a loan, or those without a car who wanted to move house, were dependent on the help they could obtain from those who were more fortunate than themselves. On probing deeper in an attempt to seek some explanation for the respect for the relatively wealthy element in the Asian communities, I discovered in two cases an interesting and unexpected reason.

They have a nice new house and they can go "back home" every other year...Amina is really well sorted out, she sees her parents' country and all her relations and she gets all the love from everyone.

(Mother: 5, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

If you can afford to go back often and take all the family it is really lucky for you and a good thing for your children.

(Father: 11, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

Neither of these speakers' families had gone "back home" for a very long time. They could not all afford to go together for another few years at least. Although it is not possible to generalize on the basis of the experience of a few families, there was a feeling generally expressed that somehow it was the fortunate family who could do all this. It was felt that the children who could not go to their parents' countries of origin often enough, somehow missed out. These parents strongly felt that they were doing their children a great disservice by keeping them out of touch with their cultural roots and identity. Asian parents would strongly object to Honeyford's (1983, 1984) assumption that trips "back home" are simply undesirable and detrimental to children's education. They were only too well aware of the advantages and drawbacks of such trips. They did not want to uproot their children in the middle of their schooling with trips that sometimes amounted to the loss of one whole school term. But at the same time they were sure that regular trips "back home" were an

extension of their children's education, in the fullest sense. This was not understood at all by their children's teachers, whose conception of education was perhaps more narrowly confined to schooling. One of the typical sentiments expressed was that:

Supposing something happens to me, at least these children must know they have their blood relations, their whole ancestral ties in Bangladesh. It is the unfortunate child who is kept deprived of that knowledge. But if you can't afford to go what can you do? You can then only show them photographs of people.

(Mother: 34, translated from Sylhetti/Urdu, field notes)

When I talked to those children who visited their parents' countries of origin frequently, or those who had come to Britain when they were old enough to remember their childhood friends and experiences, I found a sense of self-respect and an ability to shrug off racial taunts. This would imply that when children came later to Britain they were in touch with their roots and had formed a positive self image. It seemed that they had not been hindered by racism in early childhood. An example of this was provided by a 14 year old Pakistani boy who had come to Britain at the age of 12.

He (white boy) is **paagal** (mad). He thinks he is better than me just because of...of that...I come from Pakistan. I think he is stupid. All he knows about is Cherrytown. Me? I know two countries two languages. But he is stupid so I don't bother with him. I make other friends.

(Zafar: 32, field notes)

I also found this kind of attitude in four Bangadeshi boys. There seemed to be some truth in the feelings of those parents who said they wanted to take their children to their countries of origin regularly.

It is interesting to discuss the same issue with parents who did go back every three years or so. The reasons given by them for regular visits were for the social needs to maintain family ties, to attend family weddings and for opening up a business or buying a plot of land. They gave the impression that they went because they wanted to go and because they prioritised it as something which had to be done, whatever the cost. They did not single out

the effect of the trips upon their children as the sole purpose of the visits, though they did express their gratitude to providence when they felt their children had managed to "adjust happily" into the environment in the Subcontinent. Likewise they did not go out of their way to point out any negative outcome of the visit upon their children. It may be that those parents who were not likely to take their children back home often, noticed positive outcomes in their children's Asian peer group, or they guiltily imagined positive outcomes in other people's children. The two parents quoted above, who could not afford to take their children "back home" regularly, nevertheless felt that the lucky children got the best of both worlds.

People who could afford to go back often did sometimes drop hints about the deferential attitude of the villagers towards them. This again was incidental information, which on tape forms a part of unprompted digression. It is important, however, because it could help to explain some of the parents' motivation for success in the face of all kinds of obstacles they faced in Britain. On a more practical level it would also help to explain why these parents could not seriously go back even if they really wanted to, as a small minority of parents said they did.

"Back home", the majority of people where I come from were very poor. The landlord was the powerful person and everyone looked up to him. You were worth nothing because you were poor. Now when I go back I can hold my head up high. Coming (to Britain) gave me a way out.

(Father: 1, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

This comment is as much about the lack of social mobility within the village context in Pakistan as it is about the opening of a new door in Britain.

Pride is a bad thing. Allah is not happy with proud people. Some people forget their bad times and become proud. Mohsin is from my village. Look at him now! Stuck up. He has forgotten our landlord in Jhelum. He doesn't realize he is slowly becoming one!

(Father: 11, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

It seemed that most of the parents I interviewed had at some point in their lives been the



victims of social and economic inequalities in their countries of origin, and that only now could a few of them begin to share and talk about their situations with a relative stranger like me. They felt as a result of their experiences that wealth conferred power both within their communities in Cherrytown and in the eyes of their relatives "back home". This would be especially true of people who were surrounded by their extended families in this country, as they would have many witnesses for their success. Only one father, a successful shopkeeper, actually said anything explicit about this, though there were many subtle hints about it in conversations.

They know me where I was and where I am now. They respect me in the community.

(Father: 1, translated from Urdu, field notes)

It was difficult to say conclusively whether he was respected more or envied more in his community. He was talking mainly about his financial standing. It seemed to me that he was equating material success with the notion of respect. The important thing to note here was that this father had succeeded where other fathers had failed. "Unsuccessful" Asian families who lived in the shadow of that success faced a different sort of pressure. For families who did not have much in the way of financial security in their countries of origin, or in Britain in the 1980s, in relation to their more successful neighbours locally, there was a painful heritage of guilt.

Suppose I don't provide the best for my children. I will have failed them. Money is one real way of providing that.

(Father: 44, translated from Sylhetti/Urdu, field notes)

Those people who did not possess a house or relatively speaking in Cherrytown terms much wealth, felt money would make their social and therefore cultural standing very strong. They assumed that:

If you have a good life, you know you can do more cultural and religious things, and then everyone will respect you.

(Father: 19, translated from Sylhetti/Urdu, field notes)

Paradoxically however, those who did possess wealth and power in the Asian communities

felt they were in the throes of insecurity, especially if none of their children had done well educationally, judging by the parents' own expectations. This was mostly true of successful shopkeepers who felt they had made their families financially secure. However, they were in the words of one of them, "not very well-educated. Only ten class pass." These were the fathers who strongly felt the need to expand their children's horizons beyond the opportunities they themselves had.

If I could open a shop with the minimum of education, my son should do better than that. He's been educated in this country right from the start.

(Father: 1, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

People like the father quoted above felt that his son still had a better opportunity here than he himself had had "back home". At the same time he had a great lurking fear that his son might not be able to improve himself substantially and might remain static at the point at which the father would leave off.

My main worry is that apart from the fact that he speaks better English than me, I am not at all sure how he is better able to face the future in this country.

(Father: 1, translated from Urdu, field notes)

He felt that it would be tragic if his kinship system would have to rescue his children at the end of the day.

This will mean, that if my son also ends up running a shop, my shop, that this country didn't change things for the better for my children.

(Father: 1, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

This type of thinking was widespread among shopkeepers. However, most of the other families did not extend their thinking into their children's long term future in quite the way expressed by the father quoted above. They seemed to be more concerned about their child's immediate academic performance at school. As will become apparent in the chapters on children, the children's educational future to a great extent, was left in their own hands. Their parents were unable to guide them while at the same time they expected a lot from them educationally.

#### 4.5.4

##### **The paradox of financial security**

Asian families did not always feel secure in the position in which they found themselves. It is paradoxical to note that in the Asian parents' generation, insecurity was highest in families which were financially secure, who ran successful businesses and owned a property in Cherrytown in addition to a house which they had built "back home". This has been mentioned before by at least one other researcher (see Helweg 1979). Those who had been successful had built a house in their own village or on the outskirts of a town nearest their village, just in case they decided to retire and settle there, or in case they were "thrown out of here". They felt they had undertaken a tremendous challenge in setting up a business here. Now that they had achieved a modicum of success, they felt the onslaught of

double jealousy. Mad hating jealousy from the local English people and from your own people, most of whom have tried and failed.

(Father: 13, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

The "mad hating jealousy" was a fairly typical experience for the "successful" families within my sample. This affected their children's out of school friendships in many cases. Quite apart from the competitive nature of the relationships between people in the communities, for families who had a house in their countries of origin, the temptation to go "back home" was in a sense more tangible and realizable than it was for less prosperous families. Those who owned homes in their countries of origin in my sample did not have any outstanding mortgage commitments there. They had bought the land in cash and had a house constructed over a period of time with the help of relatives still living there. Those people who had a choice faced a greater conflict of interests as compared to those who did not.

Some parents mentioned the situation of political instability in their countries of origin and wished that the Subcontinent was a calmer place devoid of political strife, so that "ordinary,

decent people can live and die in peace" (Father: 13, translated from Punjabi). They blamed the politicians in those countries for the mess in which things were there. This sentiment was expressed by both mothers and fathers.

One parent who migrated from rural Pakistan saw the connection between economic prosperity, social class differences and respect thus:

People like Imran Khan and Benazir Bhutto can go back. Who will respect them here as much as they are respected "back home?" But don't forget they went back because they could afford to. Our case is different Baji. We... (silence) we are just ordinary people.

(Father: 3, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

#### 4.6.

#### Parents' insecurity

Parents expressed their insecurity when they talked about their lack of sense of belonging to Britain. When parents spoke of insecurity, they spoke either in legal and financial terms or in terms of the difficulty of bringing up their children in a way which would be approved of by their close relations "back home" and among their *biraderi* (kin) and extended families in this country. On the whole fathers seemed to be more concerned about the former and mothers about the latter. Mothers frequently talked about religious and cultural matters. In 35 cases (70% of the sample), parents felt, to quote one father, that Britain had "the power to throw us out." This disturbing sentence often came unprompted at unexpected points in the conversations.

They keep changing the law about everything, don't they? About schools and others...miners...that Scargill, miner man lost didn't he?...long time ago now...and he was one of them! They could change the law about us too. So you never know what they are going to do next, do you?

(Father: 5, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

For such families it was important to possess a piece of land "back home".

What if they seize my home, my shop here? As it is, shops get attacked and

the Police doesn't always catch anyone.

(Father: 10, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

This view was expressed eight times explicitly. It is significant because it was held by parents who had been in Britain for over 20 years and it is possible that other parents who did not express their thoughts thus may have held similar views.

This was where the children openly differed from their parents, though seven children, most of them new arrivals from Bangladesh, also held the view that they could somehow be made homeless and statusless in Britain. During home visits the children were not present throughout my conversations with the parents. In three cases (one Indian, two Pakistani families) when the issue of being made to leave Britain was mentioned in my presence by the parents, their children openly and fiercely disagreed with them.

#### 4.7

#### Parents and cultural reproduction

The mothers who felt insecure felt thus, as mentioned earlier, because they felt that they had failed to pass down their cultural values successfully. They were seriously worried about the values which were handed down to their children and grandchildren.

The school doesn't teach them to respect all their elders. That leaves the mosque in charge. Maulvis are not going to schools in this country. How will they know how children feel? How will my children get a correct picture? I can't teach them much, I can't read...they will forget their language, their culture, their religion, everything.

(Mother: 43, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

We have temples, but they are in London. I wish we had my mother living with us. She would have taught us all everything. It is very difficult to do everything on your own in this country.

(Mother: 20, translated from Hindi, field notes)

From talking in depth to the 20 women who chose to talk about their own values, when I tried to speak to them about their children's future, it seemed that anxiety about this

responsibility was more widespread than I had initially suspected. It was not limited to any particular religious or ethnic group within the sample. Most of the mothers felt that their culture was very different from the majority culture and they had to make a very special effort to maintain it. On balance, what Warriar (1988) found was very true for the whole of the parents' generation:

Men are regarded as the 'bread winners', while the management of the household, domestic chores, and the physical care and psychological well being of their children are firmly identified as the wife-mothers responsibility.

(p. 134)

The mothers seemed to be more concerned about their daughters, mainly I was told because the family's *izzat* was gauged by the behaviour and attitude of its daughters. This is not a new finding. It confirms all previous research findings in the field. Having said that the mothers were very concerned about the transmission of cultural values, it would be erroneous to imply that fathers were totally unconcerned about them. The question of family *izzat* or honour affected fathers as much as mothers, though mothers seemed to carry a self-conscious burden of guilt. 11 out of the 20 mothers mentioned above also displayed an awareness of the influence of wider societal values upon their children, and some seemed not to oppose it.

They watch so much TV. They speak English so much. Sometimes my daughter says she even thinks in English...just imagine that! But then of course I don't mind if they learn good things from English people...good manners, collecting money for *khairat* (charity). Some Pakistani children swear a lot. It is not only English children who are bad.

(Mother: 28, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

This particular mother and six other parents I spoke to were very impressed by the way blind people and people with disabilities and special needs were treated in Britain as compared to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. They also held in high regard the way in which children were involved in fund raising from a young age. These comments were made mostly during Comic Relief fund raising time.

As compared to fathers, mothers fall in a different category. The highest expectation every mother had of herself was to be "a good mother". This is a culturally defined role which many Asian women adopted.

I hope I have good, healthy, well-behaved children, who will obey their elders and respect everyone.

(Mother: 39, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

Motherhood bestowed status upon these women and they saw child rearing as their most important role and duty in life. In cases where the mothers were educated a little, they would, they told me:

Try my best to take the children to school on time. Try and see if he has to do any home work.

(Mother: 13, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

In some homes where the mother was very concerned about the child's mother tongue acquisition, she would find the time to sit down and teach the child something. This would make her feel good and valued, and it would give her a sense of purpose beyond housework.

It is like when a child learns to speak. It was the same when my son learned to read. It was like a wonderful thing.

(Mother: 32, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

Mothers who were totally illiterate missed this sense of joy and achievement. In Muslim families some mothers appeared to feel guilty about not having been able to recite the Quran. There were at the time of this research no Quran classes in Cherrytown aimed specifically to teach women, although that was what these mothers said that they wanted to learn. In families where religious education forms the cornerstone of education in a child's formative years, parents feel morally and spiritually obliged to perform their duties for their children. Those who "failed" to do so for whatever reason felt very guilty about it. This was in no way related to the length of their stay in Britain but to how religious the families were. All the Muslim children in the sample, both boys and girls, had been to their local mosque to learn to recite the Quran. Some boys still went after school.

Religious education was also considered important by the Hindu families who had migrated from India, but they did not speak as much of guilt and anxiety as the Muslim families I came across from Bangladesh and Pakistan. In Hindu and Sikh homes I visited I was shown the little shrine in the homes, and in one particular home offered some rose incense sticks as keepsakes. In one family only the mother was actually religious but the rest of the family observed the rites and rituals. Her son told me: "We aren't as particular as our mother would like us all to be." (Sunil: 33.) Even in most families where the fathers were fairly religious, mothers would still take it upon themselves to observe the rites and rituals at home, including for example cooking special food on feast days.

Asian mothers of young children were remarkably positive in their attitude towards motherhood. They might be tired at the time of the interview at the end of a long day with children, but they always saw children as desirable beings and as a blessing:

My husband works so hard. He has two jobs. It is all because of the children...to make the families' life better. But that is how it is. We were a **barkat** (blessing) for our parents and these children are a **naimat** (blessing) for us.

(Mother: 15, translated from Sylhetti and broken Urdu, taped conversation)

There were four children in this home, and the husband was recovering from a heart operation.

The generation of Asian mothers I interviewed did not have to make a choice between having a career and a family. The emphasis was most fervently placed on children as the focus of their lives. As a result, most families, even those who were very poor, were bringing up their children in what appeared to be a reassuring, loving, warm atmosphere. This was particularly noticeable in teenagers' families where there were younger children at home. These mothers were in different ways still facing the problems of adjusting to life in Britain but their friend circles and family networks made them feel valued as mothers.



Other researchers studying Asian women have reported similar findings (See Westwood and Bhachu (eds.) 1988). Paid work did not have the same place in these mothers' lives.

Better to work in a launderette near your home than to leave your child with a stranger and do a job which isn't that great anyway!

(Mother: 4, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

When pressed further, three mothers who had initiated the above line of argument said more or less what the mother in the following instance said:

Well till work (cashier) and teaching our languages at school. It would be different if these women were in really important jobs! But to work in silly jobs at the expense of neglecting your child! That's unforgivable.

(Mother: 14, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

It is interesting to note that for this mother and others like her, a community language teacher in a school and a woman cashier were on a par, as they both went out to work at "silly jobs". Community language teachers, that is, those who taught Urdu and Bengali were not well respected by Asian children, especially in secondary schools. The main reason was the impression that they were not "proper teachers". It is possible that children mentioned this to their parents. It is also relevant to mention that examples of a "powerful" job that Asian women might do which were quoted to me were a doctor and a gynaecologist, even though they had not come across Asian women in those posts in Cherrytown. At the time of this research there was only one Asian (male) GP in the whole of Cherrytown.

#### 4.8

##### Families facing severe inter-generational problems

Out of the 50 families I visited there were four cases where open clashes had developed between parents and children. They represented examples from Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi families. In all of these families the older brother of the child I was visiting had decided to marry an English girl, instead of marrying someone of his own kin. In one case, the couple had actually lived with the Bangladeshi family for three months before

leaving a goodbye note and disappearing. This was a financially "successful" Bangladeshi family. Their teachers had been invited to a marriage ceremony at the registry by the couple but not their parents. The mother spoke to me with huge tears rolling down her face.

He just phoned me one day to say that he had a daughter. All my life I wanted to hold my grandchild at birth...my first grandchild and look what happened.

(Mother: 29, translated from Urdu/Sylhetti, field notes)

For this mother migration had brought about economic stability at the expense of the loss of a son to what she derisively called "this modern culture." She felt that if she had not migrated this would not have happened to her.

In another family, this time from Jhelum in Pakistan, the oldest son in the family had moved out of his parental home without any prior warning to live with his English girlfriend. His mother began to suffer from mental illness. She did not and could not accept what had happened to her son and became in the words of her daughter "a worrier, always crying."

In the last two cases, the parents were very worried about their younger children's, especially their daughters' welfare, and spoke to "outsiders" very cautiously. Nothing in their previous experience had equipped them for what one of the mothers called "this unbearable sacrifice".

Although on first meetings these families looked happy, I learnt later that their children's actions had left them very sad and broken. The main reason for the disillusionment appeared to me to be the lack of trust and the lack of sharing of experiences between the two generations. These parents had mixed feelings. On the one hand they felt guilty for not having been good parents, and on the other, they blamed the society in which they lived,

and what they saw as its promiscuity and its failure.

Someone should have told me...one of the teachers, so we could all have talked about what I think, what he thinks...there is so much hatred though, of our traditions. The white people are very pleased I suppose. They (school teachers) have made fun of me by not telling me. At least we could all have talked about it. And all the teachers knew!

(Mother: 29, translated from Urdu/Sylhetti, taped conversation)

It upset this mother that she was so much out of touch with her child's way of thinking and also at the way the teachers, it appeared to her had been colluding with her son. The teachers represented to her the white world at large, which was in some ways a contradiction of the world to which she herself belonged.

The cases outlined above are not the norm, though they do represent in extreme form the clash of interests between the home and the outside world for the child. They also represent in a heightened form the issues facing parents who feel that they have "lost" their children and hold both themselves and the society at large responsible for this loss. This feeling of loss or feared loss is also true in varying proportions for the remainder of the sample of parents, and leads them to be protective of their children, particularly of their daughters, from what is perceived to be negative influences of the *azad* (free) world of the west. The stories of children having "gone astray" were repeated in other households and led to temporarily tightening the hold of those other parents upon their children. The way in which their children negotiated with this free world and its demands on their time as compared to the demands their parents placed on them is described in a chapter on children. Shaw (1988) has quoted examples where some runaway, non-conforming individuals returned to the family. It did not look as though that would happen in the cases quoted above. These young people seemed to have created their own reality which was quite distinct from that of the rest of their peer group, both Asian and non-Asian, and from their parents.

Unfortunately, I was not able to talk to the fathers to discuss with them their opinions and their feelings about their children's upbringing, as it was always the mothers who discussed these concerns with me of their own volition.

#### 4.9

##### Summary

This chapter introduced 50 Asian families in Cherrytown. They were brought up in the Subcontinent which was alive in their memories as the wonderful place "back home". It remains both culturally and nostalgically an important reference point in the parents' lives. Asian parents were concerned about the political and economic instability in their countries of origin in the Subcontinent and hoped that the situation would improve one day. The majority of parents in my sample were rural migrants. Asian fathers came to Britain as economic migrants with the intention of returning once they had made their fortunes, but this did not happen. Their wives and children joined them later. All parents felt that they were living in two worlds, one in England and another "back home". Those who could afford to visit their countries of origin did so as often as they could. It was always an expensive trip, as besides the air tickets they also had to take expensive presents for their relations. One indication of Asian families' prosperity was the frequency of the trips "back home".

Asian families had many financial commitments. They tried to purchase their own home in Cherrytown. They were also under pressure to send money "back home" and to provide expensive dowries for their daughters. Those who were affluent tried to make a house "back home" as a place to which they hoped to return. It was also a status symbol for villagers "back home".

- Most Asian parents valued their own culture, language and religion and felt that these were not respected in Britain. They mostly socialised with people from their own ethnic backgrounds. They experienced racism because of their culture and colour and felt insecure in case they might be asked to leave Britain one day. Some of their children did not agree with them about this.

Asian fathers felt that they had to provide for their families. They saw themselves as heads of their households. Asian mothers focused on their children as their main responsibility. They felt guilty if they thought they had failed to transmit religious and cultural values successfully to their children. Parents wanted a better life for their children than the one they had led. Many Asian parents saw financial security as a way of providing stability for their families. Most of the information contained in this chapter is not something I actually sought. Indeed, I listened to it in large measure out of politeness. It turned out that it is in fact highly relevant to further analysis and supports the usefulness of ethnography in this context.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ASIAN PARENTS: EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT**

#### **5.1**

##### **Introduction**

There is much research evidence concerning white families to support the common sense view that parents' occupations have a substantial influence on their children's educational attainment. A recent report by Kuh and Wadsworth (1991) reaches similar conclusion to many predecessors. Middle class children are enabled by their parents to use the education system to their own advantage in a way which working class children are not. Research on Asian children has not always taken systematic account of their social class background, but it would be reasonable to expect that here too parental social class might influence children's educational opportunities and attainments. Such evidence as exists supports that expectation (Brah 1979, Bhachu 1985a).

This chapter explores the connection between Asian parents' education and occupations. It also looks at their aspirations for their children's future and their relationship with Cherrydale School.

#### **5.2**

##### **Parents' occupations**

In terms of occupations most of the Asian parents in my sample can be divided into four distinct categories which are listed below.

(1) There were fathers and mothers who were employed either part-time or full-time by firms, companies and small businesses in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs.

(2) Other fathers and mothers were self-employed. These include shop owners and restaurant owners, who could count as 'middle class', though not as professional middle class.

(3) There were full time mothers who were home makers as well as some among them who worked from home.

(4) Finally there were the long and perhaps short term unemployed.

According to previous research findings (see Brah 1979, Bhachu 1985a) it is the Asian parents who belong to the professional middle class who are most skilled at using the British educational system to their children's advantage; among them, urban migrants would be at a distinct advantage. None of the parents in my sample belong to the professional middle class.

Table 5a presents details of 50 fathers' occupations (see Appendix: 4D). The largest single figure, 9 appears to be that of unemployed fathers. However this is unreliable, as some of the "unemployed" fathers worked as cleaners and helpers in restaurants. It was not always possible to verify that these fathers were indeed unemployed. For some children to say their father was unemployed carried less stigma than saying he had a menial job. The official figure for the rate of unemployment in the adult population of Cherrytown in the late 1980s during the time of this research stood below the national average. Cherrytown did not keep a record of unemployment figures by ethnicity, though according to a recent Labour Force Survey at least a quarter of the economically active Bangladeshis and Pakistanis in Britain are unemployed (Social Trends 23, 1993).

**TABLE 5a****Fathers' Occupations**

Fathers' Occupations	Number of families
Shop owners	3 (1, 10, 13)
Restaurant owners	3 (21, 27, 29)
Waiters/helpers in restaurants	7 (15, 16, 23, 25, 44, 48, 50)
Factory workers	6 (2, 20, 24, 32, 33, 42)
Bus/coach drivers	4 (14, 38, 39, 41)
Security van drivers	2 (3, 43)
Catering	2 (6, 49)
Post Office	2 (28, 37)
Hospital porter	1 (31)
Milkman	1 (35)
Cleaners	2 (30, 36)
Odd jobs	3 (8, 9, 19)
Unemployed	9 (4, 5, 7, 11, 17, 22, 34, 40, 47)
Retired	2 (26, 46)
Deceased	3 (12, 18, 45)

In the above sample of Asian fathers there is a link between unemployment and literacy, except in two cases. Mr Khan (8) and Mr Afzal (9) were frequently unemployed, they told me, though not at the time of this research, because although they were educated, they did not have a job which they felt they deserved. They both told me that they had degrees, one father from India and the other from Pakistan. The cleaning jobs which they were offered were construed by them as insults. They wished to do white collar jobs which they could not obtain. Their main problem, they told me, was that they did not have enough capital to set up their own businesses. The result of this mismatch between their qualifications and the lack of suitable job openings in Cherrytown was that they frequently found themselves



unemployed. When things were very difficult they did any sort of job which came their way. They spent most of their time teaching their children at home. It is difficult to generalise on the basis of just two cases, but they show that urban migrants, even those with degrees, are not always financially more successful than rural migrants from the Subcontinent.

Of the nine unemployed fathers, one had decided not to work on grounds of ill health. He had not had a pensionable job, so the burden of responsibility lay on his son's shoulders. Of the rest of the fathers who said they were unemployed at the time of the interview, seven had not been to school at all. Another had been to a primary school for two years till he was about ten and said he could not read or write anything. All their children were doing rather badly at school, except one son, not in my sample of children at school, who was studying biochemistry at a University. Of all illiterate fathers in this sample, five had migrated from the Punjab in Pakistan and four from Sylhet in Bangladesh. Some had never been to a school of any description; others had been to school but could not read or write because they left too early.

Among the unemployed fathers mentioned above, three used to work at a local bakery till that closed down. They have been unable to find any regular employment since. Besides these fathers, four more have been unable to find any kind of job whatsoever; two of them were suffering from mental illness. These four were fathers who were prepared to do any job but who had been consistently unsuccessful. It was not appropriate for me to ask about the professions of those three fathers who had died, or even those who retired, unless they or their families volunteered the information themselves.

Most of the fathers who had been to school and could write letters in Urdu or Bengali (the

official languages of Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively) were employed in some capacity. The most common spoken languages among my sample are Punjabi and Sylheti. For both Punjabi and Sylheti speakers the hurdles to becoming literate as adults in Urdu and Bengali are considerable because their mother tongues are different from the language of written communication.

In the remainder of the sample, there is a tendency among Bangladeshi fathers to be involved in restaurant jobs either as owners, or as waiters, helpers and chefs. Those fathers who were of Pakistani and Indian origin were more likely to be working in factories, on the buses, in the post offices and in shops.

One possible reason for this advanced by researchers is that historically Bengali men were considered to be good chefs and were used by the British as indentured labour on long seafaring journeys (see Hartmann & Boyce, 1983). It has also been suggested that some of the Bengali men jumped ship in Britain and worked in restaurants, later setting up their own restaurants. In Cherrytown another possible reason for this tendency could be that the Bangladeshi community more than any other Asian community, relies totally on personal contact through word of mouth to obtain jobs. Yet another reason could be that the Bangladeshi community is now going through the initial phase of early settlement which the Sikh communities and Pakistani communities, for instance, have passed through already. There are probably more commercial and business links among those who arrived earlier in Britain. The Bangladeshi community is the last Asian community to arrive in Cherrytown. Those who were restaurant owners said they had been "educated a little". They could all "write letters and add up". This helped them to set up their own business. These restaurant owners have a working knowledge of Bengali and of Maths, though that alone was probably not sufficient to make them successful restaurateurs. The majority of the so

called "Indian" restaurants in Cherrytown are owned and run by Bangladeshis.

There was one retired primary school teacher, who according to his children never taught them anything. There were two Bangladeshi fathers who cleaned up restaurants. It was enormously difficult to find out the nature of these fathers' jobs, as cleaning jobs are considered the lowest of the low in Asian communities, and are further viewed negatively as "women's jobs", not fit for men. To be a hospital porter is considered slightly better. The children of families where fathers were cleaners consistently misinformed me about their fathers' occupation, claiming that their fathers were unemployed. The truth sometimes emerged over a long period of time through casual conversations I had with the mothers. It is also possible, therefore, that at least some of the fathers who appear under the category of unemployed were doing cleaning jobs but I was not able to verify this in every instance at the time. In cases where I discovered that cleaning jobs were the fathers' occupations, they appear on the list as such.

When the rest of the sample is studied it emerges that all the people who were shop owners, had other members of their extended families living in Cherrytown who helped them. A small nuclear family could not undertake the job of setting up shop. When the main family occupation was running the family shop, it invariably turned out that they had a brother or a brother-in-law or a cousin to help set up shop in the first place. When women were running a shop (as in families 2, 24, 32, see Appendix: 4E) it was a side business which was undertaken to supplement the family's income. If the business thrived, it sometimes happened that the two brothers or cousins who had initially pooled their efforts to set up the first family business, had later branched out to do different things altogether. According to the Asian parents in Cherrytown at the time of this research, there were no Bangladeshi shop owners. One was a Sri Lankan family owned business. The rest

were either Pakistani or Indian.

Of those who were employed but not self-employed, six worked at a factory. Apart from one slightly disabled father (33) who did some "desk work" (he did not elaborate and I did not question him), the remaining five were shift workers who worked on the assembly line. All of them obtained jobs which meant working at night. What exactly they did at the factory was not always clearly explained to me. It was mostly assumed that I would understand.

Similarly, fathers who worked at the Post Office did not give further details. Their wives knew or volunteered surprisingly little explanation about the precise nature of their work. It was quite probable that they did not know details.

### 5.3

#### The link between formal education and occupation

The link between Asian parents' education and occupations is described separately below for fathers and mothers. As is only to be expected from this generation, there is a difference among them based on gender.

#### 5.3.1

##### **Fathers**

On studying the fathers' occupations and their educational background, it seems that those fathers who were totally illiterate in Urdu or Bengali as well as English were the ones with the least employment opportunities in Cherrytown. They were only able to work in areas which required unskilled labour, and they worked sporadically if at all. They had to compete in these jobs with people from their own and other communities who knew more

than them. As far as Asians are concerned, a degree from India or Pakistan does not guarantee a permanent, full-time salaried job in Britain, as becomes obvious when we study the careers of Asian teachers in Cherrydale School (see Chapter 10). However, it probably provides an opportunity for some parents to expand on what they may have previously experienced in a different country. They could for instance, do vocational courses and find employment which might give them an opportunity of using their abilities. It is difficult to say for certain whether vocational courses would have helped these particular fathers in the 1960s and the 1970s. The situation in the 1980s and the 1990s is obviously very different. According to a survey conducted by Brennan and McGeevor (1990):

Irrespective of their choice of course, graduates from ethnic minorities face particular difficulties in the labour market. The perception and anticipation of difficulties by the students themselves can lead...(to) a lowering of aspirations as a consequence. It is not a pleasant experience being rejected for a job, particularly after (sometimes multiple) interviews. And it is an experience that ethnic minority graduates go through more often than their white peers.

(p. 93)

Fathers who had been to school till the age of ten or 11 years did not have a great advantage in finding jobs over those who were totally illiterate. But at least they could read a newspaper in some language. They could write letters "back home" and they could add up.

The fathers who were educated till the age of 15 or 16 years had obtained the basic minimum educational certificate generally called "Matric" (short form for "school matriculation"). People call themselves and others "Matric Pass" or rarely if they failed their Matric exams "9th pass". These people found some job in their lifetimes during their stay in Britain. They were not unemployed for a long period of time. If nothing else worked they could pool resources with a relative, become self-employed, or find some way of earning their keep.

Excluding self-employment, the highest jobs in terms of status value, that is earning ability, within the Asian communities in my sample were held by bus drivers, and by men who worked at the Post Office or at the factory. Within the sample, those fathers who were in the higher status job as explained earlier, did see a link between their own formal education and their employment opportunities.

You see Baji (sister) we weren't educated here. We were never taught to read and write properly in English. We went to Urdu medium schools, so these are the best jobs we can get. We have tried our best.

(Father: 14, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

These fathers expected their children to do better than they had done themselves.

Those who were self-employed felt that if they were merely "Matric pass" from India or Pakistan, there was a point beyond which they could not go, no matter how hard they tried.

One father who was a shopkeeper had this to say:

Education teaches you to use your brain better. I have a friend who educated his sons in this country. He has been slogging like me for 20 years. His son told him to pack things better and market it to chain stores. Now they are doing very well. The father could not have thought it up on his own. He was educated there (India). His sons are educated here.

(Father: 1, translated from Urdu, field notes)

Ten fathers felt that they needed education, but they did not know what they could do. They knew even less how to go about it without taking time off from work. This was precious time they felt they could just not afford. "It would be nice and easy to sit and read and write I suppose, but where is the time?" (Father: 28, translated from Punjabi, field notes).

So in the end they felt that their children would have to improve on the opportunities they had been offered. One typical comment from most of the fathers is "our time is up. It's their life now". They felt that the British education system had offered them no opportunities to "grow mentally" over the past 20 years or so. They felt that they had learnt

the basic minimum to do a job such as drive a bus; and they had not progressed beyond that. "We were meant to come and get stuck in a place...I suppose in a way we did..." (Father: 39, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation).

### 5.3.2

#### **Mothers**

Of the 50 Asian mothers in the sample, I spoke to 49; the fiftieth was in Pakistan during my field work. 17 mothers said they were working at the time of my field work. This figure includes part-time work. If we include those who, by their own account, worked for some time previous to the interview the number goes up to 20. According to the figures held in Cherrytown, between 1987 and 1989 the total male unemployment figure far exceeded that of female unemployment. However this might be misleading as many women who would like jobs do not appear in unemployment figures because they do not "sign on". According to locally kept records on unemployment there was generally a fall in the rate of unemployment in Cherrytown between the years mentioned above. It was not possible to check how this was reflected in different ethnic groups.

Further details of Mothers' occupation are set out in Table 5b. Of those who used to work but were not working at the time of my visit, one had been a helper in her husband's shop and the other two had done cleaning work.

Bangladeshi mothers did not undertake paid work. One mother said she used to work initially when her husband was setting up his own shop. She stopped working when he sold off the shop and opened a restaurant. Apart from her, no other Bangladeshi mother worked. All of them dedicated their lives to the upbringing of their children. One possible explanation for their not being economically active could be that in the 1980s Cherrytown's

market for work of the kind they could do was already saturated. Thus the responsibility in this area lay heavily on their children's shoulders. These children would probably have had to work in Sylhet in Bangladesh had they been living there. They were under similar pressure to work in Cherrytown.

**TABLE 5b**

**Mothers' Occupations**

Mothers' occupations	Number of families
Housewives ( lampshade and samosa making)	33
Helper in husband's shop	2 (1, 10)
Shop owner (second income, husband factory worker)	3 (2, 24, 32)
Adult literacy work (part-time)	1 (9)
Creche worker	1 (13)
Cleaner	6 (3, 6, 8, 26, 42, 49 )
Cook/catering	2 (20, 33)
Launderette work	2 (4, 36)

In my sample those mothers who helped in the shop had small children as well as the secondary school child in Cherrydale School. Those who actually ran their own shops had no primary school aged children to care for. In fact they could rely on the help of their middle and secondary school aged children if needed. The kind of work women did was thus directly related to their domestic circumstances, most especially to the age of their children. In research terms this is widely true of women generally (for research on Asian women see for example Warrier 1988).



Whenever women were running their shops single handed, it was always the second income in the family. Their husbands in all three cases worked at a factory. The long term plan in such families was that after retirement the husband would also get involved in the shop. Over the week-ends, when the factory was shut, the husbands and sons in the families helped to stock the shop.

None of the mothers had used paid childcare as a means towards earning a living. The notion of using a child minder was completely alien to them. With one exception, I did not find that these mothers had left their younger children in the care of older children while they went out to work. Those who had gone out to work had worked near their homes after their child was at least five years old. The exception was an Indian mother (26), who felt she had struggled a lot in life. She did not elaborate. She was the only mother in the sample who had been working continuously since her youngest son was three. None of the other mothers had worked continuously for a wage for as long.

Some women who described themselves as "just home makers" also worked at home. They made lampshades or samosas. These were mothers who were clearly working, but who said they did not feel they were working. They gave the impression that they were not supposed to be working. They tried to tell me that they were working to pass the time and that their work was like a continuation of their housework for which they happened to get paid. They seemed unwilling to admit that their income was a necessity, perhaps in case this reflected badly on their husbands' ability to maintain them. In conversation, this also seemed to represent their husband's point of view. The reality was far from that. These families needed the extra income which the wife could provide, but as these women themselves admitted, no woman had gone out of the house to work for generations, and the decision to work was thus not without its conflicts. They talked about going out to work in an urban

setting and, insisted that those who worked from home were not going to work outside their homes. They were torn between having to work to make ends meet and feeling uncomfortable about admitting that they were working. Making lampshades and samosas at home is extremely low paid (at most 35 pence per item in 1990) and does not give women any self-esteem. Their earlier education in Pakistan, formal and informal, had not equipped them for the situation they faced in Britain. When they had got married the tacit assumption was that they would be "well looked after and cared for" by their husbands. Some mothers, when they spoke of work, voluntarily justified themselves to me, in apologetic tones, saying things to the effect that:

Well, I wasn't really going to but you see this is Britain and things are expensive...in any case I just do a little bit at home...it is just like an extra bit of housework.

(Mother: 35, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

It was obviously not an extension of housework even if lampshades or samosas were made at home. Also, as it is not customary to leave their children with baby sitters and child minders these mothers also justified having to work by saying:

My children don't need me now as much. They are older; I mean they don't need constant looking after.

(Mother: 4, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

Apart from women who worked in shops, which were literally in most cases the front rooms or the downstairs rooms of their homes, everyone else offered long explanations for having to work. The only mother who does not fall in this category is the Indian mother mentioned earlier. There was no sense of achievement or satisfaction expressed, which says a lot about the kind of work they had to do. The only reason I can give for the need of self-justification in these mothers and for the fact that explanations came so automatically to them, is that the other Asian women who did not work may have required an explanation from the working mothers. When the working women talked to me they simply said what they customarily said to the other women. I found this quite interesting because all the

mothers I came across knew vaguely that I did work of some sort in their children's school.

The attitudes of the mothers described above were similar in some ways to those found by Warrier (1988) among Gujarati women. The responsibility for childcare depended ultimately on women. Their economic activity was directly related to the ages of their children. Bhachu (1988) studied Sikh women who had migrated twice. They had gone from India to mainly urban areas in East Africa and had then come to urban Britain. They also came to Britain together with all members of their family, young and old, and did not experience "the myth of return" like the women in my sample. Also in their case older relatives could help working mothers with childcare. Prior to their migration to Britain, the vast majority of women in my sample had not lived in urban areas even in their own countries of origin. This may help to explain why the mothers said what they did and behaved in the ways they did.

#### 5.4

##### The challenges facing Asian women in Britain

The majority of the women I interviewed thought that once they were married to someone working in Britain they would lead a life of comfort and would not need to work for a living. Their preconceptions were challenged by the reality they faced in Britain and they had to cope with changing circumstances. This meant taking up paid employment in order to make ends meet. However, the kinds of occupations many Asian women could obtain were low-paid and menial. Brah (1992) has commented on the over-representation of Asian women at the lower end of the market. A recent Labour Force Survey reaffirms this (see Jones, 1993).

Whatever their economic position in the labour market, Asian mothers in my sample

assumed that their children would be better equipped to seek paid employment than themselves. However, as we shall see, their children's teachers mostly assumed that the majority of Asian mothers were full-time housewives, and therefore unanimously desired a similar destination particularly for their daughters (see Chapter 10). These mothers were trying to change and adapt to their circumstances. The forms of adaptation which affected them and which I noticed were as follows:

1. Mothers (mostly wives of shop owners and factory workers) learning to drive a car (families 1, 2, 10, 13, 24, 32). Women driving instructors are in great demand in Cherrytown. These mothers would rather learn driving from a white English speaking woman instructor whose language they did not understand completely, than a Punjabi/Hindi speaking Asian male driving instructor.
2. Selling alcohol, especially in the case of otherwise strict Muslim families. This is mentioned here because the subject of alcohol is a taboo subject in the communities studied, across different countries of origin, particularly with reference to women. (Families 1, 10, 13, 24, 32 plus all restaurants.)
3. Going (grocery) shopping on their own, whereas this would otherwise have been done by men in the rural hinterlands and in outlying, under-developed districts of the Subcontinent. They also shopped at the open market alone or with a child. It is more often Asian women than men who can be noticed shopping in the open market in Cherrytown.
4. Verbally expressed willingness to join a Pre-access and Access course to join "return to learn" courses in adult education, which may possibly lead to better paid jobs than cleaners' jobs.

#### 5.4.1

##### **Asian women's attitude towards employment**

There has been a gradual change in the attitudes of the parents' generation as a direct result of living in Britain. At the same time there is an attempt on their part to hold on to the values which were handed down to them by their parents.

Women who worked said that they had begun to work initially for "just a few months and then it grew." (Mother: 6, translated from Hindi, field notes.) In the families where both the husband and wife were working, with one exception there seems to be no correlation between the husband's work outside home and that of the wife. Each family did what suited its particular circumstances. (See Appendix: 5A for a list of parallel jobs held by both parents within nuclear families.)

Another relevant factor is that when a woman found employment and began to work, others in her community waited to see what the response would be. Immediately that job was approved of (for example if she worked only with other women), several more mothers wanted to do exactly the same work. (This was often not possible, especially in part-time County Council jobs, for example Adult Basic literacy programmes.) If one test case was approved of, it seemed to become relatively easier for others. However, if a mother worked as a cleaner she would not discuss it openly with everyone else. The reasons have been mentioned earlier in relation to fathers. It is significant to note that none of these mothers knew of any successful Asian career women "as a friend to really talk to" they told me. Community language teachers, that is, those who taught Urdu and Bengali, were not held in high esteem so they were not the positive role models that have been expected. Parents had certain expectations of these teachers, precisely because of their ethnic background, which they did not have to the same degree from their children's white teachers. They

complained that these teachers did not visit them at home. In the opinion of those mothers who were working themselves, the community language teachers who were educated were probably doing the best job they could obtain in Cherrytown, a view shared interestingly by the teachers themselves as Chapter 10 will explore. It might have helped the communities to think more highly of community language teachers if the teachers had got involved more openly in community related matters. In Cherrytown this did not happen. Seven mothers complained to me that community language teachers "put on airs". This might have been similar to what white working class parents thought of middle class white teachers, but I was unable to explore this at the time.

## 5.5

### Parents' experience of education in the Subcontinent

As one would expect, there is a huge difference between ethnic minority parents' own experience of "education" in their countries of origin and that of their children in Cherrytown. The link between parents' formal education and their occupation is explored to some extent in tables 4D and 4E (see Appendix). In terms of the present study I was interested in recording what parents thought about their own teachers and seeing if their impressions about their own education both formal and informal, affected their interactions with their children's teachers at Cherrydale School. Both these lines of enquiry are explored below. For most of the parents, formal education such as is imparted in Britain is rare. People who spent most of their lives in villages were not brought up to believe that formal education would necessarily change their lives in a dramatic way. This does not mean however, that they did not respect education, rather that everyone did not have the opportunity to go to school.

Parents could draw distinctions between different kinds of "educations". The learning of

language and basic knowledge about religion, parents said was something given to them at their mothers' knee, and was considered to be something which

Just happens normally, in an unthinking way. That is something to do with the **maahol** (atmosphere) of the place where you are brought up. You think that...well...I mean real learning happens in schools.

(Mother: 9, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

This mother drew a clear distinction between the informal and almost "by the way" kind of knowledge which takes place at home and the formal learning. The informal learning is valued in so far as it transmits religious and social mores, even if schools were acknowledged as places of "real" if somewhat vague and mysterious learning. This was generally true of all parents.

In the following examples two fathers told me what they remembered about their school.

My childhood memory of learning is sitting under a tree fidgeting, poking the boy sitting next to me, while we all rocked side to side repeating what Master Sahib said...all 20 of us. There was hardly any paper then, it was a sing song learning. That and the cane!(Said with a laugh)

(Father: 10, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

At that time in our village there was no proper school. For two hours every day your normal place of play was the **Madrissa** (school), so that where you played, you now went to school. Much later came the **takhti** (slate) and **qalam** (pen). Learning to behave properly towards others...your elders was more important than anything else.

(Father: 39, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

These fathers reminisced as though it was all a dream. It had been decades since they had been to school. Of those who spoke about their school, all except one had reverence for their teachers. It seemed that in rural Punjab at least, so few people could read and write that their skill was much admired.

They read all important letters and wrote all important papers in the village. They were respected. Now everybody in this country can read so they think they are cleverer than their parents. Parents can't read English themselves, they don't know how little their children can read. It is sad really.

(Father: 2, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

This father had been to school till the age of 16 in Pakistan and he felt that totally illiterate

parents particularly illiterate fathers, were at a distinct disadvantage, not only in terms of employment but more so because their children would not "respect them" because they were being brought up in a literate society. This was the widely held view among those fathers who had experienced literacy and illiteracy in two countries. They were literate in Pakistan or India but illiterate in English in Britain. An interesting point to draw attention to is that unlike fathers some of whom openly admitted that they could not read and write and that they were "uneducated" in their first languages, mothers very rarely said this to me voluntarily.

Among those parents who did go to school, there was an awareness of what school life entailed; generally speaking this could be something as basic as emphasizing punctuality and asking the child about homework, even if the parent could not actually help the child with it. Their inability to help their children was put down by some of the fathers to the unavailability of spare time.

Parents in nearly all cases drew a distinction between education for the "other world" (religious education at home, in the mosque, and so on) and education for "this world" (school in a secular society). This was done both by parents who had been to school and by those who had not. Further details about the mothers' education and the fathers' education are outlined below.

### 5.5.1

#### **Mothers' education**

On the whole I found that the mother's age and the place where her childhood were spent had determined to a large extent whether she had gone beyond the initial religious stage in education. There was a combination of different factors which had helped or obstructed



her educational chances. If she was "too old" that is, she was eight years old and had been helping her mother with younger siblings she could not possibly have gone to school. Similarly, if the middle school or the secondary school was beyond walking distance she would not have been allowed to go there. Mothers mentioned the distance of school from home as the single most important factor which kept them from studying at middle or secondary schools, even if there was a girls' school nearby. 12 mothers mentioned that there had been no girls' school in their village, so the question of formal education was not a real option open to them. If they were the oldest child in the family as was the case in four families in the sample, duty to family had been given priority. This was more true of daughters than of sons. None of the 24 fathers I spoke to said that their age or domestic responsibilities in the family had curtailed their educational opportunities. In some families, by the time less help was required of the mothers, then young girls, in the domestic domain, they found themselves to be of marriageable age.

Whether or not a mother got beyond the initial stages just mentioned would determine whether or not she passed down any formal education to her children. It certainly had a bearing on a mother's attitude to her daughters' education. It also affected her ability to help her son or daughter as far as the written command of her own language was concerned.

### **5.5.2**

#### **Fathers' education**

A father's education not only influenced his prospects in the job market, but also determined how far he was able to understand what happened in school. If he had a positive experience, however fleeting, he would be more likely to support his children's education in a practical way, such as to ask about homework. Similarly if he left school or played truant and he lived to regret it, he would again encourage his children to make

something of themselves. Those fathers who had never been to school knew virtually nothing about how formal education is imparted. They felt uncomfortable in the predominantly female arenas of primary schools, and this distance only grew through middle school and into secondary school at Cherrydale. Discomfort was also felt to some extent even by those fathers who had been to school. Two fathers who spoke to me in their wives' presence actually admitted having turned up at a parents' evening and feeling "very shy and uncomfortable" to find themselves face to face with a woman teacher. They could not tell her that, so they returned without speaking much to her. The school probably never registered that such an embarrassed silence had even occurred.

## 5.6

### Parents' experience of the British education system

What emerges very clearly from talking to parents about education is the reverence in which teachers are held. They have customarily through centuries held this "second to parents only" place in parents' estimation. This attitude was found in all people at all levels, in both mothers and fathers from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. There were some parents who felt bitter at their children's underachievement. But such parents who questioned the system were not the typical parents I interviewed in the sample. The majority of the parents had transferred the "reverence for teachers" attitude en bloc to Britain, together with the trust which goes with such an attitude. There was a contradiction between the reverence people hold for teachers in the Subcontinent and the scepticism with which they viewed the community language teachers in Cherrytown. Parents themselves, or even their parents for that matter, did not have a history of questioning their own teachers rigorously because it was not the done thing in the societies from which they had migrated. When their children found contradictions between their parents' positive views of white teachers and their own negative experiences over a period of time, they learnt to cope with the situation by not

always sharing the disturbing facets of school life with their parents. This theme is further developed in the chapters on children.

Together with reverence, Asian parents expected a high code of conduct from adults to whom they had entrusted their children. The first child in every family was the "educational guinea pig" through whom the system was tested. His or her first teacher would thus unlock a new door for the parents who had never been to school in this country. Among the questions I asked parents was: "If your child told you one story but the teacher another whom would you trust more?" Three out of four Asian parents answered to the effect that they would trust the teacher because she/he was "wiser. And because she must have the child's interest at heart." (Mother: 4, translated from Punjabi.) This assumption is only tested if things fall apart and parents feel disillusioned. This happened at Cherrydale School mostly at the end of the fourth year or at the beginning of the fifth year, when in any case it was too late to substantially change things for the better for the children concerned. I had at least five meetings with different parents who were dismayed at their child's academic results because they had taken the child's school reports "which mostly said good things" too literally. Parents did not go to the school to explain how they felt. When it came to their children's education at Cherrydale School and their children did badly, the parents did not always share their grievances, even sometimes within their extended families. There is a lot of shame attached to failure. This highlights the status value attached to children's examination entries and examination results, irrespective of their own educational background. This was also found by Joly (1986) in her Mirpuri sample in Birmingham.

One reason for parents' being so disappointed with failure was that in their own countries of origin a Matric certificate was considered a basic certificate, which they felt most people could easily achieve with some hard work.

Several (35) parents felt that their children's primary schools were more "friendly" and "approachable" than secondary schools. This tallies with most Asian children's accounts of relatively happier days at primary level and it is not something unique to Asian parents and their children. Parents who did not go to primary schools therefore were even less likely to visit their child's secondary school. Parents whose younger children were attending primary schools at the time of the interviews often smiled when they said that they were happy with their children's schools. In the light of their own formal experiences of education, they felt that in their children's primary schools, it was all "play, play, no work". (Mother: 6, translated from Hindi.)

In relating this research to previous research findings, it is relevant to mention that when Ghuman and Gallop (1981) looked at Bengali parents in Cardiff they found that the more educated Bengali Hindu parents who were in professional jobs were more aware of the role they as parents could play in enhancing their children's educational opportunities. In direct contrast to this, the relatively uneducated Muslim Bengalis from Bangladesh relied totally on school. They also expected their first language to be taught at school, and the school to be more aware of their children's religious needs. The researchers found that parents generally felt that

Primary schools did not "push" children sufficiently, that secondary schools spent too much time on non-academic subjects.

(p. 143)

Both the findings quoted above were echoed in the present research. I found that, apart from the Malayalam speakers, all parents wanted the school to offer their community languages: Punjabi in the case of Sikh parents, Urdu in the case of Pakistani parents and Bengali in the case of Bangladeshi parents. These included parents who could teach their children themselves. The reasons put forward by Malayalam speakers for taking a different view were first that all mothers could read and write their own language and had

undertaken to teach it to their children, and secondly that the school would find it impossible to find a Malayalam teacher. All other parents were more like the parents Ghuman (1980), Ghuman and Gallop (1981), Joly (1986) and Murshid (1990) came across in their research into the Sikh, Mirpuri and Bengali communities. Asian parents wanted the school to provide good community language teachers.

Unlike Joly's (1986, 1989) findings, none of the parents in my sample brought up the subject of halal meat to be provided at school. Nor was the issue of increasing single sex schools in Cherrytown mentioned once. They may have had these concerns, but they were never introduced spontaneously by the parents in conversation. When asked explicitly, Muslim parents said they would feel very pleased if halal meat dishes were available, as their children ate vegetarian meals everyday at school. Much more than these matters (or anything else), the parents I spoke to wanted better life chances for their children through good academic results. One father said his son could come home and eat whatever he did not manage to eat in school, but that his son could not get a decent education at home because he could not teach him in English. Generally speaking the majority of Asian parents fervently believed that if their children worked hard at school, they would get good jobs and would get somewhere in life.

### **5.6.1**

#### **Asian parents and single-sex schools**

The limited amount of research literature on Asian parents has drawn attention to two main differences among them, one on the basis of social class/urban-rural backgrounds and the other on the basis of Asian parents' own education prior to migration. Their expectations of their children's schools depend on their level of understanding about how schools operate and a mismatch between what parents desire and what the local education authority is

willing and able to offer. Literature on parental perspectives on Asian children's education has been reviewed by Tomlinson (1984). This subject has been studied by Ghuman and Gallop (1981), Joly (1986, 1989) Murshid (1990), and Brar (1991). Joly's (1986, 1989) research in Birmingham on Mirpuri parents' opinions shows that their demands are not being met by the LEA, especially with regard to increasing single sex provision. Joly found that Muslim parents in her sample objected to the forthcoming merger between two separate single-sex schools into a single comprehensive school. In terms of the present research the local situation was quite interesting. Although the majority of the parents in my sample were Muslims and there was a single-sex school which attracted many Muslim and non Muslim girls, the majority of Asian families among whom Muslims were most numerous, were allowing their daughters and sons to go to Cherrydale School. The socioeconomic and cultural background of Asian parents in the catchment areas of the single sex school, less than two miles away from Cherrydale school, was very similar to that of Cherrydale itself. However, Asian children were over- represented in Cherrydale school as compared to the single-sex boys and girls schools. Initially it appeared to me that Asian children were increasingly being given a choice by their parents to attend the school they most preferred. Judging by their actions not all Asian parents nor all Muslim parents appeared to be dogmatic about single-sex schooling. Cherrydale School had roughly an equal ratio between Asian boys and girls (see Table 4d, Chapter 4). One explanation for this preference for Cherrydale School was that Asian parents disapproved of the single-sex school's "moral" reputation. The local all-girls' school was falling out of favour because three Asian girls had allegedly "run off with boys" during school time and the school had failed to inform the parents. These girls, I was told in hushed tones had gone away to **bhangra** dance parties in a neighbouring city. As a result of the alleged incident, about which I did not find any concrete evidence, several parents had chosen a co-educational school such as Cherrydale. Gossip had it that one Asian school girl had even had an abortion. This was the worst thing

any Asian girl could do. She had damaged her izzat (honour) and that of her nuclear and extended family. I found no evidence for this, and even if it was true of another school, it was interesting that no one blamed the boy involved. The majority of parents thus had, unbeknown to the teachers in many cases, definite moral expectations from Cherrydale School.

## 5.6.2

### **Asian parents and Cherrydale School**

There was among the parents, a substantial majority, whose opinion about their children's education had never been actively sought in Cherrytown. Before they could be drawn into telling me their thoughts, they needed an enormous amount of assurance that their opinion was important to me, that I was not mocking them because they were "uneducated" and that I would not joke at their expense. This was the background in which the following information was gathered. All parents said that education, whatever it was, was a good thing. On being pressed further these were the kinds of things mentioned as areas of further expectations.

#### a) Academic issues

There was concern expressed about the lack of meaningful communication between the parents and the school. Parents in 13 families expressed an interest in being told in monthly or very frequent reports about their children's progress. Parents said that they would have appreciated it if the school had taken the trouble to write to them in their own language. They expected the school to tell them in advance "before tests and things" that a child was weak in a subject so that something useful could be done about it. The school could on the other hand argue that it would not be until "tests and things" had happened that the school could begin to diagnose the problem. What Asian parents perhaps meant was that they did

not like being kept in the dark about their children's difficulties at school.

Mistrust was expressed in four cases by fathers who worked in large organizations like a factory or a bus company. They said that the school looked down on them in some way.

According to one father:

Maybe because I can't write and read, they (teachers) don't want to help me understand my child's difficulties.

(Father: 4, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

This father was in no doubt that the school was more accessible to those people who could read and write. He felt that somehow being able to read and write opened other doors of communication which were a complete puzzle to him. Some parents were prepared to pay the teachers for extra time to brush up a weak subject. This was particularly the case with Science as a subject, after a popular teacher left the school.

Three parents, all fathers, wanted the school to have "talking good" sessions. By that they meant some kind of elocution lessons, though they did not use those words. They did not like their children to speak what they called "street English". They wanted their children to speak without an Asian accent. They assumed that in a secondary school all teachers spoke "proper good English like the BBC, though I don't know I haven't been (to school)." (Father: 15, translated from Urdu.) Interestingly, this was something they had not discussed with their children at home. When comments like the one above were uttered by parents in their children's presence, it would bring a smile to the child's face, and sometimes embarrassment, but no discussion took place between the parents and their children on this topic in my presence.

#### b) Asian teachers

In 34 out of 50 families parents said they wanted the school to have mainstream teachers



of Asian origin, preferably from their own ethnic background who were accessible and friendly

in a powerful position and not in unrespected jobs only. Surely they can find someone who speaks Punjabi? My wife will be so happy then.

(Father: 4, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

Nearly half my sample of mothers felt:

We have clever Asian people too. Clever people are not just white people. Why don't they find a good one for my daughter's school? Indians and Pakistanis are only allowed to teach Urdu I suppose...?

(Mother: 8, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

Children told me that they talked about some of their teachers at home more than others, but that they frequently spoke about their Asian teachers. They discussed what their Asian teachers wore and whether they were friendly or not and that they were not "proper teachers" because they did not have proper or responsible roles in school. They also discussed how their Asian teachers were treated by their white teachers. It was mentioned innumerable times to me by children that Asian teachers were not important enough to take full school assemblies.

### c) Vocational education

There was a general expectation that the school should help the child in studying subjects which would help him or her find a job. This request came most vehemently from unemployed fathers. It seemed to me that most parents would have liked their children to undertake some form of vocational training. What they wanted the children to achieve were "things that lead to jobs, not just painting pictures and playing football." (Father 47, translated from broken Urdu and Sylhetti.)

I don't know how much work he does and how much plain playing about. One day he will have to learn to stand on his own, won't he? I don't know if the school will find him a job? Will they (teachers) help him??

(Father: 30, translated from broken Urdu and Sylhetti, taped conversation)

All Asian parents expected the schools to emphasise reading and writing above everything

else. They felt that children learnt social skills at home and from friends. The typical view expressed by the majority of parents is encapsulated in the following quote.

If the school makes my children well behaved but useless for a good job, to face life here, what's the point?

(Father: 9, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

Clearly, Asian parents saw a connection between schooling and better employment chances.

#### d) Irrelevance of sport

The vast majority of Asian parents did not see the relevance of serious sport within the school day. This meant that even if a child was good at sport, it was not something he or she shared with parents. The majority of the parents, did not want their child's extra curricular activities to be given precedence over "reading and writing". They felt that life would provide opportunities to do all kinds of other things later. As one father put it to me:

Time to study is now...Tennis playing won't get my daughter into University.  
She can do that later.

(Father: 20, translated from Hindi, field notes)

Mothers and fathers were dismissive about sport. They sometimes mentioned childhood games they had played themselves, like **pitthu** played with seven stones, and **gulli danda** played with a short piece of wood, pointed at both ends and a long stick or various types of hopscotch and games played with marbles; however those were not serious things in their lives. It did not in their opinion "lead them to do anything." In their own minds there was no justification for the school wasting time on such activities.

#### e) Community languages

I picked up detailed criticisms of the syllabus, course content and teaching styles of Urdu and Bengali teachers - probably because this was the only subject which some parents could teach their children, and the only one in which they could detect flaws. Malayalam speaking families spoke about their own marginality within the local Indian community and

their attempts in previous years to find whenever possible a tutor for their own language, who would teach a mixed group of ten children of different ages in one of the children's houses. This scheme was not in operation during the time of the present research because the tutor had returned to Kerala in India.

f) Computer lessons

Four parents wanted the school to give compulsory computer lessons. Two of these parents were thinking of purchasing a personal computer for their children.

g) Exams

Several parents wanted to understand a bit more about exams. There was a sense of complete bafflement which is illustrated by the following comment:

Just when after sending four children to school, I learnt that CSE is for Matric-fail types and O Levels is for the bright ones, they are going to make it all one. Why will they make it all one? (reference to the then new GCSEs about which leaflets in English were being sent home)

(Mother: 9, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

h) Religious education

When asked, the majority of the parents said that either their religion should be taught or none at all, but they were unaware of their rights in this matter. Indeed they seemed never to have consciously thought about this before, nor to have discussed the matter with their children. This was surprising given that most of the parents said they were practising Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs. None of the 50 families knew, for instance, anything about their children's right to opt out of Christian assemblies. Although this was not a matter of direct relevance in Cherrydale School, as the school did not hold Christian assemblies, it had already caused deep consternation in some children before, particularly in their primary schools. What children said about this is explored in Chapter 6.

i) Need to stretch children more

The shopkeepers and the restaurateurs who were able to go "back home" more often than the rest, felt that on the whole the school did not push their children enough. They seemed to be comparing the knowledge in their view of their children's cousins attending schools "back home" in cities, with that of their own children in Cherrydale. Two families had left their children, in both cases girls, "back home" in their middle school years. The parents said they did this so that the girls could learn about their culture and language. Both of these were Bangladeshi families. This attitude on the part of Bangladeshi parents has also been reported by Murshid (1990). The parents might have taken this step to protect their daughters from what they perceived to be the temptations of the West.

j) Guidance for parents

An overwhelming majority of the parents wanted guidance from the school as to what they could do for their children. Conversations with their children repeatedly showed the strong feelings the children had on this matter which they did not share either at home or at school. They knew only too well their parents' inability to do much for them in matters to do with school. Children said that what their parents told them to do was meaningless. They were not, according to one Bangladeshi boy, "helped by being lectured to be good at school". Yet for their part, parents wished there was a place where somebody could tell them about schools: "Somewhere the people will be on my side, to help my son, and not take the school's side." (Mother: 26, translated from Punjabi)

k) Parents' advice

A minority of parents among those who had been to school themselves, made some suggestions about what the school could do to improve things. Some of these suggestions included criticisms.

- They celebrated Diwali and Eid and Chinese things when we were in another city, and even here in one primary school. I think Cherrydale thinks...well it is...it doesn't need to celebrate anything at all...maybe they only celebrate Christmas because all the teachers are Christians.

(Mother: 6, translated from Hindi, taped conversation)

As far as I know other secondary schools in the city did not celebrate these Asian festivals either. And in fact Cherrydale School did not celebrate Christmas as such nor any other Christian festival. It was not a predominantly Christian school as the above parent assumed. Most of the Asian parents I came across in the course of this research assumed that the vast majority of white people they met were practising Christians. For people from the Subcontinent there is little notion of people being atheist or agnostic; religion is as essential to identity as gender or ethnicity.

#### 1) Lack of connection between school and home

A minority of parents believed that the school did not involve them where it usefully might.

It was a bit funny when my son came and said he would do business studies...I suppose I could have taught his teacher a thing or two about setting up business...I told him to tell her that. Of course he didn't but the school is about books I guess...not about real life.

(Father: 10, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

This father was considered within the Asian communities to be a fairly successful businessman. Although he said what he did in a humorous vein, there was food for thought in what he was suggesting. I asked him whether he would actually go into school if the school called him. He said he would think about it, but he did not believe that the school was interested in things like that. He seemed to be right in his final comment, because the school hardly ever called parents in to contribute. It certainly did not once invite Asian parents in. One reason mentioned to me by two teachers was that they were not sure whether non-teaching adults would pitch the talk in a way in which it would go down well with teenagers. The reference below is to a white parent.

I am always afraid the lads will take the mickey. Once a Dad came in. He

was all geared up for older people I think. They wouldn't sit and listen. And after that I thought "never again".

(Mr Hoyle, deputy head, field notes)

#### m) School work

There was a minority of parents who felt quite strongly about some curricular matters, which though they were voiced in individual homes, were not aired by the same parents in school. These are as follows:

They write they tell me on bits of paper and then they hand it all in. No text books to cram from, just bits of paper. It is a mystery to me what my own child does in school every day. At his age in my life I had classwork books and homework books. All the work you did badly you had to get signed. I know very little about my son's work, yet he says he is doing ok, let's see.

(Father: 2, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

The father who made the latter comment did so because he could remember cramming for exams at the last minute. He got the certificate for matriculation, he told me, because he had books and not "bits" of paper. His son did not always bring his folders home so the father could not see proof of work being covered daily or weekly. At the same time he did not feel able to go to see his son's teacher on a regular basis, so he assumed that the teachers were teaching in a most peculiar way.

### 5.6.3

#### **Hidden expectations**

The following have been termed hidden expectations, because they were not made explicit either by the school or by the parents when they visited Cherrydale School. They remained "assumed" by the parents when they visited the school. The issue of whether they were legitimate assumptions or not is not a question I am addressing here.

In 30 families parents expected the school to inform them immediately the child was caught

"misbehaving". This included all kinds of activities which were other than what the parents saw as "studying" and "working hard". This included smoking, truanting and having a relationship with the opposite sex. Part of the reason for wanting an Asian teacher on the school staff was to be a home-school link person who would convey such information, as well as a role model for the children. This may explain why initially some children, particularly Asian girls were wary of me. The parents did not specify gender in this connection, so it would be fair to assume that on the whole it did not matter to the parents whether it was a male or a female teacher.

Some parents said they would have liked it if the school could arrange a local or other Asian celebrity to visit the school and to invite the parents too so that everyone would know that there are "good Asian people too." When asked to elaborate on the kind of people they had in mind, they mentioned, surprisingly in this connection, sports personalities like Imran Khan and politicians like Rajiv Gandhi, who was alive then, and Benazir Bhutto. The school was expected to perform this task only if these people were visiting Cherrytown. It was interesting to note that the parents could not think of any names of Asian people they would have liked to meet from within Britain.

Parents in six different families said they expected to be asked if they would like to accompany their children on school trips to places like Alton Towers as well as France. They complained that the school expressly ignored them. This wish was expressed in all six cases by mothers of third year students. Their daughters had all attended the same school before joining Cherrydale, and the previous school had encouraged these mothers to join them on school trips.

The issue of arranged marriages came up in conversation. 15 parents, again only mothers,

wanted the school to stop making fun of arranged marriages, which is what they felt it always did. These mothers felt that the girls were humiliated and constantly "bothered" about it more than boys were. All the mothers who brought up this subject had sons as well as daughters. They said that their daughters felt embarrassed and sad and that this subject cropped up more often in Cherrydale than it had done in their daughters' middle schools. It was almost as though by posing this question the teachers and peers, but more the former, were harassing the girls. This issue is discussed again in relation to teachers and children in the relevant chapters.

All parents wanted their values, traditions and culture to be treated with respect by the school. It was when the parents spoke about this aspect that words like "us" and "them" crept into their language. By "us" they meant themselves and their children, whereas "they" meant the teachers, and sometimes white teenagers. Quite frequently the parents explicitly included me in the "us", thus broadening out the differentiation between people on the basis of their perceived culture, ethnicity and colour.

Almost all parents thought school uniforms were a good idea otherwise they felt they would have had to make more "latest fashion" clothes especially for their daughters. Cherrydale School allowed Asian girls to wear shalwaar kameez to school in school uniform colours. Daughters' clothes were mostly made at home because ready-made shalwaar kameez suits are not available in Cherrytown. Sons' clothes were bought from shops.

#### 5.6.4

##### **Parents' concerns**

Among roughly 30% of all families which tried to encourage their daughters to study as much as their sons, there were some things in common. The agents of change were



mothers. It is worth exploring this further. The mothers who were working, or who had tried unsuccessfully to find employment themselves, felt that it would be advantageous for their daughters to be educated, "so that she can work easily if she wants to." (Mother 3, translated from Punjabi, field notes.) Those mothers who were doing cleaning jobs did not want their daughters to have to do cleaning jobs like themselves. They felt fiercely protective about their daughters.

It's OK for me to do this. I am a mother of four. But it is not OK for her. What was the use of all her education in this country then? I would rather she didn't work at all...(silence).

(Mother: 6, translated from Hindi, taped conversation)

These protective and defiant feelings are very much like the comments working class Chinese mothers expressed to Baxter and Raw (1988). The most highly valued profession to parents was that of a medical doctor. This did not mean that they all expected their own children to become doctors. Of all the parents I spoke to, three thought that their children might have a chance of entering the medical profession. When I asked the reason for the preference, I was told by one shopkeeper that this was so because

Once you qualify, you can help so many people. You can settle anywhere in the world. It is not like a shop which is tied to you and it is a respectable job.

(Father: 1, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

On a second or subsequent meeting the fathers were mostly the ones who wanted to know, through me if possible, their offsprings' level of academic performance in class. Some fathers asked specific questions :

Is he first or last in class? I don't know. If you can't find out for me what's the point of all this talk?

(Father: 2, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

If the parents had attended school in the Subcontinent they had not been "promoted" to the next class without passing the annual examinations. In Cherrydale School as that was not the case, those parents, especially the fathers who on average in the sample had attended the school for longer than their wives, wanted to know their children's "class position".

These fathers did not totally agree with the system of "moving the children up and up, even if they know as much as a donkey!" (Father: 14, translated from Punjabi, field notes). Parents were confused over the fact that children's move up a year did not mean they were doing well. Their own experience was of a different system.

Fathers, like mothers, wondered if their children paid attention in class. They wondered even more if their children's teachers were strict enough and if they were disciplined. One of the fathers in my sample whose neighbour's son went to another school said:

You know Shahzad? Well, his father is always too busy and his mother ...well, she can't control him. I often wonder if he is as bad at school and if his teachers sort him out.

(Father: 24, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

Parents were generally keen for their children to obtain good grades and certificates. Those parents who raised the question of good behaviour felt that there was a connection between behaviour in class and the learning that occurred there.

### 5.6.5

#### **Discussion of parents' problems**

The vast majority of the parents did not know how to go about expressing their views and fears to the teachers. It seemed to me that unless the school was actively interested in seeking it out, there would remain a silent deadlock between Asian parents and the school. With major exceptions which have been discussed in the above section, most parents did not disturb the school with their "nagging worries" about for instance the child's daily academic performance. These parents are also used to being introduced to a stranger or to a new person only through a common acquaintance or through somebody they already know. They might make a stand and come together to visit the school if something threatened their interpretation of religion because that would act as a uniting force. This,

to my knowledge, had never happened at Cherrydale School. Other issues, that is academic issues faced by individual children, remain to a great extent the problems of individual families. At least that is how the parents see them. This is an important point as the Asian communities were numerically in a majority among different ethnic minority groups settled in Cherrytown. If Cherrydale School had communicated more with Asian parents it might have meant teachers having to respond to parents' demands and higher expectations; for instance setting and marking more homework. This would require the school to do more work.

The African-Caribbean communities had come together to form a parents' forum where such issues were discussed and I learnt that they had organised themselves to form an African- Caribbean pressure group which regularly met the chief education officer. Not all African-Caribbean parents opted to join the group but they had a mechanism for bringing problems into the open in a manner which the various Asian communities, despite their greater numbers, had not even begun to recognise collectively. It is impossible to say on the basis of this research, how effective the African-Caribbean parents were in actually getting their voices heard for the benefit of their children, but they had a collective force in Cherrytown. Parekh (1992), commenting on the workings of the Swann Committee, reported very similar findings about Asian communities.

To their great credit the Afro-Caribbean members of the Committee formed a cohesive group, did their homework, spoke with one voice and co-ordinated their strategy ...Their Asian colleagues could not have presented a greater contrast...They tended to speak and act as isolated individuals and lacked collective presence and power, with the result that the problems of Asian children received inadequate attention.

(p. 98)

The LEA contacted local community representatives for the purposes of official consultation. However, only one father, a Bangladeshi, said to me that if he wanted to go to school, he approached one of his relations who was a "community leader". The latter had

been, however, too busy on several occasions to go with the father. This "leader" had, by his own account, been chosen by Bangladeshi men to speak to the local councillors and other officers. He was a restaurant owner. It is important to mention here that none of the 49 other families ever mentioned or acknowledged in several months of fieldwork, either their acquaintance with or even the existence of a "leader" who was aware of the problems they were facing and was acting to obtain help for them.

During the period of my fieldwork I met three Asian "community leaders" in a social gathering organized to launch an event at the local Asian community centre, but these leaders, all men, did not appear to have education as a main item on their agenda. The question of the community leaders' representativeness has been raised before by researchers although not in connection with educational matters (see for example, Eade 1989). I have no reason to believe that they did not have the educational future of their respective communities at heart, but during the period of this research they did not actively participate in discussions about Asian children's schooling. It appeared to me that the community representatives probably faced the same inhibitions which the parents had with regard to school. Also, parental struggle had so far taken place in the area of seeking housing and employment, rather than in decoding the complex educational systems operating in schools. It could be that even if community representatives were to intervene it would still not help resolve the issues the parents spoke to me about, as it would be a very long process. The majority of the Asian parents are completely cut off from what really happens in schools. Set out below is a summary of some main facets of the deadlock. (Obviously not all of these are limited to Asian parents).

None of the parents knew about the existence and purpose of governing bodies and management committees at school. They were not aware that they could have approached

a parent governor if they wanted to, or even tried to become one. They have never come across such things in their work. The parents did not know what went on in a typical day at school. None of the parents seemed to understand the discipline code in school and especially the meaning of "exclusion". Two of the children in my sample were excluded from Cherrydale school on grounds of unacceptable behaviour during the period of my research. Children never told their parents when they were in detention. This word was not in parents' vocabulary.

On the whole, Asian parents trusted the school and believed that it would not be malevolent. Why should it be? The assumption was that people become teachers according to a Bangladeshi mother "because they must really love children." Also, it was generally true that parents were used to giving more weight to older people rather than believing everything a child said. This is the way the parents were brought up and this was something they generally did. It is difficult to say how long this benign trust in the education system will last.

The four parents who for the sake of their children "swallowed their shyness " and took the grave step of "meddling with the system" when they felt that their children's future was at stake were unusual. It is quite possible that similar occurrences take place in other comprehensive schools like Cherrydale, but that these have not been researched systematically because of the difficulty entailed in obtaining such information first hand. The issues which the parents raised will be discussed in the next section.

Parents' difficulties in visiting Cherrydale School

It took a long time, certainly more than two home visits, to actually get parents to talk openly about Cherrydale School. Then their basic lack of self-confidence, the fear of the unknown, fear of letting their children down and inability to cope emerged consistently in conversations. The comments below are typical of what the parents had to say. Two of them are from fathers and three from mothers. They demonstrate the sense of powerlessness which assails parents in the face of an organized institution such as a secondary school. Asian parents are not alone in experiencing this feeling of apprehension. White parents from similar socioeconomic background experience similar feelings. One white mother from Lawley opened her door wide to meet me. I was very moved by her warmth. No Asian person had ever crossed that threshold before. Almost the first thing she said was

Oh I am glad to see you. Good job you came. Because I can't get myself to go in there (school) !

(John's mother, field notes)

What makes it still more difficult for Asian parents is the lack of facility in spoken English combined with inherent fear and hesitation built into the situation. Asian parents do not want teachers to feel sorry for them and at the same time they do not know how to proceed. As can be seen from the quotations below, each parent gave a different reason but there was remarkable similarity in the feelings of inhibition displayed together with complete powerlessness. The majority of Asian parents went to school on one or at most two occasions during their children's secondary school careers. I am quoting so many parents in order to illustrate the subtle variety of worries and concerns which the parents voiced.

I went to my son's school once. They (teachers) were very polite when I got there but I will not go again. It smelt strange (embarrassed laughter) and I felt afraid. I should have taken my sister...you see the children stare at you and you don't belong...you are in a strange place.

(Mother: 4, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

Because I haven't been to school here I feel awkward Bajji (sister)...and stupid. The teachers are so clever, so sure of themselves aren't they? You just feel silly.

(Father: 5, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

You have to have a good reason. Your child goes because he has to learn good things. You go because...well, you can't can you? You can't just go in for no reason and... just because you worry about him.

(Father: 25, translated from Sylhetti & broken Urdu, taped conversation)

My daughter has forbidden me from going again. She feels ashamed of me you see...it seems all her Pakistani friends in her year are the same.

(Mother: 24, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

If I could speak good English it might be better, but I am so busy...it is ten at night when I finish all the housework and my children don't want to teach me (English). They are busy too. It's not easy.

(Mother: 14, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

Within the context of the particular conversations from which the above quotations are taken, none of the parents had any specific complaints; they were sharing with me their general feeling of unease.

It was difficult to know how far the teachers were aware of the particular situation facing Asian parents, that is, of their having been in Cherrytown for a long time and at the same time being completely at sea in the majority of cases about the education system and its potential uses. It is also relevant to mention here that none of the teachers I spoke to ever spontaneously mentioned having seen Asian parents at school. Without extensive fieldwork in the children's homes, there was no way in which this aspect of home-school interaction would have surfaced. The usual comment I heard at school was simply that Asian parents did not come into school very often. Another general feeling which prevailed at school was that there was one particular teacher Mrs Fisher, who was responsible for all Asian matters. She happened to be a very senior member of staff. Other teachers would refer to her for help and advice mostly to do with behavioural problems. This is developed further in Chapter 10. Another opinion held by teachers at school was that Asian parents are not

seriously aware of the value of education. On the contrary, on the basis of the data presented so far, it would seem that Asian parents do want their children to get a good education because they value it. Their inability to understand school processes is an altogether different matter.

### 5.7.1

#### **Parents who went to Cherrydale School and found it wanting**

Most of the parents in my sample had ambivalent feelings and they avoided unnecessary contact with the school; they trusted that on the whole the school must be doing what was best for their children. However, when incidents happened which caused parents from five families to visit the school they felt deeply disillusioned about the way things operated. This is a reflection of parents' expectations and how these matched up with actual school practices. There was a mismatch in the perceptions teachers and Asian parents had of each other.

There is a scarcity of published research data in this very important area, and to the best of my knowledge, no one has as yet recorded such accounts of visits to schools by Asian parents. Every case uncovered may give us a clue about matters into which more systematic research is necessary within different schools and in different ethnic communities in Britain. It is significant to note that none of the five cases include Bangladeshi parents. Parents from four different families had gone to Cherrydale School on their own initiative and the fifth parent had been summoned by the headteacher because of her son's misconduct in class. Of the four families, two parents went in to discuss their child's truancy and the other two were concerned about their child's academic work. Four of the cases were about boys and one about a girl.



### 5.7.1.1

#### Concerns about truancy

A mother and a father in two separate incidents found their sons truanting and went to the school, in one case with the child, to discover what the teachers had to say about it. In the first case the boy concerned was in the fourth year, and in the second case in the fifth year. Both parents were dismayed that the school had not taken serious action or invited them in to discuss their son's difficulties. The mother who had discovered her son by chance in the shopping centre was shocked that his teacher had not realised he had been missing for over two hours.

I know he wanted to learn Punjabi for a long time and the school can't teach that and I know he doesn't like French but that was no excuse. I nearly cried. I just took him back to school on the next bus and asked to see his form teacher. And do you know something terrible, they did not even know he was missing! I was shocked, so shocked! They didn't care about him and he is only a child and he needs help. Can you imagine what I felt?

(Khushwant's mother: 26, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

Khushwant's mother was hoping the school would keep her informed and keep her son under a watchful eye. She was in the end, dependent on her own relationship with her son to try to resolve the problem. Her son's school had gone down in her estimation because of this incident. She had never been to the school with a complaint before. There was above all a sense of betrayal and of having nowhere to go and no one to talk to about such matters in Cherrytown. Apart from taking it up with the school she felt there was nowhere she could go for professional advice. She told me that I was the only person to whom she had spoken about this so openly, other than her immediate family and the form teacher.

In another case a father who came home unexpectedly one day to find his son at home was even more dismayed. He took a friend with him to visit the school because he was apprehensive about going alone.

They made us sit for fifteen minutes in the corridor and then this lady wanted

to know what the problem was. She said there was no problem with my son; that he could get a job somewhere. He is in fifth year. But I said I wanted him to study, and she said "you worry too much Mr Khan". I felt strange...All these years I thought they cared...And she never said he had missed school. I then thought it was a bad school but it was so late. Couldn't...(silence)...couldn't do anything.

(Shakeel's father: 35, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

Both these parents told me they would not send their younger children to Cherrydale School. They were both to discover to their deep distress after talking to their sons that they were regular truants and had been truanting for some time. They felt deeply worried about other truants in school.

They are children. They can get killed by a car or something and nobody will know where they are. Something must be terribly wrong with that school. I am going to tell my friends not to choose that school for their children.

(Shakeel's Father: 35, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

His son did not get admission into the sixth form to re-take his exams and was very upset at the point at which my fieldwork ended. He was trying to gain entrance to the local college of further education. He was the oldest child in the family.

The school was having problems with truants during the period of this research, and I knew children who used to truant on a regular basis and told me they did not get into any trouble because of truanting. The white children who used to truant towards the end of their fourth year and the beginning of the fifth year were doing casual part-time work or just spending time sitting aimlessly in Macdonalds or in a park. The school did not always catch up with them. Perhaps there was a tacit collusion between school and children who tranted. If such children challenged teachers' authority, the teachers may have been happy not to have them in their classes. The educational social worker's post was held by three people one after the other during the period of my research and it was well known to the school that the social worker had to be shared between several schools, sometimes as many as eight schools. When she did come to Cherrydale School, only what were considered severe problem

cases were referred to her. During the period of my research in the school, the issue of truancy never formed even a minor topic of open discussion at school staff meetings. The school did have a policy of informing parents if a child missed school on consecutive days, but not every head of year adhered rigidly to the rules and not every child truanted in a manner which would openly call attention to him or her. Obviously all parents, including parent governors, did not know everything about individual truanting patterns. The inner workings of the school were not spelt out openly.

### 5.7.1.2

#### **Concerns about academic performance**

There were two parents who had specific complaints about the academic standard their daughter had reached. In another case a father was concerned about the academic standard in Cherrydale School generally. In both cases parents felt they had been misinformed about their children's educational abilities.

The first case concerns a girl at the end of her fourth year at school. Both her parents went in and found to their dismay that they had trusted the school too much.

It was not as though we have not been going to parents' evenings. The school told us she can do anything she likes. She is so bright. We now go and find that no matter how hard she works she will remain in the dump set, she is doing the dump course you see! How can she ever get a good grade in it? We went to see the teachers and they just said well, they said we should not worry...maybe she will catch up next year...It's too late for this year.

(Parveen's mother: 8, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

The visit to school mentioned in this conversation was initiated by the parents. These are not typical parents in the sample. Both her parents had been to school in Pakistan and they had the experience of having lived and coped in cities there. The specific concern seemed to arise out of the parents' wish for greater involvement in their daughter's school and through that in her academic future. They felt wronged. They would gladly have paid extra

—tuition fees to give their daughter more academic help, because they could not teach her themselves. A similar complaint was repeated to me by an African-Caribbean mother. It is difficult to say how widespread this concern was, as I did not have direct access to the relevant data held on school files.

The second case was more unusual. During a trip "back home" a father discovered that his brothers' children in Pakistan were attending a much better private school there than his son, who was not being stretched enough in Cherrydale School. He decided to send his 14 year old son to Pakistan to continue his education but Qasim failed the entrance exam. The father took the exam papers to Qasim's form teacher in Cherrydale.

She looked puzzled then she said things are differently taught over there from the way they are taught here and that this is a different kind of school. I then found out that in this country Cherrydale type schools are for second and third rate people. Now it is too late. What a waste of a life. I am very angry with myself Baji, but you see I never knew. My friend Malik told me all rich Indian and Pakistani parents send their children to private schools in this country.

(Qasim's father: 2, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

Arguably, Qasim's father was making unrealistic comparison between an ordinary comprehensive school, such as Cherrydale in Britain, and a sought after fee-paying school in Lahore, Pakistan. He did not think that his son would be able to do very well at Cherrydale School which had failed to impart good education to him in the first place. Qasim was his oldest child. He told me that he would not send any of his other children to Cherrydale.

I managed to check this story with the form teacher Qasim's father had met. The general impression about Qasim was that he was a "reasonably bright lad" but that his parents were far too ambitious for him, and he would "get a job at the end of school." By the time I finished my field work Qasim had lost interest in school and was planning to join the

college of further education to re-take exams. The main reason he gave for not doing well was that he needed extra help at school and his parents were not able to help him. One interesting point worth mentioning here was the surprised reference his form teacher made to Qasim's attitude to work placement.

Well he got a placement at Debenhams. Most of the lads like going there and I can remember he looked displeased. Of course he did it, but he just scoffed at it. Odd boy.

(Form teacher, field notes)

His form teacher could not understand this attitude. Qasim told me later that he thought shop work a trivial matter and something he did not have to go to school to learn. Qasim's mother was a shopkeeper and he helped her sometimes. He did not rate that work highly as even his eleven year old sister could stand in for his mother any day.

### 5.7.1.3

#### Summoned to school

The following is the only example in my sample of a mother having been called into school to learn about her son's misconduct. It was the only time to my knowledge when a letter to a parent had been written in Urdu with the help of the Urdu teacher. This particular mother had never been to Cherrydale School before.

I did not take my son in with me though he is good with English,...you know how it is if you have done something silly and you are shown up...I thought they would have a Punjabi speaking teacher, you know I can't speak English well and I did not want this to go right through the **Biraderi** (extended family), and this girl Mubeena explained it all to me...same thing that was written in the letter...I felt very very small. You see Mubeena lives next door to my cousin and each time I thought about meeting the girl in the street I...I felt so bad. I did not hear half of what they were saying.I felt so ashamed. I just came home and...(long silence)...I didn't go again.

(Yusuf's mother: 12, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

In her lack of confidence in English this mother was very typical of the majority of the Asian mothers in the sample, and it would be fair to assume that other mothers, or even for that matter fathers, who could only speak Punjabi or another Asian language, and who

could not out of embarrassment ask a friend, or a relation to accompany them to school, might have felt humiliated in exactly the same way. The school failed to find a bilingual adult to intervene but instead depended on the services of Yusuf's classmate. This case highlights both the difficulty of direct communication between the non-English speaking Asian parent and the school, as well as the school's insensitivity to an Asian parent.

### 5.7.2

#### **Uneasy relations with school**

Matters which caused anxiety to individual parents left the school's normal processes unperturbed and as far as staff room gossip was concerned, undiscussed. It may well be that such visits were discussed in my absence, and that some teachers, perhaps heads of years, did sometimes say to other teachers that a particular parent had been in school. But what I heard were mostly references to white parents between teachers who knew a little bit about the background already. I saw an expression of the school's insensitivity to parents on another occasion, this time a white working class mother. That case is mentioned here because it would be misleading to imply that insensitivity, albeit unintended, was confined to Asian parents.

Reports of uneasy conversations between African-Caribbean parents and teachers were reported to me by two mothers towards the end of my field work. Among parents from ethnic minority communities, African-Caribbean mothers deployed the most effective coping strategies because of their greater awareness of problems confronting their children at school and their determination not to take the official school line at face value. They were the only parents I came across apart from two middle class white parents from two separate families who seemed to be able to question the school about issues concerning their children's education. These two categories of parents seemed to be more aware about

ways in which schools operated than either the working class white or the working class Asian parents in the school. This is mentioned here as evidence of the school's inability or unwillingness to treat parents as partners in their children's education, unless parents were already aware of their way through the system.

Apart from the five cases mentioned in the previous section, other Asian parents did not go to school with their worries. They were reluctant to attend the social functions which were held in school. They mostly felt comfortable in a social setting with which they were more familiar and among people whom they already knew. Asian parents were interested in attending events which might assist their children educationally and help them seek teachers' advice about future careers for their children (see Appendix: 5B). Ironically, at the time of the interview not a single Asian parent in my sample knew what a career teacher was. The extent of Asian parents involvement in Cherrydale School is illustrated in Table 5C (see Appendix).

## 5.8

### Parents' attitudes to employment

Asian parents' expectations of their children's secondary schools were tied to their relationships with their children. One aspect of that relationship is drawn upon here: parents' anxiety about their children's future.

Parents would speak of their concern about their sons obtaining a "good job" or a "nice job", meaning a white collar job, after completing their education. They were mostly silent about their daughters. Fathers saw wealth as a visible symbol of success. While talking about the connection between work and education one father said:

Say, if someone drives up in a Mercedes, I will feel, God, it will take me

thirty years to save up, for me to buy a new one, maybe longer and here is a man, only about thirty years old and in a Mercedes. It's not the car, but the amount of work. Maybe he's educated...a lucky man...(education) saves you years of working life.

(Father: 23, translated from Urdu & broken Sylhet taped conversation)

What this father did not say till I asked was that the person about whom he was talking was not a fellow Asian but an affluent white customer. He had no actual information about his education. The main thought behind the comment was that if education and training did not lead to a tangible outward sign, it was not a success. This is generally true of Asian communities in Britain. The comment also underlined something true of Asian communities in Cherrytown, their tendency of being impressed by cars in general and with Mercedes cars in particular.

Working class Asian fathers' aspirations for their sons differed from that of some white fathers'. Jim, for example, was in the fifth year. His father was a bricklayer and although he wanted his son to do well for himself, if Jim decided to follow his father's trade, as was going to be the case, he would not be seen as a failure by the father. There was no shame attached to it, as there seemed to be in the case of Asian fathers. It may well be that I was talking to the parents at a time when their children's future careers were still being decided. Subsequent research, or a longitudinal study of the same young people, might find their fathers well adjusted to the sons' following the fathers' occupations. When their sons were aged 14 or 15, however, these were their fathers' thoughts:

He must find a better job than me...have a better life...more relaxed.

(Father: 39, bus driver, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

The effect parents' expectations had on children will be discussed in Chapter 7. Here the focus is on parents' perspectives. In white working class cultures parents are usually quite happy for their children to follow them into the same trade and perhaps teachers would expect the same from Asian children. Teachers would not expect a bus driver's son or daughter to aim to be a doctor. This highlights the mismatch of expectations between



parents and teachers. Asian families have migrated to break the mould and to "better" themselves, and teachers do not understand that. Parents who were employees of large firms or factories like the Post Office, the local bus company or hospitals felt that they were not in a position to hand down their jobs to their children. At the same time they worked long hours and felt they were contributing to the economy of this country in that they paid tax, "more tax than shops have to pay." (Father: 28, translated from Punjabi, field notes.) These parents felt that their children just had to do well.

Within the community there was a sense of competition among various shop-owners, six in all in this sample, which also existed to some extent among bus drivers and factory workers. However, perhaps because the latter two categories of parents went away physically from their homes to a work place where they met other white workers as peers, they were able to see aspects of white British culture, or the majority culture more clearly. They had also interacted with the general public as bus drivers and as workers at the Post Office. I found them slightly better able to see things from a different point of view. They had their own view of culture.

You can tell by the way a person asks for a ticket, whether he is educated or not, **muhazzib** (cultured) or not.

(Father: 41, translated from Urdu, field notes)

By comparison, shopkeepers and restaurant owners, especially those who were considered economically successful in their communities, had an air of self-sufficiency which could border on arrogance.

Well, people ask me who I go to for advice? It is not befitting to praise yourself, but I've never needed anyone's advice. Everyone comes to me when they need helping out. Asians, white, West Indians, you name it!

(Father: 1, translated from Urdu, field notes)

This particular father was quite self-conscious about his own position, and yet unbeknown to him, two other Pakistani fathers from his village joked about his pomposity, even though

by their own admission it was him they turned to for help.

## 5.9

### Asian parents and the absence of leisure

It is significant to note that Asian parents did not talk much about leisure. The only leisure I was told about was watching Indian films on the video. Other interests quoted included sewing children's clothes, making the house better and visiting each other. Some parents went to see relations in other cities. They never seemed to go sight-seeing on those occasions, only visiting and talking to relations. Sight-seeing only occurred in families where the father was a bus driver (who got free/cheap tickets for travel within Britain) and this mostly happened in places where there were no relations or extended families. Most of the activities occurred within the house. This is in stark contrast to what the parents, notably the mothers, recounted about their own childhood. I was told about swings on trees in the villages where mothers then teenagers remembered "swinging till the tree broke" (mother: 14, translated from Urdu). And the habitual dip into lake

where only girls went. It was near this place where the saint is buried in our village in Jhelum. No one (meaning men) came there because they knew its for girls.

(Mother: 14, translated from Urdu, field notes)

Most of the mothers had led an outdoor life as children and as teenagers themselves and had been used to freedom of movement in their own villages which living in a city like Cherrytown made impossible for their children. Many mothers felt very sorry for their daughters who had such little freedom here.

They have to do homework and housework. Their friendships are not half as close as ours were. In a way we were luckier.

(Mother: 24, translated from Punjabi, field notes)

Parents worked long arduous hours to make ends meet and to fulfil all their obligations here and "back home". The only real escape was the idyllic trip back home. The work ethos

is so strong in Asian families that as compared to that everything else takes a secondary place. Leisure as one father put it "is a rich man's rest. Work is my way of life." (Father: 3, translated from Urdu, field notes). Men who did shift work in factories were always according to their children "sleeping and working at strange times." However they did escape from their work places in a way restaurateurs and shopkeepers could not or did not because they mostly lived above their places of work. These related experiences run counter to the myth of the much better quality of life people expected to achieve in Britain. Parents came from sunny rural backgrounds where they were closer to the natural world. They experienced a lack of access to the countryside in Cherrytown where life is lived behind closed doors away from the natural world.

## 5.10

### Summary

This chapter was about Asian parents' educational background and their social class position in Cherrytown. In all cases fathers were the heads of households and in instances where mothers worked, theirs was a secondary income. Asian fathers were either self-employed or they were unskilled or semi-skilled employees in large organisations like hospitals and factories. Some were unemployed.

All parents wanted their children to do well at school. Many mothers and some fathers had not had the opportunity of receiving any form of schooling, though they had been given religious training at home. Other fathers had left school without learning to read and write. Even among parents who had been to school, many could not help their children with homework because they could not read and write in English.

Those parents who were doing low status jobs, such as cleaning jobs, were anxious that

their children make the best use of the educational opportunities available to them. Mothers were very concerned about their daughters in this respect. Many parents lacked knowledge about the workings of the British educational system and felt uneasy and awkward when approaching Cherrydale School. Those parents who went to Cherrydale School found it wanting. Instances of such visits to the school and the feelings of powerlessness they generated have been cited in this chapter. Asian parents had particular complaints about Cherrydale School. These included among others the absence of mainstream Asian teachers and lack of adequate communication between the school and home. Asian parents were also concerned about their children's moral education.

Parents hoped that their children's education in Britain would provide good employment opportunities for them. Most Asian parents did not have time for leisure activities. Those who had time preferred to spend it at home watching films on video.

## CHAPTER 6

### ASIAN CHILDREN: GENERAL BACKGROUND

#### 6.1

##### Introduction

An ethnographic study of Asian children's experiences where, in addition to social class, 'race'/ethnicity and gender are also at play, is not a simple and straightforward matter. Accounts of Asian children's lives at school as well as at home add a dimension of further complexity which does not lend itself to simple, single stranded analysis or easily measurable trends. This may be one reason why despite its obvious importance and potential value no ethnographic study concerning Asian children at home and at their secondary school has been attempted before. Another reason for this absence in the literature is of course that it is only recently that there have been large numbers of British born Asian children. According to Statham and Mackinnon (1991):

With the passage of time, the proportion of the non-white population who were born in Great Britain is increasing. Thus in the early 1980s, 86% of the non-white population aged under 16 were born in Britain compared with 14% born overseas; this is the exact reverse of the figures for those over 16, of whom 14% were born in Britain and 86% overseas.

(p. 15)

It is possible that with the passage of time more studies of the present kind will be conducted.

In order to present the whole picture facing Asian children it is important to study the relationships between Asian children and their Asian and non Asian peers, as well as those

between them and the adults who are responsible for them. These adults include their parents and their teachers. How far children are affected by their interactions with their parental communities, their peers and their teachers, and how far they are able to negotiate their way successfully in different spheres, socially, academically and culturally, will emerge in the course of this and the following three chapters which all focus specifically on Asian children.

This chapter introduces my sample of 50 children (see Chapter 4: Tables 4a and 4b for details). In the course of this research it seemed unwise to ignore past issues which surfaced in conversations with children and which were of continuing significance to them. To this end, this chapter will first explore Asian children's experiences before their entry to Cherrydale school, including long remembered details from their primary school days. The main issues which children raised were those of language, religion and culture. The chapter will then move on to look at Asian children's lives at home, their views about their parents and their communities. Children's mixed feelings about visits "back home", the dearth of leisure activities in their parents' friends' circles, and Asian parents' inability to help their children academically are also discussed.

## 6.2

### The significance of primary and middle school

Children's experiences at primary schools help to shape their attitudes towards learning and can have a lasting effect on some of their future aspirations and preferences. According to Grugeon and Woods (1990): children's

beliefs, attitudes and values have already been shaped, to a large extent in the formative years of primary school. They will certainly have made adaptations to school and developed learning and coping strategies that will serve them throughout their school career.

(p. 4)

The ethnographic study of Asian children's experiences of primary classrooms and primary school curriculum has recently received researchers' attention. Grugeon and Woods (1990) took the Swann Report's recommendations as the starting point for collaborative research with teachers in primary schools. The issues of language and culture have emerged as worthy of detailed analysis, in the study of both infants and juniors at school. Grugeon (1990) highlighted the plight of individual children like Abbas (Chapter 1) whose adjustment to school is described in a graphic account of what starting school must have felt like to a five year old boy who never spoke any English till he arrived in class. Something like Abbas' experience of initial bafflement, insecurity and unease must have been the experience of nearly all the children in my sample. They too started school not speaking any English and not having been to a pre-school nursery.

Wright's (1992) account of the interaction between Asian children and their primary school teachers underlines the negative aspects of the encounter. She found that:

Asian pupils (particularly the younger ones) were perceived as a problem to teachers because of their limited cognitive skills, poor English language and poor social skills and their inability to socialize with other pupil groups in the class room.

(p. 39)

More recently, the texts that Asian children produce have also been studied. A teacher's notes about an Asian child's written text, were scrutinized by Moore (1993) who highlighted different perspectives about the text's cultural contents. Such studies have also sometimes hinted at teachers' complete lack of knowledge about the inner workings of the Asian home even when it comes to statementing an infant (see Chapter 2, Grugeon and Woods 1990).

The situations and experiences which Asian children from Cherrydale School described to me were obviously selective memories from the past which were shared with a researcher.

Ethnographic studies of those incidents and events at the time they actually took place would most probably have been different in detail and texture. However, the experiences related to me are significant as they have not been reported by any of the above studies. The incidents which were recalled, although they describe biographical details, are more than that because they recreate the remembered world which may yet be a future world for other Asian children from similar socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. They are also important because they help us understand Asian adolescents' latent inner worlds precisely because they are unsought, incidental, unprompted digressions. They were related unbidden as flashes of insight into the past and as illuminations of the adolescents' inner worlds. These memories shape the children's present perceptions and attitudes. The children raised various issues in their conversations with me which are discussed below.

### 6.2.1

#### **Learning to speak English**

It has long been recognised that children who speak a language other than English at home need extra time to cope simultaneously with two languages. Many children continue to think in their first language even when they are in monolingual English speaking classrooms. According to Rex (1986) Asian children face at least three sorts of problems in school at the time of entry. These are:

the problem for the non-English speaking child of approaching his school work with the linguistic capacity he or she actually commands...the problem of maintaining his or her skill in the mother tongue and...the problem of acquiring sufficient English to be able to work with English as the medium of instruction.

(p. 209)

All the children in my sample, except those seven who had come directly to Cherrydale School from Bangladesh, had been to primary and middle schools in Britain. The majority of the children in the sample had either been born in Cherrytown, or had been born



elsewhere in Britain but had come to Cherrytown as infants. 76% went to primary school in Britain, 68% in Cherrytown itself. 86% went to middle school in Britain, all in Cherrytown (see Appendix: 6A). All these children could remember not being able to speak English fluently, as in all the families from which they came the language spoken at home was not English. It was only much later when their younger brothers and sisters could speak English that they began to talk to each other in English at home. Most of the parents objected to their children speaking English at home, as this would in their opinion cause them to forget their own language and would take them one step away from their cultural roots. The children compromised by speaking to their parents in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu or Malayalam but to their brothers and sisters in English. All 50 children were bilingual to different degrees. The newly arrived children from Bangladesh were not fluent speakers of English, but they progressively understood more and more of the language and were able to conduct very simple conversations in English.

Those children whose first encounter with spoken English as the main language of communication was at primary school recalled with affection and gratitude the adults who had helped them master the language. In 29 cases this was a student from the local University who had helped them on a voluntary basis. Cherrytown University students had set up a group of volunteers from among their midst who give willingly of their time and effort to children from ethnic minority communities. In the 1970s and 1980s such help was considered invaluable by the children and they gave moving accounts of the trust and friendship which had developed between them and their "home teachers". Some of the undergraduate students had provided information about their availability to different schools in Cherrytown. Others had contacted families themselves. Very early in their lives Asian children whose parents could not read and write English and in the majority of cases could not speak the language either, began to benefit from this form of help. Many children

continued to feel that they needed this extra help even after they joined their secondary school. In explaining the important role played by one home teacher this was typical of what children said:

Jane was our friend from the outside world. She taught me how to write, how to speak, and how to make friends with English people. My mother made extra things to eat when she came...Later she was like family. She visited us, sometimes twice a week...and after some years she had to leave Cherrytown to go somewhere else and we were so very sorry...even my mother cried I can remember. I was ten years then...Jane still comes to see us when she's here (meaning Cherrytown).

(Manzar: 3, taped conversation)

This "home help" was very important for the child to whom it was being offered. According to those who told me about it, had it not been for continuous, persistent help, a vital part of which besides helping with the homework was social interaction, these children would have found it even more difficult to adjust to school educationally. The major difference between qualified teachers teaching at school and the undergraduate "teachers" teaching the children informally at home was that Asian children felt that they could share much more with these home teachers. These interactions helped them to build bridges culturally and linguistically and on a one to one level which was something quite often absent from the child's school experience. Their home teachers often bought children presents and also got them books from the public library. Only three homes had any books other than the ones the children had brought home from school. There were no novels or magazines in evidence in the living rooms. Only six homes had Urdu and Malayalam newspapers in them.

The children felt quite possessive about their particular home teacher, they told me, and were not always pleased when their home teachers were invited home by their other friends. They were really worried in case they might lose their home teacher to a friend.

Well, what if Mary decided to see them more often than us. Who would be

our home teacher then?

(Saira: 38, taped conversation)

They also treated their home teachers as special family friends to whom they gave presents and with whom they could share their good news.

Each time anyone went to Pakistan we would ask them to bring something, bangles, earrings something special for our Kath. If any of us got good reports from school, we celebrated, Kath and us.

(Amina: 13, taped conversation)

There was no formal regular link between the school and the home teacher. The child's form teacher and the home teacher never met each other, not even once a year to discuss the child's future or her/his difficulties. The children seemed to accept this as normal and thought nothing of it. Home and school were separate domains of their experiences.

The home teachers were in every instance native speakers of the English language. None of the children reported having come across an Asian home teacher. When I began this research the children wanted to know if I would be prepared to become their home teacher. I was often asked if I knew anyone else who was one. Once the University students graduated they moved on, thus leaving a gap which was filled only if the family was introduced to another undergraduate. The continued need was felt by the children at Cherrydale irrespective of gender, age or ability. The effect of the expression of this need on their current teachers at Cherrydale School is discussed in Chapter 10.

Some of the home teachers still wrote letters to these children and sent them post cards from time to time. There were occasional reports of some women even bringing their spouses and children to these children's homes nearly eight years after they had graduated and left Cherrytown.

## 6.2.2

### Family background and self-consciousness

About half the children I spoke to had vivid memories from their primary school days. They remembered negative allusions made by both children and teachers about the norms and habits of Asian children and their families. These varied from references to clothes and family sizes or the streets in which they lived, to negative attitudes expressed by some individual teachers concerning their visits "back home" and how they were "always behind" (Naz: 1) and "difficult to teach" (Yusuf: 12). They told me that those incidents:

Come back to you when you get older. They don't always hit you at the time, you know what I mean? But still you feel hurt at the time...and can't say why.

(Kaneez: 14, age 16, taped conversation)

On probing further, Kaneez said she and her two sisters were made to feel that they were outsiders, or that they were "very odd in some way." These messages were received both from their white peer group and their teachers. There were pointed remarks about "our strange ways." (Mala: 20, age 16) Five girls elaborated on this by giving the example of **mehndi** or decorating hands with henna on festive occasions, about which some teachers wondered why the girls did not "wash it off before coming to school" (Monira: 23). It could not be washed off. The whole idea was to let it last for as long as possible and at least for the duration of one week, so that decoration patterns could be compared between friends.

Twenty instances in all were shared with me of negative feelings expressed to individual children about family sizes, mostly by their white peer group. Some of the remarks overheard by these children in their middle school years still rankled years later. Others mentioned comments which some of their peers continued to make at Cherrydale.

You know Sally? Sally who sits with Elaine? She says nasty things don't she...like, saw your whole clan yesterday! Marching up and down High Street

you were! People always say these hurting things. I know Big Kevin was awful in Little School (meaning primary School).

(Zeenat: 29, taped conversation)

Extending these feelings to the present, several girls explained that by the time they reached Cherrydale they had learnt not to

talk openly about those bits of your customs which would be made fun of.

(Naz: 1, taped conversation)

you learn not to have your hands done and not to put coconut oil in your hair on school days even if your mum gets cross.

(Parveen: 8, taped conversation)

The advantage of having an older sister in the person of Parveen meant that the younger girls in her family were spared some of the social discomfort she went through herself. There were several references to this kind of advantage which the younger children felt they had, both socially and educationally. It was hardest for the oldest child in many ways, a fact very rarely noticed by teachers or parents in the course of this research. This is of course not unique to Asian children. It was almost always the younger siblings who brought the matter to my attention. Some of them openly and admiringly wondered how their older brothers and sisters coped.

I am lucky my sister can help me...with option choices and study things and that, who helped her God knows!

(Daud: 45, field notes)

Self-consciousness about parents was not affected by the child's gender or position in the family. As children in primary schools some were "shamed" they told me to call their mother "Amma" or "Ammi Jee" or "Ma" in front of their white peers.

You just called her "mum" and got told off at home. At home you'd call her properly, you know what I mean?

(Yusuf: 12, taped conversation)

Five children told me that they spoke to their mothers in English in front of their white peer group. This happened when they were about eight or nine years old, and it was done so that "my mates wouldn't think she could not understand English" (Nazim: 7). In Nazim's

case his mother could not understand much English. Self-consciousness about family background has also been reported among junior aged children by Grugeon and Woods (1990).

Several children, more than half the sample, including both boys and girls, spoke of having gone through a phase, often very painful, of "being ashamed of being odd" (Bali: 15) and "just not knowing what to do about it" (Yusuf: 12). The majority response was a feeling of being "awkward" (Nazim: 7) and "keeping quiet" among children who could not speak "my language" (Huma: 27). Relatively fewer incidents expressed "uncomfortable feelings with teachers" (Manzar: 3). Altogether eight children spoke about their interactions with teachers of their own accord. One particular incident related to me was about children being asked to draw a picture of "my family" at primary school. The vividness with which it was related so many years later was telling.

Well I like an idiot drew everyone - all twelve of us, my Aunt and Uncle from Bangladesh who had just come and had nowhere else to stay, and my cousin brothers. Mrs Walters held up the picture and asked everyone to count them...Then she gave it back to me...and I sat down... that day I felt so bad and I don't know why...And the way the children laughed at me!

(Salman: 25, taped interview)

Incidents such as these heightened feelings of negative self-consciousness about family backgrounds. The mothers of three children in the sample told me about negative comments their children had heard about family size, although the children themselves had not mentioned it. A further four mothers of children at Cherrydale told me that their teenage children would not go shopping with the rest of the family in case they met someone from school. They were happy to go out alone with their mothers, but not if they were invited to go out with all their brothers and sisters.

I did not come across such a heightened form of self-consciousness among white children

as regards family background or family size. This is an important point in that quite early on in their lives Asian children at Cherrydale began to keep home and school separate, as two unconnected and different aspects of their lived experience. By the time they joined Cherrydale, they were, as later sections of this chapter will attempt to show, quite good at keeping the two worlds apart with or without their teachers' and parents' full knowledge or consent. As their English was better than their parents', they were more knowledgeable about various issues being faced by their parents than their white or African-Caribbean peers. They often found themselves at the centre in important situations concerning interactions with other English speaking professional adults. These included interactions with social workers, doctors, solicitors and so on. Several children were required to accompany their parents to the hospital or to translate whenever the situation required them to be available. They told me that they had to miss school sometimes in order to fulfil their duties to their parents. This continued to cause much anxiety for them even at secondary school level. At the same time these incidents which the primary and junior aged school children performed for their parents gave them a sense of power and responsibility, which if they wished they could use to suit their own individual purposes during secondary school years.

On the whole children said they had enjoyed their time at their primary schools because they felt they played a lot in those days and also because they did not have far to go.

It was not like having to catch a bus or take a bike. You could just get up and go.

(Khushwant: 26, field notes)

One girl said she used to feel really good and "protected" as a child because she was taken to school by her mother and could always go home for lunch.

We lived round the corner from school and my mother could take us over. Also, you could go home and eat all your favourite things during dinner times. I used to take two of my friends home with me.

(Zara: 17, taped conversation)

The primary schools tended to have higher concentrations of Asian children of the same age in the same class as compared to Cherrydale School. This was perhaps why they felt safer in their primary school. The children were relying on their memories for this information, thus it was difficult for me to verify it. Being at secondary school required some of the children to travel home by bus or to walk some distance home. Their reference to closer proximity before was an awareness of the difference between their present situation and the past. Not all families, as already explained, possessed cars and the children from those families that did not have cars had to learn to cope with distances on their own, and in some cases to deal with unpleasant experiences en route.

The sense of play and enjoyment expressed by most of the children at primary schools contrasts with the different kinds of pressures related to employment, studies, marriage and future prospects prevalent at secondary school level. How the children in question perceive the differences will be elaborated in the following chapters.

### 6.2.3

#### **Peers in primary and middle school**

Six children, both boys and girls, told me that it was easier for them to cope with bullies in the playground at their primary schools than in their secondary schools, because they could go home at lunch times, thus avoiding contact with the mostly white older children whom they found overbearing. None of the children I spoke to said that they shared these very painful and anxious thoughts with their parents at home. There were widespread instances of racial name calling and bullying at primary and middle schools and children recalled

Sticking together in groups with your friends at lunchtimes to avoid trouble...Trouble happened when there was a bully in your class and you couldn't tell your teacher and you didn't tell your parents.



As early as at seven or eight years of age these children reported that they learnt to stay together with others in their classes who were "like you, Asian or Indian so you could be friends" (Khushwant: 26).

These experiences should not be underestimated. Tattum and Lane (1989) have argued that:

It is tempting for parents and teachers to regard many cases of bullying at the infant school stages as of little real significance. Nevertheless, minor incidents, if not dealt with appropriately, can easily escalate into major ones...Lefkowitz et al (1977) found that aggression at age 8 was the best predictor of aggression at age 19, irrespective of IQ, social class or parental models.

(p. 41)

Whereas some children in my sample related instances of bullying, others related incidents of close friendships with white children. Denscombe et al (1993) have also found instances of inter-ethnic friendship among children. It seemed from my data that in schools where there were only three or four Asian children, there were more positive reports of inter-ethnic group interactions than in schools with larger numbers, perhaps because in the former case they are not seen as a threat. Also, because even Asian children who would have preferred to make friends with other Asian children are forced to look more widely. This was an unexpected finding in that one might have expected more, not less, racial harassment for these children at the hands of their peers. Friendships are age-linked to some extent, as close primary school based friendships remained strong during middle school years but had generally declined by the time the children got to Cherrydale School.

Eight children reported close friendships with white children who lived in the same street as them and were allowed to visit and play with them at home. Five Asian boys were allowed to visit their white friends. Few girls were allowed out, though the girls' parents welcomed their white mostly English friends from the same neighbourhood into their own

homes. These friendships are still remembered in detail, with obvious pleasure.

I remember Alice used to love eating **halwa and puris** whenever my mother made those and we used to play "home home" in the shed and eat it in there. It was such fun and we were good friends.

(Parveen: 8, taped conversation)

I went to Gemma's house on her birthday party, other times she and her mum even, used to come to ours. She didn't know other Pakistanis then and she was very good to me.

(Bali: 15, taped conversation)

Thing about Tom was he was always a real laugh on the bike. We used to have these races up and down the road and we were good friends. I taught him to play Carom Board...and those were fun times.

(Asad: 5, taped conversation)

These were all instances of good days when the children had a lot of fun and remembered some of their white primary school friends with affection. In all eight instances, the children were in schools where Asian children were in a small minority. Often they were the only Asian children in their class. I did not hear similar accounts of such close friendships which may have existed between Asian and non Asian children in Cherrydale School itself.

In the above three cases it may be significant that the friendship between the girls did not survive in secondary school, but the one between Asad and Tom did. There seems to be a link between this particular finding and the degree of greater geographical freedom generally allowed by their parents to Asian boys, as compared to Asian girls, from very early on in their lives. An example of the difference based on gender is that even at primary and middle school none of the girls mentioned going to school on a bicycle though most of the boys did. Most of the boys had played cricket and football in the street whereas their sisters had not. The theme of spatial freedom based on gender differentiation found at Cherrydale is developed further in Chapter 8.

As children, Asian girls played mostly with girls, and boys played mostly with boys. Gender specific friendships have been reported by other researchers (Grugeon and Woods, 1990). There was also more interaction between children of the same ethnic group at primary school, because they attended religious classes together after school as well as meeting each other at home. By the time they reached secondary school this kind of interaction outside school hours decreased as other pressures took over.

#### 6.2.4

##### Teachers in primary school

Among the positive things mentioned about primary schools were accounts of two individual teachers, both in the same school who "loved you and really cared and wanted to teach you good English" (Sohel: 4). One particular girl mentioned that she felt happy at school just because of her reception class teacher.

Mrs Roberts was so kind, you could go up and cuddle her. I always gave her a present at Christmas. I went to see her even after I had stopped going there.

(Bindya: 6, taped conversation)

Such accounts of warm relations between teachers and pupils were given by three children, both Pakistani and Indian, all from this one primary school. The seven Bangladeshi children who arrived at Cherrydale straight from Bangladesh did not talk about their primary schools.

One particular middle school was seen in a positive light by the children in my sample. There were eight feeder middle schools for Cherrydale. Only the one middle school took some trouble at Diwali and Eid times and celebrated these festivals.

I always took sweet rice. Once I took kebabs. That can never happen in this place (Cherrydale).

(Salman: 25, field notes)

It is difficult to account for the absence of the acknowledgement of the children's religion

and culture at all primary schools and its prevalence at a single middle school. It could be simply that the particular school mentioned had an individual teacher or teachers in it at the time, who took a special interest. It seemed from talking to the children that in Cherrytown as a whole "treating them all the same" was the predominant practice across the primary and middle school sectors. This could have the effect of treating everyone as if they were white middle class boys. What happened at Cherrydale School later was then in a sense a continuation of practices to which the children who had attended local schools were already in the process of getting accustomed, and for which they had long had to devise coping strategies. The situation was different for those children who had arrived recently from Bangladesh or who had been living within Britain but in other cities such as Manchester, Bolton and Bradford.

### 6.2.5

#### **Gender in the primary years**

Most of the girls who spoke of their primary and middle school years tended to associate it with their domestic situation at that time. The division between their "home lives" and "outside lives" was more clearly marked it seemed than it was for boys even at primary school level. Several girls but none of the boys reported experiences like this:

I remember we had to move house three times and I had to help my mother with packing and unpacking and it used to make me fed up.

(Tasneem: 11, field notes)

Other children, again always girls, spoke about the additional responsibilities on their shoulders with the birth of new babies in the family. The situation was aggravated for the oldest daughter when on one occasion twins were born.

I used to hate it. Mum used to wake me up at three in the morning. I was around ten then and I had to help feed the twins. Dad was on shifts and with no one else I just had to do it. I hated it. Of course I couldn't say it to my mum so I used to go berserk in school (laughter). I was always being told off by the teachers.

(Saira: 38, taped conversation)

None of the boys mentioned such pressures. They were not required by their parents to be involved in sharing domestic responsibilities.

### 6.2.6

#### **Religious education and quiet conflicts at primary school**

All the Muslim children went to the mosque after school and the Hindu and Sikh children were given religious training at home. Some of them went outside Cherrytown to celebrate the main Hindu festivals like Dasehra and Divali with their extended families. All the primary schools these children attended were Church of England schools, and many of the children remembered and related their feelings of confusion and unease at religious assemblies. Their parents were totally unaware of these feelings because their children did not share them at home. None of the Asian parents interviewed withdrew their children from Christian assemblies. They seemed to be unaware of their right to do so. Joly (1989) has reported an identical finding. None of the parents interviewed remembered being invited to stay on at assembly, either at primary, middle or secondary school, so there was no way in which the parents could find out about their children's difficulties. Some of the children developed their own coping strategies.

They hold their hands like this (demonstrated palm to palm) when they pray. I was taught to do it a different way, so I drop my hands. I felt silly...You couldn't shut your eyes in case a teacher was watching you. You then pretend quick to scratch your ear and hold your hands up and pretend you been praying all along!

(Manzar: 3, taped conversation)

You know when the Vicar said the Father and Son prayer (The Lord's Prayer) I closed my eyes and said my own prayer words, **dua** you know. White kids standing next to me knew, I think, but they never told the teacher.

(Qasim: 2, taped conversation)

As they got older, many said, they began to dislike the idea of religious assemblies.

I mean what's it got to do with school or with reading and writing? You

should be doing school-type things at school. When I was in baby school I did not think so I just followed all the others.

(Parveen: 8, taped conversation)

These feelings of confusion and alienation occurred in most of the children and if it had not been for the teachings of the mosque or the temple, these children said they would have felt, in the words of one pupil Bali, "more stranger".

Because my mother taught me my prayers about Lord Krishna and that, I didn't care what kind of prayers the school did at harvest festival and all. If my mother did not teach me I would become Christian.

(Sunil: 33, taped conversation)

If I did not go to the mosque and learnt **kalmās** at home, I would have felt I am missing out. When you are little then these things are important.

(Tahir: 39, taped conversation)

Asian children had to learn very early to reconcile themselves to the impact which different philosophies, cultures and religions had on them. This was something about which their parents had no inkling, as their own childhood was nothing like their children's in this respect. The children also grew up feeling that the school was not interested in their parents' culture and religion. One way out for the child, which surfaced again and again, was day-dreaming.

Once in my other school I wondered what would happen if I took out the slow music tape and put in **Bhangra** (Punjabi folk music) dance music instead... and how our head would do a round and the Vicar would come into assembly dancing behind her! (big chuckle) and I was laughing then in assembly and telling my mate all about it and I got sent out.

(Khushwant: 26, taped conversation)

Khushwant was well known among his friends for making up excuses and inventing stories, even with his mother (see Chapter 5), and it was sometimes difficult to believe what he said, but his irreverent attitude towards the vicar and the headteacher still comes through in the above quotation.

Almost all Muslim children in the sample who were brought up in Cherrytown remembered going to the mosque. As children, most of them said, they enjoyed the walk to the mosque

though they did not always enjoy the lessons. They enjoyed the spirit of camaraderie and the feeling of belonging.

It was where you could be yourself and you could talk in your own language and be normal and all your brothers and sisters were in your class. It was OK.

(Amina: 13, taped conversation)

It was very different from school. No messing about in the mosque but we messed about on our way there and back...and you got into real trouble if you did not learn your lessons, not like school. School teachers were soft and well it was so different.

(Amir: 36, taped conversation)

Family based classes were enjoyed by the children as was the freedom to speak totally in their first language. The difference between the strict discipline in the mosque and the implied laxity at school was again something many of the children noticed. By the time the Muslim children, who were in a majority in the sample, joined Cherrydale School, most of them had learnt to recite the Quran. Whereas the girls used to go to the mosque when they were younger, this small outing ceased for them at secondary school level. They had learnt to recite the Quran, and there was no separate regular arrangement for women to pray within the mosques in Cherrytown. The onset of puberty symbolised for them an increase in spatial restrictions. Boys continued to go to the mosque. The second quote above, which was typical of the feelings expressed, also raises questions about authoritarian and non-authoritarian styles of teaching and interaction at home, at the mosque and at school. Some of the boys found the non-authoritarian, self-directed activities at school particularly difficult to handle. Other researchers have touched on this aspect of difference between home and school, though more in connection with African-Caribbean children (see Stone 1981). Writing about the literacy skills which young children absorb at mosque schools, Mines (1984) has written:

Koranic teaching is part of an oral and literary tradition, indeed the word Koran means 'that which is recited'. It is a religion of the Book, the sacred text...At its simplest, learning the Koran may be rote-learning but important lessons are still being taught about literacy: the meaning of print and layout

of a page. Furthermore the book relates to the rest of life.

(p.17)

Religion had played an important part in all the children's childhood. Another school in Cherrytown attracted all the Christian Asians with the result that there were none in my sample. Their experiences might have been different and worth researching.

### 6.3

#### Main points raised so far

Obviously, not everything that happened to all children in their primary and middle school years is recorded here, and what is recorded is at least filtered through their memories. In-depth ethnographic research of their primary school experiences at the time would have yielded more detailed and perhaps more certain information. There has not been sufficient published research in this area of Asian children's experiences. In terms of this research, as often happened with their parents, much that was shared was in the form of digressions to the past in conversations mainly about the present. These conversations nevertheless provide valuable insights into these children's present lives and help to shed some light on some of their observable attitudes and behaviour now in their secondary school. The limited amount of ethnographic research about Asian children at primary schools indicates the existence of potential mismatch between Asian children's homes and their schools' predominantly mono-cultural ethos. Wright (1992) explored teacher-pupil interaction in a primary school and highlighted the kinds of misunderstandings which can exist in a classroom situation. More research is needed in this area to study the processes at work at different phases of Asian children's education. According to Parekh (1986):

The black child raised on a mono-cultural diet in an English school experiences profound self-alienation.

(p. 25)

The important issues which have emerged so far are notions of cultural differences and



pressures felt by children because of their ethnicity, gender and family circumstances. The overriding message obtained from children was that their home and school occupied two totally different aspects of their lives. Of all the adults they came across, only their home teachers would have any idea about some of the problems and challenges the children were facing. These would have included the assessment and analysis of the role played by the child's gender, play activities and peer group interactions. Their home teachers might have been able to explain the precise kind of academic help which had benefitted the children. Their accounts of the past family circumstances of the children would have provided very valuable information. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview any home teacher who had helped them as children, because they had all moved out of Cherrytown. The remainder of this chapter focuses on Asian children's relationships with their parents and other members of their communities.

#### 6.4

##### **Religion, parents and "community leaders": attitudes in adolescence**

Children expressed very different views about religion. Girls on the whole did not dwell much on this aspect of their lives as an area of conflict. Neither did any of the Sikh or the Hindu children. Most of the Pakistani boys, however, especially in the fourth and the fifth year expressed anger and disillusion at the way their religious leaders and their parents' generation of family friends and relations were disunited and unable to do anything for their children in a way that would have been meaningful to them. There was particularly scathing criticism from some fifth year Pakistani boys who told me they would not dare say what they told me in public because it would upset their parents too much. (They allowed me to tape their conversations only on condition that I would erase them afterwards, and not mention them by their real names.)

I mean here we are in Cherrytown and we are told to be good and Muslim

and all, and look at them for God's sakes. There are three different mosques, one if you are Bengali. Another if you are A kind of Pakistani and another if you are B kind of Pakistani. C'mon man this is mad.

(Asad: 5, taped conversation)

If them mauvlis can't come together to pray what the hell is the point of all the lecturin' on being good Muslim and that?

(Yusuf: 12, taped conversation)

I can't trust them lot. They spend all their time arguing whether this kind of a Muslim is a good kind of Muslim or that kind of a Muslim is a good kind of a Muslim, instead of getting on with it. And what kind are they?...They don't understand us (teenagers) they just sit there and talk them posh words that no one understands! Crazy.

(Shakeel: 35, taped conversation)

It was true that there are three different mosques for Muslims in Cherrytown, as there are in other parts of Britain today. Similar feelings of disillusionment probably exist among some boys in those cities as well. The children who did not seriously question their elders simply went to pray wherever their parents went, but there was persistent covert questioning as children like Shakeel found Maulvis' talks in Urdu difficult to follow and unrelated to their own lives.

And sometimes it is such difficult language. We can't understand it. We never hear those words at school or at home. Maulvi Sahebs come from Bangladesh you see, where they speak posh words. So you have to sit there and pay attention.

(Abdul: 46, taped conversation)

You can't argue back in mosque can you? It's not respectful. So you switch off sometimes like...well, like in school assembly, really.

(Sohel: 4, taped conversation)

These were the impressions of the mosque from a Bangladeshi and a Pakistani boy's perspectives. They went to different mosques and the *vaaz* (sermon) was conducted in Bengali or Urdu respectively. The children spoke Sylhetti and Punjabi at home and found the literary allusions difficult to follow. This, ironically, was the only instance where school and non-school based experiences were so alike. The lack of unity which these young men found distasteful was also shared by two fathers in my sample. However, the parents' generation thought the Mosque Committees would have to sort out the problems. They did

not think they had studied Islam sufficiently to pass any studied comments. Their sons, however, were more disillusioned and felt the mosque did not have a significant place in their lives during the time of the field work, even though they went to pray with their fathers when asked to, and had been there daily during primary and middle school years. There were no religious classes in English specifically aimed at British born teenagers, which they would have found easier to follow and through which they might have found the solace and guidance they were looking for. The differences between the two mosques were over-simplified by the children as they did not understand the historical and philosophical differences between the Barelvi and Deobandi sects. (See Robinson 1988 and Modood 1990, for discussion of different Islamic sects.) One mosque attracted the Urdu and Punjabi speaking *jamaat* (congregations) to which the parents could relate, the other was attended by non Urdu speakers from various other linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, including University students from different countries who were temporary residents in Cherrytown. This mosque had facilities for translation in English. The Pakistani children in my sample had experienced only the atmosphere prevailing in the first mosque because that was where their fathers mostly went.

I noticed a self-proclaimed growing apart from parental value systems in the Asian boys who looked critically at their own communities. This was linked in complex ways to their fathers' unemployment in two cases, their negative self-image and their own lack of pride in being "Pakistani and Muslim" (Amir: 36, field notes). Another comment uttered disparagingly in the context of anxieties about the future was: "Don't help does it, being Paki around here" (Nazim: 7, field notes). This also suggests that racist name calling was endemic.

In these boys' lives, being Pakistani got mixed up with being Muslim which in turn got

mixed up with experiencing racism. These turmoiled, difficult, one-to-one conversations, some of which took place just before and some during the Rushdie affair, were conversations where boys were saying things which hurt them and for which there were no easy answers as they already knew. There was also a sense of helplessness and frustration in these children, and a feeling that their opinions did not count among their elders who seemed to bypass them or not take account of the situation in which this younger generation found itself. The older generation did not acknowledge these boys' teenage culture.

Some Asian boys felt alienated from their community elders and disillusioned especially with their so-called "community leaders". This disillusionment again was expressed only by boys, especially a group of eight friends. They told me they were expecting these "leaders" to sort out some of the problems the boys and their parents were facing, but they could not explain how the "leaders" could do that. Five fifth and sixth formers expressed particular agitation on this score. Two Bangladeshi boys had tried to set up a group to celebrate cultural activities in a community hall and had run into

trouble with our community leader. He refused to attend the function because it was open to everyone from any country or nationality, and not just for the Sylhetti community. He felt what is this boy trying to do? Steal the limelight!  
(Daud: 45, taped conversation)

This particular young man, a youth worker or even a teacher in the making, felt so disgusted that after three abortive attempts at getting "the Bengalis together" he gave up all plans of such kind. Eade (1989) has reported similar differences of opinion within the Bangladeshi community in East London. Werbner (1992) too found similar disquiet among Pakistani youngsters in Manchester. As most of the parents moved within their own linguistic or religious groupings, they were cautious about other "Asians" who fell outside their social group. The children mentioned above were trying to build bridges and they

failed. They became aware of the power structure among the male members of their parents' generation and they felt excluded and alienated.

Not a single girl spoke in a similar vein about religion or about local political representatives of her own community. It was as though it was an issue for the boys not for the girls, or something which did not impinge on teenage girls' lives in quite the same way. This could be because girls were restricted generally in what they could do and where they could go. As far as religion was concerned, they were not exposed to the internal disquiet which existed among the religious leaders or to the "posh" language used in a religious setting. When they prayed they prayed at home, something the boys admitted they never did, although there was nothing stopping them. It seemed to the boys that on account of their youth alone, they were excluded from the older generation's inner workings.

These were not problems for Muslims alone. Malayalam speaking Indian children felt marginalised because they told me they could not speak Hindi, and Sikh children similarly mentioned that they were marginal within the local Indian community because of their language and religion.

## 6.5

### Asian children's relationships with parents

The issue of Asian children's relationship with their parents is a complex one. Predictably it existed on several different levels at once, and was affected by a vast number of factors which were in operation at any given time. There were external factors affecting the family as a whole, which have already been outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, and over which the children had no personal control. The most important one was the question of parents' employment or the lack of it, whether both parents worked or not, and what the perceived

status of any job was in the eyes of the community and family members. Another factor, which was very significant for the children and which made them self-conscious and anxious, was their parents' lack of formal education. This, combined with parents' lack of understanding of the British education system and British culture, seemed to heighten their inability to help their children educationally during their secondary school years.

All Asian children were asked and expected by their parents to do well at school. This expectation, though verbally vehement, was not always practically supported by the parents. The following sections, based totally on children's reports, will explore this issue further. Asian parents' lack of practical support happened not through any wilful neglect on their part but through their lack of first hand experience of schooling and their preoccupation with several other competing demands on their time. In moments of growing insecurity when the parents spoke to their children about going "back home", all sorts of conflicts were let loose in the children's world; the most important ones arising from the pressure on them to do something sensible which would be useful "back home" as well as in Cherrytown. However, apart from medicine, neither parents nor children had any idea about what that could possibly be. Stress-related anxious moments in children's lives occurred around the time they approached the end of their fifth year. These Asian parents were not in touch with educated middle class Asians in Cherrytown. They were not offered the option by the school to meet a bilingual career teacher. Thus, even with the best of intentions, they were not in a position to guide their children. In fact not a single Asian parent in my sample knew of the existence or purpose of the career teacher even though they were very concerned about their children's future. Most Asian parents had an implicit trust in their children's teachers to advise and guide them for the best.

Working alongside these external factors were the internal factors which affected the quality

of educational and social possibilities at home. These varied from family to family and included such matters as the amount and allocation of living space within the home, (for example whether children had their own rooms in which to do homework) and the amount of time children had to themselves. The amount of time parents could devote to their children was restricted by a number of factors. Responsibility for ageing, dependent relatives and parental illness (diabetes and heart problems) emerged as factors limiting parental time. Family size, whether the child in the sample was the oldest or the youngest, and how well the older children had been able to help the younger ones in their studies and in dealing with other problems, also influenced relationships with parents. The average family size in the sample was five children per household. One third of the families lived in overcrowded homes. Just over a quarter of the children in the sample lived in two-bedroom houses (See also Appendix: 6B).

### 6.5.1

#### **Mother's and Father's role in the family**

In all the families, except those where the father had died, the father was recognised by everyone as the head of household. All the children were aware of this and those without fathers felt their status as "orphans" very keenly. Fathers were responsible for earning a living and mothers were mostly responsible for looking after the children. Mothers went out to work or began to seek paid employment only when their youngest child was no longer an infant. There was only one family in the sample where the mother was a stepmother of a boy at school. There were no divorced or separated parents in the sample. This is highly typical of Asian families in Britain. Single-parent families are very much rarer among Asian than among white or African-Caribbean communities (Statham & Mackinnon, 1991: 17). Asian children's view of life was affected by their mostly close relations with their parents, but as this chapter will show this closeness did not always

remain intact during adolescence. Childhood memories of parents related to me were mostly happy ones despite the fact that some families had experienced severe financial hardship during their children's early childhood, and several families had moved house many times and not always to better accommodation. During their teenage years, however, conflicts began to surface which the children did not always share with parents and teachers.

The most important thing to mention at the outset is the view held about adolescence by Asian parents. Almost all of these parents had been brought up in close knit rural communities, and they had passed into adulthood under the watchful eyes of their own parents, but none of the parents I spoke to recounted or specifically remembered any period of heightened trauma during their own adolescence, even though I tried to ask questions as sensitively as I could. It was thus very difficult to say whether these parents shared the same conception of normal adolescent behaviour as white teachers and white parents in Cherrytown. The general impression among Asian mothers and fathers was that:

Too much fuss is made about children. These children are growing up in more comfort than their parents ever did. What is lacking is discipline, not freedom. Discipline never hurt anybody. As for growing up...we all did that. What's so new about that?

(Sohel's father: 4, taped conversation, translated from Urdu)

Set against this background are the children's varied experiences.

## 6.5.2

### **On not being understood**

My father cannot understand me, how can he? He is so... so old fashioned. And he likes being strict and you can't talk when he is talking. So I guess I am different at home when he is around. My Mother's OK. You can joke with her.

(Sohel: 4, taped interview)

When I want something like new (expensive) trainers I ask my mum and she has to ask my Dad and then I don't have to worry too much...otherwise he will start asking one hundred questions and I will get a headache.



(Abdul: family 46, field notes)

Many children reported that their fathers were strict and liked to order their children about and were not the sorts of people with whom the children could joke. Sons said this more often than daughters did. When I visited the children in the presence of their fathers, the atmosphere was not always relaxed or humorous. Three fathers took time off work to see me and asked if their sons had been up to any mischief at school. Their sons looked pleadingly at me and later said things to the effect that:

Why I always have to be Mr goody goody I don't know. They (parents) never really believe you'd come (to visit) without moans about me.

(Aslam: 43, taped conversation)

Children knew that their parents were dependent on others to find out about their school based activities. They also knew that their parents could not find out a lot about them unless the children confided in them. They did not always treat their elders' views with respect.

My parents can't read English so...well so how can they know what is going on in the world?

(Asad: 5, taped conversation)

Their friends and them like to give you lectures, do this, do that, be good! Real pain. Of course you sit and hear them boring things out.

(Shakeel: 35, taped conversation)

They go on and on about their lovely life as children and that. I don't really understand why they go on and on, it's not as though they are really going back there...(ten minutes later, same conversation)...mind you if he gets thrown out of the buses he might.

(Tahir: 39, taped conversation)

Not all children could relate to their parents' childhood. In this they probably resembled most of the other children in the school. However as the above quotations show, the problem of Asian parents not knowing English and giving children "lectures" about how they should behave was probably not so widespread in other ethnic groups. Other children at Cherrydale School were not faced with their parents' bouts of nostalgia for "back home". For Tahir too in the above case, actually going back was a remote possibility, but it still

hovered in the background.

Children expressed conflicting feelings about their parents. They felt protective about them on the one hand and frustrated with them on the other:

My parents are not like other parents. They belong to a different...um different kind of place and um...they don't understand things...God looks after us completely they think because they can't. I think they could have done more for us but they can't...you see they are different.

(Nazim: 7, taped conversation)

I must help them now, they will get old and I must care for them but they can't help me, like in finding a job, in getting things done. They can help by praying...but you need more than that.

(Zara: 17, taped conversation)

According to their children, parents could not always relate to the children's world. When Nazim used the word "different" he did not and could not explain whether he meant they were different from him or from his other Asian or non-Asian friends' parents. Parents' predominant trust in their faith was their last resort. For their children their parents' faith in God alone was, as the above quotations show, not enough.

The two quotations above were answers to these questions:

Do you think your parents have helped you?

How have they helped? What more can they do for you?

Many children interpreted these questions in material terms, elaborating on their parents' inability to help beyond providing food, shelter, clothes and sometimes emotional support. Leaving things to divine purpose and to luck has been mentioned before by those researching Asian communities. (For similar attitudes to health and illness see Howlett et al 1992.)

Feelings about ethnicity and visits "back home"

For parents the move from a Sylhetti or Mirpuri village to urban Cherrytown was, with all its problems, a move upwards in life. They and their relations could look back on their migration as yielding better living conditions and providing an opportunity for greater prosperity in the future. The parents' generation had experienced at first hand both kinds of worlds, and in many cases a move from deprivation to relative affluence. For their children on the other hand, especially those who had been born or had spent their life since infancy in Cherrytown, their parents' move upwards was not (necessarily) such a major achievement. As compared to their white peers they were not living in the most desirable accommodation or facing a bright future. They had to learn to find their own feet in a changing competitive world, quite different from the Cherrytown to which their parents, particularly their fathers, had come. They could not share their parents' sense of achievement and glory. Many children felt they were at the deprived end of Cherrytown, whatever their parents might indicate to their relations "back home".

We went to my grandmother's village in Pakistan and she was so loving...she said she was so proud of my father and of us, that nearly made me cry...proud about what? Of course I didn't say anything. You can't, can you?

(Asad: 5, taped conversation)

Asad displayed an attitude of great sensitivity by not causing his grandmother pain or his parents pain in her company. His school teachers judging him by his disruptive behaviour in class, would probably not have believed him capable of such maturity. He was not unique in the sample. Children who visited Kerala in India felt distraught and deeply upset, and reported that the Indian government suppressed Malayalam language in local schools, when that was the most important language for these particular children and one which they had learnt with limited resources and with great difficulty in Cherrytown. They had gone to India with an image which got tarnished. Pakistani and Bangladeshi children who had

spent most of their childhood in Cherrytown also had very mixed feelings when they returned "back home". Some children whose parents had built beautiful houses on the outskirts of towns, or in a good location in the villages, were pleasantly surprised. Some felt very honoured by the warm welcome which they received from their relations, of a kind they were not used to in Britain. But others were shocked to see the poverty in which their parents had grown up; they felt embarrassed by it and wanted to distance themselves from their parents' country of origin. The myth of return had a different meaning for these children.

There are no proper toilets and water in taps. There is this hand-pump...and people are so poor aren't they?

(Naz: 1, taped conversation)

And children don't all have shoes and in Mianwali we went there too to see some relations, they sit on mats on mud floors in schools and they share **takhtis** (slates). And that made me feel so bad. So bad...

(Amina: 13, taped conversation)

Their biggest dilemma on coming back, they told me, was that although the relations "back home" were wonderful and they received a lot of love and special presents, their holiday was not something they could share with their non-Asian peers or their teachers. They themselves had mixed feelings. They liked visiting cities in India and Pakistan and Bangladesh, but they had spent most of their holidays in rural places and they could not show their peers their holiday photographs.

I mean they will laugh won't they? Sitting on a **manjhi** holding a goat! No shoes on, wearing shalwaar kameez!

(Amir: 36, showing a photograph, taped conversation)

Amir never wore shalwaar kameez in Cherrytown. That made him self-conscious. The goat, which was a beautiful white billy goat, made his self-consciousness all the stronger. The slippers he was wearing too would have to be edited out in accounts to friends. Other children thought they would have to impress their white peers by symbols of recognisable affluence in the west, like big buildings.

I can show them postcards of big buildings like hotels, to say they don't all live in trees over there! (laughter).

(Shakeel: 35, taped conversation)

It is like these Oxfam places. How can you ever talk about your holidays, your parents' village? You have to keep that to yourself.

(Parminder: 49, taped conversation)

The children remarked that in Pakistan and India they felt they were not in a minority; but they were not fully at home there either.

There are lots and lots of you and they don't call you Paki. But you don't speak proper language and the children look at you when you talk Punjabi with an English accent. That was bad.

(Nazim: 7, taped conversation)

Some of their white peers had been to the United States and to other European countries for a holiday. If they went somewhere within Britain they were culturally not so far removed from where their parents had spent their childhood and how they were living themselves. There would most probably be a difference between urban and rural backgrounds. For Asian children visiting the Subcontinent, however, the holiday was a mixture of fantasy and reality, an emotionally uprooting and a re-rooting time, and something they very rarely shared openly with their parents or their teachers, though they did discuss these things with their brothers and sisters. It was seldom just a holiday and a complete escape from their lives in Cherrytown. Most of them found the contrast between Cherrytown and the Subcontinent too stark. They felt self-conscious for one set of reasons at school and for a different set of reasons during their holidays spent away from Britain. Only two children in the sample had ever gone anywhere abroad except to their parents' countries of origin; one to France and the other to Moscow, both on school trips. The rest of the children in the sample had not gone abroad with the school, so they had nothing against which to judge their trip "back home".

Parents' lack of leisure and children's desire for social activities

What annoyed many children the most was their parents' lack of leisure activities in Cherrytown. Both boys and girls told me repeatedly that they had to spend most of their holidays at home or in a relative's home. They enjoyed the latter up to a point, but eventually they said they got bored, and their parents then felt that they were spoilt and ungrateful.

'Think of Arshad,' she says, 'what do you think he is doing in Bangladesh? Sweeping the floor, and you say you are bored!' God that makes me mad!...I can't help it if Arshad is sweeping the carpet or the floor what can I do about it? I still get bored and my Mum and Dad don't.

(Maqbool: 40, taped conversation)

These children were not mollified by being given examples of other children in more difficult circumstances than themselves. There was no concept of an annual holiday in the parents' generation. Asian children, returning to school would, they told me, overhear their friends telling each other what each of them had done and where each of them had been.

And what will I say? Cleared up Dad's shelves (in the shop) and re-stocked them?

(Shakir: 10, field notes)

They told me they did not always look forward to school holidays. This was true even of those children who said they did not enjoy school. They knew that unless they visited family members and relations there was no special plan for a holiday, except that they would meet those cousins and friends in other cities whom they only ever saw in the holidays. If they were very lucky they might be able to attend a family wedding.

There is no question of social functions in our family, no going away on holiday. My parents say when they were little they never needed to go on holidays so why should we?

(Yunus: 30, taped conversation)

The children would say such things disparagingly, but at the same time some of them felt sympathetic about their parents, especially those who were conscious that their parents were

not well off. This did not mean that these children had no outings whatsoever, but rather that most of the events which took place over the holidays happened within the circle of parental acquaintances, like wedding parties and family get-togethers. Knowing their parents' hesitation about going to unfamiliar places for the sole purpose of socializing, children told me that they did not always give school invitations to their parents.

## 6.8

### Asian children and educational experiences

Much has been written about the academic achievements of ethnic minority children and young people (Mabey 1981, Mackintosh et al 1988, Modood 1993 among others). What have not been researched so systematically are the factors related to children's home and school which may hinder them from realizing their aspirations. Schools' lack of knowledge about their pupils' needs (see Tomlinson 1983 & 1984, Swann 1985, Eggleston et al 1986) and their failure to involve Asian parents in the education of their children by building upon Asian parents' optimism and goodwill (Afshar 1989, Joly 1989, Brar 1991), can combine with parents' lack of knowledge about their children's daily lives at school to leave Asian children totally in charge of their own destiny.

Many children were aware that there was only limited help that their parents could offer them with school related matters. On a practical level, actual parental behaviour as seen through the boys' and girls' diaries and verbal accounts contradicted their parents' good intentions. They simply could not help their children in this respect. Girls were treated protectively as **paraya maal** ("someone else's daughter/wife", **maal** literally means property) and **amaanat** (given for safe keeping). They were at the same time expected to help with general housework and also with cooking if they were the oldest. Some of them laughed when they spoke of the practical support their parents could give them.

Take day before yesterday, I was doing this graph thing for Mr Long and my mum was sewing these things and er... every two minutes she asked for things, put the light on, do you want biscuits? Are you warm enough, put the heater on higher...she thinks if you are sitting in the same room then she must talk to you...so I went upstairs and my little brother came in... and we had a pillow fight, it was good fun!

(Amir: 36, taped conversation)

I must help stock the shelves in the shop at night. You know yesterday I was there till ten because my Dad had a stroke in February and he can't lift things... and then I went to sleep... I couldn't hand in that assignment today and project work.

(Shakir: 10, taped conversation)

If I'm drawing that's fine but my mum doesn't know, she'll say things like - get this from upstairs when you have finished, or do you want a hot drink now?

(Monira: 23, taped conversation)

As can be seen from the accounts these children shared, even though their parents wanted their children to do well, the use of space within the home and the interruptions to their studies were such that simple course work assignments became more and more difficult to hand in. Then, as in the case of Shakir, there were moral obligations which intervened; though temporary, they were significant in terms of keeping abreast with school work. It is important to mention in this context that there were only seven homes out of 50 where there was a prioritized space where a child could do school work in peace. In poorer homes in winter months, only one room was heated by a mobile gas heater. Children were obliged to try and study in a room which had the television in it and where, when I visited the homes, the tempting smell of food always seemed to waft in from the kitchen. That in itself was a huge distraction for the children.

On further enquiry I learnt that when the home teacher, who taught some Asian children once a week as a volunteer, used to visit them many years ago, their mothers would leave the best room empty for the home teacher to teach the children in. That practice did not always prevail in the home teacher's absence as the children grew older and the family



needed more space. In winter months four Bangladeshi and three Pakistani children said they tried to read in bed upstairs, away from the living room downstairs, where Indian films were being watched on video. They put their feet on hot water bottles and covered themselves up in warm quilts. They then complained to me next day about how lazy they were and how they deserved the worst because they had fallen asleep in the middle of whatever it was they were reading.

Moreover, many children were expected to help younger brothers and sisters with their homework while they did their own home work.

There comes a time you can't be bothered. Too much hassle man! Besides, my sister is good at it now.

(Yusuf: 12, taped conversation)

Yusuf's sister was younger than him so she was expected by him to help the younger ones, while he managed to escape into the street to meet his friends.

Unlettered Muslim parents had their own criteria for judging their children's academic abilities, or their educational potential. 12 parents used the age at which the child first finished reciting the Quran as an indication of the child's abilities. As the parents could not read English they had no way of testing their child's academic performance. When they were younger, some children were expected to settle down to work.

After breakfast and reading the Quran my mum used to sit us down and give us bits of paper to do our work on! But she couldn't read and write so we really did silly things. Sometimes we worked. She could never check it so we could do anything and pretend it was work!

(Salman: 25, taped conversation)

His mother knew he used to play around.

I knew my son isn't very bright. He took longer to finish the Quran as compared to my daughter. so I thought maybe he also dreams in school. That is why I tried to make him work...but now he is 14 he doesn't need that, he should know what he is doing.

(Salman's mother: 25, translated from Sylhetti/Urdu,field notes)

Bangladeshi parents like the mother in this case were not likely to go in to school to check whether Salman was indeed day dreaming, unless he really got into trouble and his parents were invited in by his teachers. Children knew this and saw it as a weakness in their parents. This might also be true of many white parents and their children. This was certainly the case in most of the families in my sample.

My Dad's too much in respect (awe?) of teachers. He never says this to you (meaning the researcher) but he is frightened of going into school, so there is no chance of him even seeing what school's really like! (laughter).

(Maqbool: 40, taped conversation)

Maqbool did not give letters and invitations to his parents. According to him they were not going to be "understood" so he did not see the point in giving out letters. This phenomenon was very widespread among both boys and girls. Eight boys told me they tore up letters about school events and scattered them on the way home.

## 6.9

### Parents' dependence on their children

Other matters which emerged from studying the questionnaire (see Appendix: 3B) and from conversations with parents were inability of almost all parents to help children fill in the third year option sheet, their lack of knowledge about the existence of sets and different ability bands, and their lack of awareness about how the school used sanctions against children. The complete dependence of almost all parents upon their children to keep them informed, left the children totally in charge of their own destinies. Those few parents who tried to find out more about their children's schooling have already been mentioned earlier (see Chapter 5).

Children described to me in their own words how little their parents knew about their school day.

My mother doesn't even know we have to change classes so many times. She thinks I live in one chair all day long!

(Zara: 17, taped conversation)

How do you mean I don't tell them about school? They wouldn't understand what litmus paper was, or a graph and what a test tube is!

(Talib: 47, taped conversation)

One bright day she packed keema paratha (mince meat and bread) for me to take to school, (laughter) God! Can you imagine! Eating that with your hands in the dining hall with everyone watching! I just laughed my head off. I wouldn't take it. She went mad, absolutely mad.

(Kalsoom: 24, taped conversation)

The first two quotations are about daily routine at school. The last one reverts to the issue of self-consciousness about their home culture. So different in her own mind was the atmosphere at school that it was unimaginable for Kalsoom to even consider eating home food at school, and worse than that, eating it with her hands. She would not have thought twice about doing that at home. What children did and what they talked about at home was completely different from what they did, what they ate and what they talked about at school.

None of the Asian children I interviewed had ever taken part in the annual school play at Cherrydale, to which they might have invited their parents. 30 children reported that their parents would like to meet their teachers more often; but only 15 children said they themselves wanted that to happen. Half of the children said their parents would not know what to talk about and roughly half said that their parents did not feel able to communicate with their teachers in English and that none of their full-time teachers were bilingual who could speak Sylhetti, Bengali, Punjabi or Urdu.

**Summary**

This chapter drew together the background factors which colour Asian children's perceptions of their primary and middle school days. Some aspects of the children's relationships with their parents and their community elders were discussed. The children painted a complicated picture where many different factors were at play all at the same time, where religious, cultural and linguistic identities mattered to Asian children's self-perception. The myth of return had a different meaning for each individual depending on whether people and places "back home" turned out as the children had imagined them. Gender was a key factor in determining the different kinds of experiences Asian children had.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **ASIAN CHILDREN AND EMPLOYMENT**

#### **7.1**

##### **Introduction**

It is mostly assumed that school days are carefree days when concerns about employment are very far from children's minds. This was probably true of many children attending Cherrydale School. However, it was equally true that some children were aware of wider issues besides schooling and were responding to pressures generated by their particular circumstances. This chapter will explore the employment situation facing Asian children. It begins by tracing the connection between parents', particularly the fathers' jobs and children's attitudes to their school, before moving on to consider the effect of gender on children's employment. The role played by Asian mothers in determining their daughters' future is considered. Teachers' understanding of the situation facing Asian children is also explored.

#### **7.2**

##### **Parents' employment and children's education**

There was a connection between the particular jobs the fathers did and their children's attitude to their studies. Those parents who had thriving businesses, such as a corner shop or a restaurant, provided the means of earning a livelihood for their children even if they may have wished that their children should study hard and ultimately get a better job than they had managed to obtain themselves. Their children had a sense of psychological and

financial security regarding their immediate future. They were not highly motivated to succeed academically. Socially, they felt superior to those peers whose fathers were not as prosperous. They were being provided with status-giving objects of teenage culture such as personal stereos and small items of jewellery, expensive trainers and clothes. If the family business turned out to be unsuccessful they felt they could always return "back home"; there was usually a house to go to and ready to move into. The contrast is illustrated by two typical teenagers:

You see I do want to do well and I suppose I am trying but we came to England, here, late and it will all depend on my exam results won't it? I am not sure if the school will help me find a job.

(Shakir: 10, shopkeeper's son, taped conversation)

My Dad says I should do well at school. He has nothing to leave behind he says...no big houses, no business, nothing.

(Rizwana: 41, bus driver's daughter, field notes)

When I talked more to Shakir, it became apparent that, although his father said that he wanted his son to do well at school, Shakir was expected to help in the shop over the weekends and holidays to learn how the business worked. His mother had once wondered in my presence why her son spent such a long time in the school, and why the school had not taught him enough in all that time. This was offered as a tentative query when in her presence her son told me he needed daily help at home in order to be able to do well enough at school. Rizwana was under far more pressure to succeed than Shakir. She was, however, still in the same situation as regards extra need for help with homework and with discussing ideas which could then be written up at school next day. Her teacher was not allowing her extra time to hand in an assignment for which she had already been given an extra day. She had not managed to find anyone in the family who could have helped her.

This was not a matter which was confined to these two children. It had wider connotations as fathers were the main bread winners in the family and there was a direct link between

their jobs and their children's will to succeed. The children in my sample who re-took their public examinations at the sixth form were mostly those like Rizwana, whose fathers were not able to hand down a thriving business. Whether the shopkeepers' and restaurant owners' children would decide to go to colleges of further education or to return to education later in their lives is difficult to say. All the children I spoke to in the sixth form felt they had no option but to carry on with their studies. They thought and hoped that, as another girl Kaneez(14) said to me one day, "some more bits of paper" would be useful in the future. This helps to explain to some extent the domestic, socioeconomic and other background factors which propel so many Asian children into becoming "repeaters" and into improving their grades (see Eggleston et al 1986).

In the light of the above analysis it is interesting to study children's hopes for their own future and their opinions about whether they would achieve that hope.

### 7.3

#### Asian children's aspirations

These children were not guided by their parents because of the parents' lack of knowledge about how the education system operated in Britain. Their hopes for their future were bound up with the reality facing them. Those children who said they were interested in doing medicine and law were reflecting their communities' high opinions about these professions. Those who said they did not know what would become of them were reflecting the uncertainty which stared them in the face of the limited options open to them. It is significant that not a single person wanted to enter the teaching profession (see Appendix: 7A). It is also interesting to note that just seven out of 25 girls thought that they would most probably get married, though six out of the seven said they wanted to continue their education or pursue vocational training (see Appendix: 7A). At the time of the interviews

only one (Shamim: 21) girl saw her future only in terms of being married. Some boys repeated the very words their parents had used for them. They had wanted their son to be a *bara admi* (big man) and do a "good job", that is, do a respectable white collar job. One Indian boy (26) and three (8, 9, 38) Pakistani girls said that they wanted to do a medical degree at a University. As well as those who were hopeful of entering Universities, six children seriously thought they would enter further education of some sort, making it altogether 20% of the sample who felt the reality would match with their educational aspirations.

Before considering Asian children's hopes for their long term future it is important to consider the financial pressures under which their families were operating and which lay heavily on some of these children's shoulders. For reasons beyond their direct control, some children had to undertake part-time casual work from time to time even though a majority of them were under 18.

#### 7.4

##### Paid employment while still at school

Altogether 28 children were working at the same time as they were at school (see Appendix: 7B). Most of these children had been to local schools since their primary school days. Among those not working were the seven new arrivals from Bangladesh. Life after school for many Asian boys and girls entailed making choices in the light of the academic results obtained by them as well as the financial circumstances facing their families. There was an awareness among Asian children of the discrepancy between what they would ideally like to do and what they may have to settle for. However, their favourable attitudes to education provide an optimistic indication that provided their circumstances permit they would remain in education either immediately or perhaps later in the future.



One of the unexpected findings of this research was the sheer number of children, Asian and others, at Cherrydale School who felt under pressure to seek employment while still at school. Many children were working in their fifth year, on newspaper rounds and washing up dishes in restaurants. I also came across two boys from the fifth year, both white and from a local council estate, who told me they were "a brickie's (bricklayer's) apprentices". They used to help him instead of going to school on alternate Thursdays. Similarly, three more white boys were learning to be a "sparkey" (electrician). In the case of Bangladeshi and Pakistani boys, I found instances as early as their third year of boys seeking paid work. However, they were totally dependent on their parents, older brothers or other kinship networks to help them find jobs. Unlike white children from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, all Asian children said that they intended to carry on studying if they got good results at school. These included those children who said they had not been trying their best at school. They said they intended to work very hard in their last two terms.

## 7.5

### **The aspiration to carry on with education**

There is an acknowledgement in the literature of the tendency among Asian children to stay on in the sixth form or at colleges of further education to improve their grades (see Fowler et al 1977, Eggleston et al 1986). Eggleston found that children from ethnic minority backgrounds wanted to continue studying:

Many wanted to enter higher education, many believed that education will assist them to get a job that they want, and to a lesser extent many were influenced by the prospect of unemployment. The second most popular reason for continuing education was that they wished later to enter another institution of further or higher education.

(p. 228)

It is significant that 66% of the children in my sample indicated a desire to carry on with

further education or further training when asked what they would ideally like to do after school. This could on one level be taken to mean that these children might still follow this route if their circumstances permit it in the future. Asian boys' attitude to work was easier to understand and analyse in the context of their domestic circumstances.

Girls on the other hand displayed considerable reticence before they trusted me with their employment situation. Girls' notions can be best described as guarded and ambiguous. The situation facing Asian girls in the job market and in the further education sector is very complex and it would be naive to make unqualified judgements about them. A recent PSI report (see Jones, 1993) has again confirmed the under-representation of Asian, particularly Bangladeshi and Pakistani women in the labour market. Thornley and Sianns' (1991) study of the career aspirations of South Asian girls in Glasgow underlines the complexity of their situation. They write that Asian girls have similar aspirations to their white peers, but their expectations are different. Although they hope to find good jobs they do not expect to find them. The concept of *izzat* (honour) exists alongside inadequate career advice, given with the assumption that all Asian girls will immediately upon leaving school enter arranged marriages.

This assumption and the concept of *izzat* place constraints on South Asian women. They are denied access to careers and financial independence by the existence and interaction of both.

(p. 247)

Afshar (1989) has pointed out the limited options facing educated and well qualified Asian women who work for their menfolk far below their actual ability and capacity because of the patriarchal system in which they exist. However we look at the situation, it is not a simple and straightforward one.

Most of the Asian girls I met wanted to lead interesting lives. Although they saw marriage

and children as a normal part of adulthood, very much like their white peers, they did have a desire to improve their life chances. Yet their circumstances made them face a discordant world where their hopes were not immediately realisable. When they had to work, they invariably felt the need to defend their parents and made excuses for having to work, very much as their mothers had done, as explained in Chapter 5.

## 7.6

### Girls' employment

The girls interviewed helped their mothers with housework and child rearing. In poorer families wherever feasible, they also helped directly in supplementing the family's income. The girls who said they "helped" their mother either made samosas to sell at one of the many delicatessen shops in Cherrytown or they helped their mothers in sewing and making lampshades, thus enabling their families to generate extra income. This mostly took place within the home, as a matter of course in the case of half the girls in the sample, before the girls were legally allowed to work outside the home. This was prevalent in Pakistani homes rather than in Bangladeshi or Indian homes. The Pakistani community had local business links with Asian and non-Asian retailers for whom the work was being done. In Bangladeshi homes, once a daughter was over 16 and was reasonably fluent in spoken English, she was expected to work and to go to the sixth form. It is relevant to note that Bangladeshi fathers were twice as likely to be unemployed as other fathers in the sample. In some families, I was told categorically and always by the fathers, that

In our family women don't work (outside the home), because that would reflect badly on us.

(Zeeba's father: 22, field notes)

But here people claimed one thing and often did another. There were instances even in these families of daughters having to work. They are the first generation where unmarried girls had no choice but to go out to work because of the economic situation their families

faced. There were two main reasons which I discovered. The first reason, linked to the myth of return, was ostensibly described as "getting some money to visit Bangladesh." This included money for presents, not just the fare. The second reason, only ever given to me by sixth formers and very reluctantly, was to:

Tell the Home Office that I can support my husband when I get married.  
Otherwise he may have to live in the ship for a long time.

(Monira: 23, taped conversation)

The latter was a reference to the off-shore immigration detention centre in the form of a ship where the children told me the Home Office supposedly housed people who had not fulfilled all the requirements for entering Britain. This, in the case of husbands and male fiances wishing to enter Britain, would include providing evidence of being economically self-supporting, or of having wives who could support them. This was mentioned more frequently by girls from Bangladeshi families, though it seems to have been equally true of families from India and Pakistan.

There was similarly talk in three homes of a certain Bangladeshi man who charged a fee to help fill sponsorship forms for the Home Office. The amount quoted varied between £80 and £120 in 1988/1989, an exorbitant charge for what was, unbeknown to those who paid the fee, a simple task for anyone literate in English. This kind of exploitation of working class migrant families by someone from their own community has been mentioned in research before. Helweg (1979) found that among Sikh Punjabis:

Brokers from the early and middle years (of migration) were generally notorious for their exploitation. (They were) usually bilingual and knew enough about English ways to help people with income-tax, medical and social service forms, jobs, and general survival in Britain; but (they were) in a position to exploit (their) fellow immigrants.

(pp. 78, 81)

There was a discrepancy between what parents said to me and sometimes even to their daughters and what actually happened when the time came to carry out previously made

plans. In most homes where the daughters said they had assumed they would be allowed to join the sixth form on a full-time basis, parents never, according to the daughters, spoke or discussed the matter of their seeking employment beforehand. There was only one exception to this and that was in a Pakistani family. By the time the girls approached the end of the fifth year they found themselves in a situation where their parents were not well off and their academic future looked vague and uncertain. They were being required to do jobs for which they felt unprepared and which they undertook with increasing trepidation. Most of the Asian girls in the school did not socialize with those white girls from working class backgrounds who looked forward to leaving school and entering the world of employment and financial independence. Had they been close to their same-sex white peers they might have learnt something about the world beyond school. They did not know anyone who had been through similar moments of anxiety before them, to whom they could talk or whose support they could seek. There was no evidence at any stage in this research of support groups springing up in the Asian communities to help combat shared problems. Each girl felt very isolated and had first-hand experience of divided loyalties in similar circumstances.

In poor Asian, especially Bangladeshi homes where the father did not have a fixed income or a regular job, the question of children not working never arose, whether they were boys or girls. In Bangladeshi homes, only where fathers were unemployed or had died, were daughters expected to pay some money to the mother for the running costs of the house. Otherwise their work was all in aid of the "immigration man" or the dowry. But this only dawned on the girls when the time actually came for them to work. A high percentage of Asian young people in Cherrytown were married to, or engaged to be married to a member of their extended family from their own **biraderi** (kinship group). In some instances these were people living outside Cherrytown in Britain, but mostly they were cousins living in

Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Parents never spoke to me openly about their daughters' work, so it is possible that they did not discuss it openly with their daughters until the last minute. There were instances where the girls were totally unprepared because of ambiguity. There was ambiguity in areas surrounding prospects of employment, further studies and early marriage. They did not know how to fill in forms and how to give interviews. From their earnings Asian girls were expected to contribute a substantial amount towards the cost of their own dowries. This was an obligation in which they did not have a choice. This was especially true in poorer families and in families where there were many daughters to be married. In such families whenever daughters made references to dowries, they saw them as a burden. A marriage without a suitable dowry was an impossibility.

Outside their homes, and at school according to most Asian girls there was a tacit assumption that they would get married. The following graphic comment sums up the feelings of girls coping with the situation.

Your teachers treat you as though you'll get married and have a dozen children, your mum and dad say they would like you to be educated...and look what happens, you end up doing a silly job!

(Jamila: 31, taped conversation)

There were bitter accounts of girls feeling very disillusioned. When the girls worked in their own parents' shops it was relatively easier because that was "like working at home really. We just live upstairs." (Amina: 13, field notes). The jobs which caused nerves and jitters were when they were working as cashiers at supermarkets tills as early as those places would take teenagers on. Having to serve their classmates and teachers made them feel

So embarrassed to begin with! I mean if I knew two or three years ago that this will be my job, maybe I would have been a different kind of person in

my fourth year. I would have been a swot.

(Halima: 48, taped conversation)

I also heard elaborate statements, always from girls whose mothers had never worked in Britain.

Well, I am doing it for my fiance really. It is only till he comes here. My Dad never wanted me to work but it is one of those things.

(Shama: 34, taped conversation)

Bangladeshi girls and those from poorer Pakistani families were all having to work as soon as they were able to, even if it meant doing jobs over weekends to supplement the family's income. They were in four cases the only members of their family who were working. They were trying to do this alongside studying, retaking GCSEs or 'A levels'. This was especially the case in those homes where girls were older than boys. The girls, as has already been mentioned, treated the kind of work they were doing very dismissively, and felt it was a temporary measure till they got married. They also felt that they should have been taught better at school before they got to the sixth form, then they would not have had to retake their GCSEs. In some cases they blamed themselves for not having worked harder and for not finding home teachers who would have helped them obtain better grades.

After they had been working as cashiers for a while they began to see its value only in terms of the money they could earn, most of which they paid to their mothers for dowries. These teenagers were often quite insecure and felt they had achieved nothing in their lives despite "all the opportunities" they had. I found the harsh self-judgement naive and very moving when I was told solemnly:

Look lots of people come here to study from all over the world and here I am, so lucky to be here and still I didn't study well did I? Didn't get good grades, I am not clever am I?

(Halima: 48, taped conversation)

In terms of employment, one of the major differences between Asian girls and boys working was that whenever an Asian girl worked, she worked either at walking distance

from her home where her mother or aunt or sister would go and see her, sometimes several times a day, which was possible in a supermarket, or else in an all female environment. A local white businessman was capitalising on the latter cheap source of labour. He was running a lampshade making factory. Girls worked in a more protected environment as compared to boys. They were expected to return home safely immediately after work. Four boys I knew in the fourth and fifth year reported returning as late as two or three in the morning.

### 7.6.1

#### **Asian mothers as the agents of change**

In some very strict Muslim families, where fathers felt that they could not let their daughters work or study because they wished to protect them from "bad outside influences", there were instances of great discord between mothers and fathers on this topic. In some of those households women were change agents. Some mothers had friends who were working and felt their daughters should be given the opportunity to study and to work if they wanted to. There were five such examples in the sample. In families where mothers were doing cleaning jobs, they were prepared to let their daughters study so that they would have better opportunities to work. Three teenagers, in three separate instances, shared with me in utter confidence the unhappy plight of an older sister who was working in an all female environment and was not being allowed to study in a college of further education. They reported arguments between the parents on this score. The older sister was supposed to have been married but the family did not have enough dowry to marry her off so she had to work instead of pursuing her studies. In another family the option was between that and waiting at home to get married. The parents believed that if they did not do their duty in helping her settle down soon (she was more than 21 years old I was told), she would never get married at all. This was a real worry for elderly parents.



In homes where the parents' financial position was relatively secure, where for instance the parents had two properties and there were older brothers with secure incomes, girls stayed at home instead of working outside the home. The disadvantage of belonging to such a financially secure family from the girls' point of view was that they were cut off from others of their own age group and did not have any regular activity to go to outside their own home. Girls who went out to work had some exposure to an environment where they could exchange conversation with someone of their own age besides immediate family members. However, these girls were not employed in high prestige or fulfilling jobs. The positive outcome in such homes was that younger siblings had a clearer notion about precisely what would happen to them if they did not do well at school. Some girls felt tremendous pressure to do well academically otherwise they would they felt have to marry earlier at 17 or 18 instead of later at 20 or 21 years of age. Girls sometimes mentioned that they would have to get married and then it would depend on their husbands' families whether they would be allowed to work or not, but in order to obtain a suitable rishta (proposal) from a good family in the first place, the dowry had to be collected which either older brothers or the father would provide or the girl would have to provide for herself.

## 7.7

### Boys' employment

Many boys felt the pressure to work much earlier and much more intensely than girls did. In more affluent families who owned restaurants or shops, where there were older brothers and cousins, younger brothers' help was optional. This was not the case in smaller families, especially over the weekend when extra help was required in the family business. In other families by the time a boy was in the fourth year he was invariably working. There were very few boys who had never worked by the time they approached the beginning of their fifth year. The fifth year boy who was not working had acquired the reputation of being

"plain lazy. Should feel shamed of himself, 15 and not working, not even for an hour" (Asad: 5 of Qasim: 2, field notes). It is a complex situation to describe. It seems from the data that parents who felt they were not educated wanted their sons to be educated but simultaneously to find stability through work, especially if they themselves had difficulty in finding and keeping jobs. If permanent part-time jobs were offered to their sons, they felt those jobs could not be scoffed at. Another related factor which is relevant to mention here is that these fathers themselves had worked at a very young age "back home". This was also true of working class white boys who went out to find employment while at school. Their social class position was responsible for this, as was the case in Asian families.

In the homes of unemployed fathers more than of those who were employed, there was an additional problem. Sons had contempt for their fathers and there was often a breakdown of communication between father and son. This was obviously a very difficult and extremely sensitive subject to broach. What data I have on this were mentioned in passing by sisters and mothers, never directly by the fathers, though some sons did talk to me about it. In such homes sons could not see the relevance of education for the sake of education. They were under tremendous pressure to work. The poorer the family the more the pressure. It affected boys more than girls. If the situation was reversed, which would only happen if the oldest child in the family was a daughter, she would have had to work "if not for the money then for the Home Office" (Shama: 34, field notes).

The Bangladeshi boys whose fathers owned restaurants were least under pressure to do well academically. Only one Bangladeshi boy, whose father's restaurant business was on the verge of bankruptcy, was the exception to this. His father had to repay a very big loan and his family was getting into financial difficulties. The shop owners, all of Pakistani origin

in my sample, had sons who were in a difficult situation. On the one hand they had businesses to take over from their fathers, on the other they were under pressure to improve upon their father's employment records. This was an extremely difficult task to achieve. They took their fathers' achievements as a starting point.

He came here with 20 pounds. Look at him now, and all in 20 years! What can I do to do better for the family?

(Shakir: 10, taped conversation)

When this particular boy had a work placement for a week as a salesman in a departmental store he scoffed at it, and his form teacher found that attitude "rather arrogant". His family owned two shops, which is perhaps why he was not very impressed by work experience in that field. Yet all along at the back of his mind was the feeling that if all else failed there was always the shop. None of the Asian boys I interviewed wanted to be shopkeepers; even those who had well established family businesses. They wanted to be engineers, or go into computing, or they displayed uncertainty about their future occupations. Some said they wanted to study on, rather than take over the shop. Asian sons' unwillingness to follow their fathers footsteps has been described by Brown (1970) thus:

While their fathers were prepared to accept inferior jobs and inferior living conditions, the younger people look for opportunities equal to those of their British contemporaries. Few will be ready to accept jobs as manual labourers...not least because their fathers had such jobs: and the fathers themselves want their sons to do better than they have done.

(p. 156)

Brown was discussing the attitudes of Asian factory workers who did manual labour and whose work was different in nature from the Asian shopkeepers'. However, the similarity between the attitude of factory workers towards their sons' futures and that of the shopkeepers is very striking. On being asked further questions the children could readily distinguish between what they wanted to do and what they would actually be doing (see Appendix: 7A). Many discussions with boys about future plans ended in bouts of grave uncertainty as they displayed diffidence and lack of self-confidence.

My Dad thinks that if you study hard you are sorted out for life. What job can that be? Not a pilot or a scientist, oh no, only a shopkeeper.

(Qasim: 2, taped conversation)

Another boy who had just returned from visiting his extended family in Sheffield said one day:

My cousin brother at the beginning was very upset about the shop and that...now he just accepts it. He has an HND. Didn't come in handy.

(Sohel: 4, taped conversation)

It was explained to me that this cousin was better off running his family business than waiting to be employed after HND. He had not been offered a job despite several applications. There were also boys in the sample who said they were never going to work in shops no matter what

It's damn hard work, 12 hours a day at least, and a heart attack at the end of it! What's the point?

(Shakir: 10, taped conversation)

This boy's father, a shop owner, was a heart patient. He was 48 years old.

The boys who derived the greatest sense of achievement from work were those whose fathers did not or could not work. There they had no record to beat and any achievement, academic or economic, would be considered a success.

It was not always easy being an Asian boy. He had to arrive at a balance which, from every account I received, seemed to be increasingly difficult to maintain. He was expected to take Dad's place in his absence, to pay bills, to take mother shopping and so on. In the sample studied, most Asian boys irrespective of ethnicity and religion had to learn to try and maintain these values alongside the messages they were receiving from the white British culture. They were the first people in their families in this situation. With the additional freedom of movement allowed to boys outside school, they had more exposure to situations and people who did not fall neatly into the "school" and the "home" category;

consequently they faced potentially more conflicting situations. Six boys in the sample said for example that they had tasted alcohol just to "see what it was like". This would have caused much consternation to their parents if they found out. None of the girls in the sample related such incidents, though three had tried smoking "just for a laugh".

There were some fathers who felt that if their sons worked instead of studying they would live to regret it.

He will find himself working in awful places at awful times. Now if he was educated he would work nine to five, go dressed up like a **babu**, come home, be his own boss. I can't understand why he has to work sometimes here sometimes there ...

(Nazim's father: 7, translated from Urdu, taped conversation)

Such advice given twice in my presence, much to my embarrassment, was never heeded from an unemployed father, about whom the son would later say: "He is not working.

How does he know?" (Nazim: 7, field notes). Researchers in this area have acknowledged that

It is true however that the fathers of the Asian boys are much less able to provide advice and contacts leading to better jobs outside the Asian community since so few of them are employed by private industry themselves.

(Fowler et al 1977, p. 77)

A daughter in Nazim's situation would forgive her father's unemployment and not hold it against him. She would rationalize it. For example Tasneem whose father was unemployed once said, "My dad's too old. He's done what he could in work, isn't it? And now it's up to young ones like my brother and me, isn't it?" (field notes). The son in every case where his father was unemployed told me he was working because his father was not and his friends would make fun of him for "shirking" his responsibilities. The friends he referred to were his Asian peer group. They made him feel uncomfortable if according to them he was not shouldering his responsibilities. Some boys felt ashamed because "no man is working in my place" (Amir: 36). The obligation for Amir to seek a job, albeit over the

weekend, was enormous. His father was poorly paid as a part-time cleaner, a fact Amir tried to conceal from me by claiming that his father was unemployed. This in itself was a source of disgrace and embarrassment for him albeit a lesser one.

Unlike girls, whose hard earned money bought dowries and pacified the Home Office in the shape of a lump sum in the bank, boys felt obliged to pay most of their money into family bills. They paid their mothers to "run the house with" (Yunus: 30), in exactly the same way as their fathers would have done, if they were working, or if the family needed more money than the income of one individual. They were otherwise expected to save the remaining amount in a bank. However, in order to be able to socialize with their particular peer group outside school time and out of school uniform some spent a "neat fortune" (Salman: 25) on clothes, which were considered essential for going out. Some boys bought themselves huge gold signet rings and expensive trousers and Reeboc trainers. In this way they were suitably dressed to join those boys whose parents could afford to buy them such things. The gold signet ring crowd was made up of just three boys in my sample. The baggy trousers and trainers were more widely aspired to. Their mothers complained to me about this squandering of money. My solemn question as to whether parents agreed that work could seriously interfere with studies invariably met with such replies as:

Well it's up to him, isn't it? We aren't making him work. He is the best judge of how much time he needs to finish studying.

(Sohel's mother: 4, translated from Punjabi)

The onus of maintaining the balance was placed again and again totally on the young man. Some parents who had not been to school themselves often did not know how that could create a competing pressure on the child against his other social and cultural obligations towards them.

So in short, as a boy he was expected to study, to work, to be ready to step in for Dad and

to keep an eye on his sisters' welfare. He was not expected to stay at home all the time in the way his sister would be; that in turn meant he could in effect get away with doing minimum homework and no housework. Most of the boys in the sample, except those who were very serious about their studies, then felt the easiest choice around the age of 14 or 15 was to make many friends and "make life easy man, stay out!" (Khushwant: 26, field notes). This attitude was indirectly encouraged by parents, particularly by mothers, who could be caught off their guard when they said things to the effect that, "he is not a girl, that you could put bangles around his wrists and keep him at home" (Yusuf's mother: 12, translated from Punjabi).

Some boys began to work earlier because of parental ties "back home". During the time of floods in Bangladesh for instance, there was growing evidence of under aged Bangladeshi boys going out to seek poorly paid jobs in restaurants. This kind of job seeking did not always happen without conflict, because these children knew that if their white peers worked they did not have to give any money to their parents. Particularly poignant from my tape recorded conversations with boys is the following extract which portrays the feelings of unease overseas television news reports caused in the homes of these children in Cherrytown.

Did you see Kate Adie on TV last night in Hobiganj? ...well, that's where my mother comes from. She hasn't been normal since...you see, her sister still lives there and she won't eat anything because she thinks of her sister's house flooded; there are many people here (in Cherrytown) who are like that." (complete silence) ...and what do you think these rich (Bangladeshi) restaurant owners are doing about it ? Nothing. Only sitting, getting rich!

(Salman: 25, taped conversation)

The reactions of children who were deprived financially even by Bangladeshi standards showed great emotional turmoil. They differed to some extent in what they said, but they did not differ in terms of intense feelings and notions bordering on despair.

I mean what the hell can I do if my family is stupid enough to be born in

Sylhet? what can I do? I haven't ever seen them lot (relations and extended families in Sylhet) and I must spend all my spare time sloggin' it out in restaurants so that my mum can send all the money there! I mean what do I get out of it? I can't have any pocket money like everyone else. I wish I wasn't Bangladeshi. I wish I was somebody else!

(Yunus: 30, taped conversation)

Yet Yunus paid all his hard earned money dutifully to his mother. Morally he felt he had no choice. None of his teachers knew what he was going through. It was a matter which was deeply personal to him and he did not want anybody to pity him. He was inconsolable and he was only 15.

I was not able to discover how much their teachers knew about individual children's domestic circumstances. The school had no formal procedures to ensure that pieces of knowledge individual teachers did have would be shared with appropriate colleagues. There was no counsellor based at Cherrydale as there was at another school in Cherrytown. There was a widespread feeling among the staff at Cherrydale that having a counsellor would give out "wrong signals" (PE teacher) to prospective and existing parents. Some children would need more support than others, but one white teenager who got pregnant while still at Cherrydale, summed up her feelings to me thus:

Well you see, there were these 50 teachers, all grown up and that...but I couldn't talk to anybody when I really needed help, not really.

(Jessica, aged 15)

A large organisation such as a secondary school does not always manage to reach all the children who are in need of extra support. The children above are examples.

## 7.8

### Asian children's problems: the school and community response

One pertinent question which arises from the data presented so far is what the school's, the local education authority's and the local Asian community's response was to the problems



faced by Asian children. Cherrydale School did not have an equal opportunities policy statement. The local Multicultural Centre was set up through Section Eleven funding for developing work which could benefit children from the Commonwealth. During the course of this research or even before it, the advisors based at the Centre did not visit Cherrydale School to help directly with policy development in the area of Multicultural/Antiracist work, which might have helped to raise the teachers' general awareness of issues facing Asian children. For their part the four advisory teachers could argue that the school did not invite them to do so. One thing was certain: the advisors did not do casework with individual children and their families. This led to confusion whenever a situation arose where Asian parents or their children wanted help in approaching the school with a complaint, or if they wished to seek clarification. Three parents in my sample who wanted to discuss educational matters told me they were turned away from the Multicultural Centre because "they are supposed to help white teachers not our children or us." This puzzled the parents because two advisory teachers were both Asian and bilingual and the parents said they could easily communicate with them. It is difficult to say whether the two advisory teachers were enabled or hindered by their (white) senior colleagues to get directly involved in community matters.

In my conversations with the career teacher I received a casual affirmation of the belief that the responsibility for the children's work lay mostly with the parents.

Yes so some kids work, but surely there is a collusion with the parents there. I mean what can one teacher do about it when their own parents obviously turn a blind eye? Besides, who has the time to follow each kid through the school in a school this size?...Once they get here it's our job to try and keep them coming. We are trying. If they then skive and work what can we do?

(Mr. Jessop, taped conversation)

He was talking of the school as a whole, not only about children from ethnic minority communities. This comment could be interpreted as an acknowledgement that a school-wide

policy might be able to do more. The head of the English department held very strong views about the role of the teacher: "Teachers can't be social workers or they wouldn't be teachers. Can't do both!" Truancy was a growing problem at Cherrydale School but it was not discussed as a whole staff room issue (see Chapter 10) when I was at Cherrydale. Similarly individual teachers within the school were aware of some children who were working when they were still registered at school. This was a wider issue and not just limited to some Asian children. Yet that too did not lead to open discussion. In fact the career teacher was the only teacher who talked about it, and then only when I spelt out the number of employed children I had come across personally. He also said that many of the Asian children did not come to him for career advice. He thought that the Asian communities "all helped each other anyway" and that these children, unlike their white peers from the council estate probably did not need help. He felt that unlike the Asian communities these white teenagers did not have any family support; if Asian children needed assistance, they would have asked for it.

As far as Asian children were concerned each child tried to cope with the situation as he or she best could. There were several simultaneous conflicting pressures which the children were not enabled to share completely at home or at school. Such things certainly did not often come up in discussion at school and when they did, they helped to reinforce the stereotypical view about Asian children as Chapter 9 on Asian children's experience of teachers will attempt to show. As a result of all this children learnt to keep their problems to themselves. In this way they would be able to get through life without betraying their parents and without losing their own integrity. Obviously some children found this harder to do than others.

It was not only the school which paid little attention to the problems Asian children faced.

There were no self help groups within the Asian communities because the parents were not well resourced in many cases. There was no equivalent of the African-Caribbean community's Saturday/Sunday school because there were not enough Asian volunteers to help set it up. There was no specially appointed full-time Asian youth worker to work with this particular age group, no meaningful dialogue between the Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi community elders and the local authority, no history of research involvement by the local University in the adolescents of these or any ethnic minority communities. The Islamic Centre affiliated to the local University was not involved directly with these working class children and their families; even though most of them were Muslim and the majority lived less than two miles away. The local Council for Community Relations was not functioning fully, thus depriving even those few members of the Asian communities who might have benefitted from it. None of the parents in my sample mentioned it as a place they went to, but its existence might have helped others.

With such a background, this generation of Asian children did whatever felt right for them on an individual basis. Some young people struggled or hoped to struggle on academically, others thought they would go out and seek a job. Yet others could not face the complexity of life and turned their backs on the confusing world which neither their teachers nor their parents could completely comprehend, as neither from that generation of adults had experienced it in quite the same way before.

Asian boys, especially those approaching their final year at school, appeared to be less culturally rooted than Asian girls. Girls for their part waged their own battle against racism and stereotypical images which were a part of their daily existence whether they liked it or not. This was also true of some of the Asian boys, particularly those Bangladeshi boys who could not understand English. Others daily faced subtle forms of racist "humour" for

which they devised their own coping strategies. This is described in greater detail in the following chapters.

On the basis of my research findings so far, it would not be surprising to find that Asian girls being more "culturally rooted" would somehow manage to cope better with situations in which they found themselves. They would be able to justify their situations, they would protect their parents' stand with more empathy than boys managed to do. African-Caribbean girls would probably do even better than Asian girls and from my observations African-Caribbean boys would do as badly or as well as Asian boys. The unavailability of the school's internal records on pastoral care based on gender and ethnicity, regrettably did not make it possible to put this hypothesis to the test during the research period.

Learning to speak English as a second language was the main and often the only "problem" teachers could recognise. Placing the blame on Asian children's parental background does not give a true picture. Many of these children had attended local primary and middle schools. Their parents wanted them to do well and to support their children in their educational endeavour but were constrained by circumstances which were in many cases beyond their immediate control.

## 7.9

### Summary

This chapter discussed the influence of gender and fathers' occupations on their children's employment. This includes both part-time casual work done at home and outside home while the children were still at school. This chapter also introduced the idea of employment in the form of additional pressures on Asian young people to earn some money, very little of which was spent on themselves. Daughters were obliged to collect dowries or to save

money for their wedding and sons were under pressure to pay most of whatever they earned to their parents or to their poor relations in the Subcontinent. As most of these young people did not personally know any success stories from their own communities, they struggled to find their own way out of their situation.

## CHAPTER 8

### ASIAN CHILDREN AND THEIR PEERS

#### 8.1

##### Introduction

The 50 children I came to know over a period of three years told me much about themselves, their friends and their family. What came through very strongly from talking to the majority of these children were images of a world which is constantly divided, which has to be renegotiated, reinterpreted and to some extent unified. There was not already a unified world where things fitted happily together. To some extent this can be said about all adolescents caught in a transient world of half adulthood and half childhood, but as will become clear from this chapter, the situations perceived through the eyes of Asian children are unique in many ways.

This chapter introduces the inner world of Asian children, drawing particular attention to the different images adopted by them. It looks at the impact of gender on the drawing of spatial boundaries, and at the ways in which boys and girls choose to present themselves to their peers and to adults. The chapter also looks at different kinds of pressures which Asian communities exert on Asian children: they are quite often gender specific. The quality of these children's interactions with Asian and non-Asian peers is explored with reference to gender and ethnicity. Asian children's painful experiences of peer-group racism are interwoven into their daily experience of school life; these are described within the contexts in which they were experienced and related.

## 8.2

### The image makers

Asian children, like other children of their age, were interested in exploring their effects upon others through the images they could create, often despite the images which were in a sense given to them through the stereotypical way in which they thought they were perceived by others. This chapter will explore the thinking behind this self-conscious image making. Some of this is what Goffman (1956) called "impression management" and has to do with the autonomy children exercised over self expression. According to Goffman:

When an individual appears before others, he wittingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part.

(p. 155)

In interaction, individuals try to "manage" the impressions others have of them. They put on a performance and present a "front". They try to influence the other's definition of the situation. Together, they establish a "working consensus".

Some children in the sample, especially the older ones, were concerned about both the image they had in their own ethnic community and the image they wanted to create and maintain among their peers. There was the obedient son's or daughter's image at home compared with the trendy image the fifth formers and sixth formers donned socially for the benefit of their peers, which again was different from the image of the Asian student in the classroom. Most Asian children experimented to some extent with different images. The most important image, however, was the one learnt through interaction with the white community. This was where the battle was waged against "the stereotype" and where being trendy mattered.

From discussions with several boys and girls and from their explanations of their behaviour

and attitudes, I have identified three distinct images which seemed to concern Asian boys, two of which also concerned Asian girls. Whereas some of these images were easily intelligible, the reasons for adopting others had to be explained to me. Boys and girls were both concerned with what I shall call the typical Asian image and the Asian peer group image. In addition, most boys, but only a small minority of girls, were concerned with a trendy Asian image.

### 8.2.1

#### Boys' images

Asian boys seemed to be concerned with three distinct images. The first, typical image was the one maintained in front of elders within the community. This was explained jokingly to me as "keep quiet and nod, nod many times, saves you talking" (Yusuf: 12, field notes) or "Don't fuss, just agree with everything, otherwise you have to hear lecturing" (Salman: 25, taped conversation). When the parents' friends and relations came to visit, this was the "face" presented to them. This would, it was hoped, impress the older generation and obviate the need for fully participating in long conversations with older people whom they were expected to respect. It was also the face which gave the impression of good behaviour: "They'll say to Dad 'Ma'shallah (God be praised) you have a good son', and then I can get out quickly and see my mates" (Amir: 36, field notes).

The second image, the image within the Asian peer group, was to "have a decent laugh. Smoke, unwind!" (Maqbool: 40, field notes) or "go to town, to MacDonalds, hang around in streets, just talk" (Khushwant: 26, taped conversation). Within their Asian peer group, the boys told me, they felt they were all in the same situation which they did not have to explain to each other. Their parents seemed to have similar sorts of expectations from them as regards "do good work at school, respect all your elders and all that" (Abdul: 46, field



notes). The boys did not have the same need to put up a front or to defend what they were doing as they might have had to do in a mixed group of boys and girls or in an ethnically mixed group. Also if they told a Punjabi or a Sylhetti joke for instance they would all understand each other. If a group of Asian boys smoked together in defiance, it was done in the knowledge that it would be severely frowned upon by all their parents. These activities seemed to cement the group together.

The third image was the image in the wider community where the trendy boys felt obliged to wear one ear-ring and to walk in a jaunty style, hands in pockets whistling down the pavement with other friends, who were not all Asians. The trendy boys sometimes also used African-Caribbean peers and African-Caribbean people (musicians, actors) as their reference point. One particular instance of the sense of intrigue and excitement caused when this image clashed with the typical one is mentioned below. Another contrary aspect of this image was the typical Asian image which was put on to obtain jobs. For that the boys would look smart, take off their magnetic studs or earring and dress up as they would for their father's friend circle. Obviously it was difficult to maintain all images simultaneously, but it was very interesting to discover that the children were aware of the different images they all put on. Some "wimps" and "chickens", so nicknamed by their more adventurous and adaptable Asian peers, just kept the first image for all occasions. They could not win the respect of their trendy Asian peers and did not have a following. The trendy crowd used white peers as their main reference group.

It was not surprising to meet a very contrasting physical image: clothes, ear-rings, hair style of the same individual at home and at a teenage event at the Town Hall when the fathers' friends, mostly bus drivers, were on shift duties on the roads outside. I can remember an instance when two 17 year olds turned away from the street and stood behind me when

they saw their fathers coming. They were both standing near the main street outside the Town Hall reeking of Brut aftershave with hair oiled and wearing a magnetic clip-on earring in one ear. (They would not dare have an ear pierced because that would cause problems at home.) An interesting observation I made was that no matter what happened, Asian boys did not, as they put it, "grass" on one another whether it was at school or at home. However, some Asian boys did "grass" on Asian girls.

## 8.2.2

### Girls' images

Girls mostly had two sorts of images, the typical Asian image and the trendy Asian image.

The first was a

Goody goody image when you smile sweetly and obey your teachers and parents and have two plaits down your face, and you always but always wear shalwaar kameez.

(Maahin: 37, taped conversation)

This was the image which was most acceptable to the Asian community elders as well as the teachers it seemed, and it was an effortless image for many girls. The other trendy image was

Where you open your hair but people still know you normally plait it, coz it has them crinkles in it, coz it won't brush out straight, and you give an attitude back and you wear trousers. And when you see people you make your eyes small like this (demonstrated) and that way you look important.

(Naz: 1, taped conversation)

There were six girls in the sample who said they actually put on the second image for the benefit of their white peers and who wanted to distance themselves from the

Goody goody two plaits down the front, oil in your hair, shalwaar kameez type.

(Saira: 38, field notes)

Girls who deliberately tried to change their "image" and openly admitted it to me were always Pakistani. They did it, they told me, for the obvious reason of wanting to be

different and also I felt because there seemed to be more variation in attitudes among the Pakistani than among the Bangladeshi and Indian children in my sample. It is important to mention here that Asian girls' shalwaar kameez were the subject of much criticism at white peer group level.

Asian girls mostly laughed about it but were painfully aware of the prevalent attitude amongst their white peers. This is developed further, in the following section. In girls' minds generally, there was a connection between how they dressed and how they were perceived, and they were sure that they were stereotyped to some extent because of their clothes. Some girls were convinced that their teachers too used the same measure to stereotype them. It was unfortunately not possible to test teachers' attitude to Asian clothes as it did not feature among the questions when I was collecting data from teachers. It had not occurred to me at that time that teachers' opinions about girls' clothes were so important to Asian girls.

One of the Asian girls in the sixth form reported her secret trip to the sauna with a white friend. That was the naughtiest and most exciting thing she had "ever done in (her) whole life" she told me. Her parents, according to her, would have been shocked to hear about it and would have "stopped (her) from carrying on with her education", in case she made a "habit of wandering around". She explained that she had to do it to demystify forbidden things and to prove to her white peers that "not all Asians are boring people" (Saira: 38). She said she wanted some excitement in her life but that she did not want to upset her parents so she was a "goody goody" daughter at home and a rebel outside. According to her, one day she would decide what she really was, but she did not know at the time and she was in the process of finding out.

Many girls tested in different ways the limits of what was possible. Some did it by wearing lipstick, mascara and high heeled shoes during lunch times, and others through playing truant. Asian girls had to be more cautious than boys because of the irreparable damage gossip could cause them within their communities. Thus for girls to get away with experimental behaviour, it was safer to find a white girl to have an adventure with, as in the instance quoted above, than to risk having the adventure with an Asian friend, "in case we fall out and she tells my family" (Naz: 1). If the girls did not have white or African-Caribbean friends, this avenue of safe adventure would be closed to them. If Asian girls nevertheless went ahead with having adventures with Asian girls, the scope of what was possible would be restricted to sticking magazine pictures of Indian film stars in a book or at the most clothes shopping or window shopping in a group.

Girls spend their leisure differently from boys in secondary schools. Interest in 'pop' literature and film stars is part of teenage culture generally, but for Asian girls it was part of a covert culture as far as their parents were concerned. They told me that their parents would have objected to their hobby of pasting magazine pictures of film stars in a book because it contained so many pictures of male actors. They left the book in a locker at school. I did not come across any boy who had similar interests. Asian children were not allowed to display posters of film stars or pop stars in their rooms at home because that was unacceptable to their parents. Some of these girls would spend half of their lunch breaks reading gossip columns about their favourite actors and actresses from magazines which circulated among those girls in school who were also interested in similar things. The other hobby was their transcribing the words of Hindi or Punjabi songs which they then learnt.

### 8.2.3

#### **Asian children and the dress code**

Most of the Asian girls adhered strictly to a dress code. This affected to a great extent their acceptance by their Asian peers and contributed indirectly to their being rejected by white peers. Most of the girls wore shalwaar kameez if they were of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin. Indian girls in the sample often wore skirts and blouses; one of them who was very friendly with a group of Pakistani teenagers sometimes wore skirts, sometimes shalwaar kameez. The school uniform colours were adhered to in the choice of clothes. Sixth formers could wear whatever they liked and any colours they chose. Dress was very important. There were parental wishes that their daughters should dress modestly in their traditional clothes. As unmarried young women their parents objected to their use of fashionable clothes and make-up, saying that once they were married they could do as they pleased. Boys were exempt from this dress code, as they also are in the Subcontinent. There were five instances of girls coming to school very modestly dressed and then applying a lot of make-up in school which they were not allowed to wear at home.

In school some girls would spend a long time opening their plaited hair, combing it out and admiring themselves in the mirror. School provided them with the opportunity of trying on different "images". This behaviour began to appear at the end of fourth and the beginning of the fifth year. It was tolerated by the non-makeup groups who were quite amused by it.

Well, I told Hina she's fine as she is, but she likes showing off in front of the mirror. Well, if it makes her happy (laughter) that's fine.

(Kaneez: 14, taped conversation)

It's harmless isn't it? It would be different if she wore short skirts and had boyfriends.

(Maahin: 37, taped conversation)

Asian girls tolerated departures in some cases, from the dress code; if a Pakistani girl wore very long skirts with a long scarf, that was considered acceptable. Even modelling

themselves on Indian film actresses in terms of make-up and

Oh! smiling a lot, shaking her head, being actressy

(Rizwana: 41 of Uzma: 9, field notes)

was allowed in certain cases. But having a boyfriend infringed heavily on the unforgivable moral code and was never taken lightly.

Those girls who felt restricted by "my national dress" felt upset not because they felt their culture was inferior but that they felt their "image" as perceived by their white peers and white teachers really did matter.

They've (white peers and teachers) never worn anything else except western clothes and they think dresses of other countries aren't good enough. I don't think my mum's clothes are bad but I think people wear other things sometimes if it impresses their friends.

(Naz: 1, taped conversation)

Girls like Naz made deliberate efforts to create a "new image" which was rejected by the majority of their Asian peers. This "image" consisted of loose long shirts and tight trousers, conspicuous make-up and earrings. These resembled the trendy clothes white sixth formers were wearing at the time. These girls consciously made an attempt to be different from their Asian peers and said they would go home and change into shalwaar kameez; their parents did not see any problems with this so long as they behaved properly.

The attitude in their white peer group caused some consternation.

You know when I was off school because of Diwali, Joanna asked me if I had worn "the curtain" (sari) at home.

(Bindya: 6, field notes)

Saris were nicknamed curtains, while shalwaar kameez were called "the pyjama suit" or "gary glitter" because of the "shine in 'em", according to Gillian a white fifth year student.

This caused a variety of responses from

I wouldn't make friends with creeps who had the nerve to tell me that to my face!

(Parveen: 8, field notes)

to

People have a right to their opinions. If I object to skirts they are right to object to shalwaar kameez. After all it is their country, we only came here later.

(Zeenat: 29, taped conversation)

Whether they liked it or not, clothes were an issue for Asian girls in a way they were not for any other group within the school.

Asian girls tried to lengthen or shorten their kameez and have wider or smaller shalwaar ends according to the latest fashion prevalent in the Subcontinent at the time. Their clothes for parties and for going out were sometimes modelled on Indian film stars' clothes. Two Bangladeshi girls showed me expensive Banarsi saris which their cousins had brought for them and which they were saving for their dowries. They said that the best thing about saris was that they "keep in fashion all your life. Their length never goes big and small". Thus they were considered to be excellent investments. This was not the case with other kinds of clothes for Asian girls.

Asian children mentioned instances of their relations visiting them from other cities and occasionally from the Subcontinent, explaining how they were then expected by their parents to be even more particular in dressing up properly. Some girls, especially shopkeepers' daughters, said that they were expected by their mothers to dress smartly because they wanted to present an affluent image of their daughters to those relatives in other cities. All in all, daughters were amused by the requests and complied with them. Sons were usually more rebellious and would not always dress up to impress their female relations, most especially those who had daughters who would soon become of marriageable age, whom the boys did not like nor wish to impress. They always had escape routes planned

for such occasions.

My boring Aunt from Manchester is coming this Saturday with her boring daughters. I think she likes me so I'm going to play cricket all day.

(Amir: 36, field notes)

Something significant which only girls pointed out to me was that one of the women teachers who taught Urdu never wore shalwaar kameez at school because according to the girls their teacher was concerned about her own image.

Makes you wonder why! She's ashamed of wearing her real clothes, that's why! Mind you, our English teachers (meaning white teachers) still don't talk to her, you know!

(Parveen: 8, taped conversation)

The presumption that the teacher wore those clothes because she wanted English teachers to talk to her was impossible to check with either the Urdu or the English teachers. This was not an issue with their male Urdu teacher.

The significance of clothes as gifts in the lives of Asian women, as expressions of status symbols and wealth, has been elaborated upon by some social anthropologists (see Werbner 1990, Jeffrey 1976: Chapter 4) who have emphasised the important role clothes play in rituals. The clothes worn by professional counsellors who work with teenagers from different cultural backgrounds in secondary schools in America were studied by Littrell and Littrell (1983). They found that children tended to:

Assess counsellors' empathy, warmth, genuineness concreteness...based on (their) attire. The results contributed to identification of clothing dimensions useful for understanding cultural similarities and differences in non verbal communication through dress.

(p. 110)

Thus Asian girls at Cherrydale School were not unique in judging their Urdu teacher by her attire.



#### 8.2.4

##### **Duality of images and the older generation**

There were matters which Asian boys and girls felt obliged to conceal from the older generation. Some of the older Asian boys and girls followed the latest fashion in the English pop music scene. Most of the girls were more interested in Asian music which comprised background music for Indian films. Some boys and girls liked **Bhangra** music, which is Punjabi folk dance music. Although Asian girls sang songs together they did not get any opportunity to sing these songs aloud in public, which was a pity as some of them were very good at it. They assumed, perhaps wrongly, that their music teacher would not be interested in their singing. Their white peers, however, would not have understood the language, and their Urdu and Bengali teachers either did not know of or did not encourage the hidden talent among their students.

There were other things which these children felt obliged to hide from their parents. Both boys and girls said they would not like their parents to know that they had a "scrap" at school with someone, because that would cause cross-questioning at home about the incident. Similarly they would not tell their parents about detentions or any kinds of verbal cautions they might have received from their teachers. They would not tell their parents about smoking or about the fact that they knew people who were on drugs. They would not tell their parents about their knowledge of a teenage pregnancy among their white peers, just as they would not tell them that they knew what a condom was. They said that they would not necessarily share instances of racism which had occurred because it would only hurt their parents' feelings and "anyway, Ammi jee can't exactly come (to school) and thump Jacko!" (Saghar: 19, taped conversation). The boys would not tell their parents that they had won a match "coz then my Dad will think I spend all my time playing games" (Salman: 25, field notes). Playing games would have been too frivolous an activity to share

at home and it did not fit in with the goody image. Many of the things which were not shared with parents clashed with the images their offspring were trying to carefully cultivate at home.

There was also a more serious aspect to some of the sons' relationships with their fathers which made it difficult for me to know how to respond to the situation. Some sons told me in the strictest confidence that they were having problems with their fathers. They told me that their fathers drank alcohol when they were not supposed to "because we are Muslims" and that no one knew about it. If I appeared equally shocked I would be presenting a moral stand which took sides against the fathers in question and whose homes I was planning to visit. If I did not appear to be shocked I would in a sense go down in these Muslim boys' estimation, something I could not afford to risk. Daughters never divulged such indiscretions about their fathers' moral conduct but some sons, especially sons of shopkeepers and restaurateurs, complained bitterly to me about the hypocrisy and double standards in their fathers' conduct and their own alienation and subsequent lack of respect for them. The irony here is that what the fathers were doing was exactly what so many sons including their own sons in some instances and some daughters were also doing. They were being "goody goody" at home and "naughty" outside. There were in the sample seven such cases where each boy thought he was the only one in that particular situation. None of the mothers drank alcohol, even those whose husbands did. According to their children, 28 fathers but none of the mothers smoked cigarettes.

There was a discrepancy between the sons' and daughters' attitudes of alienation or open questioning of parental moral and cultural standpoint. Girls in almost all cases seemed to comply more willingly with parental wishes. They were more culturally rooted than boys were. Some boys too were in a similar situation, but generally, given similar circumstances

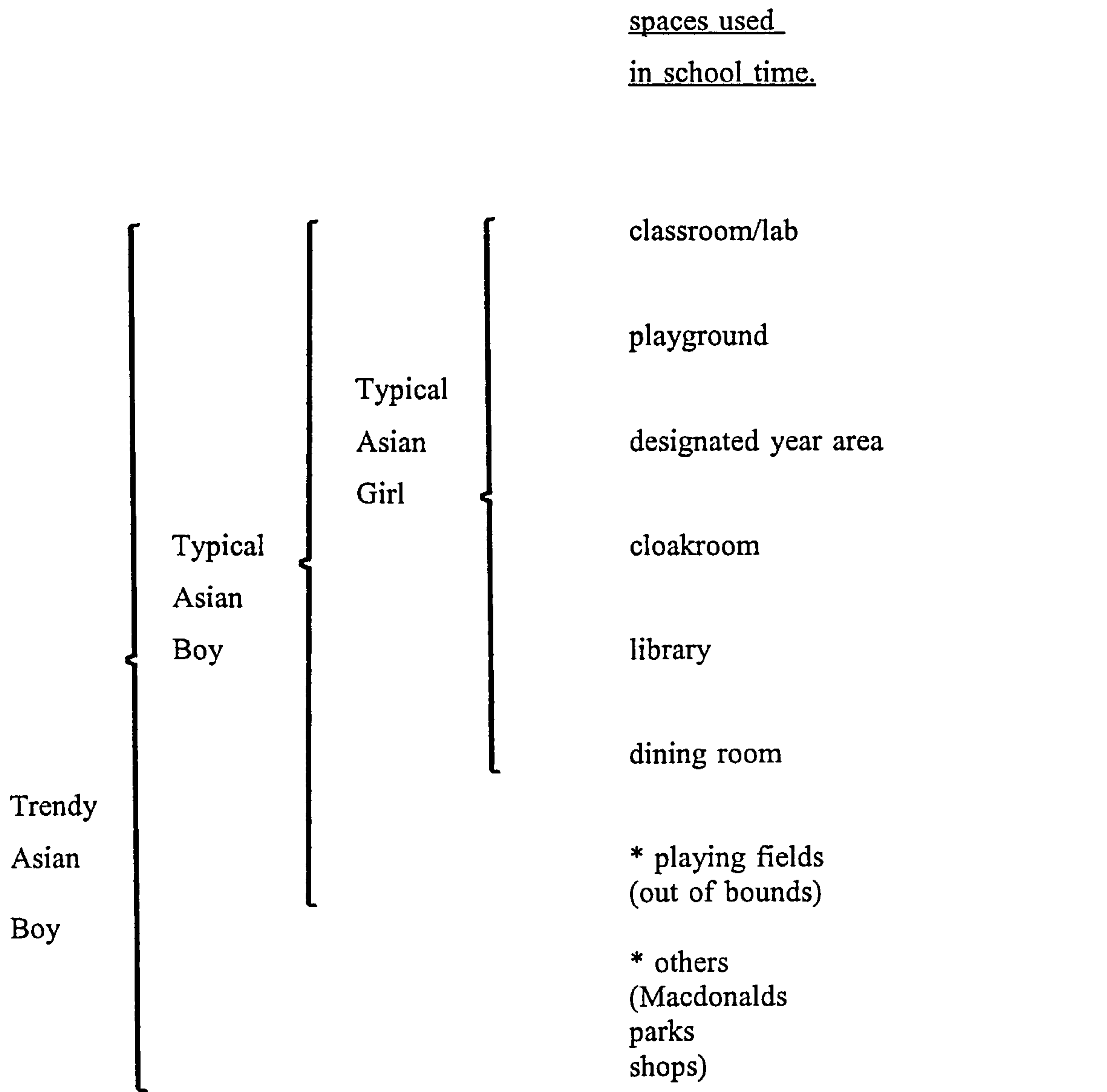
and home backgrounds, boys turned out to be far more covertly rebellious and even disenchanted at home and openly disaffected at school than girls were. It is important to seek to understand this difference as it affected girls' and boys' behaviour and "image" both within the school and outside it. In this context it is interesting to look at spatial boundaries within which these children operated and its connection with gender.

### 8.3

#### Gender and spatial boundaries

The spaces used by children during the course of a normal day were affected directly by the context and by gender. With teachers whom children mostly met at school, there was little spatial choice involved. Teachers told children where as well as how they were expected to interact with them. Parents and children met mostly at home and again the space was pre-defined for children. Boys could use their choice negatively by opting out of being present at both these places. Girls did not have the option of opting out at home in the way Asian boys had. With peers however a new exploration of space was possible which was partially given and partially chosen. There was in this sphere relatively more room for manoeuvre, than either in the home or in the school setting. People whom children met in the places where they worked similarly did not offer much choice. Asian children's use of physical space is summarised in the following diagrams.

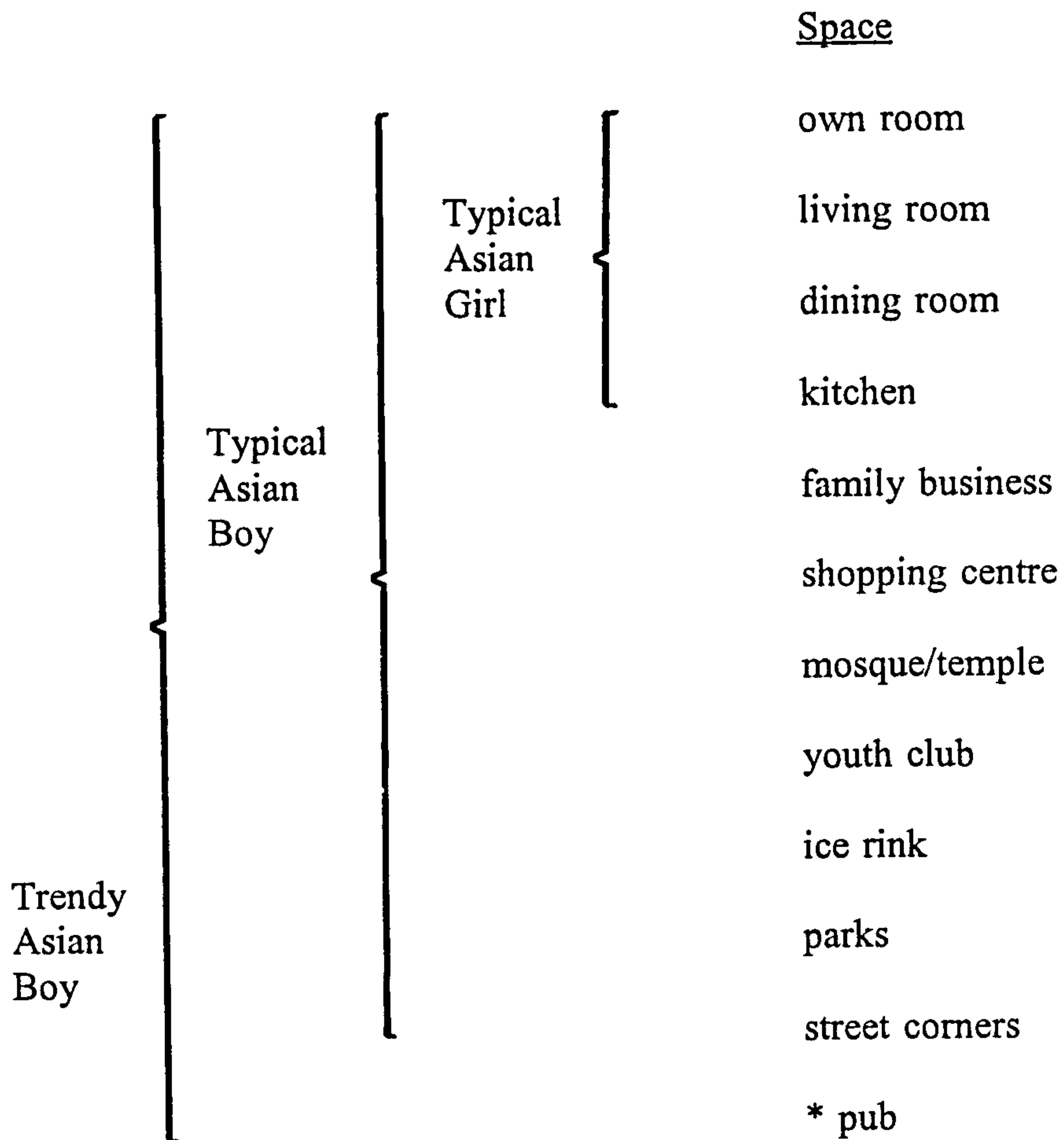
SPACES USED IN SCHOOL



(\* = forbidden/prohibited places)

Fig. 8a

SPACES USED OUTSIDE SCHOOL



(\* = forbidden/prohibited places)

Fig. 8b

As a matter of empirical observation Asian girls used only a subset of the spaces used by Asian boys. This occurred within the school and outside it. Why is there a difference based on gender? The answer lies first in finding out where the boys and girls choose to go when they have a choice. This is relevant when we look at Asian boys and girls at school in their spare time, for instance during lunch breaks. Secondly, it lies in discovering where they are permitted to go. This is particularly important at home.

### 8.3.1

#### **Use of space at school**

Almost all Asian girls in third, fourth and fifth year used the spaces allocated to their particular years within the school building. This was a large classroom for the third years, the downstairs cloakroom in the case of the fourth years and the science area cloakroom in the case of the fifth years. Sixth formers had their own separate sixth form area and their common room, which was situated near a small kitchen/cafeteria and had its own record player. If the children chose to walk around in the playground they could in theory go anywhere they liked. This option was mostly exploited by Asian boys and African-Caribbean and white boys and girls, not by Asian girls. Children from all years were allowed into the library during lunch breaks provided a librarian was present. Several Asian girls could be seen huddled in there talking in whispers. Sometimes some white and Asian sixth formers would wander in there looking for books or a space to sit in. The school had no benches for people to sit on outside, so children spent some of their time after lunch looking for empty spaces on the grass or the steps overlooking the playgrounds. The last two options in Figure 8a were not utilised by the majority of Asian girls, that is playing fields and other spaces (Macdonalds, parks, shop round the corner).

During a period of two years I only once saw three Asian girls, all fifth formers in a little group looking at woolly jumpers at Littlewoods during school time. That was about as far as they exercised their choice of space. Asian boys on the other hand could be seen more often wandering in and out negotiating new spaces. In the school Asian girls mostly stayed indoors in the library, in their year area and sometimes on the steps. The other interesting observation was that whereas the other sixth formers played loud music and sat and talked to each other in the sixth form common room, Bangladeshi children, new arrivals to Cherrydale School and some Pakistani girls who did not feel at ease in the loud noisy sixth form common room area went out and sat on the steps or wandered around the school in small groups.

Many Asian boys had at some point been to all the places visited by white boys. They could go to the corner shop to buy sweets, coke and cigarettes. A handful of them had been to MacDonalds during school time, less frequently than white children had, but then there were far more white than Asian children at Cherrydale School. Asian boys, never girls, could be seen in parks in the vicinity of Cherrydale School. Asian boys could get away with it without serious repercussions especially at home; Asian girls could not. Ten Asian boys said they had been to a pub. None of the Asian girls had.

### **8.3.2**

#### **Use of space at home**

The situation at home was also quite interesting to study both through observation and through conversations with children. The time spent after school for the purposes of this analysis, would include all possible places defined in Figure 8b. Asian girls experienced far less physical mobility outside home on a daily basis than Asian boys.

One could further break this up into spaces within the home; different patterns defining the use of space emerge for Asian girls and boys. After school girls spent most of their time indoors. This could help explain why they were to be found in indoor situations in school as well. It was something they were used to and which did not require extra effort. Girls spent their time in their own room, the dining room, the living room and the kitchen. It was a familiar situation for them. It was in most cases only after they had left school that they could be seen helping in the family business and contributing to the family economy. Boys on the other hand could choose to spend their time at home, though they preferred not to do so if they could avoid it, and in addition they could and did use all the other spaces indicated in Figure 8b. Asian boys, when they were at home, reported spending their time watching television, or if they had their own room, spending time autonomously in there. Asian girls were expected to help with housework and other domestic chores whereas in general boys were not.

The differences in attitudes can be further explained if we see how many waking hours outside school hours on average the Asian boys spent at home as compared to Asian girls. Boys reported being able to get away from home after spending as little as one and a half hours after school. If we add to this the average of six to seven hours the older Asian boys spent away from home over the weekends the average figure for boys far exceeds that for Asian girls.

In relation to the above findings it is useful to refer to the Newson's (1968, 1976) research on predominantly white children. They found that young girls were more likely to be encouraged by their parents to remain indoors and to talk to adults, more specifically to their mothers. This led them to be unadventurous from a very young age. Boys on the other hand were given more spatial freedom, and this arguably led to more psychological freedom



for them too.

### 8.3.3

#### **The effect of different use of space on Asian boys and girls**

As can be seen from figures 8a and 8b Asian boys were able to negotiate more space. This gave the boys considerable exposure to different kinds of situations and adventures as well as avenues of escape from situations they did not like. It also exposed them to conflicting messages from different sources which they somehow had to learn to accommodate. All this combined to produce a sense of alienation in some of the older boys, a growing away from parental values as they progressed through their secondary school career, which was something girls did not face in quite the same way. Most Asian girls like other girls did not openly display threatening behaviour towards teachers at school. This was why according to Asian boys Asian girls had a better time at school; "teachers like wimps and that's all" (Dilip: 42). Dilip was talking specifically of Asian girls. This attitude was compared unfavourably by the boys with the harsher views teachers, especially female teachers held about them. Asian boys who displayed signs of distress and disruption in classroom situations complained about teachers' unfair behaviour. This is explored further in Chapter 9.

In the light of the above information, together with all the other complex demands made on Asian boys, it is not difficult to see why Asian girls were more culturally rooted within their home culture than Asian boys were. How all this affected Asian boys can also be seen if we study their relationships with their parents and their teachers, and their growing anxiety about their future prospects both in school and in the employment market.

The other very interesting short-term outcome of restricted space was that girls, because of

the limited choices open to them, could only choose between staying at home and helping their parents, mostly mothers, or doing their homework. Boys, generally speaking, had many more options. In the long term for some girls, there was a choice between staying at home and waiting to be married or studying on. In poorer families they would have to find a job. Boys exposed to far more diverse situations did not have a clear cut choice between studies/work and marriage, at least not immediately upon leaving school; staying at home was not an option open to them. Boys had to think much more seriously about work or studies whether they liked it or not, and had to balance all this in their minds against the problems which faced them and their families. With little relevant guidance available at home about careers, without many Asian role models to follow, and with the daunting prospect of having to improve on fathers' employment records, it was not always an easy choice.

#### 8.4

##### Gender and friendships at school

There were differences in boys' friendships and girls' friendships. Boys' friendships continued to change over time in a way the girls' did not. Boys' friendships unlike girls' also varied between contexts. Whereas Asian girls, by the time they reached the fourth year, had formed their friendship groupings, Asian boys had relatively more negotiable friendships. They had different friends with whom they played cricket or football after school, different friends with whom they stood talking at street corners or in the parks in the evening. They met different, mostly older people if they went to the mosque or if they visited their cousins in Cherrytown. In school they spent less time sitting in corners in the playground than girls did and more time roaming around the playing fields. Asian boys mostly had Asian friends but occasionally they would join one or two white boys for specific activities like going out on a cigarette or sweet buying expedition. It was

interesting to note that in the rare instances of one to one friendships between white and Asian boys, it was in every case the element of deviant behaviour that threw the boys together.

I'm fed up of that new science teacher, so is John. We'll have to see if we can skive next Friday.

(Asad: 5, taped conversation)

Kevin and I was planning phoning the fire engine for fun! See what happens! Them Qasim lot are chicken, they won't do it.

(Shakir: 10, taped conversation)

The latter plan was not carried out in the end, though a degree of friendship was necessary to make the planning a source of thrill and excitement to the two boys. The disparagement of peers who were "chicken" was reversed the following week when Shakir joined the same chickens for cricket. Children's attitudes to their friends and their definitions of friendships do not remain static.

#### 8.4.1

##### **Asian boys and the sense of freedom**

On the whole Asian boys were able to have a far greater degree of social freedom and faced far less sanctions from their own peer group than their sisters or other Asian girls did. Boys were socially free to move in different groups. Some boys, especially in the fifth year, experimented with a form of behaviour which would have put their reputations seriously and irrevocably at risk had those acts been performed by girls from the same ethnic group. Although most of the boys did what was expected of them at school a substantial number behaved in a manner which would have shocked their parents. They boasted about the number of cigarettes they had smoked that day. There were three boys in the sample whom their friends in an all male group would tease about their English girlfriends in my presence, which they would sheepishly deny. Some of the boys in the fifth year made and then carried out elaborate truancy plans. All this was absolutely forbidden territory for

Asian girls.

Asian boys could openly cultivate multiple images and identities to suit the occasion and they had several avenues of exploration open to them. They hardly ever mentioned their fathers in the way a recurrent image of mothers was present in girls' conversations. They were equally silent about the effect of their peers' gossiping tendencies on their own behaviour. Neither of these acted to curb deviant or defiant behaviour in the boys. Some boys were concerned about their parents and wanted to protect them by not sharing with them negative feelings and incidents they had experienced at school. In this most of them were quite similar to the girls.

Only two Asian boys reported having gone to a youth club. The majority just stood around in street corners and talked. If there was a friend who had no one at home or whose house was being decorated and stood empty, the boys would buy coke and crisps and have a party in which I was told they also smoked if they wanted to. These were exclusively Asian affairs. Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys met up together, depending on friendship patterns and depending on their interests. As there were very few Indian boys in the sample it was difficult to ascertain whether they were being deliberately excluded. Sometimes boys would invite their cousins, or Asian boys of their own age group from another school, to join them. There could be boys with whom they had been to primary or middle schools or boys who lived in the same neighbourhood. These boys were quite confident in themselves, and were eager to talk to me, saying they had never been anywhere where an adult led discussions about interesting things.

Those Asian boys who began to play truant in the fourth and fifth year, and did not feel like spending time at home either, found part-time poorly paid jobs or wandered about in

gangs. Seven fifth year boys had been to court for petty theft in 1988. Four of these were Asian. Two boys were "getting interested in cars" but had not been caught. There was an increase in incidents of drug abuse among Asian and white boys which was never, during the entire period of this research, brought out into the open at school. Some youth workers told me about the increasing numbers of truants and substance abusers who were Cherrydale students. A group of seven Asian boys displayed their knowledge about drugs quite convincingly and told me rather proudly that so far:

Not a single girl at Cherrydale school had a sniff. Ain't it neat?  
(Talib: 47 field notes)

They felt this was at Cherrydale an all male preserve and that "girls weren't mature enough to handle it." (Khushwant: 26). They displayed sometimes a protective, sometimes a patronising attitude towards girls in this respect.

Girls would get ill or sick or something...they would have problems...besides it is not meant for girls anyway.  
(Nazim: 7, field notes)

When I suspected their claims and said they seemed exaggerated, the answers often left me in no doubt.

Oh pot's fine. So is liquid gold. I've gone off glue for a bit...tell you what, if you let me have 12 (pounds) I can get some for you tomorrow.  
(Yusuf: 12, field notes)

This group of boys was a mixed group of two Bangladeshis, one Indian and two Pakistani 15 year olds. I found it enormously difficult as a researcher to contain such information and not show any negative feelings which might have destroyed the hard won faith which was being placed in me. My references to the local therapeutic centres and drug counselling services which assisted young drugs and substance abusers were met with disdain and derision. Their parents did not know and the school at that time appeared to be oblivious to the growing problem. I later learned that some members of senior staff in the school had known more about it than they admitted, but as these children were not using drugs on the

school premises nothing was done about it, either as a consciousness raising exercise for those teachers who were unaware of the problem, or for the parents.

There was a connection between Asian boys "interest" in drugs and their mostly self-reported loss of direction academically at school. Within the context of peers what was generally true was that boys felt more under pressure to be seen to be "manly" and to be managing well in both cultures, namely white peer group activities to some extent as well as all Asian settings. The strain of attempting to keep both things balanced began to show in the middle of the fourth year or even earlier. Rejection by white footballers during school lunch breaks because of peer group racism, for instance, led to an all Asian football team being formed impromptu in a distant part of the playground. Asian footballers told me that they preferred cricket but the bat had gone missing. Now and then an Asian lad would join the white team. Asian boys' behaviour in the playground was linked in interesting ways to what parents expected from their sons and the way children themselves decoded those overt and covert messages. This situation, limited to Asian boys as far as I could see, was explained laboriously and with considerable exasperation to the rather "slow" researcher thus:

Well you have to be both Pakistani and English at the same time, haven't you? You have to make a good name for yourself, so no one will run down your family name. You should get a good job and look after your sisters. You must know your religion and that..and be a big guy soon and not need anyone's help.

(Shakeel: 35, taped conversation)

Shakeel was not implying that all Asian boys managed to do all these things but rather that the subterranean pressure always lurked in the background. There is a strong implication in the above quotation which I subsequently explored. Whereas boys felt the pressure to be both "Asian" and "English", girls were under pressure at home and outside it to be predominantly "Asian". One apparent indication of this was for instance the dress code for

boys being the same as that for white boys, thus slightly lessening the chances of exclusion from those groups. It turned out from group discussions, that the view that Asian girls should remain distinctly Asian was shared by Asian boys. Asian boys expected Asian girls to be looked after by their families and thus not to have to prove themselves at school.

They don't have to deal with all the people a man has to deal with. They don't have to provide a home, earn a living!

(Asad: 5, field notes)

#### 8.4.2

##### **Asian girls and the delicate art of balance**

Stereotypical views were held about Asian girls at school. This reinforced in Asian girls in subtle ways, both covert forms of rebellion and a lack of self-confidence on the one hand, and an assertion of "Asianness" on the other. About one third of the girls in the sample felt that Asian communities, that is their elders, gave less freedom to girls than to boys but girls were therefore under a different more subtle kind of pressure; while conforming to parental wishes they had to extend delicately maintained boundaries of personal freedom and self-expression. The main difference though was that if girls failed to perform the balancing act, they could always act passively and get away with it so long as they did not infringe the moral code as defined by their friends and family.

If boys failed, the price was heavier, exclusion from their peer group, guilt for having let the family down, guilt about not having become a "big" that is a rich, independent, self-sufficient man. On balance, then, boys were paradoxically under more noticeable pressure. The pressure on the girls was more subtle. The differences which emerged between the two sexes as they approached the school leaving age became pronounced in their attitude to school, marriage and employment.

Asian girls of all ages in Cherrydale School were expected to go to school and to come straight back home again and not be seen wandering about in town without first seeking their parents' permission. Once a girl started going to a secondary school, and sometimes even before that, her older brothers' friends were no longer allowed to visit her family informally. If such visitors came they would sit in the front room or in the brothers' bedroom in very rare instances. Mostly the boys would play outside the house. Similarly parents, especially mothers, wanted to know if the family her daughter was going to visit had any older boys in it who might without meaning to

not know how to treat girls other than his own sister... and might do things which are not wise and sensible.

(Kaneez's mother: 14, field notes)

Mothers made it their business to find out quite a lot about their daughters' circle of friends to a degree which was unimaginable in the case of their sons. For parents "back home" there would not be such overt concern displayed quite so consciously because the family visited would play the role the mother played here. Besides, in a village people knew each other through generations and meticulous enquiries would be unnecessary. In Cherrytown, it was not always the case that families knew their children's Asian peer group through generations. This cross-examination by mothers irritated the girls who found the "the whole damn thing maddening!" (Huma: 27). Another girl had this to say:

For my mother, family is more important than friends. For me it's the opposite. I don't care about my silly aunts and their gossip; friends are very very important but she will never understand that. All her (mother's) friends are family...so she cannot understand (me).

(Naz: 1, taped conversation)

What Naz said was equally true of several other Asian girls, though they did not always immediately admit the gap between themselves and their parents. The specific instance which gave rise to the above comment was that she was not allowed to go to a friend's birthday party in the evening. Although school served as a place where the girls met socially, friendships established at school were accepted by parents only for the duration



of the children's school days. Children would sometimes tell me about older sisters who once they were 16

sat at home and hardly met their old school friends except at weddings and here and there.

(Amina: 13, taped conversation)

Interestingly, I also had access to some white children's views about Asian parents. White teenagers who had Asian friends, or who used to have Asian friends, found Asian parents very unreasonable because they did not let their daughters stay out late at night or go alone to parties.

I mean why does Tasneem's mum think the party will be an orgy? For God's sakes we'd just go out for a couple of hours and have a good time! I'm getting a bit sick of it now.

(Anna 4th year, taped conversation)

Tasneem's mother apparently wanted to come along and the trip excluded Tasneem when it went ahead. Bindya, who told me that she had some English friends, never ever invited them home. Within an Asian context, calling friends home would be considered the most valuable way of cementing a friendship. There were in the entire sample only two instances of friendships between an Asian and an English girl which functioned during the first year at the secondary school. One was an instance of an old well-established friendship with a childhood friend who had lived in the same neighbourhood almost since these children were infants, and where the mothers met each other in the local supermarket or in the street. The other was an instance of what the Asian (Pakistani) girl in this example described to me as "the most liberal Asian home around here." (Hina: 28). She said that she and her older brothers were always encouraged to bring their friends home, provided they were of the same sex as themselves. This however, was the only example of its kind among all the girls and therefore cannot be seen as the norm.

Some Asian girls rebelled in interesting ways against the situation in which they found

themselves. No one in the sample said that they tried to explain their white peer group's point of view to their parents or vice versa. The onus of decision making was on them as individuals. For the sake of maintaining peace at home the girls agreed on the whole in nine out of ten cases to follow the parental line. This does not mean that it was an easy choice or that they agreed without facing any conflicts.

For their part Asian parents, it seemed, were working extremely hard at maintaining or even trying to replicate the way they were brought up. Somehow in the majority of the cases this anxiety was more intense where daughters were concerned. It was a question of maintaining family *izzat* (honour), a predominantly female virtue in a patriarchal society. (See Wilson 1978, Afshar 1989.) Some Asian girls produced long winded answers when I asked them how they felt about their situation.

My mum listened to her mum, and she to my grandmother and it worked ok for them and that is what it is, now if I did something against my religion (long pause) that will not solve anything will it?

(Bali: 15, taped conversation)

Some girls had come to Cherrydale School from middle schools where there were few Asian girls, or where there were opportunities for Asian girls to make non-Asian friends. Yet, once they arrived at Cherrydale School, it pained them to realize that they could not maintain their friendships with English girls at the same level, and that in nearly all cases, these friendships petered out and died by the time the children reached the end of their third year or the beginning of their fourth year in school. The girls who made friends with predominantly white children were those who felt ostracized from their Asian peer group because of gossip, personal differences or because they had boyfriends or went quietly to disco parties, or those who, like the few Malayalam speaking Indians, were a minority within the Asian communities. Malayalam speaking Indian girls who were not befriended by other Asian girls were more friendly with white girls at school than others. They said

that they made friends with those people whom they liked best and did not dwell much on their obvious lack of friendship with other Asian children in the school.

Friendships between white teenagers and Asian girls were renewed or re-established mostly at the sixth form level. These were academic interest led and instrumental; not necessarily led by common social interests.

Diana's Dad is good in science, so she lets me see her notes. She is a friend...but we only meet at school. We never meet outside school.

(Saira: 38, taped conversation)

### 8.4.3

#### **Relationships between Asian boys and Asian girls**

Of particular interest was the attitude prevalent between the two sexes within the same ethnic groups. According to the girls the "sensible" element amongst the Asian boys was "OK". These boys went in the **shareef** (respectable) category. The "silly" element perceived by the girls, a label they applied to just under half the boys in the sample, is best explained from the boys' perspective below:

I mean you can say hello to other girls, and they will answer back, normal, innocent-like. If you say hello to Asian girls they either look away or they give you an angry look (laugh)- just like in Indian movies! Uzma is like that in our class. She and her three buddies.

(Tahir: 39, taped conversation)

This boy knew perfectly well that he was teasing girls partially because they were Asian and shared his ethnic background. He chose to see the lack of self-confidence in the girls as deliberate play acting. The girls whom I spoke to later thought he was immature and saw him as

a nuisance, such a pest! Just messes about and thinks he is so clever.

(Shamim: 21, field notes)

Close one to one communication between Asian girls and Asian boys was not very

common. Two Asian girls had Asian friends who were boys but all the other Asian girls avoided them in case

My mum finds out. She would find out from Maahin, who is such a big mouth. And really I do want to study on.

(Tasneem: 11, field notes)

It was a common assumption among Asian girls that those girls, both Asian and white, who had boyfriends at any stage during their school career including the sixth form, obviously did not like to study on, otherwise they would not be "messaging about, being silly." (Tasneem: 11). Girls did not express similar feelings about boys' behaviour. This view was expounded most vehemently by those fifth and sixth formers who had managed to get through their secondary school without forming any known relationship with the opposite sex and about whom there were no negative "rumours" in their communities. It was explained most eloquently by a sixth former who had negotiated her way out of several hurdles in order to carry on studying.

It is my parents' duty to get me and my sister happily married, but it is my duty to make sure I use my common sense and get into a career..Well, its like this, if I get good enough grades to get into University I will be able to talk to my parents into letting me carry on studying. They aren't very well educated and they think if I don't do well at school, how will I do better later?

(Saira: 38, taped conversation)

This particular girl was unusual in that other girls referred to her as "completely clever".

Complete "cleverness" unlike its incomplete counterpart comprised of knowing

as early as third year or even earlier, that you must tow the line, gain your parents' trust and then get good grades and then do what the hell you like once you get to College!

(Zara: 17, taped conversation)

This view was never aired in quite that way in front of one's parents. They would it was felt, put an end to such a venture because of their fears about their children's especially the girls' rejection of their culture and their involvement with boys. There was an implicit and very strong expectation among parents that the children could acquire "education" and "bits

of paper" and be loyal to parents' cultural traditions and expectations. Parents on the whole saw no reason why it was not possible for their daughters to remain loyal to parental values while at the same time being educated at school. If a child was well brought up there was no logical reason for her to have any conflicts. Having an open interest in the opposite sex would in this context jeopardise the girl's chances of carrying on with her studies. All Asian girls were aware of these expectations and tried to behave accordingly. As mentioned in earlier chapters gossip played an important role in curbing deviant behaviour in the majority of girls, in a way it did not for the majority of the boys. Mothers wanted to learn a lot about whom their daughters mixed with and what kind of cultural and moral upbringing her peer group had had. Gossip travelled home through other girls thus curbing deviant behaviour in this area. This was equally true of those girls who did not feel they would be able to study on for long enough to get any qualifications beyond the compulsory school age.

Parental influence affected girls' attitudes toward their peers more than it did for boys. Two girls came to school wearing shalwaar and kameez and changed into mini skirts and applied heavy make-up which rendered them, even to me at times, unrecognizable at a distance and went, as their severest critics, the non make-up, non mini skirt groups pejoratively called "man-hunting at the Poly!" They were notorious and were social outcasts within their own ethnic groupings, but a subject of curious speculation in their white peer group. Any "good" shareef (respectable) girl who talked to "them", immediately acquired "a reputation". All kinds of implausible rumours were rife about them.

You know she was kissing this boy (name whispered in my ear) and that was when she had run off to college of FE one day and it was in the video room and it was filmed. I nearly died!

(Huma: 27, field notes)

This particular story was repeated to me by six different girls, all of whom were Pakistani; the girl in question was also Pakistani.

You know she has a different boyfriend every month and she's on the pill!  
(Rizwana: 41, field notes)

The very mention of these girls' names caused knowing looks to be exchanged. There was no evidence establishing the truth of the latter story. These girls were at ease with boys and able to handle discussions with the opposite sex. The typical Asian girl did not feel comfortable talking to boys, or worse, being seen talking to them.

You know Rizwana is such a gossip. She came up to me to say she saw me talking to a boy, I was furious but I wanted to annoy her, so I didn't tell her he was my brother!

(He had just joined school at the sixth form).  
(Hina: 28, field notes)

When we are walking in the playground and we see a group of boys coming we walk a bit far away.

(Kalsoom: 24, field notes)

Both these comments demonstrate the uneasy relationships between Asian boys and girls at Cherrydale School. Some Asian boys took advantage of this unease to subtly harass Asian girls in a way they did not white girls. They blew kisses at them and made "smoochy" (Manzar: 3) noises when they walked past Asian girls. None of the girls shared these incidents at home. The same view was not held about white peers as it was considered acceptable for them:

because they don't have to hide it from their parents. It (having boyfriends) is in their culture.

(Halima: 48, field notes)

Asian boys were told to treat all Asian girls as their "sisters". One mother who was as interested in her son's friends as she was in her daughter's added a new dimension to the scene.

I try and make friends with my sons. One day I spoke to Manzar about children at school, and he said one Pakistani girl liked him and followed him around, so I told him that he must treat her with respect. I told him that "she is just like your sister," after that she did not follow him around.

(Manzar's mum: 3, translated from Punjabi, taped conversation)

Manzar began to go out with an English girl and did not confide in his mother. His mother

had not foreseen this. The news did not travel home to his parents because only one Asian family (his) was involved and this limited the channels of communication to his mother. The interesting finding in this and other similar cases was that Asian boys never "grassed" on Asian boys whereas girls did on other Asian girls.

When brothers and sisters were studying in the same school, brothers had an additional responsibility as compared to other Asian boys who did not have sisters in Cherrydale. They had to look after their sisters during lunch breaks and play times. "Looking after" included making sure no one was teasing their sisters and being able to sort out any boys who were. White boys in the playground even those who knew the brother a little, did not always understand this attitude which they found rather peculiar.

I'd stick up for me girl friend like this Bingo (Bangaladeshi) bloke, what's his name Abdul sticks up for his sister.

(Paul, white 4th year, field notes)

Only one Asian boy in the sample openly shared with me the sympathy he had for Asian girls in the school. Salman had only one older sister who had been married three years ago.

It must be awful being an Asian girl. First you are surrounded by gossip. Because you are a girl you have to be a goody goody, I suppose...And then well if you are not careful, you end up staying at home, don't you? Sometimes...I feel I am right glad I don't have a sister to look after!

(Salman: 25, taped conversation)

Other boys thought things were acceptable the way they were. Many of the girls did not need constant looking after as they kept away from boys anyway, but they knew that should the need arise, any brother in the school, was around to help out. It was more a sense of moral obligation than actual need which sometimes bound siblings together. Some families, five in the sample, sent their sons to Cherrydale because it was near their home, and their daughters to a single sex school, thus in some cases obviating the need for looking after sisters. There were eight children in my sample who had siblings in the school.

Relationships between children from different ethnic backgrounds

Among the first things that struck me when I began to negotiate my way into spending lunch breaks with children in the playground, were peer group segregation along the lines of gender and then ethnicity. Children moved from one part of the playground to another in groups which seldom appeared to be ethnically mixed. There were some exceptions to this observation, but generally speaking Asian children could be identified at a distance because of their colour, and girls were further identifiable, especially Muslim girls by their clothes, even though these were in school uniform colours with the exception of the non-uniformed sixth formers. Both Bangladeshi and Pakistani girls wore shalwaar and kameez. African-Caribbean children, of whom there were fewer in the school than Asian children, could be seen among white children, but there was no example during almost two years of playground based fieldwork of white children joining a predominantly Asian group. There were more instances of Asian boys being seen with white girls on their own or with a group of white boys, but there was only one Asian girl, a Pakistani sixth former who was going out with a white boy.

It was very interesting to ask the children I got to know the reasons for this. The general view held among white children was that "them lot don't make friends easily". More informative explanations offered by two individual children are set out below.

It's like this you (researcher) are different. I can have a laugh with you, most of them Asian girls are so serious and they don't make friends easily. Black kids are luckier, they have their black friends and they have others (meaning white friends). Asians are not like that.

(Chrissy, African-Caribbean, 4th year, taped conversation)

Now I think Nazim is good, he comes out to club (youth club) with me and my brother, but most of them boys are in gangs and are a bit stuck up like coz they have their own lingo and they go around showing off.

(Trevor, African-Caribbean, 4th year, taped conversation)



After what Chrissy said, I began to note the behaviour of Asian girls more closely and found that their humour was confined to their own friendship group. They appeared to be far less confident and openly, boisterously happy than boys from their own ethnic group or than African-Caribbean and white children in general. Asian girls often complained about being invisible in school but they colluded with that by not calling attention to themselves. There were reasons for this. They were far more self-conscious than any other group in school and this was one response, though not their only response, to the racism they faced. As we have seen Asian girls' clothes were a target for negative peer group comments, more than was the case with Asian boys, who did not wear ethnically distinct clothing. As far as the second quote is concerned, most of the children Trevor came across in his classes turned out to be Bangladeshis who were mostly left to their own devices, even among the Asian groups in the school, because of their lack of fluency and confidence in spoken English. The majority of Asian children were divided linguistically very much as their parents' generation was. This was something their white and African-Caribbean peers were not aware of. They could not always tell the difference between Pakistani and Bangladeshi children except for the very obvious criterion of the new arrivals' inability to speak English.

The most provocative racial remarks which I heard directly about Asian children at Cherrydale School were those uttered by white working class boys. It could well be that like white teachers I did not hear the worst the white children could say about Asian children. White girls also held stereotypical views, especially about Asian girls. One of the tape recorded group discussions which shows white working class girls' attitudes towards their Asian peers is set out below. This is followed by a discussion I had with two white boys.

Joanne: I don't like them curtains they wear, why can't they dress smartly like the rest of the girls. If they want to live here they should get smart like us.

GB: What about the boys, Asian boys I mean?

Joanne: Some of them are ok, most of them ..well they act important like, but I think they are scared of people like Sam.

Neil: Pakis own all the shops round where I live.

Jack: Yeah and...and they're mostly stinkin' rich.

Neil: Not fair is it? Me dad's had to work bloody hard all his life (in catering) not like some of them.

GB: Do you think all of them are rich?

Neil: Well, you're not that's for sure! (laugh)

GB: So how is it that they are all rich?

Neil: That's coz they're Pakis ain't they?

These white children from working class backgrounds did not, or could not because of their own age and experience, detect the insecurity behind what they perceived to be the "important-like" behaviour of Asian children. Working class white children might also have been reacting to racist images of Asian and African-Caribbean people in the media. Children of this age group were on the whole more critical of people of their own than of the opposite sex. Racism frequently lurked on or just under the surface. Joanne had noticed the boys' playground behaviour of bullying, though in the case of girls' clothes, she was, as the above quote shows, far more critical. The disparaging reference to "curtains" has also been recorded by Elizabeth Grugeon (see Grugeon and Woods 1990, Chapter 4). The white boys did not see it like that; they could not empathise with the opposite sex. Earlier on in the same conversation Neil and Jack were not, by their own admission, doing too well at school; they were worried about their own future prospects in the job market. What was a surprise was their uninhibited discussion with me on this topic. In the majority of my white teenage "friends", such as Neil and Jack, I was the first Asian person with whom they said they had such detailed conversations about such sensitive matters. It was almost as though I was not one of the Asian adults whom they generally felt very negative about, for instance "Paki shop owners". I did ask them whether they were teasing me but decided after talking to them on several subsequent occasions that they were not in the above

instance. Later in the research I had asked two white teenagers what would happen if I told them my family owned a shop too?

Nothing we'd call your shop...umm ...let me think, Gazzi shop, yea that's it and we'd come and pester you and you'd have to sell all fags dead cheap!  
(Brendon, white 4th year, taped conversation)

If I had been living near the school, I would have had a never ending stream of visitors, and Brendon would most certainly have been one of the first ones. In terms of the relations between different ethnic groups, there were no adverse reports of gang fights or of open animosity between children of different ethnic backgrounds within the school; yet racism lurked constantly in the background.

In more than two years only two small incidents of racism came to my knowledge; one where four boys of different ethnic groups had reportedly clashed with each other half an hour after school in a nearby park about a stolen bicycle. The other was triggered off in school (see Chapter 9 for details) and was continued as a quarrel outside it. (There may have been relatively few openly racial clashes in the school because Asian and African-Caribbean children were in a minority.) Such instances with possible racial overtones, were not discussed openly in the staff room, at least not in my presence. There were several small instances of uneasy relationships between children at school to which the staff did not pay serious attention. These included children pushing each other in corridors and small scale accidental looking scuffles. Racial name calling was often reported to me by Asian children. It caused hurt feelings which were mentioned equally frequently.

What can I do about it, if my parent's country has become a regular swear word in English language? It's not my fault.  
(Kaneez, Pakistani 6th former, taped conversation)

Les Back (1990, pp. 16-18) has written about the symbolic power of particular terminology, such as the word "paki" used by children and young people to deliberately hurt their peers. The particular incident he reported took place between two white boys and a brother and

sister of mixed (English and Jamaican) origin where the term "paki" was evoked as a term of abuse.

Asian children at Cherrydale were having to cope with the presence of racism on their own. The staff never formally or openly acknowledged the existence of racism. Racist name calling was not an issue which was recorded or especially dealt with by the teachers. In terms of their experiences with white peers Asian children related instances of negative allusions to colour. Most of it was dealt with by being shrugged off as a joke. There was often an embarrassed laughter from the boys when they told me what had been happening to them for such a long time that it had become part and parcel of their daily existence. One way of dealing with it was to joke back about it.

Racism? D'you mean the time Old Jo banged me head in the door at me old school or do you mean them calling us names and us calling them **Mooli**? (white carrot shaped radish) (laughter).

(Nazim: 7, taped conversation)

Asian boys generally provided more examples of physical encounters with white boys when they spoke of racism than girls did. I could not possibly ask why the word **Mooli** caused such billowing laughter. It seemed to be a humorous but unmalicious reference to a phallic symbol, which most white children would not understand. I did not come across any currently used terminology among white children to provide a comparable example in English. The main significance in the above remark however is that a **Mooli** is white and would not be used for a non-white person.

When Stevie asked if it (brown skin colour) wears off with washing I told him I 'd sell it to him as sun tanning lotion! (laughter)

(Sunil: 33, taped conversation)

These jokes were so widespread and pervasive, that how they were responded to depended on the child's personality and the presence or absence of an audience. The first instance was related to me in the presence of Nazim's two Asian friends and it was an Asian in-joke.

The second incident occurred between Asian and white boys who knew each other quite well. The comment made by Stevie was uttered just as a joke would be shared between friends, thus numbing any chance of a serious retort from Sunil. The second incident related to me alone is an excellent example of the disarming which was going on at both levels and on both sides. Children who could not banter in a similar vein or who could not joke back, as some Bangladeshi boys could not because of their lack of competence in spoken English, would then become the butt of more racist jokes. Several Pakistani boys told me about the way in which two Bangladeshi boys were often harassed by their white peers because "they could not take a joke and joke back" (Qasim: 2, field notes).

Children coped with different kinds of incidents in different ways. Those children who had arrived in Britain recently often did not understand what was being said to them. Other Asian children, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian, who happened to be within earshot would painfully explain to them they told me, the meaning of derogatory words like "paki", "curry", "wog" and "scum".

Girls on the whole tried to do what their teachers told them. They attempted to ignore abusive language and tried not to take much notice.

You sort of know which ones are the nasty ones. You just stay away from them and when they call you paki you look away and pretend you didn't hear.

(Monira: 23, taped conversation)

There were rare reports, only two in two years, of a retaliation from Asian girls. "Anyone that calls me a name I call them a slag and that upsets them!" (Huma: 27, field notes).

Racist name calling was not talked about openly by the teachers and not recognised for what it was. Verbal abuse of any kind was not seen as a discipline problem generally; if

no physical attack occurred it was something the children had to learn to cope with on their own. The obvious place in the curriculum where racism could have been addressed directly, that is PSE, was timetabled at the same time as Urdu and Bengali so very few Asian children would have been present. Cherrydale School was tacitly supporting racism by not seeing it as an issue. Most children did not see it as an issue either, though some white fifth formers did. (The latter tried unsuccessfully to set up a students union at Cherrydale School. Counteracting racism was one of their proposed aims.) Whether Asian children managed to ignore the problem in their own terms or not, they were nevertheless very deeply hurt by the experience. They remembered vivid details and a sad expression would come over their faces as they shared with me the incidents which had caused them pain.

It happens all the time, like after the Urdu class, last week there was this group of fifth years waiting to come in after our class (Urdu classes were held in PSE lessons for three terms) you know they (fifth years) got there early and when Mr Khan left they all came into the room holding their noses saying 'Yuck I can smell curry, can you?'

(Sohel: 4, taped conversation)

It's same like it happens on the buses. No one wants to sit next to you sometimes, unless there is no other chair left in the room...and that hurts.

(Mala: 20, taped conversation)

Many children gave examples of everyday incidents which went unregistered and unreported at school and which in the school's terms would be classed generally under the title of bullying. Asian children saw them as something different from bullying. In one instance when the tape recorder was on I asked a group of three girls between the ages of 14 and 15, to explain to me how racial abuse was different from bullying. This is what they had to say:

Uzma: Well bullying is when you hit someone little, like when you trip them up.

Parveen: Yes and you ask them for money or you run away with their coke.

Tasneem: Yes. and in racism you say hurting things about...um um.. being brown and you call people nigger and paki.

Uzma: ...You don't have to be little, even big people can get it you know (meaning racism).

Parveen: ... And big people can't get bullied.

These girls were used to the experience but it took them a long time on tape to get to the point in their conversation where they explained it the way it is reported above. Never in their lives had they discussed such things with an adult they told me and although they all knew what they were talking about they had not actually teased out the difference before. They certainly did not tell their parents about it. When asked for their reasons for not sharing it, they said it would worry their parents unnecessarily, and also that like their teachers their parents would not be able to do anything about it. The view that teachers were unable or unwilling to help in this respect was widespread throughout the sample, with different degrees of criticism or tolerance.

I don't think teachers can stop it. They can't be everywhere can they? They can't be watching naughty people all the time.

(Salman: 25, field notes)

I think they are like this in this country. People don't call you that (paki) in India. Anyway they are so thick they don't know I am not Pakistani. Teachers don't know either. They are ignorant.

(Khushwant: 26, taped conversation)

Many Asian boys on the whole seemed to think, as the following quotation shows, that unless they were attacked physically, the matter did not require teachers' attention, and that it would go against their pride to complain about it. They did not want to be seen as cry babies.

I mean you can't go around being a cry baby each time someone calls you a dirty name. It's not cool, is it? You have to sort it out on your own.

(Tahir: 39, taped conversation)

On being pressed further they would say that they would prefer to sort things outside the school anyway. Girls never spoke about sorting things out, preferring to hide them from their parents and their teachers, thus becoming even more anxious.

Asian children, both girls and boys provided, unsought, elaborate explanations for this kind of behaviour by their white peers. The following extracts from children's diaries and taped

conversations shed some light on this.

Today that silly Sam called me paki again when we were queuing up, dinner time because I got there before he did. I think his parents are as stupid as him and they don't teach him good manners.

(From Qasim's diary)

I think there's good and bad people everywhere. It is just too bad if you get in the way of a bad one. Their parents are bad people that is why they (the children) are so bad. Tom's parents probably teach them it. My neighbour is a white old lady she is not bad. All goras (white people) are not bad.

(Amir: 36, taped conversation)

Not all children provided explanations for racism. Some got angry, others wanted to change the subject quickly, others looked pensive. But when explanations were offered, peer group racism was always explained by referring to white parents as the root cause. But they were able to make distinctions among white people. Amir was reluctant to generalise because not all of his experiences had been negative.

As we know, much of what happened to children at school was not shared by their parents. Interviewing parents about the level of racism experienced by their children would not yield accurate information. Optimistic assertions about racism based on information derived from parents may therefore be misleading, where it is not supplemented by ethnographic material collected in schools. For example, Ghuman and Gallop (1981) write:

A very optimistic picture emerges as regards prejudice in school, for neither Hindu nor Muslim families reported any discrimination at all. The general consensus of opinion was that teachers were very kind and understanding, and fair in their treatment of indigenous or immigrant children.

(p. 140)

Similarly, Smith and Tomlinson (1989) conclude:

These findings suggest that difficulties children would notice, such as racial hostility at school, are rare or that children have learnt to live with them. This is strongly confirmed by the survey of parents.

(p. 106, my emphasis)

Their latter assertion would need to be redefined if their research incorporated schools such as Cherrydale, to say at most that "children are learning to live with them on their own."



What parents from ethnic minority communities say about their children's experiences has to be verified with the same children before final assertions can be made about the presence or absence of discrimination and racism.

## 8.6

### Summary

Within both school and home, gender emerges as a significant factor in the use of space. The spaces used by girls were a subset of the spaces used by Asian boys. Children's autonomy or lack of autonomy in being able to select the space of their choice defined the nature of their interest and of the power relationship between them and those other people who inhabited the same space.

This chapter also described the different images which Asian girls and boys adopted. Asian children were having to cope with experiences like racism on their own because the school failed to openly acknowledge the existence of such a problem in their lives. Girls were more restricted in the kinds of close friendships they could successfully cultivate, as compared to Asian boys. Asian boys' attitude towards Asian girls differed from a tendency to tease them towards another extreme of "protecting" them if they were those girls' brothers. White and African-Caribbean children were on the whole better able to mix with each other socially as compared to Asian children, particularly Asian girls, whose humour and in-jokes were mostly confined to their own ethnic groups.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **ASIAN CHILDREN: RELATIONSHIP WITH CHERRYDALE SCHOOL**

#### **9.1**

##### **Introduction**

Much has been written about the effects of school processes on school children. Researchers have been interested in exploring student responses to different teaching styles and school ethos. In terms of the present study, it is important to look particularly at ethnographic studies of those secondary schools that have an ethnic minority intake including Asian children.

Wrights' (1986) ethnographic study was significant in the way it drew attention to the African-Caribbean experience of racism within secondary schools. It was however not able to focus similarly on the Asian experience. Mac an Ghail's (1988) study focused on the theme of "resistance within accommodation" which was according to him how some Asian and African-Caribbean young people in his sample reacted to their experiences of racism at school and college. Asian and African-Caribbean girls were united, and known as "The Black Sisters". They were able to use the school in a way that was "instrumental, that is, knowledge is not valued for its own sake but as a means to an end, that of gaining qualifications". But Asian and African-Caribbean boys experienced and "resisted" school rather differently. The "Rasta Heads" openly rejected school values and school curriculum, whereas Asian boys, in "The Warriors" as a working class sub-cultural group, put up

resistance and "carried on their anti-school practices covertly". The latter's resistance remained largely invisible to their teachers who took more notice of African-Caribbean boys. Although Mac an Ghail has looked at some of the aspects of social class, 'race' and gender, his focus on racism to the near exclusion of other factors can give the impression that if this aspect is rectified somehow all other problems would be resolved in school and college for these children. My research suggests a more complex picture. Undoubtedly racism is a very powerful constraining factor, but although Mac an Ghail had also negotiated access to these children's homes, the study did not consider the children's home related worries, such as the differences between African-Caribbean and Asian girls' responses to gender specific concerns. No analysis was presented of the young people's linguistic and cultural heritages, nor any staffroom and within-class ethnography.

Another recent secondary school based ethnographic study which looked at Asian children's experiences is that of Gillborn (1990). He concentrated on Asian male pupils, mainly under the heading of differentiation and polarization within the school, and found that

...in terms of their academic careers the Asian males in City Road experienced school in ways which resembled the careers of their white rather than their Afro-Caribbean peers.

(p. 100)

But the similarity in terms of the academic careers of white and Asian boys needs to be studied with more detailed knowledge of their social class and linguistic backgrounds, and their numbers/percentages in particular schools. Gillborn did not study Asian girls' views and experiences within the mixed comprehensive school. Wade and Souter (1992) studied British Asian girls, but not British Asian boys.

This chapter will attempt to address some of the omissions from previous studies by focusing on Asian children's experiences of Cherrydale and their expectations from their

school. This was to a great extent affected by the quality of their interactions with their peers and teachers. This chapter will draw heavily on Asian children's accounts of their daily encounters with their teachers.

The chapter will begin by describing children's categories of "good", "bad" and "normal" teachers. It will draw attention to those vivid instances which caused particular distress to children and those which Asian children quoted as examples of racism. The chapter will then explore what children felt about school more generally and what they wanted from it in their own terms. The effect of gender is also considered wherever possible.

## 9.2

### Asian children and their teachers

Like many other children in Cherrydale School, Asian children described some of their teachers in graphic detail. Some of the instances described include the experiences which they shared with the whole class. But they talked often in emotional terms about other events which they experienced individually. All this had implications for the categories in which children placed their teachers.

Before more details are presented of teachers who fall in different categories it is important to explain how these categories were derived from children's conversations and questionnaires and how they all fit together. Some children used words such as "caring", "kind hearted", "helpful" and "not-caring", "mean" and "unfair" whereas others used words such as "racist", "non racist" and "plain normal". All children claimed to know which teachers liked children and which ones disliked children. Unlike many Asian parents, Asian children did not assume that most teachers liked children in general. Asian children were clear in their own minds about what distinguished a good teacher from a bad one. The most

frequently used words throughout the sample were "good" and "bad" and "just normal". These three main categories cover all the teachers in the school. The children's category system was not always simple and straightforward. For instance whereas all racist teachers were "bad" teachers not all non-racist teachers were automatically "good" teachers. Most non-racist teachers were "just normal" teachers unless they displayed other attributes. These qualities are described in the section below. It was easier to detect from children's individual accounts the qualities of "bad" teachers than it was to immediately tell the difference between "good" and "normal" teachers in every single case. This was a difficult task and I had to confirm my understanding of Asian children's categories several times before arriving at the following conclusions from questionnaires and conversations.

There were altogether 60 teachers in Cherrydale school. 15 of these were consistently described as "bad" teachers. Of the "bad" ones five were "racist" teachers. There were eight "good" teachers in school and all the rest, that is 37 were "just normal". There was widespread consensus about this. Obviously not all children were taught by every single teacher but the reputations of the "good" and the "bad" teachers travelled through the school and children could explain the differences quite vividly. It is possible that some children could have been prejudiced (for or against) some teachers by knowing their reputations before actually meeting them. It must be said at the outset that children on whom I relied for most of the information in this chapter were not themselves ethnographers. They described recent and long remembered accounts of what they experienced as their realities.

Woods (1993, pp. 15-19) has discussed research on pupils' conception of the "good" and the "bad" teachers. Most of the pupils in previous studies like those in my sample thought that good teachers should be able to teach and make children work and keep control. Some

children in my study expressed a preference for a strict teacher so long as he or she made them work hard. The role played by humour in teacher-student relationships has been discussed by many researchers including Woods (1976), Walker and Goodson (1977) and Stebbins (1980). The children in my sample described the kind of humour they did not like. As in many previous studies (see Gannaway 1976 and Furlong 1977) "soft" teachers were seen as ineffective and described as "bad" teachers.

### 9.2.1

#### "Good" teachers

Asian children had quite a clear idea of who a good teacher was. This was a combination of the children's perceptions of the teacher's teaching abilities and the teacher's general attitudes towards them. What follows is an "ideal type" of the good teacher. Obviously not every good teacher had all these qualities. A good teacher was somebody who could control the class and make all children work. She or he was somebody with a sense of humour which did not touch on racist or sexist topics, neither would it verge on sarcasm. Children, irrespective of ethnicity and gender, were very offended by three particular teachers who were frequently sarcastic. Sarcasm was always equated in children's minds with arrogance and misuse of power. A good teacher was a fair minded teacher who preferably told children off in private and did not make a spectacle of them in public in front of their peers. (See also Docking 1987, p. 79.) Such a teacher would in addition praise children too and smile and not look serious all the time. Such teachers explained things very slowly so that everyone could understand them. They would not ask one child to explain things back to the whole class knowing full well that the child had not understood. A good teacher did not have one favourite but many favourites, each for a different occasion:

Take Mrs Nicholas, she likes Tom for carrying things, Jill for cleaning the board, me for giving things out, Sammy for tidying her table. Mr Thomas, now he is a different sort. He only chooses girls.

(Sunil: 33, taped conversation)

A good teacher gave clear instructions and did not scold individual children but reprimanded the whole class. A good teacher displayed every child's work at some time. A good teacher did not need to shout. Asian children, together with other children, made fun of teachers who shouted at them very frequently. Shouting caused silent hysteria at the back of the class in the case of those teachers who were not considered to be particularly good at controlling children. Some children offered to take me to good and bad teachers' classes, an invitation I could not resist but could not always accept.

Good teachers gave out notes to children who had missed their work because of absence or illness and did not often make them copy things from somebody else because that would make that somebody feel very important. Good teachers were supposed to set a little bit of homework from time to time, which they marked promptly, but they were forgiven if they did not. Children looked forward to their lessons. Good teachers were described by many children as "X" (excellent), "brill" (brilliant) and "ace".

Above all, good teachers did not send many children in detention or in the annexe and they did not need to "go running to the Deputy Head for cover" (Yusuf: 12). Good teachers confiscated sweets and chewing gum but returned them to the children at the end of the class or made the child share them with everyone else including the teacher. Good teachers liked children. They were interested in cricket and football results and in television programmes such as Eastenders and Neighbours. Children could talk to them about "normal things" (Mala: 20).

A good teacher was someone who went out of the way to help those children who were having problems. Instances of such help quoted to me were a teacher intervening with other

teachers on behalf of the students to let them have extra time to hand in an assignment, giving up lunch breaks to help children, occasionally visiting children at home without complaining about them to their parents about mischief done at school. This category was a personal one for individual children and was linked to the teachers' general attitude to the whole class as well as their attitude to the individual.

Among Asian children it was interesting to note that the words "caring teachers" within the "good" category were most often mentioned by the Bangladeshi newcomers to Britain. They were most grateful for any kind of help which was offered to them, most particularly help with English. They were the most appreciative of any children in the sample as far as relationships with teachers were concerned. Any negative encounters they may have had with their white peers were offset against the help teaching assistants and ancillary staff offered them mostly within the class. They were not withdrawn from their normal classes for extra lessons. They were equally happy about any rare home visits they received from teaching assistants. They did not differentiate between teachers and teaching assistants. So long as they helped them with their English, Bangladeshi children treated them with equal respect. They were shocked at the noisy behaviour of the rest of the class and thought children were not taught to respect their teachers in England. This would just not happen in Bangladesh.

They are so naughty. They swear you know, about their teachers. I think that is very bad. Very, very bad.

(Hasina: 50, field notes)

They are lucky. They have nice building and things to do here...and they don't like teachers, some of them. I don't understand that.

(Nazar: 44, taped conversation)

These children had experienced deprivation and in some cases could see the contrast between the school they attended in Bangladesh and the school they were attending in Cherrytown. They found it very difficult to understand the attitude of many children in their



classes. They held particularly negative opinions about their Asian peers' disobedience. They felt very ashamed they told me if another Asian child misbehaved in school because that spoilt the name of all Asians. They were rarely in top sets. They never participated in a whole class discussion or in anything which required a team effort at class level; they were thus heavily dependent on teachers for most of their interactions in English. By contrast, they excelled in Bengali classes. Success in Bengali helped to build their confidence. These particular Bangladeshi children could not believe that teachers could be racist towards them. They did not understand or failed to recognise how that could be possible.

Teachers are there to help you. If you are good, teacher will help you. If you are naughty, what can teacher do? Racist, you mean rude? How can teacher be rude? Children are rude.

(Saghar: 19, taped conversation)

From the other children, there were by comparison fewer examples of caring acts which teachers had performed. But it could be argued that the criteria described by Bangladeshi newcomers to Britain were not applicable to the rest of the sample. Even so, I did hear examples about some individual teachers, who had in the children's opinions helped them greatly.

Well Mr McLaren you see. He is caring. He will always stop and ask how the lesson was and if things are OK at home and he looks worried when I miss his lesson...and he gives out notes to me and that is very kind.

(Qasim: 2, taped conversation)

Mr Jones actually talked to my father and made him let me go on a trip. He said he would look after me and make Mrs Smith personally responsible...my father listened. No one else is so good in this school, not for me anyway. Most teachers are plain normal.

(Parveen: 8, taped conversation)

The reputation of being a good and caring teacher mostly had to be earned through personal one to one interaction.

### 9.2.2

#### "Bad" teachers

Again, what follows is an "ideal type". Bad teachers could neither control children nor teach them. They were boring people. They did not like children and should be teaching old age pensioners who would "sit deaf and dumb to listen to boringness" (Manzar: 3). They shouted all the time and got very red in the face. They had "pokey" and "squeaky" voices and they could not respond to a joke from the children. They felt they were there to teach and everything else was a waste of time including cricket and football and television programmes like Grange Hill and Neighbours. Bad teachers liked one person in the whole class whom the rest of the class made fun of next day or in the next lesson. Children often sat and discussed what kind of a human being had married or was going to marry such a boring teacher.

Maahin: She'd (the teacher) probably feed him spinach soup everyday.  
Shama: Yuck and cabbage and brussels sprout salan (curries). Yuck yuck.  
(Taped conversation)

Sohel: He (the teacher) will spend all his time looking grumpy. He'll never buy his wife a treat. He never gives us sweets not even (at) end of term.  
(Taped conversation)

Food always seemed important to children of this age. It was interesting however that Maahin and Shama thought in terms of the female teacher feeding her partner/husband and Sohel thought in terms of him buying her presents. Bad teachers could not control naughty noisy children. They could not make their lessons interesting. They were very predictable in their behaviour and the work they set. They never went out on school trips with the children. They were unfair people who picked on individual children lesson after lesson. Once they made up their mind about individual children they did not change their opinion easily. These teachers were caricatured with tremendous zeal and did not seem real when the children described them eloquently with a mixture of passion and humour. There were, time and time again in conversations with both boys and girls, vivid instances and live

demonstrations of humour as a coping strategy:

Once old grumpoo don't like you, he never never can like you. TOUGH!  
(shrug of one shoulder and a wink copying a teacher. This teacher often said "tough")

(Asad: 5, field notes)

Bad teachers were not open to reasoning. Children could not talk them out of their apparently perpetual bad mood. Bad teachers were also moody people who did not tell the children what exactly it was that the children had done to deserve the bad mood. They were adults with whom children could not make amends. They did not tell the children anything about their personal life. Bad teachers were more likely than good teachers to have a nick name. Asian children used the same names which the rest of the children used. In Cherrydale School these were "Slow torture" (boring long lessons), "Speedy" (Late comer to class), "Dracula" (shouted to frighten children), "Uniformy" (wore the same clothes to school daily), "Suede Shoes" (wore worn out leather shoes, not suede) and "Postman Pat" (sent many complaint letters home and put many children on report, that is, children had to get a piece of paper signed for good behaviour by each teacher for a week).

Racist teachers were always placed in the bad teachers' category. They stereotyped Asian children. They thought, several children separately told me, that most Asian girls got married at 16 or soon after and most Asian boys were noisy and male chauvinists. (Although I heard some comments from teachers which would confirm the fairly widely held view about girls, I did not hear comments which would confirm the opinion held about boys.) These were teachers who always looked serious and wore a scowl on their faces and according to the children did not have any sense of humour. They actually managed to hurt the children by their attitude both by saying things and by not saying things and pretending not to notice hurtful behaviour which was being perpetrated against the Asian children. Children told me they could always sense if a teacher fell in the racist category.

There was a possibility of some children calling those teachers racist in whose lessons they were having particular difficulties. It was difficult to ascertain whether some children were blaming their own problems and those their parents were facing at home on the teacher as a figure of authority, or whether, their accounts were wholly or partly true. Racist incidents and the number of times they were mentioned to me by different individual children are set out below in Table 9a. They were mentioned repeatedly in connection with particular teachers whose classes I was not able to observe. In my presence the teachers whom the children put in the racist category did not do the kinds of things Asian children said that they normally did. This is not altogether surprising, given my presence as an identifiable Asian adult.

I repeatedly asked the children for concrete evidence to support their references to teachers' racism, such as perhaps the atmosphere in the classroom. This was not always an easy topic for the children to broach as many instances might sound ambiguous and unprovable. The powerful feelings expressed like the ones indicated in the following sections made it difficult to deny their negative impact. If the children felt upset about an incident it had a dimension of subjective truth for them which had to be taken into account and dealt with very sensitively. Further details of Asian children's experiences of teacher racism are explored in a section below.

A significant point to mention here, which came up very frequently was that most Asian children in Cherrydale School did not remember having been taught by any Asian mainstream teachers in Britain. Those who were taught by the first mainstream non-white African-Caribbean teacher at Cherrydale School found her strict but good because she forced them to do their best and because she was really angry when they missed school. Most Asian children whom she taught thought she was caring and they put her in the

"good" category even though two Asian girls admitted that they were terrified of her. Only two children mentioned having been taught for one term by an Asian Business Studies teacher.

### 9.2.3

#### "Normal" teachers

The normal teachers, who were most numerous in Cherrydale, were situated between the two extremes described above. They did not have any outstanding negative attributes. They were sometimes caricatured in the names which children bestowed upon them and yet they seemed to be on the whole nondescript. The children had little to say about them and they did not spend much time talking about them but to say things to the effect that: "If you don't hassle him he don't hassle you" (Yusuf: 12). Another interesting and highly original use of descriptive language for the normal teacher was that used by the confident bilingual Uzma (9). "He is OK. What can I say? Not very warm, not very cold, just **kunkuna!**" (meaning lukewarm). A normal teacher was mostly a harmless, fair minded person who would occasionally do peculiar things like "phoned my father, just imagine! To ask if he'd come to parents evening. Mostly he's normal. Mostly he doesn't do that" (Asad: 5). Children's general opinions about what kinds of pupils teachers liked best were mostly based on their interactions with their normal teachers.

All children had an opinion about what sort of pupils were ones that the teachers liked and what kind of pupils were the ones the teachers did not like and why. They could tell me with touching honesty which teachers they themselves were good to and which ones they did not much care about or were disobedient with, and why. Predictably they were on their best behaviour with the good teachers and had different coping strategies to deal with the bad ones. With normal teachers they claimed to behave normally.

#### 9.2.4

##### **Distress caused by teachers**

There were many instances of Asian children reporting individual teachers who "picked" on them and made an example of them and African-Caribbean children rather than white children.

Last week David kept talking to me in Maths and he never said anything to him for ages. When I turned around to tell him to shut up I got sent out. That's not fair is it? If you answer back he (the teacher) goes mad.

(Tahir: 39, taped conversation)

I think Mr Hawkins is racist you know because each time I put my hand up or another Black or Asian kid does, he doesn't ask us. He always asks a white kid. You come and see for yourself.

(Shakeel: 35, taped conversation)

In another incident related again to Asian boys' effort to work hard in class I was told that

You know when you get stuck in your work and you put your hand up to ask for help, she never comes. And if you moan then she will come very near the bell time and then you stay behind (in your lesson) don't you, till the next lesson, because all the white kids will have done it and you won't. This happens (to me) so many times. And what can I do about it? Can't tell other teachers.

(Sunil: 33, taped conversation)

Incidents repeatedly brought up in conversations are summarised in Table 9a.

**TABLE 9a**

**Incidents of alleged teacher racism**

Instances quoted of teachers' racist behaviour.	Number of occurrences reported by different children.
1. Not given the chance to answer questions in class.	23 = 19 boys, 4 girls.
2. Not given any responsibility in class (giving out books etc.).	15 = 12 girls, 3 boys.
3. Being singled out for punishment or admonishment.	35 = 33 boys, 2 girls.
4. Not being helped in class.	25 = 14 boys, 11 girls.
5. Being ignored.	12 = 10 boys, 2 girls.
6. Teachers not believing complaints against white peers.	21 = 21 boys.
7. Teachers being racially abusive of other students in their absence. (All references about 5 particular teachers)	16 = 5 boys, 11 girls.

There were ten children who individually explained to me what exactly it was which made them feel so uncomfortable with certain teachers. A random selection of incidents which hurt the children, and which they considered racist but too petty to mention to their parents or other teachers, are reported below. I was not present at any of these incidents.

It was when we were going to draw pictures of our teacher in Art and he said "Oh no you can't draw me in shorts, you can't do that I'm Muslim and Muslims don't show their legs!"

(Parveen: 8, field notes)

This was said to a Muslim girl in front of the whole class which laughed aloud leaving her most embarrassed. There was implied sexism in the remark, besides the allusion to Muslims.

In cooking we were talking one day about recipes and different dishes and one teacher said if we had ever eaten nignogs because that was one of the things written in a book she had, called Good Housekeeping. Karen (African-Caribbean child) was not in the class then.

(Tasneem: 11, taped conversation)

Tasneem knew that it was something which would have hurt Karen a lot. What saddened her was that of all the dishes in the book the teacher made it a point to mention this one. They did not make that particular dish in the end.

It was that French teacher. All of us (Asian) children get into trouble with her sooner or later. She goes on and bloody on about how French is the best language in the world, and how some people speak funny sounding languages...

(Qasim: 2, taped conversation)

Qasim's Urdu was quite good and he tended to speak Urdu with two friends. He felt she was talking about Asian languages in particular. African-Caribbean girls too told me about this particular teacher's "stupid, dumb" behaviour. This was further confirmed by white children who attended her class and who felt that she was unduly harsh with children from ethnic minority backgrounds. Yet the children felt that she did not actually do anything outrageous enough for them to report her to anyone.

But you can see racist teachers are like that. You can't actually prove anything about them often...They just are (racist).

(Saira: 38, taped conversation)

The incidents above are about language, culture and food, all of the things which were important to the children and about which they felt highly sensitive. The important common factor in all these reported incidents was that the girls and boys did not feel able to do anything about it. The other finding was that although the children were hurt by the experiences, they felt these incidents were too petty to report to anyone. On probing deeper it became obvious that even if they wanted to talk about this to someone they would not know which particular person in school they should talk to. Besides, there was at that time no equal opportunities statement in the school and no statement of pupils' rights. It was all very ambiguous, so that when such incidents occurred the children did not know how seriously to take them, or who to turn to. They talked to other Asian friends about it, they told me, and left it at that.



**Racism and the teaching staff**

The incidents mentioned above were different in degree and kind from the incidents the children considered much more serious, which were consistently mentioned about particular "bad" teachers. One of these was lack of action on the teachers' part when children were being racist towards each other in the teachers' presence. One typical incident reported to me in this connection was by a friend of the boy who was "picked on".

One day after the test Mrs Hinds was calling out names of kids who got high marks. Someone asked who got the lowest marks and the teacher said "Zafar Ali". Someone shouted at the back "All Pakis are dumb". Everyone laughed. Everyone heard it, even Mrs Hinds...She didn't do nothing. She pretended she never heard it. There was no punishment, no...Then the same damn teachers tell you to ignore it, just like they do.

(Salman: 25, experience related in 4th year, taped conversation)

Zafar, to whom I later spoke, was not the only one who said that teachers were really good at pretending not to hear offensive remarks which were aimed at children from ethnic minority backgrounds. Zafar was so incensed about the way no reprimand followed the comment from his classmate, that he told me he did not go to school for two whole days. He said he just sat in the park, nursing his pride. He said he had got low marks because he had been ill the previous week and did not know they were going to have a test, otherwise he would have been better prepared. He did not talk to his parents about it because he said he did not want to worry them. His paternal grandmother had died around that time and his father was very anxious about going away to Pakistan to take part in the burial. It was his battle. The school was not told about Zafar's other pressures at home because he felt that the school was:

Good at kicking you when you are down, if they can't help me with studies  
how can they help in other things?

(Zafar: 32, taped conversation)

He was convinced that he had to learn to be a "strong man" and would have to solve any problems on his own.

Some children would call out offensive names then, at a lack of response, those children then hurled bags across the floor to trip up children who would not respond to racist name calling. As this mostly happened during lunch breaks and after school, I was told that teachers tried not to notice. Now and then, some Asian children told me, things got out of hand.

Tahir: They call us paki, bingo, curry chappati, curly worly (reference to hair, aimed at both African-Caribbean and Asian children).

Bilal: Yeah and umm...curtain, greasy (oily hair) and when we are in a gang we call them honky tonky, pagan, red necks, piggy wiggy...If we are not in a gang, tough luck ain't it!

(Taped conversation)

It was difficult to be sure how far teachers were aware of the prevalence of racial name calling at the school. Not a single teacher during the course of this research once mentioned it to me as one of his or her worries. It never formed the subject of serious discussion in the staff room during all the time I was there, though it was clearly a major daily issue for many Asian and African-Caribbean children.

When teachers did take action it was often seen sarcastically by the Asian children as an act of tokenism and did not give out a message of real concern or reassurance. Such critical incidents were more often mentioned to me by boys. The following is a typical example where the teachers' intervention was seen by the Asian boys in the class as "a real good pretending to care". It was reported to me by Nazim's friend Amir.

In class that day one boy was giggling and pulling faces at Nazim. Then he called Nazim paki, so Nazim told Jimmy that he'll get him after school. I don't know how Cole (form teacher) got to know about it. He was not in class at the time, he had gone to get the stapler. When Cole asked Jimmy Manders he said "I wasn't calling him paki. I was making jokes about them other Asian peoples that's all." You know what Cole did? He told Jimmy Manders not to do that again and made them shake hands...Ha!...Jimmy wasn't put in detention. Now he's going around doing it to other little children.

(Amir: 36, taped conversation)

There were instances quoted to me by African-Caribbean and Asian children, of spiral provocation between white and non white boys, on both sides, which ended in the African-Caribbean or Asian boys being put in detention or being sent to "the annexe" which was a form of solitary confinement during class time. The teachers who witnessed the final act, which acted as the last straw, did not always seem to want to objectively explore details about the build up behind the particular incident which led to the Asian child's punishment. The following incident is an illustration of this. The child who was eventually punished was seen as the loser in the event by his opponent and his peers, thus adding insult to injury. Whenever the teachers punished an Asian child, or an African-Caribbean child in such circumstances it was construed by the punished child as a racist act because in the child's estimation the white child got away scot free. Teachers did not appear to be fair minded from these elaborate accounts.

It was going on and on between us for days, in Maths in English then in PE Kevin beat me with a hockey stick on my legs during the Games lesson. I told him to stop it. After the lesson I asked him why he did it. He said he'd do it again. So my mate grabbed him and I hit him. Williams and Hicks (teachers) annexed me and my mate all day. They said they will expel me if I'm caught again! Nobody asked him why he hit me with the hockey stick! These are good racist teachers...huh, and they knew!

(Dilip: 42, taped conversation)

The Asian boys in all these instances expected better behaviour and more fairness from their teachers because they were adults. In the event of that not happening in the boys' estimation, it was seen as collusion between white people at the expense of Asians, and added a kind of subterranean tension which the teachers did not seem to do anything about.

Although it is very rare for examples of racism by teachers to occur openly in an Asian or African-Caribbean researcher's presence during ethnographic research, one instance that could arguably be interpreted in this way did occur in my presence when the tape recorder was left running and I was making notes. This was construed as racism on the part of the

teacher by the Asian boy who was unfairly punished. It was the only incident of its kind which I witnessed in several months of fieldwork, and it occurred during a typically misguided, mismanaged, noisy, uncontrolled Humanities class, which always seemed to start five to seven minutes late. The teacher Amanda Paine used to enter looking harassed and leave even more harassed. Time passed very slowly, even for a researcher, in her lessons, and the children had nicknamed her "slow torture". I was sitting behind Asad and Shakeel at the back of the class. The following account is based on a transcript of my tape of the lesson, supplemented from my field notes.

As my field notes said at the time all the boys in the class seemed to sit in the back and concentrated in the left half of the room. The girls were sitting mostly in the front rows.

(Fifteen minutes into the lesson, tape recording)

AP: You must work out what you were doing from last week. Then you can do today's work.

Paul: But Miss what were we doing last week?

John: (shouting) Yea. He don't know nothing Miss.

Chloe: It was them graph things with the blue ink.

Noise level was rising slowly. Shakeel sitting in front of me laughed aloud. Paine fixed him with a stare (field notes)

Paul: But Miss. Miss ask John to stop it this minute.

John was sitting behind Paul on Shakeel's right at an adjacent table and was trying to pull Paul's bag lying on the floor towards himself, using his foot as an aid. Asad was sitting on Shakeel's left. (Field notes.)

Asad: Fancy footwork, John. (tape)

John: Shut up Asad. You keep out of this.

(John and Asad look at each other, field notes)

Ann: Miss can I borrow a sharpener?

(field notes)

As my field notes said at the time Ann walked across to Liz's table without waiting for an answer. With her back to Miss Paine she put a smartie in her mouth, winked at me and went away with the sharpener. Ann put her hand up looking at me. "Miss can somebody help me?" Miss Paine nodded. I walked across to Ann's table to help her. It seemed Miss Paine had no intention of getting up. Noise level was quite high. Miss Paine was reading the book to herself. Some children, mostly girls and one African-Caribbean boy, were trying desperately to concentrate on their work.

When I got back approximately ten minutes later to my previous place there was an argument going on between Asad and Shakeel on the one hand and John and Kevin on the other. (Field notes.) In the general noise of the classroom the conversation had not been audible from Ann's table. Something had flared up in the few minutes I was away. The following is a transcript of the tape recording.

Shakeel: Your referee cheats in cricket any way.

John: Pakis are always playing foul. Now you should know that.

Shakeel: (looking at me, field notes) Did you hear that?

John: What can she do? The whole world knows. I saw it with me own eyes on telly. (Reference to the Shakoor Rana and Mike Gatting incident in Faisalabad, Pakistan. It was cricket season).

The atmosphere was getting charged. Miss Paine was busy writing the date on the blackboard. Lot of general noise in class which sounds incoherent on tape. Shakeel looking very provoked, shoved the book aside and pushed the chair back (from notes immediately after the lesson). Lull in noise level.

John: Look at him! Paki Pakora. (Latter said in a near whisper but audible to Shakeel, Asad and me, field notes)

Shakeel: I'll smash your face in, you clown (said very loudly, tape recording)

AP: (turning around) Right that's enough. Shakeel leave the class this minute.  
(Field notes and tape recording.)

Shakeel: But Miss, (tape recording)

AP: Out! Go and stand outside...God these boys!

I wrote in my field notes at the time that Shakeel made a lot of noise collecting things and putting them in his bag. There was a look of great satisfaction on John's face. There was pin drop silence in the class. Ann and Teresa and Huma looked sympathetically at Shakeel who walked out showing a fist to John. (Field notes.)

After the lesson I asked Shakeel what he would do. He said that the teacher was racist and should be sacked but that he would sort things out with John eventually. I had tried to ask John what would happen to him, but he just pushed me aside as he walked away when the bell rang. Miss Paine's decision to send an Asian boy out instead of punishing both boys was racist in its outcome if not in intention. Had both boys been Asian or white the matter might not have had racist connotations. The incident led next day to a fight between three white and three Asian boys outside school premises and outside school hours. Both Shakeel and John were involved. Shakeel's friends told me about the fight. They did not tell their teachers.

When Shakeel was sent out of the class it had seemed an irrational, impulsive act on the teacher's part. Other children had also been making a noise and not just Shakeel. It had seemed surprising to me at the time that Miss Paine did not keep the quarrelling parties behind to try and ascertain the circumstances which had led to the incident. Miss Paine did not leave the classroom to explore what had happened. She did not send either of the two boys to detention classes. She did not to my knowledge discuss the incident with a more senior teacher. If she had brought it out into the open, my presence in the classroom as a

researcher together with comments from their peers who saw the whole event, could have been used to establish a fairer outcome for the boys. At the time it had seemed very odd to me that she did not discuss the incident with me. One possible explanation for this could be that she was not accountable to me and did not consider me worthy of discussing the incident with. She may not have discussed the incident with me either because she knew I was quite close to some of the children, or because it might have amounted to acknowledging that she had failed to maintain discipline in her class. She might have been aware of my need to keep what I had observed confidential. I am not sure whether she would have discussed it with a male researcher or a white researcher. It is possible that Miss Paine was tired that day and wanted to go home. It was the second last period on a Thursday afternoon. Perhaps she had had a difficult day or had taught unusually demanding classes on that particular day. It is hard to believe that Miss Paine thought the matter would end there as far as the boys were concerned. She had even seen John's rude behaviour towards me and had not admonished him. Perhaps she did not feel responsible for the boys' behaviour.

As a teacher she could have done a number of things. She could have asked the whole class to be quiet for some time. She could have changed the boys' places. If she felt she had to send Shakeel out she could have sent him on an errand instead of sending him out as a punishment. She could have read something to the whole class. She could even have asked me to go and find a senior member of staff. Miss Paine did none of these things. She did make some comments to me in passing immediately after the lesson but my opinion was not sought. She did not once acknowledge that her style of teaching and lack of classroom control had something to do with what happened. She thought the boys in her class were the worst she had ever seen and blamed them for making things difficult by wasting her time. She could not believe Shakeel could ever be good in any class. I told her

about how good he always was in Urdu classes. She looked surprised and unconvinced. She did not mention John's rudeness towards me. It is just possible that she did not see it, but that does not seem very likely. Miss Paine did not once mention that she could improve her class management. The reason she let me come into her classes was that she felt I was following Huma, Paul and Asad in different classes.

I felt very uneasy at the end of each of these lessons and after this particular incident considered asking one of the deputy heads to do something to support the children. In the end I did not because I feared that if the news of my indiscretion travelled through the teaching staff it would have put an end to my access to other classes. It was a most difficult decision.

When four Asian girls at fifth and sixth form level, who were better achievers than Shakeel, spoke of racism, it was never in the context of physical incidents or physical violence, but in terms of implied allusions. It was as though the girls began to categorise in their own minds as racist, incidents which had happened to them in the past as well as noticing those which occurred now. These girls spoke bitterly of being "used by the teachers when the teachers needed my help but not helping me out when I needed their help" (Saira: 38). That could be because there were more Pakistani than Indian or Bangladeshi girls whose "services" were needed by the school. Pakistani parents were more likely to come to school as compared to Indian or Bangladeshi parents (see Chapter 5: 5.7.1). There were fewer Indian than Pakistani and Bangladeshi children in Cherrydale School (see Chapter 4, Table 4d). Asian girls were hardly ever excluded or punished at Cherrydale in the way boys were. Asian girls were seen by most of their teachers as passive quiet creatures who were "really well brought up" according a Maths teacher. Nevertheless, these girls were bitter when they realised what had happened to them along the way. It was interesting to find that none of



the fourth or third year girls had similar complaints to make, even though, judging by what the fifth formers and sixth formers were saying, they too were being "used" in the same way. One incident which captures the feelings of being "used" is set out below:

Each time they wanted to worm things out about Asian children they asked other Asian children. Me? I was always called in to translate for them, you know, for parents who only speak Punjabi. At that time I felt very important of course. I thought look Miss asked me from the whole school. Miss Ellis told me I was so intelligent and reliable! But when it came for the time for me to apply to University they did not believe I would get the grades. They could have said earlier, I would have brushed up my revision better...I was stupid. I believed the school was on my side! I think they were racist, don't you?

(Parveen: 8, taped conversation)

Parveen's story raises several interesting points. The school did not have or did not want to maintain close contact with a member of staff, or with somebody at the Multicultural Centre whose help could be sought when needed. Instead the school had to rely on children who were not really in a position to refuse. At most it shows a lack of sensitivity on the school's part. It was difficult on the basis of available data to ascertain whether Miss Ellis actually said that Parveen was intelligent and reliable. Assuming words to such effect were used by the teacher, it is possible that they were used only in the context of translation and not as a general statement. I did not have access to Parveen's predicted grades or to her progress reports over the years to check her achievements against teachers' predictions. It could be the case that Parveen assumed she would be able to gain entry into a University very easily and it turned out to be harder than she had imagined. By her own admission she had not revised as well as she could have. Miss Ellis had left the school by the time I learnt Parveen's story, so I could not hear Miss Ellis' account of the same. To call the school racist on the strength of Parveen's story alone would seem to me to be premature. If such incidents occurred repeatedly among Asians and African-Caribbeans as opposed to white working class students then there would be reason to think that Cherrydale was actively discriminating against ethnic minority students. I do not have comparable data.

Another incident quoted to me of being "used" was one related by a bus driver's daughter. The same incident was quoted to me by a white parent who later became a local councillor and who was present on the occasion one year before I started the research, thus confirming Saira's account. Saira said she had reached the sixth form by the time it dawned on her what had been happening.

You would not believe it! There I was dumbo idiot standing in front of so many people in the hall, telling them all white black and all (prospective parents) what a good school Cherrydale was and how all Asian parents should send their children to it because here we could wear our own dress and LOOK here we could study what we liked! Bloody hell! Two years after that I discovered that the same school didn't care a toss! They forgot, forgot to tell me I needed Biology O levels to get into medicine! Mr Hill helped me but he never used me. To them (rest of the school) I am just Muslim, just a bus driver's daughter. That to me is real racism... You can never quite prove it, right? They all defend each other. You should have seen them when they needed my help! I feel so sick I can't bear to think what an idiot I have been. God!!

(Saira: 38, taped conversation)

When I enquired about Saira at school, especially from teachers who she said had "used" her, there was an uncomfortable silence. Whereas previously they had been talking happily, teachers dropped their gaze and looked away. One of her previous teachers said "Saira was all right she had never needed much help." It is difficult to verify whether teachers forgot to advise Saira or she was advised about Biology and she forgot. Perhaps the particular teachers Saira came across were ignorant about the entry requirements. Saira singled out one teacher who came to her rescue and wrote to medical colleges on her behalf. He was the Head of History. Apart from him all other teachers had fallen in Saira's estimation. When Saira was asked to talk to people about her school in public she was very flattered. It was only when she failed to gain admission to a medical college that she became self-conscious and put it down to teachers' alleged prejudices about her social class and religious background. It may be that teachers had simply not thought about her as a potential University student and had not considered what subjects she needed to take for

a particular University course. It is also possible that had Saira not encountered any difficulties with her intended course she might not have felt that most teachers were being racist towards her.

It is significant that not a single Asian boy related a similar incident to me where he felt "used".

## 9.4

### Teachers and the gender effect

Asian girls and boys interpreted school processes differently. Each had a lot to say about the way teachers treated the other. Asian boys thought Asian girls were treated leniently whereas Asian girls thought Asian boys were ostentatious and therefore often got themselves into trouble.

#### 9.4.1

##### **Asian boys' accounts**

Almost all children - boys and girls, regardless of ethnicity - said that girls could get away with breaking "small rules" (Oliver, white 4th year) more easily than the boys, and that teachers were particularly partial towards Asian girls. This opinion was first brought to my attention by white boys who felt that they were "got at" (Simon, white 4th year) by teachers more often than girls were. There was, according to what the children described, an informal hierarchy among those who were caught.

They (Asian girls) can come in late, even ten minutes late into Science and get away with it. Teachers are real softies with Asian girls...Take that Amina. She will look at her shoes and mumble something and walk away. Dead cool like...You watch me when I try mumbling into my shoes...oh boy oh boy Goggles will annexe me if I do that.

(Joseph, white, 4th year, taped conversation)

There were several examples quoted in this vein by eleven boys, Asian, African-Caribbean and white. According to the boys, Asian girls in particular were excused more easily if they failed to hand in their work on time, or if they truanted. If they were caught they were let off lightly. They were not scolded for misbehaving in class or for answering back at teachers. They were not reprimanded for copying work from the girl they were sitting next to in class. They were seldom caught while talking in class.

Asian boys also mentioned arranged marriages when they spoke of teachers' attitudes towards Asian girls.

It is very simple. They (teachers) feel sorry for you. You are doomed. You are an Asian girl with arranged marriage written on your face...Of course if you are a boy you can never never have arranged marriage...oh no.

(Nazim: 7, taped conversation)

This seemed to be a particularly sore topic with both Asian girls and boys. Girls felt the teachers stereotyped them. Boys felt that teachers were not concerned about them.

Something else emerged from talking to boys: Pakistani and Indian boys felt neglected. They told me in great detail how in their opinion teachers treated Bangladeshi newcomers to England differently from the way they themselves were treated.

Manzar: They say nothing to you if they can feel pity for you. "Oh poor thing Bengali boy, you're new to our wonderland we better pity you, we better not tell you off!!" (said in a high pitched tone, mimicking a teacher) that is what they say to themselves. But if you are good in speaking English they don't try to make you better, get you gooder marks. They think you're fine!

Dilip: Yes. Once you speak English, you don't get real help no more.  
(Taped conversation)

It was true that the school had no provision for offering second stage help in English. It was significant however, that boys like Manzar and Dilip were able to diagnose their need. Asian girls did not talk about favouritism or about teachers' patronising attitudes towards newly arrived Bangladeshi girls. This does not rule out the occurrence of such incidents

among Bangladeshi girls.

Asian boys, like boys in general, said they could not respect teachers who could not control the classes and make the children work. They had more contempt for "soft" male teachers than for "soft" female teachers. The boys both Asian and white related instances where

Downs just stands and smiles! I mean Jeff throws books around. Peter pulls faces. And there is Old Softie smiling!

(Kevin, white 4th year, field notes)

Soft teachers whose class management allowed disruptive noise to rise to the detriment of classroom activities were, as far as the boys were concerned, especially despised.

What teachers thought about Asian children is discussed at greater length in chapter 10.

#### 9.4.2

##### Asian girls' accounts

Those girls who saw themselves as "just normal, not very thick not very clever," (Halima: 48) seemed to be judging themselves according to the ability band in which they were placed by most of their subject teachers, though it was difficult to say so with absolute certainty because of lack of access to children's records. These girls and those whom their peers expected to get into University or college said similar things. They thought that boys were forced to prove themselves to their male friends in a peculiar kind of combat, and that girls did not labour under that sort of pressure.

You know how it is, each boy has to show off to his friends about how strong he is. So he must belong to a gang to look strong. Girls don't have to do that. They can if they want to, but they don't have to.

(Naz: 1, taped conversation)

Many girls, Asian, white and African-Caribbean felt that boys on the whole got into more trouble with teachers than they themselves did. They did not think that Asian boys got into

more trouble than white boys did, a point disputed heatedly by the Asian boys. This happened according to most of the girls because boys were more mischievous and also because they knew they could get away with mischief with less drastic consequences than Asian girls could as far as their parents were concerned.

They won't be made to stay at home to help at home will they? I mean if anything goes wrong...(if they overstep the limit at school)...if you are a girl it will be quite bad. You may not be able to go to college.

(Amina: 13, taped conversation)

The gossip factor mentioned earlier was evoked again and again in this context. In terms of teachers' attitudes, girls complained that many of their teachers assumed that they would be married off young. They said that the ghost of arranged marriage was more often mentioned by their male than their female teachers.

"Your sister got married then? Was it last weekend. When will you get married. Kalsoom?" he says. He has no business saying that to me...It was after the bell went so no one heard it, but still..

(Kalsoom: 24, taped conversation)

It seemed that Asian girls were much more aware of an audience, of peers overhearing comments made by teachers about them, mostly because of their upbringing at home. They were far more self-conscious than Asian boys were. Many Asian girls mentioned arranged marriage as a vexed topic.

It is difficult to say much on the strength of available data, about the extent to which white teachers' assumptions about Asian girls' early arranged marriages may have negatively affected their expectations of them academically. This would probably affect more the life chances of those Asian girls who were placed in lower and middle ability bands. Six Asian girls and two Asian boys in particular spoke bitterly about the low academic expectations their teachers had of them. This was mostly, though not always, true of the first child in the family, through whom the education system was being tested by the parents. (See Chapters 4 and 5.)

In classroom observation it was not always possible to tell the differences between those girls who were keen to study on and those who might have been waiting to get married, as all Asian girls were quiet in their classes most of the time. By comparison Asian boys appeared to be less quiet. Stanley (1986) has written about the way in which girls deliberately keep quiet and do not always draw attention to themselves. Asian girls in my sample excelled at this. Some Bangladeshi girls were struggling in their English lessons and suffered from a great deal of consternation at having to stand in front of the whole class and perform short plays and even to read aloud. Their teachers did not make allowances for what they saw as acts of timidity.

## 9.5

### Teachers' alleged lower academic expectations of Asian children

Many Asian children who found themselves re-taking exams in the sixth form felt that teachers did not press Asian pupils as highly as they could have. I was not able to verify whether teachers pressed white pupils more than they did Asian pupils. More detailed data would be required to explore this further. Cherrydale School however, was aware that its pupils did not obtain as high grades as another school in the city.

Elaborate explanations were often offered by Asian children of why teachers behaved in the manner they did.

One dirty fish spoils the whole pond they say in Punjabi. It is the same here, isn't it? If there is one stupid Asian boy or girl in class they (teachers) think we are all the same.

(Parminder: 49, field notes)

I asked this sixth former to explain exactly what she was implying and learnt that she, together with the three other Asian girls who were re-taking exams, said that they felt they were not "stretched enough" in secondary school in the first place, otherwise they would

not have had to re-take examinations. She thought teachers did not expect Asian children to do well at school because there were some disobedient Asian children in the school who were being alluded to in the above proverb. She felt that as a consequence all Asian children had to bear the brunt. This was, by her own admission a retrospective look at Asian children's experiences.

Parminder's view was typical of Asian sixth formers several of whom told me that their teachers should have set them more homework which they should have marked. They felt generally that they should have been put under much more pressure to achieve. If they had been put under more pressure they would have produced better results.

One of the girls explained to me her feelings of anger and disillusionment with a teacher who upon her failing to get into a medical college said; "What a B and still winging!" (Uzma: 9.) She was upset because she thought with a little more help and pressure she could have got the grades she needed instead of which she was being told that she should be grateful for what she did get.

I went home and cried. He would have been happy if I failed everything I suppose. I now go around telling everyone to work hard for A levels from the very first day and not treat it like O levels or baby exams. Nobody told us A levels were so different from other exams.

(Uzma: 9, oldest child, taped conversation)

It was difficult to say for sure whether these children were able to see the whole picture clearly or whether they were taking account of their own lack of best effort in obtaining the grades they now felt they could have got "with some extra pushing". Others who re-took exams felt that they had not tried their very best consistently and that they were in large noisy classes which made it difficult for them to concentrate. They also felt that when they met the same teachers in the sixth form they were treated very differently from the way they had been treated in previous years. They thought that their teachers had



"improved". Asian children did not make any direct connections in their conversations about teachers' changed attitude as a direct response to their having got older.

## 9.6

### Other experiences of education

Besides the experiences which have been described so far Asian children spoke about other matters related to schooling and education. These are discussed briefly in this section.

#### a) Educated in two countries

Seven newly arrived children from Bangladesh as well as two Pakistani children who found themselves moving between two continents, had the experience of being educated in two countries. (See Appendix: 6A.) Except in one case these Bangladeshi children had fathers on low incomes. Their mothers told me that they were pleased their children's schools were "good and warm" as compared to their homes. These interviews had taken place during winter months. There was no central heating in their homes and gratitude expressed by the mothers was about the basic necessities of life. In the seven Bangladeshi families, one father had died (18), one was unemployed (22) three worked as waiters or helpers at restaurants (16, 44, 50) and one undertook odd jobs (19). One father (21) was a restaurant owner. These families had undergone much stress as they had only recently been reunited after several years. These children were grateful that they could attend school. One of the children with whom I was having a group discussion told me in a matter of fact way one day "my parents are not educated. That is why we are in a mess" (Zeeba: 22).

Zafar (32), Shakeel (35) and Aslam (43) had attended schools both in England and Pakistan. Their perceptions of education in the two countries were interesting, even though these children were a small minority in the sample.

You are taught loads and loads in Pakistan. You get loads of homework and heavy books, yeh? You are afraid if you don't finish it. I had four homework books in Gujrat. You have to buy them yourself and cover them with brown paper so they don't get dirty...If you drop your book on the floor because it is full of ilm (Arabic/Urdu word meaning knowledge) you have to kiss the book...otherwise you will remain budhdu (stupid) (laughter). If the teacher calls out your name over there you have to listen with attention or he'll get mad...here you can mess about, yeh?

(Aslam: 43, taped interview)

They felt that they learnt more in Pakistan but they enjoyed and "messed about" more in lessons in Britain. Classroom observations of the boys quoted above confirmed their statements.

#### b) "Repeaters"

This word has a negative connotation in the Subcontinent because it refers to those who do not pass their examinations and are obliged to stay down a year. There were six children, mostly boys, who by their own account were likely to be "repeaters". They were mostly Pakistani boys who felt that they did not manage to achieve what they wanted and they would use the sixth form or a college of further education for instrumental purposes to try and "learn again, new things if I can" (Shakir: 10). These children felt let down by school:

I wish they had pushed me more at school. Mr Collins should have made me do it like he made me practise for football matches.

(Maqbool :40, field notes)

Children like Maqbool were more likely than the rest of the sample to join the college of further education.

In a group discussion I had with five Pakistani boys, one boy had this to say to his peers and me about his older brother's experiences at Cherrydale. He classes himself also as a future "repeater".

But Mr Richards said he should be able to find some apprenticeship. They

gave him admission (re-admission at the sixth form) because he was quiet like, had given them no serious trouble and when he did well enough to get into college no one was surprised. Sajid said Mr Richards would've been pleased if he failed again. So he (Sajid) says you should use school as a repeater if you fail. No point liking it or trying to enjoy it. Just slog, like.

(Tahir: 39, taped conversation)

### c) Reading

This generation of Asian children had gone through Cherrydale School without having cultivated the habit of reading at home. They said they did not bring books to read at home on a regular basis, and they had passed the stage of reading aloud daily to their teachers. They were not regular users of the public library even though they remembered having had library cards at some point in their lives. Only three children out of 50 made use of the public library, roughly on a monthly basis. They said they spent some time during the school holidays in the public library when they accompanied their mothers to the shops. The main public library was located in the main shopping centre. Their mothers would spend a long time shopping and window shopping they told me, while they went to the library by themselves. These children did not have English newspapers at home, except those delivered free, nor did they report having many discussions at home with their parents about issues of topical interest. They were more likely to discuss matters of interest to them with their peers or siblings. No one read to them at home. On the whole their written English would have benefitted immensely from extra reading and writing. This was something some of the children realised when they approached their school leaving age. They found it difficult to fill forms. In more than half of the cases I filled in the questionnaires for them while they spoke and looked on. They said they would have found it easier to complete them at home in their own time. Some would have found that difficult too and were likely to lose them. They preferred to talk things through than fill the answers in a form. One of the tasks they found most difficult was writing essays at home they told

me. Only four children had dictionaries at home. Two out of the four reported actually using dictionaries at home.

d) Problems with homework

By the time girls and boys were old enough to join Cherrydale School, the responsibility for completing homework lay on their own shoulders. There was a pattern of diminishing interest in school matters among many of the children which they shared with me. Once an Asian child entered the secondary school and found himself or herself running into difficulties with subjects like Science and English, the next logical step was to try and approach the subject teacher for extra tuition. When that and "home help" failed to materialize, life was very difficult for those who were determined to make a success of it at any cost. It needed considerable determination to succeed. It would have been very useful to have had access to these children's Maths, Science and English results for three years during which I was involved in the fieldwork and to have compared that with the rest of the children in their year groups, but this was not possible, not for lack of trying but because I was not granted access to such information (see Chapter 3). The members of staff I approached did not find time to sit and talk to me specifically on this matter and also told me that they did not see any point in it as all the children were treated

in exactly the same way and all the teachers try their best to let all children realise their full potential.

(Head of CDT, field notes)

The "colour blind" approach apparent from the rhetorical comment above is discussed in Chapter 10.

e) Feeling invisible at school

Many Asian children, mostly those in the fifth year and in the sixth form, told me that they felt invisible in school. On being pressed they supplied examples of invisibility which to

them meant that the school and their mainstream teachers did not celebrate their presence, their festivals or their achievements. If someone from their background had done very well academically, the school did not acknowledge it. When I asked whether the same teachers acknowledged other children's achievements better and pointed out that I had not seen other children's photographs on the walls either, I was told vehemently by the sixth formers that three teachers continuously gave examples of high achievers who were white who had got good grades in the previous year but they never during the course of the whole year mentioned the Asian children who had got into a University or into a polytechnic in the past. Asian children felt that if they did well they too would soon be forgotten. They then began to wonder if the school cared about them even while they were there. Except in one case, non-academic achievements, like sport related events, were not mentioned as something to be glad about.

Others who were not in the sixth form felt invisible too. I was told that in the third year their PE teachers for instance did not let them rest and not do PE during Ramadhan the Muslim month of fasting, unless they brought letters from home every day. Nine children who did not have older brothers and sisters who could write fluent letters in English said they had to forge letters and signatures because their parents could not write in English. They would not dream of bringing letters written in Urdu or Bengali into school, even if their parents could write that language, because that made them "feel silly". They knew there was "no one in school who could read that anyway". They felt that if the school had not had one particular deputy head teacher (Mrs Fisher) who cared about them they would have been even more "unwanted and invisible". They also felt that the school did not really make any effort to invite their parents in. The school never during the course of this research told parents that there would always be someone there who would be able to explain matters to them in Punjabi or Bengali. All these things made Asian children feel

invisible in school even though they looked different from white children because of their colour and on that account were highly visible. In addition they were also noticeable because of their names, religion, culture and so on.

Several children felt that their teachers did not make any effort to pronounce their names properly and because of that they were called a name which bore no resemblance to their real name at home. This sometimes resulted in their friends, including their Asian friends at school, calling them something completely different from the name their parents called them at home, thus reinforcing the difference between home and school one step further.

They (teachers) don't even know how to call your name correctly. That is because we are different from them. But we must call their names correctly, even rude names...otherwise the whole class will laugh...I had a teacher called Higginbottom (loud laugh).

(Manzar: 3, taped conversation)

Some said they had got used to it. Six children said they felt invisible because they had to please their teachers but their teachers did not have to please them. They knew that this was also the case with many of their white peers and that this was what school was all about. As Saira once said to me drily, "at home parents are always right at school teachers are always right". They themselves dwelt somewhere in between and had to learn to negotiate their own space. 26 children said they had at different times asked the school to help them get in touch with home teachers and told me that unlike their primary and middle schools which kept telephone numbers of such people, only two of the teachers at Cherrydale seemed to know what these children were talking about. Their Cherrydale teachers were similarly, they felt, not prepared to give them extra tuition even when the children said that they needed them and some were ready to pay.

The woman thought I was a raving lunatic! All I said was I didn't understand the Physics experiments she was teaching us and wanted the name of a home teacher who could teach me a bit!

(Qasim: 2, taped conversation)

Qasim said he did not ask again.

## 9.7

### The kinds of children teachers liked

Children thought that teachers liked polite good mannered well behaved children who were, according to a widespread opinion, "hard working and brainy and who did what they were told" (Maqbool: 40). The words mentioned frequently were bright, brainy, intelligent, good, and "goodie". Teachers also liked children who did not miss their lessons and who did not "creep". More girls than boys felt that teachers liked children who cared about their work and offered to help their teachers. Six boys told me that their teachers were scared of boys who "gave an attitude back" and who lived in Lawley. These informants did not live in Lawley themselves. Teachers on the whole liked children who were well dressed and rich and those who agreed with everything the teacher said and did not argue back. To the question "I think most of my teachers care about me", ten said yes, 16 said no, eight said that they did not know and 16 did not answer. Most of the 50 Asian children thus did not openly say they felt teachers really cared about them. Of the ten who thought teachers cared about them eight were girls.

## 9.8

### Expectations and aspirations

Many children in the sample said they wanted to carry on with some form of further education or training after leaving school. Some of these children could see the discrepancy between what they ideally wanted to do with their lives and what they might have to settle for (see Appendix: 7A). In order to find out how far they actually achieved their aspirations, one would have to do a longitudinal study of the same children and their families. In their study Eggleston et al (1986) found that:

In their fifth year at school, more black than white children were expected to undertake a one year sixth form course, usually to enhance O level or CSE stocks.

(p. 280)

Asians are included among black children in the above reference. What the children told me about themselves seems to indicate the existence of the same trend in Cherrydale School as the one reported by Eggleston. Despite all the challenges they were facing in their lives, given an opportunity and structured support with academic work, it seemed that these children might consider carrying on with their education, though it is difficult to say for sure. It is significant nevertheless that only eight children mentioned employment as their immediate future plan upon leaving school. Seven did not know what they wanted to do. All the rest wanted to study on or receive some kind of vocational training, either at a college of further education or at a University.

Eggleston et al (1986) made two observations which were also found in my data. They found that "fathers of children with South Asian family backgrounds were more likely to be in unskilled or partly skilled jobs" than in other jobs and also that in the case of children

It is probable that some of the enthusiasm to continue full-time education sprang from a lack of confidence about employment and a desire not to face negative experiences.

(p. 280)

Whatever the reason the children in my sample had, they saw education on the whole as something to aspire for. They thought that they would be in a college of further education if need be and if the school refused to let them stay on.

When they had to address the question as to what in their opinion they would actually be doing, altogether 19 children did not know what their future would turn out to be (see Appendix: 7A). Seven girls, four Bangladeshi and three Pakistanis, mentioned marriage as a real possibility, but the hurdle of dowry had first to be overcome in some families. It was



more likely that these girls would have to start looking for employment rather than walk straight into marriage and domesticity.

## 9.9

### Summary

Asian children's perceptions of their teachers helped to place them in three different categories. There were good, normal and bad teachers. Children could describe in minute detail the distress which had been caused on occasion by their teachers. The most poignant memories were those which children associated with racism. Several incidents which caused children much concern have been discussed in this chapter. The effect which gender had on teacher-student interactions was also explored. Boys thought that teachers were very lenient with Asian girls, whereas Asian girls complained that teachers held stereotypical opinions about them. Some Asian children felt that teachers held lower academic expectations of them as compared to their white peers. It was not possible to verify this. Many children felt they knew what sorts of students teachers liked. Many Asian children aspired to further and higher education and wanted to have the opportunity to achieve that goal. From most of the children's accounts their hopes and aspirations did not however receive the proportionate level of practical help and encouragement from their teachers and they were to a large extent responsible for their own destiny.

## CHAPTER 10

### CERRYDALE SCHOOL

#### 10.1

##### Introduction to Cherrydale School

The main focus of my thesis so far has been on Asian children. Their education began at home. The schools the children attended continued that education. It was logical therefore to present Asian children's homes before looking at Cherrydale School. The latter undoubtedly played an important part in their lives. In this chapter I wish to focus on the school and its staff.

Schools are not autonomous institutions. They are influenced by their local education authorities and both local and national policies. To see a school in a decontextualised manner without considering its location within a broader framework is equivalent to ignoring its influences, constraints and its responsibilities to the wider community. As Hargreaves (1985) has commented, researchers working within the micro perspective, like ostriches can be "so preoccupied with the fine-grained detail of school and classroom life" that they forget to take "their heads out of the sand" and fail to notice what lies beyond. Troyna and Hatcher (1992) have also reminded researchers of the need to be aware of wider issues in society which affect schools directly and affect particular incidents within schools, such as racist incidents. Cherrydale School too is a product of a local set of circumstances. It cannot be abstracted from its geographical, historical and political specificity.

Like many other comprehensives in the country Cherrydale was formed by the amalgamation of two schools. Fifteen years before this research was carried out there were a technical school and a girls' grammar school on the same site, less than two miles away from the city centre. Fifteen years on, and many changes away, there were only two out of 60 teachers who remembered what it was like in those days. Rather than dwell on the past, most teachers were more likely to be challenged by the immediate concerns of the present moment, and the forthcoming changes, as the school braced itself for its first ever GCSE examinations. The research was done during the time from the appearance of 'GERBIL' to the passing of the 1988 Act.

Throughout the period of research at Cherrydale School the insecurities ensuing from the school's recent past were very noticeable. The future of all secondary schools in Cherrytown had been under consideration just six months before this research took place. A proposal to amalgamate two single sex schools in Cherrytown in order to take account of the decline in pupil numbers had caused each of the six schools to shudder in turn about its own future. Cherrydale School was no exception.

Teachers and advisory teachers told me that both at school and at LEA level teachers were working in a context of little or no formally stated policy particularly regarding 'race' issues.

A new headteacher had been appointed at Cherrydale barely two years before the research commenced. I was told that the new headteacher was still settling into the school and that he was according to one head of department, in the process of "dipping his feet in the water and (had) not yet begun to swim." The previous headteacher, whom I did not meet, was apparently completely different and much more assured in his management style. Many

teachers who had worked under both - approximately four fifths of the staff when I began this research - feared that the school would begin to show signs of confusion, not knowing the direction in which it was going, and that this would through negative parental choice affect the quality of its intake and eventually its reputation.

Some teachers said bluntly that in future more working class children would attend Cherrydale School. There was much talk among the teachers about the school's intake and about its catchment area. This school, I was told by several teachers, was living in the shadow of another school in Cherrytown which "creamed off" the majority of the "middle class whiz kids". However, there were still many middle class children choosing to come to Cherrydale School. It was said by some teachers, two of whom had done supply teaching in upper schools in Cherry County, that Cherrydale School was the only real comprehensive in Cherrytown.

During the period of the research I found that pupils were coming to Cherrydale from outside its previous catchment areas, which included in addition to the mostly owner occupied, housing estate, the council housing estate of Lawley. There had also been a steady though smaller increase in the number of African-Caribbean children attending Cherrydale. There was in addition a sporadic increase in the small number of children whose parents were temporarily working in Cherrytown, and who would in a few years be returning to their own countries as wide apart as Israel and Korea.

Children came to Cherrydale from eight different middle schools, as Cherrytown had a system of operating first (5-9), middle (9-13) and upper (13-19) schools. The average number of children on Cherrydale's roll during the entire period of this research was 850, with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls. In 1988, 11% of these children were of

Asian origin (see Chapter 4: Table 4c). The total number of African- Caribbean children recorded in the school files in 1985 was 25. It was predicted that the number of children from ethnic minority backgrounds in Cherrydale was going to increase over the next few years.

In its literature the school did not portray itself as a multiethnic school. The school it seemed had not stopped to take stock of its cultural, linguistic and racial composition since 1985 when the staff and pupil handbooks were written. Probationary teachers who had been trained in the Midlands and in London, as well as three teachers who had taught in some large northern towns, remarked upon the well meaning, well educated, predominantly male, liberal, middle class ethos of the school. The school's governors, I was told, also reflected the same element. One local councillor who was also a governor at Cherrydale once said half jokingly that parents would be expected to produce their typed curriculum vitae before they could hope to be taken seriously as prospective school governors. This in her opinion would ensure that ordinary white working class parents and parents from ethnic minority backgrounds who were not confident and well educated did not stand any chance of governing Cherrydale in the near future even if their children formed the majority of the school population.

## 10.2

### Cherrydale's Geography

Being a split site school meant that Cherrydale's staff had a tendency to be dispersed. The school hall was not big enough to accommodate the whole school. New teachers and part-time teachers found it very difficult initially to find a foothold outside their own department. The Bengali and the Urdu teachers were theoretically part of the modern languages department, but in reality they felt that they did not belong anywhere. (The

Bengali teacher was paid by the school through Section Eleven budgets and the Urdu teacher was paid by the Multicultural Centre.) Supply teachers sometimes told me they found the day a little disorganised and that they got confused in finding their way around the place. It was only at the full staff meetings that all members of staff met or saw each other.

### 10.3

#### The ethos of Cherrydale School

It was not an easy task getting the white teachers to talk openly about the education of Asian children. Some of the difficulty arose, at least initially I am sure, because of my own ethnicity. I could only broach the topic after I had listened to what the teachers had to say about a whole range of completely different matters, quite unrelated to Asian and African-Caribbean children. These wide ranging topics were useful in that they presented a fuller picture of the school within which the issue of ethnic minority children was embedded.

The teacher-initiated topics which caused them endless interest, included the existence of different cliques in school and the effect on individual teachers being or not being "in the know" about "what's what". This arena of "micro politics" in the school created much excitement. The vexed issue of efficient use of limited time in school, lack of inter-departmental liaison, and the growing load of administrative duties within different departments, led to grave concerns about the damage on the quality of contact time between teachers and pupils. Teachers repeatedly said they much preferred to teach. "Hate admin. But what can you do? That is where the promotions are." (Maths Head of Department.)

Lack of proper consultation within the school and lack of active support were very often bemoaned. Almost as many times teachers mentioned lack of debate on whole school

policies, as they queried the logic which allowed certain kinds of in-service training programmes to be sanctioned and not others. It could be, of course, that no matter what was done some teachers would remain dissatisfied. Teachers' complaints therefore cannot be taken as straightforward representations of school reality.

When it came to discussing the issues facing children from ethnic minority backgrounds, however, it was another story. So unwilling were the majority of the teachers to talk to me specifically about Asian children, that a questionnaire designed only to gather teachers' thoughts about children from ethnic minority backgrounds would almost certainly have been answered by very few. The only way to obtain some idea about teachers' perspectives on children from Asian backgrounds, was to first allow most of the teachers considerable latitude, both in conversations and questionnaires, to elaborate to their hearts' content on topics which were their own main concerns. These were mostly their anxieties about their own future prospects as teachers, and the trouble they were having with some members of the senior staff team. Lack of support and appreciation "from on high" to quote one teacher, in times of mounting stress was very frequently mentioned. It accelerated, by their own accounts, at least four full time teachers' consideration to leave the teaching profession altogether. They were all on permanent contracts; two were in senior posts.

Another recurrent theme among the majority of the staff was that the school was not a

united, cohesive body. Look at us we can't even all be bothered to have lunch in one staff room. Oh no many of them hide in their own cubby holes (departmental rooms/resource rooms).

(Home Economics teacher, tape recorded conversation)

When you do get into the staffroom, you find them cordoned off from the plebs (buzzing sound of animated talk coming out of a small room adjoining the larger staff room). Amazing isn't it how the department can get away with hogging the little room. (sound of mounting laughter from the four teachers in the little room) That's the room you are supposed to work quietly

in. I have to get all my quiet work done at home.

(Religious education teacher, tape recording in staff room)

Cliques exist in all schools, of course. The interesting thing to observe as a researcher here was that the feelings of lack of cohesiveness were expressed by those teachers who belonged to a clique as well as by those who did not. Many teachers were aware of the

PR job the school must do to keep kids come rolling in. (reference to a photograph in the local newspaper publicising an Art exhibit)

(Science teacher, field notes)

They saw that as something which was done to cultivate a positive and united image about the school. That was something completely different from the internal view expressed to me.

If you saw those (Bangladeshi) kids holding up Bengali books (in a local newspaper) you would assume things were all hunky dory. We haven't really taught them all we should. They can't fill in forms in English for Pete's sakes.

(History teacher, taped interview)

Although this was a minority view it highlighted some individual teachers' deliberate lack of involvement in what this teacher called the "publicity stunt". One teacher who was trained in Leicester said:

This school is very good at getting Asian children in it, but once they are in, it doesn't know what to do with them.

(Business Studies teacher, field notes)

The main feeling the school generated was one of an institution in the middle of change and impermanence. This is not surprising considering what was happening to schools in Cherrytown generally and to other comprehensive schools in the country. What was surprising for me at the time was that children's needs within it were going to remain just as vehement but were being ignored. The following is an extract from my field notes:

Why are so many of the teachers so concerned, obsessed with themselves, about their own betterment, their own future?? They don't spend much time talking mainly about the children. So many children have financial difficulties, unemployed parents and all teachers talk about is what will happen to them! When they do talk about individual children it is about trivial things, today for instance there was much joy expressed because Jim managed to score a goal for the school football team last night. I mean so



what? That, and Philips failed to turn up for detention twice. Good for him I thought!

(Field notes, June 1988)

Many teachers spoke about the changes which would be changes for the better in the interest of the school and they invariably began with the headteacher's management style or what seemed to them to be lack of "up front management."

## 10.4

### The role of the headteacher

The role played by headteachers is crucial in school based ethnographies. Wolpe (1988) spoke of how the headteacher of the school she was researching changed his attitude towards her when she tried to renegotiate an entry. Wolpe put it down to her publication about the school which the headteacher may have read. Burgess (1987) encountered a friendly and cooperative headteacher at Bishop McGregor School about whom he said:

Little did I think that this casual conversation was an important research encounter which would result in research projects, a research career and a research relationship that would span fifteen years until the head retired from the school.

(p. 67)

The headteacher of Milltown where Foster (1990a) carried out his research was willing to commit to paper his ideas about multicultural and anti-racist education (p. 48-9). Without this willing cooperation Foster's study might have turned out very differently.

Again and again throughout this research, in conversation rather than in written answers teachers provided to the questionnaires, the question of the headteacher's weak leadership was raised. With the exception of the deputy heads almost everyone seemed to be concerned about it. Mr Oakley was described variously as a "back seat driver" (maths teacher) and "a things' person not a people's person" (history teacher). This was a reference to the new computer network installed in the school after Mr Oakley joined. One teacher

thought the headteacher was

A shy man. He doesn't do much teaching. He does not know his own pupils. Amazing. They (children) don't know who the head teacher is. They think it's Derek (head of CDT).

(Art teacher, field notes)

He's a one legged man in a three legged race. His one leg might be very good, but you still need the other leg...Teachers are leaving this school left right and centre and he is just sitting there! He'd make a really good deputy head to a warm caring head in a leafy suburb.

(PE teacher, field notes)

In terms of my interaction with the headteacher, it surprised me that I had been in the school for two whole terms virtually unheeded by him. I felt obliged to go and present myself to him as somebody who was doing some research in his school. After all, I wondered at the time in vexed notes to myself:

What will happen to me if I run into Mr Oakley and he mistakes me for an intruder wandering about the school? What will he do to me?

(Field notes, March 1988)

When we met I told him I would be visiting some children at home possibly in the summer vacation. He was exceedingly polite and did not ask many questions except to query if I would be required to write up all my findings one day, a prospect which was on that particular occasion very far from my mind. It was a ten minute meeting for which I had made an appointment. I was never invited back to share any of my findings. It was difficult to say whether that was because I was trusted implicitly, because he was indifferent to my presence and the research findings or because he was aware that I would have to preserve confidentiality. After two terms of an innocuous existence, it seemed I could get on with whatever it was I was doing, so long as I did not get in anyone's way and did not seek much information held on the school files about individual children.

It was said of him that he was a fair minded person in the way he conducted school matters, that he would not for instance, willingly give a parent of a sixth former

deliberately misleading advice even if that meant the child going to another school to pursue further studies.

The staff generally felt that the school did not have clear policies and that the headteacher did not use full staff meetings to have open discussions. Teachers who had worked in three or more schools before coming to Cherrydale were shocked when he cancelled full staff meetings.

Just because there aren't enough agenda items. You make agenda items for heaven's sakes, everyone has put the time aside for months and he goes and cancels an opportunity to sit and talk. What I ask myself is he frightened of?  
(English teacher, field notes)

The lack of clear guidelines were also disliked, together with lack of policies. According to one head of year, "you name it, we ain't got it...no clear cut policy on discipline, uniform, truancy..." (field notes). The question of how far and whether such a headteacher would himself personally initiate or welcome positive change involving the 11% ethnic minority students in his school was extremely difficult to say.

It would however, be naive to take everything the teachers said at face value. Whatever type of headteacher Mr Oakley was, some teachers would probably have complained anyway. Within the school the headteacher's role was a management role and with the exception of the deputies who did not discuss him, most other teachers found him a little distant. This however could be at least in part a reflection of teachers' general attitude towards any headteacher. He might have been criticised for being dictatorial if he was more assertive.

**Cherrydale's delegation of responsibility for ethnic minority children to one teacher**

In the school as it worked out in practice, the children from ethnic minority backgrounds were the main responsibility of one particular teacher, Mrs Fisher, the senior deputy head. This was not stated explicitly. She was also the head of pastoral care and was the same teacher with whom I had to negotiate my initial entry into Cherrydale. In many ways her role in the school described simply as deputy head was an over simplification of the crucial and complicated position she occupied. She was perceived by teachers as the key person for Asian and African-Caribbean children and children with special needs. Her role as seen by the children and the teachers merits a detailed description. There was nobody else in quite the same position in the school. It was impossible to find out how much support she needed, whether she always got it and whether and in what ways her efforts were ever frustrated. She did not return the questionnaire to me so I could not take her written views into account. Unlike many teachers in the school she talked almost exclusively and at length about children rather than about herself or about other teachers. According to staff room gossip, she had applied unsuccessfully for the headship two years previously. Nothing she said or did in my presence betrayed any lack of loyalty to the school. She lived within the school's catchment area. From children's accounts she even shopped locally and knew many parents well, especially Asian fathers. Her concern for the children, especially those with special needs and those from ethnic minority backgrounds was often present in her conversations with me. She knew for example if there had been a bereavement in a family or if children were having problems at home.

More than half the children I met spoke of her as the single most useful and helpful teacher. In terms of the particular focus of this research it was also important to discover why it was that the school had such a person among its senior staff, yet had succeeded in

making some non-white children and members of staff feel distinctly uncomfortable and "invisible" or "unwanted".

It seemed that Mrs Fisher was among those people in school who were quietly pioneering a positive change for Asian children in the establishment, without having arguments with colleagues who might not agree. One teacher told me rather scathingly about how Mrs Fisher was planning to "smuggle in one of her cronies", Mrs Hamilton a white ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) teacher, on a permanent job when the Multicultural Centre was going to be dismantled. I was told ruefully: "The post won't be advertised. Just wait and see!" Mrs Hamilton was then being paid through Section Eleven of the 1966 Local Government Act through the Multicultural Centre.

The other example concerned the need for extra tutorial time required by some children to practise their Bengali. Mrs Fisher arranged the room next door to her own office to be used for that purpose by the Bengali teacher. The latter was a part-time teacher and would not have known about negotiating the use of the room if someone in Mrs Fisher's position had not read between the lines and helped her.

As far as children from ethnic minority backgrounds were concerned, things were done for them and then small notices in the shape of exhortations and reminders were written in the staff bulletin to ask teachers to support them and their special teachers.

I often wondered whether Mrs Fisher led discussions about such matters in the staffroom in my absence. If they took place I was not aware of them. She was the only woman in the senior staff team. It was very difficult to say how issues concerning the education of ethnic minority children were discussed by the senior staff, as the minutes of their fortnightly

meetings were not shared with the rest of the school staff nor was I allowed to attend.

Mrs Fisher's colleagues in the senior management team had not reached a point where they would deliberately appoint an Asian or African-Caribbean teacher to reflect the percentage of ethnic minority children in school. Nor were they ready to open the school for use by Asian parents. Mrs Fisher could not be prevailed upon to say more than "Well, maybe the school isn't ready as yet for more than this". Although she said "the school", in the context she was referring to the senior management team. This comment was made specially in connection with Asian parents being encouraged to attend LEA funded community education classes after school in Cherrydale. This comment ran counter to her usually sympathetic attitude towards parents. It suggests that the senior management team, possibly including Mrs Fisher herself, were opposed to or uninterested in the project.

The outcome in practical terms was that by delegating all ethnic minority related issues to Mrs Fisher, the teachers in the school seemed to have done their duty by them. All pastoral care issues which caused concern were referred to her. Generally speaking then, most teachers felt quite comfortable in "treating them all the same" and saw nothing wrong with that. When any problems arose, they were first tackled by the form tutor, or referred to the head of year and failing that they would come under "pastoral care" generally and be placed on Mrs Fisher's table. Many teachers I knew went straight to her.

The position of Mrs Fisher has been sketched out in some detail because of her unique situation, and its contrast with that of all the other white teachers in the school.

## 10.6

### "Treating them all the same"

There was, with a few exceptions, what appeared to be genuine discomfort whenever the subject of children from ethnic minority background was mentioned. I constantly found that teachers who had until that moment been talking confidently, loquaciously, suddenly became subdued, quieter and tentative. Several teachers dropped their eye contact and looked away, if only for a few seconds. It was quite telling that I encountered this unease despite having been in school day after day over a long period of time, and being present at several meetings and school events and within different classrooms.

Whenever I tried to gain information about streaming or setting and the school's policy of dividing up Asian pupils into different groups I ran into difficulties. I had obtained very general information which did not give sufficient clues about individual children. I knew for instance that the school was divided up into two parallel bands for timetabling purposes, and that the middle school results and the informal conversations between the head of the third year at Cherrydale and the middle school teachers contributed towards pupils' group allocation. Some departments used the end of third year examination results to decide where a particular student would go during the following two years. Some departments said they had mixed ability teaching. Others did not make such claims in writing.

Only one head of department actually obliged me when I had gone to her armed with a list of ten Asian names whose group-allocations in her particular subject she looked up and told me. She was disappointed at the way the school had treated her and had confided in me about her decision to leave the teaching profession eventually. This was a possible explanation for her unguarded comments. The official policy of her department, which Asian parents believed, was that pupils were not placed in ability bands. This was not the

entire truth. It would indeed be extremely difficult for parents to learn about the exact set in which their child was placed unless they came to school with a categorical enquiry or complaint. In the case of Asian children this happened twice and it caused great dismay to the parents (see Chapter 5).

The immediate response and the most common one about children's ethnicity was that the school did not differentiate between people because of their ethnic backgrounds.

Surely, to pick children on grounds of their colour is itself racist? No, why should one talk only of them and not of others?

(Deputy head, taped interview)

In nearly two years of field work out of 60 teachers only three initiated the topic of ethnic minority children of their own volition. The frame of reference for the majority of the teachers was:

This is the kind of school we work in, we are all in the middle of a pudding at the moment...we have to deal with several children, some of whom just happen to be Asian and West Indian.

(Religious education teacher, field notes)

The other predominant view was that:

Given our intake I reckon we are not doing too badly. (academically). We treat all children in exactly the same way here, though in terms of mixed ability, some topping and tailing goes on.

(Maths teacher, field notes)

There was in the speakers' minds no problem with the view. They seemed to believe that they were indeed treating the children in the same way. The views of children set out in Chapters 8 and 9, suggest that in fact teachers do not always treat children from different ethnic groups "the same". Indeed, to do so would be a questionable educational policy; as we have seen, different children come to school from very different backgrounds and with very different needs.

One day as I stood near the window in one of the classes with the head of CDT, we saw



three Bangladeshi boys follow their Bengali teacher out of another class. The head of CDT who had been talking about the school in general, at that point turned around to look at me and said "I think we are bending over backwards to accommodate some children". Two Asian children sitting within earshot doing some assessed work who followed our gaze outside the room, looked up at him for one split second and then at me. He seemed to believe that the school was already doing too much and should not do any more than it was doing already for the kinds of children who walked by outside. In this particular instance he was probably referring specifically to the Bangladeshi newcomers to Britain.

In complete contrast to this view, there was another opinion to be found in the school. Judging by actual conversations I had with individual teachers, however, this was held by only a small minority; five white teachers in all who spoke to me about it. They believed that the school was most certainly not doing enough for Asian children but that it was pretending to, so that Asian parents were not aware of the true picture.

As with everything else in this place you can only do anything new if you have clout. I don't have any. I can only plod along and do whatever I can as an individual. I can't see any equal ops policy happening here this year or next year.

(Humanities teacher, taped interview)

I guess schools are like that. They only respond to pressure from vocal middle class people, and your average Asian parents are not that! This merry go round will carry on for a while! You would think this (Cherrydale) is heaven on earth.

(History teacher, field notes)

The reference above was to a local radio interview for broadcast to an Asian audience, of two members of staff about the facilities available to Asian pupils at Cherrydale School. The teachers were very conscious of social class differences within the parental communities. The school was trying to attract Asian children to join it, but according to the History teacher who overheard the programme being recorded in the school library, the school wanted to raise its pupil numbers and Asian parents were not being told the whole

truth.

## 10.7

### Social class as seen by teachers

The majority of the teachers who answered the questionnaires were well aware of social class as a category, especially in terms of the lack of parental participation in school activities and in terms of delinquency and truancy. The latter had reached a very high level in 1987 and 1988 according to several teachers, most of whom felt that it reflected a national trend. This worry was also reflected in the weekly staff bulletins reminding teachers not to allow children to wander out of their classes during lessons or before the bell rang. The headteacher went as far as checking pupil attendance during one particular week in 1988. Two deputy heads and three teachers mentioned that in their opinions working class children were not achieving good academic results because there was insufficient parental support available to enable them to make the best use of their time at school. Children from ethnic minority backgrounds were very seldom similarly mentioned as a distinct category except by some who saw some Asian children as presenting the school with "the language problem". There was no indication however slight at any time during this research that African-Caribbean children had needs which were not being met.

One teacher who seemed to have thought about Asian children and their desire to stay on at the sixth form, and who was aware of some of the issues facing children at home was the careers teacher. Talking to him I learnt that about six years or so before this research, the local education authority had cut down on two career teachers' posts in Cherrydale. They had based the career service in the city centre instead of basing it in individual schools. He said that out of about 240 children in every year, between 60 and 80 came to the careers office for advice.

When I asked him if he had any target groups whom he found difficult to reach, he interpreted that as a question about social class. He felt that there were several children whom the careers service failed to reach because "it is not cool to talk about careers when you're a teenager" (field notes). He was aware of different pressures on boys and girls and was regretful that because of the way the school operated, no figures were kept on children who visited the careers room. He did not lead any open discussions in full staff meetings. This meant that in effect his awareness of issues facing children did not formally filter through to the rest of the school.

## 10.8

### Teachers' views about Asian children

Occasionally in connection with Asian children, teachers volunteered explanations based on gender differentiation. Six teachers, all women, told me that in their opinion Asian boys on the whole seemed to have been brought up not to respect women and that they seemed to be more impressed by men. One of the explanations cited in conversation was that

Dad must go out to work and they see their mothers and sisters sitting at home not doing anything except housework and these mums can't control their sons always...They don't know what's happening in the outside world.  
(Religious education teacher, field notes)

When I asked how many such mothers she had actually met in person in connection with the children she taught, she said they seldom came into school anyway. She had not met a single Asian mother. At one point Mrs Fisher was considering inviting somebody from the mosque to talk to Asian boys in school because the school was having discipline problems with the boys. Several women teachers went to her with complaints, which arguably ran contrary to "treating them all the same."

Three teachers felt that if children could not read and write English fluently they should

be encouraged to study somewhere outside Cherrydale sixth form, because school sixth forms were meant for children who were seriously considering following a career. Interestingly, all these ideas about the sixth form came from women teachers and they concerned Bangladeshi girls in particular. The other places mentioned where those who should not attend the sixth form could go were the college of further education or "somewhere else".

The majority view about Asian women prevalent at school was that they did not go out to work and that the girls too would therefore not go out to work, that they would get married quickly or that they would stay at home till they got married. The tenacity with which these stereotypical views persisted even after discussions I had with teachers surprised and annoyed me at the time, as the following passage from my field notes shows:

Had to restrain myself today. I was talking to Summerfields. One of these days I will have to do something and search right through Cherrytown and physically BRING some of the mothers into school to talk about their jobs and how much they want their daughters to do well...

(Field notes, May 1988)

Several teachers both male and female told me they could not understand Asian children's repeated requests for extra tuition and that they talked

Ad nauseam about some kind of home teachers. I told them most teachers are school teachers and that those that aren't, can't be teachers.

(English teacher, field notes)

Many teachers had probably not worked in cities where there was a voluntary student body whom the children called "home teachers" and children did not or could not explain to their school teachers who these individuals were or even how their relationship had developed with their home teachers.

Many teachers also believed that Asian families were all very united and they "all help each other out don't they? "

They are all interconnected in some ways and boys can find jobs with cousins and relations.

(PE teacher, field notes)

Three teachers mentioned that they were puzzled by the fact that Asian boys did not like having work experience in a shop as a shop assistant and felt that somehow that was beneath them. The teachers felt that was rather an arrogant stance when "our children (meaning white working class children) don't seem to mind it that much." No distinction was drawn here between Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian children.

## 10.9

### The use of questionnaires

The questionnaire referred to in this chapter (see Appendix: 3A) was administered to the school staff who were in school until or before July 1988. 23 teachers out of 60 returned their completed questionnaires. On the question of whether, in the teachers' opinion, children from ethnic minority backgrounds at Cherrydale needed a role model in an Asian or an African-Caribbean teacher, out of 23 teachers who answered the questionnaire, five said yes, 15 said no and three did not answer the question. Five teachers elaborated by adding comments such as

"No I believe this would be a form of racism."

"No. They have their family and parents as role models."

"Why only these children?"

"No! Though more Afro-Caribbean and Asian teachers generally would be a good idea, role model or no role model."

"We should have more black teachers particularly in positions of responsibility."

To the statement "community languages should be offered to children alongside French and German". (Urdu and Bengali lessons were held during PSE lessons or during form tutor periods), 19 teachers said yes, one said no and three said they did not know. 15 teachers

did not like the idea of Asian children in their classes missing PSE. However this view often co-existed with the belief that PSE lessons were a waste of time. For example, one form teacher said "it's all very well doing PSE but half the teachers don't know how to teach it. No one has told us" (field notes). But some weeks later in a conversation she said without any apparent awareness of self-contradiction, "I think it's a pity Asians miss PSE and other things because of their language classes" (field notes). Apart from this, most of the teachers seemed open-minded about the community languages issue.

In commenting on the statement "I think this school is doing enough for ethnic minority children, four said yes, 13 said no and six teachers did not answer. Nobody ticked 'don't know'. It was difficult to know why six teachers declined to answer the question, but going by the responses offered, more teachers thought that the school was not doing enough.

The statement "I am aware of racism in this school" drew this response: 16 said yes, five said no and two did not answer. Teachers were then asked to specify whether in their opinion there was racism in the schools's organisation, among teachers or among children. Of the teachers who were aware of racism, one ticked the first one, one ticked the second one and the other 14 said racism was confined to children.

Two statements drew an overwhelming response and agreement between teachers. All 23 teachers said yes in reply to the question "On parents' days the school should try and provide someone who can communicate with parents who can't speak English". The other statement which all teachers agreed on was that parents who cannot speak English should come to school anyway.

Although the school did not have any multicultural or anti- racist policy it might have been

possible to initiate discussions by senior staff on the basis of some of the answers I received. I was never asked about the questionnaires by any member of staff. I had placed a questionnaire in every pigeonhole and all teachers knew of it. Their silence on the matter can perhaps be explained in that they considered it a confidential document and did not want to appear to be openly curious about what their colleagues thought or wrote.

## 10.10

### Policy on 'race' related issues

It could be argued that the absence of written policy statements about racism, multiculturalism or equal opportunities made it difficult for the staff and the pupils to react effectively when racist incidents occurred. The instances which took place in school and which portrayed Asian children's perspectives have already been mentioned in the chapters on children. The following incidents in this section are those which some teachers chose to share with me; some were described in a humorous vein and others in earnest.

Children's lack of knowledge about simple biological facts regarding pigmentation was mentioned by one teacher.

You know Larry? You should have heard him talking about Qasim. One day out of the blue he said "Sir you know it's the climate" and I said "C'mon Larry what do you mean?" And he said "the longer these people are in this country the lighter their skin gets" I laughed at that but the rest of the class was dead quiet. So I said "look Larry it is not that at all." and he said mimicking Larry) "Sir Sir it is. You know Qasim, he was so very dark when he was little. I know I was there and now he's been in here and just look how light he is." I told Larry he was being silly it had to do with pigmentation. You know what he said (suppressed laughter) "Sir it has nothing to do with pigs!" and they all fell about laughing.

(History teacher, taped interview)

The above conversation took place in the context of a discussion about the science curriculum. The history teacher who told me about Larry was wondering why it was that children were not taught about pigmentation in detail during Biology lessons. In his opinion

there was no point in teaching children about other things in science without first addressing and demystifying issues which were part of their daily misconceptions. Yet, this idea was not communicated to the science department perhaps because of the lack of formal or informal communication between the two departments.

One of the Pakistani girls in the fourth year had befriended Melanie who was a classroom assistant. She put henna on Melanie's hands just before the festival of Eid. Melanie related the following incident to me. She was showing the henna patterns to some teachers in the staffroom. She told me it was received coldly and in utter silence, before one of the teachers looked at her and said "Ugh! fancy doing that to yourself. I thought only Asians do those kinds of things" (field notes). She said that because the school did not have any written statement about challenging racist comments she could not share it with other teachers by recording it in an incident book. She also felt that if she just talked about it to teachers it would be construed as malicious gossip.

A more serious incident occurred during the first year I spent at the school. It was related to me by the teacher concerned, Brian Smith. Ambrose, a West Indian boy was not paying attention in class. Suddenly he got his roller skates on and started skating outside the classroom in the corridor. Brian asked him to come in and sit down and he thought that was the end of it. Later the boy's older brother who was a fourth former and was a tall and a big child for his age, appeared and used abusive and threatening language in heavy creole which he normally never used. He physically barred Brian's way and he asked him to stop hassling his little brother. Brian felt upset and reported it to the head of year. According to him nothing was done about it for six days.

Brian Smith felt that more senior teachers than him were prepared to keep quiet about it



because of the boys' ethnic origin and for no other reason. He also felt that this differential treatment could inadvertently amount to racism. Whether or not Brian's account of the incident is a fair one that has not omitted anything of significance, the general point which this incident highlighted was that teachers were uncertain as to how they should deal with such matters because there were no policy guidelines about racism in the school.

The word "racism" was not mentioned in any of the printed material the school published. There was no acknowledgement of such an issue ever having been in existence at Cherrydale. The likely explanation is that most of the teachers hoped that if they ignored it for long enough it would go away. The continuous refrain was that "we don't differentiate between children. We treat them all the same."

Brian Smith's experience was not an isolated one. Lizzie Knight, the school's only mainstream African-Caribbean teacher related several incidents to me which she considered "trivial on the one hand, but odious on the other" (field notes). As a head of year she took students' absence from lessons very seriously. (She appeared from my observations to take it more seriously than other heads of year, but I cannot be certain.) Lizzie believed that when third year students began to play truant, it was a cry for help. They would find the next two years even more difficult to handle. In her opinion children had to be persuaded to come back to school in whatever way it was possible, including phoning the child at home if he or she had been away. This according to her, had decreased the number of those students who were early starters in truancy. In the course of one such telephone call a white child's father used racially abusive language on the telephone. When she went next door in her distress to tell the headteacher about it she felt that he offered

no sympathy, no words of comfort, no backup support! He just felt it was part of the job. I couldn't believe it! I was made to feel that somehow the trouble was with me.

(Lizzie Knight, field notes)

Such feelings of frustration were expressed in different ways by a white teacher and an African-Caribbean teacher. The headteacher was certainly aware of both incidents, but according to the teachers concerned he did nothing to help them through it. Thus the school was not equipped to deal with future incidents of this kind. No steps were taken by anybody to open discussion on the school's lack of policy statements in this area, nor was anything done to put 'race' forward as a matter for serious consideration. How that affected Asian and African-Caribbean teachers' perception of the school is worth exploring in some more detail.

## 10.11

### Teachers of ethnic minority backgrounds and their relationship with Cherrydale School

There is very limited research based ethnographic data available in Britain about the experiences of teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds. Not much has been written about what white teachers make of them in a multiethnic secondary school such as Cherrydale. Ranger (1988) who conducted a survey of ethnic minority school teachers in eight local education authorities found that the

ethnic minority teachers are few in number, and that they are disproportionately on the lowest salary scales. They do not enjoy the same career progression as white teachers, even when their starting scales and length of service are similar...Over half of the ethnic minority teachers believed that they personally experienced racial discrimination in teaching.  
(p. 65)

This is true also of the teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds in my sample. This section explores these issues further. As there were during the research period several opportunities for me to talk in some detail to six individual teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds who worked in Cherrydale for different periods of time, it seemed worthwhile

to record their experiences of Cherrydale School alongside the impressions formed by white teachers, where possible.

Apart from Lizzie, who was a full-time mainstream English teacher and the head of third year on a temporary contract, and Joya who joined the school temporarily during the second year of my research as a probationer within the business studies department, the remaining four teachers were employed part-time under Section Eleven of the 1966 Local Government Act. Among those four, one teacher, Carole, was of African-Caribbean origin. The remaining three were Asian community language teachers on temporary part-time or full-time contracts. The community languages teachers never met Carole or even each other during school time. Carole never met Lizzie, the first mainstream non-white teacher ever to work at Cherrydale School, as Lizzie had resigned by the time Carole came to school. Lizzie and Joya had a greater opportunity to participate in the school as compared to the other teachers who were employed on a temporary, Section Eleven funded, peripatetic basis by the LEA. However, by her own admission Joya spent all her time within her own department because she felt she had to learn a lot during her probationary year.

From only six individuals, it is possible to draw only provisional conclusions about teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds, but there is no reason to suppose that their situation was untypical of ethnic minority teachers working in secondary schools in Cherrytown at the time. What was common to them was a distinct feeling of marginality, irrespective of the length of time they had spent in Cherrydale and irrespective of their seniority in career terms.

What distinguished these six teachers from each other was the place where they had obtained their first degrees, and whether or not their entire teaching experience was based

in Britain. Three out of the four Section Eleven funded teachers had graduated outside Britain in countries which were once British colonies. All of those teachers were paid on an instructor's scale as opposed to mainstream teacher's scale, because the Department of Education did not consider their qualifications equivalent to a British degree. Without a qualified teacher's status these teachers could not hope for promotion. The number of years they had spent teaching did not make their case any better in this respect. They told me that they were made to feel lucky to be employed at all.

Three of these teachers were teachers of community languages who taught Bengali and Urdu. Two Urdu lessons were taught every week by two different teachers in turn, during form tutor period or PSE period. They were Firoza Ansari and Tahir Khan. The Bengali lessons taught simultaneously next door to the Urdu classes were taught by one teacher, Geeta Dutt, whose Section Eleven monies were paid directly into the school. The fourth teacher Carole James was a part-time African-Caribbean support teacher. Carole, Firoza and Tahir were employed by the Multicultural Centre on Section Eleven funding. Of these four teachers only Carole was able to be present in mainstream classes. She was sent to Cherrydale School after Lizzie Knight resigned. This in effect means that at any one time there were four teachers of ethnic minority background working in Cherrydale and at any given time only one was teaching mainstream classes. Ethnic minority teachers did not do any team teaching together and they were so constrained by their timetable commitments that they never met each other in school. They could not support each other.

There was considerable confusion in the minds of some white teachers over the grounds upon which teachers paid through Section Eleven had gained entry to Cherrydale School. Four white teachers felt that Section Eleven teachers had obtained jobs which they did not really deserve because they were unqualified teachers who were somehow getting into the

teaching profession through the back door. In conversations I had with mainstream teachers, they elaborated upon the idea. This was said specifically in connection with Carole James, the African-Caribbean support teacher who according to her own accounts experienced a considerable animosity from other teachers. Of all the Section Eleven funded teachers she was the teacher the rest of the staff came into most contact with. There was another Section Eleven funded teacher, Sue Hamilton, who taught English as a second language to children. She was white and although she too came across mainstream teachers, her qualifications were not viewed doubtfully. The ordinary mainstream teachers were completely baffled by the Section Eleven arrangements. They were not in favour of "bending the rules" to let ethnic minority teachers in.

It's not good enough. We've all had to work very hard to be qualified teachers. If you are then going to be teaching alongside people who get in through the back door, it just can't work. Some people may accept that, but many won't.

(Maths teacher, field notes)

If you put people in positions unfairly because they are the token black person in your school for example when in the normal competitive system there is no way they would have got in because they were not good enough, you're actually placing somebody in a high position who is actually not up to that position and the effect is to demoralise anybody.

(Head of English, taped interview)

There were only two teachers in the whole school who stated that the school should deliberately try harder to find and keep a good mainstream teacher who was Asian or African-Caribbean and who was not

At the bottom scale, or a mere probationer or something like that, but someone who has the power to influence policy.

(Head of History, taped conversation)

There might have been other teachers who had similar feelings but no one else expressed them to me. Most of the rest of the staff seemed to believe that if teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds were good enough, they could easily obtain employment "just like the rest of us", to quote a science teacher.

The two Urdu teachers were "unknown entities" (CDT teacher) at Cherrydale School. They entered the school through the main entrance, walked past the reception and the headteacher's office, went upstairs, taught their respective lessons and left. Whenever I attended the Urdu classes in the two years I was at school, these teachers were never seen talking to any of the full-time, mainstream teachers at Cherrydale and the Asian children they taught noted this. The Urdu teachers said that once they had a meeting with the senior deputy head. They never used the staff room and never had coffee in school. They were never formally invited to parents' evenings or to other school events, they told me. The reason they gave me for not using the staffroom, was that within half an hour of finishing their lessons at Cherrydale they were expected to be at their next school. For the same reason, my conversations with these teachers had to happen outside their teaching time at Cherrydale. They also pointed out, however, that nobody invited them to have coffee. They had never been properly introduced to all the staff at Cherrydale, whose names and faces they were unfamiliar with. The teachers' handbook in 1987 did not mention their names.

Other part-time teachers' names were mentioned. According to one Urdu teacher:

You get the job, you meet one teacher who shows you the classroom. You go in and start teaching next week. You don't have a cupboard to keep your books in or a notice board to display any work. You teach and you go.

(Tahir Khan, taped conversation)

Tahir and Firoza belonged to the same ethnic group as the majority of Asian children at Cherrydale. They were the only Pakistani teachers the Pakistani children had ever come across in all their years of schooling in Cherrytown. For this reason attention is drawn to them here. They felt quite powerless in school. They had to rely on their students to put pressure on the school to buy them bilingual English/Urdu dictionaries, without which the children would find it difficult to do their translation practice for their exams.

Firoza, who was a graduate from the Punjab University in Pakistan, had been on temporary

contracts for over six years. She said she did not know members of staff in Cherrydale School and felt that the school was not making any serious effort to liaise with Urdu teachers. Firoza and Tahir had to produce all their own teaching materials and resources, as those imported from Pakistan would be inappropriate for use within British classrooms, without first being rewritten or altered to suit teenagers in Cherrytown. Firoza felt marginalised and was losing interest in Cherrydale. Tahir was relatively new to Cherrytown. He too felt that he just taught and left the school on each occasion. He thought that perhaps Asian men should seek professions other than teaching as there was very little job satisfaction in peripatetic teaching posts, and he did not see himself getting the opportunity of being offered a full-time permanent job doing mainstream teaching. He also felt that Asian men could not afford the luxury of non vocational degrees. His was a degree in Philosophy from a British University as a mature student. According to Ranger's (1988) findings:

The disparity between the scales of white male and ethnic minority male teachers was particularly high. 72% of ethnic minority male teachers were on scales 1 or 2, compared with only 40% of white males (ie. 32%, or almost a third fewer).

(p. 40)

Asian children who were Cherrytown born and bred told me they had never come across any mainstream Asian teacher in all their lives. The first such teacher they had ever seen was Joya, the temporary probationary Business Studies teacher. She only taught two children in my sample.

The fourth Section Eleven funded teacher, Carole James, was the part-time African-Caribbean teacher who was sent to Cherrydale school by the Multicultural Centre. Carole was employed to offer help to African-Caribbean children. Although she was not introduced formally to all the members of staff at Cherrydale, a brief introduction did appear about her on the staff notice board as well as in the weekly staff bulletin. Her stay at Cherrydale was

very short and very unhappy. She handed in her resignation to the Multicultural Centre within the first year of her appointment, mainly because of what she saw as lack of support both from the school and from the Multicultural Centre. She had been a mainstream English teacher in the West Indies for many years before she came to Cherrytown a year ago. She was upset about the low scale at which she was employed as well as the school's and the Multicultural Centre's attitude towards her. Cherrytown's adviser for African-Caribbean children's education came to Cherrydale and according to Carole just left her there "to get on with it. To get on with what?"(Field notes). Her job was not properly discussed between the Multicultural Centre and the school. Nobody made any attempt to include her in any conversation in the staff room. Carole said she went to any lesson

where anybody will have me. That means geography, English, science. Sometimes I sit here (in the staff room) and nobody seems to need me. I am told by the adviser that I should go and ask everyone if they can use my services in any way. She also phones up and checks up on me whether I am here or not.

(Taped conversation)

She did not think she would remain in Cherrytown for very long. She felt unsupported and she resigned. She was not replaced by any other African-Caribbean teacher.

### 10.11.1

#### **Lizzie Knight, the first non-white mainstream teacher at Cherrydale**

Lizzie was the first ever mainstream African-Caribbean teacher to be employed by Cherrydale School. For this reason attention is drawn to her here. She resigned within three years of her appointment. She had been appointed as head of year in the time of the previous headteacher. She was of Caribbean origin and her main subject was English which she had taught for several years. She was articulate and well informed about the current debates in education on a national level. Most of the African-Caribbean and Asian children liked and respected her, though some white and Asian children told me they worked hard



for her even though they were frightened of her.

She frightens me but I always finish my work for her.

(Asad: 5, fifth year)

She frightens us and makes us work hard but she likes children.

(Sohel: 4, fourth year)

Asad and Sohel often got into trouble for not handing their work on time to their other teachers. White children said things like:

She tells us different stories and end of term we can write a secret letter to her and tell her what we didn't like in English.

(John, white fourth year)

She was the first teacher in the English Department to introduce African-Caribbean and Asian writers and novelists to the children. She built up a stock of non-European literature in the English department. Many children I spoke to said that when she taught she "was dead serious". Lizzie taught English across different age and ability ranges, right across third year to 'A' levels. Many children missed her teaching after she left Cherrydale. The general view about her departure among many Asian and African-Caribbean children was to quote Saira, "Mrs Knight left because of racism you know!" (Field notes.)

Despite her ability to teach well and clamp down on truants, she was having difficulties in the school. When asked for specific reasons, she said there were several. Lizzie felt that the school needed "a team approach and some support from the top". She was not alone in these sentiments. It was openly acknowledged in Cherrydale that one of the most difficult tasks at school was being the head of year, because he or she was expected to deal in the first instance with many of the pastoral and academic problems presented by the whole year. One of the most taxing things for anybody in that position would be to have an assistant head of year who was unavailable when needed. Lizzie said she was being expected to do two people's jobs because according to her

How can you have the head of PE as an assistant head of year? When I

really need help he is always busy practising for matches.

(Lizzie Knight, field notes)

It was true that during lunch breaks and after school, he had to train for matches, particularly in the summer. According to staff room gossip he had been given the job rather than another less busy candidate because he had been in the school for a longer period. Another reason to quote one teacher was that he was said to have a "good manner with parents" and because he could "diffuse trouble when parents came in to complain".

Cherrydale School had a policy of inviting parents for an interview before their children were formally admitted. It was an opportunity for the teachers to tell parents about Cherrydale. Student booklets were given to parents giving them basic information about the school. All the prospective parents whose surnames began with particular letters of the alphabet were given to particular teachers to interview. Lizzie told me that once when a governor's child and a lecturer's daughter were due to be interviewed by her, one of the deputy heads removed those papers from her pile, so that they would meet the deputy head or someone else instead of Lizzie. She felt very sad about that but said that she could not really do much about it. She said that when it came to a public relations job the school did not trust her. Though I do not doubt her account, I could not ask the members of the senior staff team to verify this and it is based totally on what Lizzie told me.

Lizzie wrote a paper about truancy as a discussion document within the school because she felt that as a head of year she had a duty to tell senior staff about her ideas. She sent a copy to the headteacher, who according to Lizzie did not respond positively. She then sent a copy to the chief education officer as she thought that Cherrydale School might be able to get more resources partly because of the paper. Lizzie had not been asked by anybody to do this and so no comments were made about it. In my field notes on the day I recorded

this comment from her: "good or bad, no feed back. I have been forbidden from pinning it on the staff notice board, just imagine!" She told me that when she spoke to the chief education officer about her ideas, he delegated the matter to one of his assistant officers. She said that if the local education authority did not even consider it worth its while to acknowledge the paper, it meant that the local education authority was not really interested in improving the lot of those ordinary children who could be helped before they got into serious trouble because of truancy.

Although I had a copy of the paper I could not ask the headteacher why he did not discuss it openly. Such action might have been construed as interfering with the confidential internal decision making of the school. It might have barred access for me, as Cherrydale was hierarchical in structure. It seemed to me that there was no mechanism in the school for discussing issues which had not been delegated by very senior members of staff. Suggestions from a head of year like Lizzie seemed to go unheeded. (At about the same time a request from some fifth years to form a students union in Cherrydale was not discussed with all members of staff either.) Lizzie resigned from her post mainly because she said she was not supported and felt devalued. She felt that "as a black person and as a teacher" she was not taken seriously. Although I have no reason to question her judgement, it is extremely difficult to prove the extent to which Lizzie's ethnicity was responsible for determining people's treatment of her.

About eight months after this resignation, I overheard a conversation in the staffroom, between the head of English department and the inspector for English in Cherry County. While talking about Lizzie, the inspector was told that she had not been "very happy". This was uttered in a soft tone with a shrug. Lizzie's contribution to the school was not mentioned, her problems were not discussed. It could almost be construed as meaning that

she could not cope and left, which was not entirely true. The inspector, after a moment's silence, did not press for reasons and it seemed from the quick change of topic that the head of the English department did not see any reason to elaborate. This was how Cherrydale School lost an able African-Caribbean mainstream teacher. Although it is unadvisable to generalise on the basis of a single case, Lizzie's case highlights the way in which some teachers feel marginalised and ignored. It also emphasises the fact that perhaps teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are in need of extra support because they feel particularly vulnerable and isolated.

### 10.11.2

#### **Common experience of all ethnic minority teachers**

It is true to say that every single teacher from ethnic minority background who came into contact with Cherrydale School felt marginalised and felt he or she was not really respected or taken seriously. Comparative accounts of the same school from Asian and African-Caribbean perspectives would be most useful in future research. Carole and Lizzie were regarded by their colleagues as

Assertive, oh yes you can't make her do what she doesn't like (said of Lizzie).

(PE teacher, field notes)

Strong-minded isn't she? I mean considering she is only part-time (said of Carole).

(RE teacher, field notes)

Personally I find Lizzie a bit too regimented. She doesn't let the kids relax, does she?

(Home Economics teacher, field notes)

Asian teachers were seen as

He's very quiet. I suppose that's because he is not here very much, he's only part-time.

(Deputy head, field notes)

Very pleasant lady (said of Bengali teacher). She causes no fuss, just comes

and teaches in the morning.

(English teacher, field notes)

This kind of stereotyping might have affected the way in which these teachers were perceived and treated.

## 10.12

### Conclusion

The teachers felt that Cherrydale School was the responsibility of a headteacher who did not always make his presence felt. They believed that the school lacked clear cut policies and injunctions "from on high" and carried on with their jobs as best they could. Issues concerning the education of children from ethnic minority communities were not central to the school's thinking. The school lost one third of its staff in the middle of the research period. Over a period of three years, it was according to Cherry County records one of two schools, including primary and middle schools in Cherrytown which lost the highest number of staff.

Teachers from Asian and African-Caribbean backgrounds did not feel valued and welcome in the school, whether they were part-time or full-time, peripatetic or mainstream. Judging from their answers to the questionnaires, teachers appeared to be more willing to have translators in school than use the services of existing bilingual people more efficiently. There was some unease expressed in different ways about the envisaged and actual role of the Multicultural Centre, which obviously did not have an input in initiating any thinking about equal opportunities within Cherrydale.

Most of the teachers were baffled by the requests from Asian children for further help from "home teachers". It is difficult to say how far they saw this as a criticism of their

effectiveness as teachers or of the school failing to address working class Asian children's educational needs. They held stereotypical opinions about Asian parents and especially about Asian mothers. They did not try to understand why Asian parents wanted their children to avail themselves of educational opportunities which had been denied to them. Teachers on the whole underestimated the hope which Asian parents and children placed in them, as probably the most educated people, apart from their doctor, that they had come across in Cherrytown.

According to the Rampton Committee (1981) a

wide gulf of mistrust and misunderstanding appeared to be growing between schools and minority parents...schools seem to be having only limited success in explaining their aims and practices to parents.

(p. 41)

If Cherrydale School continues in the same way the gulf is bound to grow. One way to open dialogue between parents, all parents, and the school would have been for the teachers to share their ideas more openly with parents as equal partners. However, according to Hall (1978) historically schools have evaded acknowledging their geographical and social locations.

In order to share with parents the situation being faced by their children, genuine consultation and exchange of information was necessary which never took place. According to Collett (1985) for

any consultation worthy of the name...the power of information must be devolved and shared.

(p. 19)

Cherrydale School had a very long way to go before it would manage to work effectively with teachers and parents from ethnic minority communities. It had a longer way to go to understand the real needs of Asian children who attended it daily and who felt marginalised

as a combined effect of 'race', class and gender.

## CHAPTER 11

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 11.1

##### Introduction

In the thesis I have attempted to document the experiences of Asian children. I tried as far as possible to let children guide the course of this research by especially focusing on their concerns in my analysis. A parallel analysis of Asian parents' experiences made it clear that quite often the children's world could not be disentangled from that of their parents. It also drew attention to the differences between the experiences of parents and children. This study which began its course in Cherrydale School also looked at teachers' opinions about Asian children, thus presenting a three dimensional perspective on working class Asian children's experiences.

On the basis of the data presented in this study, how reliable and valid are my findings? The data were gathered over a long period of time from different informants and the analysis was not based on a single mode of enquiry such as a single questionnaire or a single interview schedule which might have presented a partial picture. The data were checked and analysed again whenever conflicting evidence emerged from the field. I have tried throughout the thesis to openly acknowledge problems and barriers to access. Whenever my presuppositions were challenged by the evidence in the field I consciously sought to understand, describe and explain the evidence rather than to merely reflect my



own ideas and hypotheses. I tried to openly acknowledge ambivalent attitudes and inconsistencies in the data which merit further study. By stating at the outset my own position as an Asian woman researcher in the field and by considering possible weaknesses and strengths of that position, I hope I was able to present an open and honest picture of the circumstances in which this research took place. Ethnography was, it seems, the method best suited for the present study.

I have concentrated specifically on 50 Asian children and their families and on Cherrydale School. Embedded within this thesis is the constant theme of Asian children's marginality on account of their social class, 'race'/ethnicity and gender. All the children were Asian and none belonged to professional middle class backgrounds. Gender differences were very obvious in the data but Asian children's marginality did not derive from gender differences alone. It was the combined effect of these three variables which resulted in marginality. Asian boys experienced it in a different way from Asian girls. They had to live up to different expectations but their white peers and white teachers were not aware of the kinds of pressures under which these children operated. Their parents' experiences and consequently their own experiences and education were in some ways very different from that of their other working class peers. Their standard of living however, might have been similar to that of some of their peers. Asian children differed most obviously from their white peers in their experience of racism. The total impact of all these factors had a combined effect of making them feel on the periphery, unable to share in an unselfconscious way the difficulties they were experiencing and what they were going through.

In this final chapter I wish to explore the extent to which it is possible to generalise from this case study and to speculate about other Asian children in Britain. There may be some

findings whose significance may lie beyond the confines of Cherrydale School in Cherrytown. To this end I wish to see how typical the sample of Asian children and their families in Cherrytown was. The socioeconomic position of Asian communities played an important role in the present study. It is worth considering how far other Asian communities in Britain share similar circumstances to the ones described here. Do the experiences documented so far represent a transitional phase in the history of Asian settlement in Britain? How significant is the experience of racism in a study of Asian school children? The answers to some of these questions might, besides pointing the way to further research also have future policy implications.

## 11.2

### How typical is Cherrytown?

As described in the thesis Cherrytown is not a large urban town. The total population of Asians living there is much smaller than in other bigger cities like London and Birmingham. However it is quite possible that the issues facing children in Cherrytown may be the same as those in other cities. This is because the children I studied were just ordinary working class Asian children attending an ordinary comprehensive school in an urban setting. Neither they nor their school were specifically chosen for their uniqueness.

## 11.3

### The socioeconomic position of Asian communities

The described experiences of Asian communities showed that their socioeconomic position played a very important role in their daily lives. The typical Asian family experienced a great strain on its financial resources. When considering the circumstances of working class Asian communities it could be argued that in some respects one is more likely to find parallels in working class white communities than in middle class ethnic minority

communities. However, unlike most white working class families in Britain, Asian families have financial commitments towards their dependent relations "back home" in addition to their families in Britain.

My sample consisted mainly of working class Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (see Chapter 4). Preliminary analysis of 1991 census data (see Owen, April 1993) has confirmed some national trends which corroborate my findings in Cherrytown (see Appendix: 6B). It has been found that Bangladeshi and Pakistani families live in overcrowded accommodation. Bangladeshi households in particular are more than twice as large as the overall national average. Among South Asians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis experience a high level of physical housing problems such as lack of central heating, lack of exclusive use of bath or WC. These findings echo the circumstances I have described in the thesis. It was also found that nationally Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have low rates of car ownership. This was generally the case among all Asians in my sample. Not all families in my sample had the use of a telephone. The national trend among South Asians of relative affluence among Indians was not reflected in my small sample of Indian families.

Although the unemployment rate in Cherrytown is lower than the national average the nature of employment among Asians is not unique to Cherrytown. The majority of Asian families in my sample and in Cherrytown as a whole were employed at the lower end of the job market. The latest PSI Report on ethnic minorities based on Labour Force Surveys (see Jones 1993), as well as an analysis of 1991 Census (see Owen, March 1993) indicate that unemployment rates are higher for both men and women among ethnic minorities than among white people. Bangladeshis have the highest unemployment rates in Britain, followed by Pakistanis and Black ethnic groups. A high degree of under-employment among Bangladeshi and Pakistani women as compared to Indian women was also reported.

This may however not be entirely reliable as self-employed Pakistani women like those described in the thesis may not be accurately represented in national statistics. This finding was also reported in the work of Brah and Shaw (1992). I would like to emphasise however that the wages earned by these women (and perhaps some men) working at home are quite nominal. Also, many Asian women who work part-time because of the unavailability of work or because of their onerous domestic responsibilities are paid the minimum possible wage. There is a possibility that those families who could not read and write English might not have returned the census forms. This might have been the case among some of the parents in my sample or those parents whose children are too young to be able to fill forms for their parents.

Owen (March 1993) has further reported that unemployment rates are higher for 16-24 year olds than for the entire working population. Within this age group Pakistanis and Bangladeshis have been reported as having both low economic activity rates as well as low proportions of full-time students. On the basis of my research it can be suggested that some Asian young people might not admit to working as their employers may not be paying National Insurance. None of the children who were working in my sample for instance openly admitted that they were doing so. Yet they were working because they felt they had no choice. The census figures might not have been able to accurately draw up a separate category of those who are working below subsistence level.

In the light of the above findings it is easy to see why in Asian families who fall within low income brackets with a higher than average number of dependent adults and children per household, the psychological and economic stress is likely to be quite high. This study has highlighted the domestic environments of such households and suggests that the socioeconomic position of Asians in Cherrytown does not seem to be limited to this single

study.

## 11.4

### A passing phase for Asian children?

All the Asian children in my sample had parents who were migrants, a large proportion of whom were rural migrants. A majority of the parents had not had much formal education. Many could not read and write or even speak English. Many parents subscribed to the myth of return and hoped to keep their ties with their past and with their countries of origin alive. Unlike them, their own children had been mostly brought up in Cherrytown.

Could it be that with the passage of time there will be a weakening of link with the Subcontinent and a gradual break with the cultural and emotional pull exerted by everything which stands for "back home"? I have argued in the thesis that Asian children were not completely like their parents, nor completely like their white peers. They belonged on the whole to a group of young people who seemed to be in the process of carving out a separate identity for themselves. This was affected by gender and ethnicity as much as by their social class. Whether their experiences were indicative of a transitional phase would seem to be linked among other factors to their degree of acceptability within Britain. The extent to which they feel confident and feel they belong to Britain and can make a useful contribution in their own terms will define their future in Britain. If they continue to feel marginalised and misunderstood by the majority communities they might begin to show signs of alienation by withdrawing into the company of those among whom they do not feel excluded. The question of how far Asian communities are going through a transitional phase does not have a simple monosyllabic answer.

It has been suggested by many that schools reproduce the inequalities prevalent in the rest

of society and teachers' attitudes replicate the status quo. Cherrydale School helped to perpetuate gender differences and particularly so in the case of Asian girls. It failed to address the problems about racism. If these factors were to be reflected in Asian children's experiences outside school they are more likely to feel outside the mainstream and unable to achieve what they are capable of achieving. They do not seem to be as encapsulated as their parents (see Chapters 2 and 3). Their future behaviour would depend to some extent on whether as a reaction to racism they feel socially rejected by their peers and they find new forms of resistance.

## 11.5

### The role of the School

Those children who went to school in Britain would perhaps as parents themselves, understand and possibly be able to see their own children's struggles more clearly. They might be able to offer more support to their children than they were able to receive from their own parents. However, Asian parents' general goodwill towards teachers and trust in teachers might not last in the cases of those who did not have a positive experience of schooling. In this respect they would have more in common with white working class parents.

Each school is affected by general factors which exist in society like the effects of social class and 'race'/ethnicity and gender. All of these go some way towards structuring society. At the same time however, individual schools are also deeply affected by local events and chance happenings. This could mean the positive or negative influence of one particular headteacher or deputy head, the appointment to a key post of a committed or malevolent individual whose very presence can change the school ethos and can either repair the school or damage it beyond recognition. If we take an optimistic view then change is

possible through individual actions and aspirations. Against the background of "given circumstances" individuals can paint their own details and their own perceptions of the world. Individual teachers backed up by equal opportunities policies and the children they teach can take part in change for the better. Alternatively they can make it worse.

Teachers work in schools which are powerful institutions. A positive change of attitude among teachers and schools would certainly make a difference for ethnic minority children and for other working class children.

## 11.6

### Racism

Many writers have concentrated on the negative effects of racism on the lives of ethnic minorities in Britain (see Troyna and Hatcher 1992, Solomos 1992, Wright 1992). They have been particularly concerned with matters of institutional racism whereby an institution perpetuates racism in effect if not in intention (see Tomlinson 1992). Some ethnographers have looked at school processes which have brought the subject of racism to the fore. I have recorded those incidents which Asian parents and children attributed to racism. In this study I have written about racism but not exclusively about it. The discussion of racism per se on a theoretical level contains a highly emotive charge. It can sometimes get in the way of pursuing a detached line of enquiry with which people of different persuasions will agree. It can get in the way of distinguishing very clearly between individual acts of racism and documenting institutional racism. On a macro level racism has become an over used word. For example on a moral, structural and political level it has been blamed for immigration policies, for some politicians using racist innuendo for obtaining votes, debates about the national front party, under-resourcing of anti-racist initiatives and so on. Racism has in its current usage almost become an umbrella term which covers several different

aspects. It is at an individual level that I have looked at the effect of racism. To have attributed everything blandly to a single blanket term would have meant operating on a simplistic level of analysis. In a study like the one reported here, the existence of racism was not the only factor Asian children and their families were having to contend with. This does not mean that I underestimate the damaging effects of racism on the lives of those studied or that I do not acknowledge its existence. I was concerned to show how marginality in Asian children's lives results not only from racism, but from other forms of oppression which work together to diminish their life chances.

## 11.7

### Further research

My research was mainly about working class Asian children. It might be useful to conduct a study of Asian children from professional middle class backgrounds to see what kinds of barriers they encounter and how they overcome them. How do they define success and failure? This could be compared with the accounts of children and young people from those Asian families who have moved up the socioeconomic ladder from working class backgrounds to middle class but not professional middle class positions. This would for example include shopkeepers and restaurant owners' children. It would be interesting to know how likely they are in due course to join the professional middle class in Britain. The effects of gender on teachers' and parents' views about Asian girls' education is worthy of research. This could be done through longitudinal research, action research as well as by collecting life histories and documenting oral histories of young Asian men and women.

There is to date insufficient published data about ethnic minority teachers, about both those who qualified in Britain as well as those who qualified abroad. Their influence and involvement in the education system is worthy of ethnographic study and of a longitudinal



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study. The 1991 Census could be used to compile a preliminary national profile of the teaching profession according to ethnicity and gender. It could also be used as a baseline for ethnic monitoring. Another related area worth researching is the influence of ethnic minority officials in the education departments who are not teachers themselves but who influence teachers and parents from their own communities.

## 11.8

### Policy Implications

If the 60 teachers at Cherrydale School are taken as a random sample of teachers in British comprehensive schools, they show with a very few exceptions a remarkable lack of interest and support for ethnic minority children. There needs to be more commitment at government and at local institutional level to train teachers to be more aware of the needs of children from ethnic minority backgrounds. This can happen through PGCE courses and through in-service training courses. In order to be effective these courses need to involve members from ethnic minority communities and in particular ethnic minority teachers.

As far as Asian parents were concerned one of the main reasons for their lack of involvement in school and their unease was the absence of Asian teachers who could be contacted in school everyday during school time. There is a need for more ethnic minority teachers generally and more Asian bilingual teachers in British schools. These must be mainstream teachers and not peripheral Section Eleven teachers who were seen as token teachers by Asian children in Cherrydale School. With the planned drastic cuts in Section Eleven funding at Central Government level, it would be useful to know the extent to which ethnic minority teachers succeed in obtaining mainstream posts.

Without having had the opportunity of formal schooling themselves there was a limit as to

what Asian parents could do to help directly with their children's schooling. With some help from professional educationalists and others they could be helped to help themselves. It could be something as basic as the availability of free space after school. It is in the interest of local government officials to support community based initiatives from local Asian groups and other ethnic minority groups who seek better educational opportunities for their children.

On the basis of this research it seems that parents and teachers need to work together to meet the needs of Asian children. Ideally Asian parents should have been more involved in their children's formal schooling, but as I have shown in this thesis they were not able to do so. Those who did visit Cherrydale School were made to feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. Clearly for the sake of the children, ways and means must be found to shatter the deadlock between home and schools.

If all children in Britain have a positive contribution to make to its future, the education system and society at large need to invest in every child's future. By marginalising a whole section of the community schools will only succeed in failing their children and in the long run failing themselves.

I had set out to study the ways in which Asian children negotiate their way at home and at school, and to find possible connections between these two spheres of their lives. I have not been able to put forward a simple unidimensional cause and effect model about Asian children. This is because an honest description of their life defies monocausal connections. However, if this thesis succeeds in giving a voice to Asian people, particularly Asian children and young people whose voices are not often heard, then it will have gone a small way towards meeting that end.

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## APPENDIX: 3A

14 July 1988

Dear Colleague,

As you all probably know by now, I am trying to do a small piece of research at Cherrydale. Unfortunately, I have not been able to talk in detail to as many teachers as I would have liked. I have managed to talk to more children, for the obvious reason. I keep meeting them lesson after lesson! For me a 'feel' of Cherrydale would be incomplete without trying to find out what you as an individual teacher have made of it. Your personal experience is valuable because you have felt it, whether or not you have voiced it. It would be a loss for me not to have gathered your thoughts at the end of this academic year. I probably won't be able to talk to some of you again! Could you please find a few minutes to complete the enclosed questionnaire? Whatever you choose to say will be treated in the strictest confidence.

This research is funded by the Open University, not by the Local Education Authority.

Could you kindly return the completed questionnaires to my pigeon hole in the staff room? Many thanks in advance for taking the trouble to answer the questionnaires.

Yours sincerely,

Ghazala Bhatti.



## Questionnaire 1

1. Name (Optional) :
2. Present scale:
3. Subject you teach:
4. Main area of responsibility:

Please tick the most appropriate answer and add comments where requested.

- |    |   |                                      |
|----|---|--------------------------------------|
| 5. | <p>If leaving are you leaving because of</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">promotion</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">retirement</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">moving to another school</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">leaving for another reason</p> | <p>yes      no   don't      know</p> |
| 6. | <p>Have you been seconded while at<br/>Cherrydale?</p>  | <p>....      ....      ....</p>      |
| 7. | <p>If yes, what was your area of<br/>training or research?</p>  |                                      |
| 8. | <p>Has your expertise been actively<br/>sought by the school?</p>   | <p>....      ....      ....</p>      |
| 9. | <p>Have teachers on the whole welcomed<br/>GCSE at this school?</p>   | <p>....      ....      ....</p>      |

- |     |  |      |      |      |
|-----|--|------|------|------|
| 10. | Will pressure increase because of GCSE?  | .... | .... | .... |
| 11. | Do you feel you are expected to attend too many meetings in school?  | .... | .... | .... |
| 12. | Do you feel you have been involved in major decision making in school?   | .... | .... | .... |
| 13. | Is there anyone in this school to whom you can go and speak about your problems <u>without</u> it being held against you?  | .... | .... | .... |
| 14. | What are the 'ingredients' of a successful teacher in your terms?<br><br>classroom-teaching<br><br>communicating effectively<br><br>discretion<br><br>innovation<br><br>administrative expertise<br><br><i>(please add to this list if you like)</i> |      |      |      |
| 15. | Do you think mixed ability is a good thing?  | .... | .... | .... |
| 16. | Does it work in your subject?  | .... | .... | .... |
| 17. | Does mixed ability teaching cater effectively for pupils whose first language is not English?  | .... | .... | .... |
| 18. | The school deals efficiently with problems raised by parents   | .... | .... | .... |

- |     |  |      |      |      |
|-----|--|------|------|------|
| 19. | Parents mostly come to school on invitation  | .... | .... | .... |
| 20. | What brings parents into school?<br>Complaints about teachers<br>complaints about pupils<br>Other matters ( <i>please explain</i> )                        |      |      |      |
| 21. | I am happy with the degree of parental involvement in this school  | .... | .... | .... |
| 22. | This can become a successful Community School<br>If 'yes' please give suggestions  | .... | .... | .... |
| 23. | Parents should be allowed into the staff room  | .... | .... | .... |
| 24. | Given that there is no parents' room in this school do you think parents should be allowed into staffroom at      breaktimes .... sometimes .... never.... |      |      |      |
| 25. | Have you ever heard of the Home/School liaison team?   | .... | .... | .... |
| 26. | If 'yes' could you please elaborate  |      |      |      |
| 27. | All teacher should be encouraged to visit pupils' homes  | .... | .... | .... |
| 28. | A counsellor should be based at Cherrydale to talk to children   | .... | .... | .... |
| 29  | This counsellor should also have teaching duties   | .... | .... | .... |

30. Do you know of any Section Eleven  
funding in this school? .... .... ....
31. If 'yes' please say what you  
understand by it?
32. Have you ever come across  
people who work mainly at the  
Multicultural Centre? .... .... ....
33. What sort of contribution has  
the Multicultural Centre made to  
developmental work in this school?  
major  
minor  
nominal  
none  
*(please elaborate)*
34. I think this school is doing enough  
for ethnic minority children .... .... ....
35. Minority languages should be  
offered to children alongside  
French and German .... .... ....
36. Ethnic minority children require  
an ethnic minority teacher as a  
role model .... .... ....
37. Ethnic Minority children have  
specific needs .... .... ....
38. I think there is racism in this

	school	....	....	....
39.	I have come across racist incidents between children	....	....	....
40.	I know of racist incidents between teachers and ethnic minority children at Cherrydale	....	....	....
41.	At parents' days and parents' evening the school should try and provide someone who can communicate with parents who cannot speak English	....	....	....
42.	Parents who can't speak English should only come to school if they can bring their own interpreters	....	....	....
43.	Parents who can't speak English should bring their children to help them	....	....	....
44.	This school needs an Equal Opportunities Policy Statement.	....	....	....



8. I think parents don't come to school because
  
9. Over the past year, what has kept me most busy is
  
10. If I had more time in school, after teaching children I would
  
11. One major weakness in this school is
  
12. Cherrydale is a good school because
  
13. The main factors which keep this school together are
  
14. Any incident which made you feel valued in school last year
  
15. Any incident which made you feel valued by ethnic minority pupils/parents last year
  
16. Any particular incident/feeling which made you feel negative or alone

17. A Community School is

18. A good school is one which

19. If I was personally charged with spending £ 5000 in Cherrydale I would

20. Most parents think Cherrydale School is

21. Ethnic minority children's needs are

Would you like to talk a little bit more about Cherrydale? It will not take more than fifteen minutes at most. Would you kindly indicate the most appropriate times and days when you might have a little time ?

Many thanks.



## APPENDIX: 3B

\* Please write in as much detail as you can.

\* Please tick the most appropriate answer and/or add your own answers if you like.

\* Everything you choose to tell me will be treated in confidence.

\* **Many** thanks for your help!

Name:

Form:

- |     |  |      |      |            |
|-----|--|------|------|------------|
| 1.  | Which options did you take?  |      |      |            |
| 2.  | Which are your favourite subjects?   |      |      |            |
| 3.  | Which are your least favourite subjects?   |      |      |            |
| 4.  | Which subjects will you take exams in?   |      |      |            |
| 5.  | In which subject do you get most encouragement from the teacher?                     |      |      |            |
| 6.  | If an extra class were held after school what would you like to study?               |      |      |            |
|     |  | yes  | no   | don't know |
| 7.  | Do you think Cherrydale is Good  | .... | .... | ....       |
| 8.  | Would you like your brothers/<br>sisters to come to this school?                     | .... | .... | ....       |
| 9.  | Do any of your friends or cousins<br>go to other secondary schools in<br>Cherrytown? | .... | .... | ....       |
| 10. | Do you talk about school to them?  | .... | .... | ....       |

11. Do you wish you were not at  
Cherrydale? .... .... ....
12. Why?
13. Has your photograph ever appeared in  
the school magazine? .... .... ....
- If yes what was it about?
- Matches
- School Play
- Fund raising
- Other
14. Which place do you use the most in  
school besides the classroom?
- Playground
- Music Room
- Year Area
- Library
- Other
15. Would you like to take part in  
assemblies, for example give talks  
and do short plays .... .... ....
16. Do you read Cherrydale News? .... .... ....
17. Do your parents read Cherrydale News? .... .... ....
- If not why not?
18. Do you belong to any clubs or  
groups in school? .... .... ....
19. If 'yes' which club?

20. Would you like to start something  
new for students at school? .... .... ....
21. If 'yes' how would you go about it?
22. Please tick one of the following answers
- a) I am really proud of being at Cherrydale
  - b) I don't feel this is really my school
  - c) I think one secondary school is as good as another
  - d) I wish I had gone to another school
23. Have you got a job lined up for you  
after you leave school? .... .... ....
24. What do you think you will actually  
be doing after leaving school?
25. What would you like to do after  
leaving school?
- Carry on studying
  - Get training for a job eg. be an apprentice
  - Do a job
  - Have a career
  - Stay at home
  - Have a rest and then start studying again
  - Get married
26. What sort of job would you do?
27. If you want to study on where  
will you be studying?
28. Who has helped you choose what you  
will be doing after leaving school?

29. What part-time holiday jobs have you done?
30. Are you doing a job these days? .... .... ....
31. If 'yes' where do you do it?
32. Do you keep most of the money you earn? .... .... ....
33. Do you save most of it in a bank
- Spend it on yourself
- Give it to your parents
34. Do your teachers know you are working? .... .... ....
35. Have you seen the career teacher for  
advice about your future ? .... .... ....
36. Can you remember who helped you to choose your options in the third year?
- My parents
- Myself
- My teacher
- Career teacher
- My parents' friends
- My friends
37. When I leave school my parents want me to
38. My best friends at Cherrydale School are
39. The friends I see most often are
- after school
- over week-ends
- on holidays
40. I think most teachers care about me .... .... ....
41. The kind of person whom most teachers  
like is one who ....

42. Do you live with your parents  
     foster parents  
     relatives
43. Does your mother go out to work?      ....      ....      ....
44. Does your father go out to work?      ....      ....      ....
45. How many brothers and sisters do  
     you have?    .... brothers    ....sisters
46. At which number are you among the  
     children in the family?
47. I do these things almost everyday at home:  
     clean the house  
     cook meals  
     make my bed  
     make all beds  
     do grocery shopping  
     help in family business  
     take my mother to see the doctor/to hospital  
     help look after younger brothers and sisters  
     vacuum cleaning  
     wash dishes  
     do other things (please explain)
48. Roughly how much time do you spend  
     on school work everyday?
49. When you study at home do you have  
     to share your room with your family      ....      ....      ....
50. I am able to study at home for one

	hour without any interruptions	....	....	....
51.	What do you like doing best at home? Why?			
52.	What do you like doing least at home? Why?			
53.	Do you have any hobbies at home which your teachers don't know about?	....	....	....
54.	My father is very strict	....	....	....
55.	My father is friendly. I talk to him about many things	....	....	....
56.	My father worries about me	....	....	....
57.	My mother worries about me	....	....	....
58.	My mother is very strict	....	....	....
59.	My mother is friendly. I talk to her about many things	....	....	....
60.	My parents would like me to stay on in the sixth form	....	....	....
61.	My parents would like me to stay at home after I leave school	....	....	....
62.	My parents would come to these events in school: school fair fun run barn dance school play Parents' Day			

63. How many times has your father or mother been to Cherrydale?
64. Who came to school with you when you were interviewed for admission to Cherrydale?
65. Would you like your parents and teachers to meet more often? .... .... ....
66. Would your parents like to meet your teachers more often? .... .... ....
67. When I take my school reports home my parents are
- pleased
  - displeased
  - angry
  - they never look at my reports
  - can't read them
68. My parents think that at school I am
- clever
  - average
  - lazy
  - hard working
  - they don't really care
69. Do you think that the report you take home is honest? .... .... ....
70. Do you think your school report omits things about you which you think should

- be there? ..... ..
71. Do you have a dictionary at home? ..... ..
72. Do you have an atlas at home? ..... ..
73. When did you last buy a book?
74. If there is some problem your parents  
want to sort out would they  
come to school  
ask you to talk to your teacher  
write a letter to school  
phone school
75. My parents don't come more often to  
school because  
they feel uncomfortable  
they don't know what to talk about  
they can't speak to teachers in English  
I don't tell them what's on at school
76. How would you describe yourself?  
Asian Pakistani  
British Indian  
Bangladeshi Other
77. Whether you have a career or not  
depends on whether you are a boy or a  
girl ..... ..
78. Are you expected to go to the  
mosque/mandir/gurdwara? If 'yes' how often?
79. Do you think religion should be



- |     | taught at school assemblies?   | If 'yes' which ones? |      |      |      |
|-----|--|----------------------|------|------|------|
| 80. | Do you like to learn Urdu, Bengali<br>or Hindi at school?  |                      | .... | .... | .... |
| 81. | When was the last time you went abroad?  |                      |      |      |      |
| 82. | Where did you go?  |                      |      |      |      |
| 83. | If I don't get a good job or what<br>I want out of life it will be because<br>I failed to get good grades at school<br>I wasn't good enough for the job<br>Because of my colour<br>I have no practise of giving interviews<br>People don't like me sometimes |                      |      |      |      |
| 84. | I think all people are treated in exactly<br>the same way at school  |                      | .... | .... | .... |
| 85. | I have come across racism at school from<br>teachers   |                      | .... | .... | .... |
| 86. | I have come across racism at school from<br>other children   |                      | .... | .... | .... |
| 87. | I think there is more racism outside<br>school than inside school  |                      | .... | .... | .... |
| 88. | I think that the teachers who are most<br>sympathetic to Asian and African Caribbean<br>children are   |                      |      |      |      |
| 89. | It is very complicated studying on after<br>you are sixteen because it depends on whether  |                      |      |      |      |

- your family wants you to do it
- you are a boy or a girl
90. Have you been to a
- a concert
- a pantomime
- a pop concert
100. Do you often go to a gathering  
mainly attended by your parents'  
friends and their children? .... .... ....
101. Are your parents quite religious? .... .... ....
102. What do you like best about Britain?
103. What do you like best about the  
country where your parents were born?
104. How long have you lived in Britain?
105. How long have you lived in Cherrytown?
106. Did your father go to school? .... .... ....
107. Did your mother go to school? .... .... ....
108. Who helps you with your homework?
109. What did you do for work experience?
110. What language do you speak at home  
with your parents?
111. What language do you speak at home  
with your brothers and sisters?
112. Do you get any pocket money? .... .... ....
113. Do you think your parents helped you? .... .... ....
114. How? What more can they do for you?

## APPENDIX: 4A

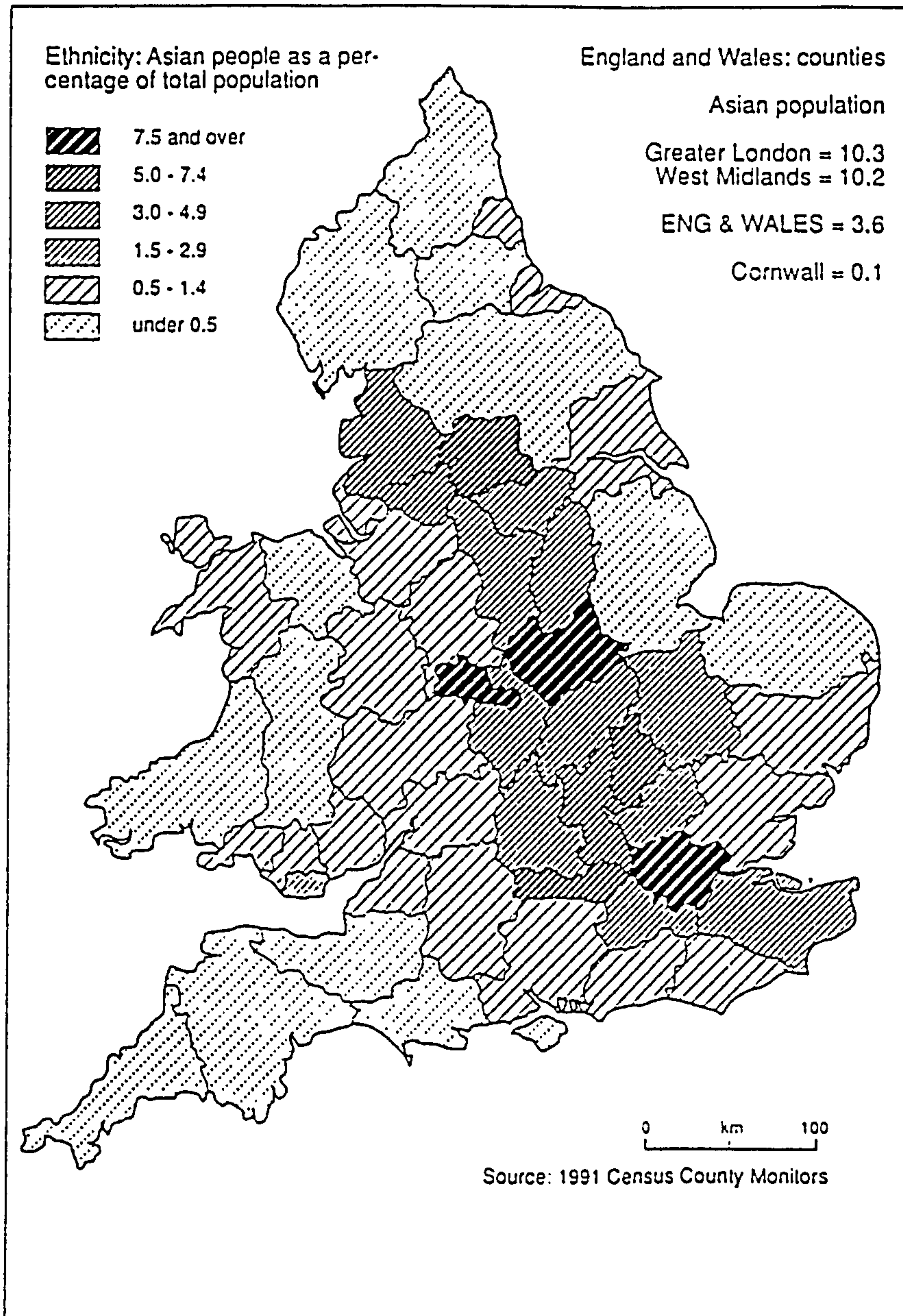
The ethnic minority population of Cherrytown, 1991.

Total all ages	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Indian	Black-Carib	Black African	Black Other	Chinese
0-9	546	148	248	241	107	269	61
10-14	282	77	152	93	50	80	47
15-17	106	44	68	56	19	37	34
18-24	309	66	239	235	112	120	217
25-29	125	30	175	249	79	98	166
30-39	290	67	287	243	110	57	178
40-49	158	31	176	151	57	32	86
50-59	150	35	119	288	30	15	47
60-69	62	9	68	158	9	7	18
70-85+	14	3	28	31	5	2	5
Total	2042	510	1560	1745	593	717	859

Adapted from 1991 Census.

## APPENDIX: 4B

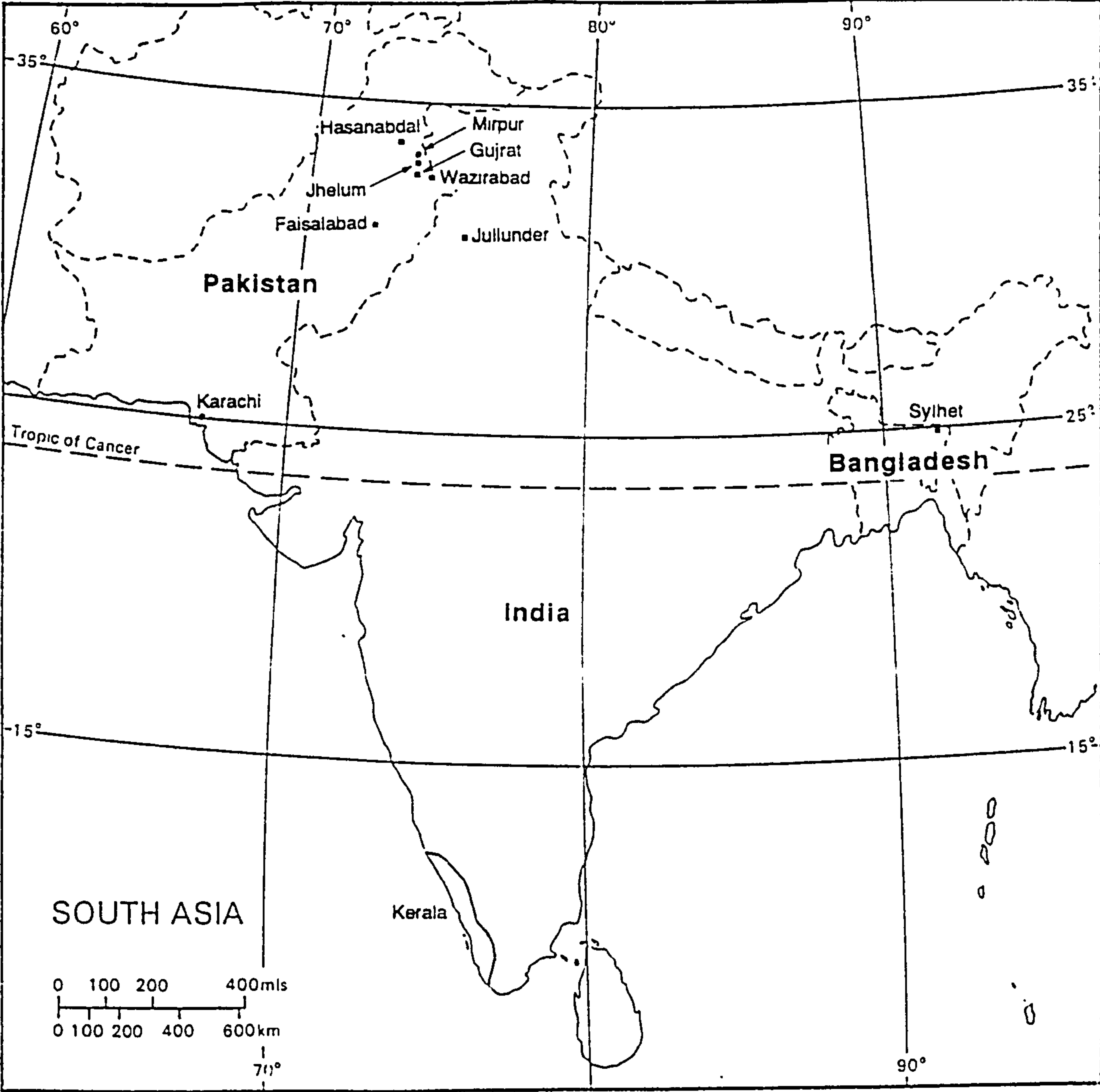
### Map of the areas of Asian settlement in England and Wales



Reproduced with permission from The Geographical Association,  
The population of England and Wales in 1991. A census atlas  
by A.J. Fielding (p. 19).

**APPENDIX: 4C**

**Map of the areas of out-migration from the Subcontinent to Cherrytown**



## APPENDIX: 4D

### Fathers' occupation, origin and education

Family	Occupation	Origin	Education
1	Shop owner	Gujrat District Pakistan	Matric
2	Shift worker in factory	Gujrat District Pakistan	Matric
3	Security van driver	Jhelum District Pakistan	Left school at 14
4	Long term unemployed	Jhelum District Pakistan	Illiterate
5	Unemployed	Jhelum District Pakistan	Illiterate
6	Catering in hospital	Kerala District India	Left school at 11
7	Unemployed	Mirpur District Pakistan	Illiterate
8 *	Odd jobs	Karachi Pakistan	B A (Urdu)
9 *	Odd jobs	Gujrat Pakistan	B A (Urdu)
10	Shop owner	Faisalabad District Pakistan	Left school at 16
11	Unemployed	Faisalabad District Pakistan	Illiterate
12	Deceased	Jhelum District Pakistan	—
13	Shop owner, co- owned with brother	Jhelum District Pakistan	Left school at 15
14	Bus driver	Jhelum District Pakistan	Matric
15	Waiter	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 9
16	Waiter	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 8

17	Unemployed	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 10
18	Deceased	Sylhet Bangladesh	—
19	Odd jobs	Sylhet Bangladesh	Intermediate Arts
20	Shift worker in factory	Kerala District India	Matric
21	Restaurant owner	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 15
22	Unemployed	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
23	Waiter	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 15
24	Shift worker in factory	Mirpur District Pakistan	Left school at 15
25	Waiter	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 12
26	Retired from casual work	Jullunder District India	Left school at 10
27	Restuarant owner	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 15
28	Post office	Jhelum Pakistan	Left school at 15
29	Restaurant owner	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 17
30	Unemployed/ cleaner	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
31	Hospital porter	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 9
32	Shift worker in factory	Jhelum Pakistan	Left school at 13
33	Desk work in factory	Kerala District India	Left school at 14
34	Long term unemployed	Sylhet Bangladesh	Matric
35	Milkman	Jhelum District Pakistan	Matric
36	Cleaner	Mirpur District Pakistan	Illiterate
37	Post office	Jhelum District Pakistan	Left school at 17
38	Bus driver	Wazirabad District Pakistan	At college till 20 but failed BA
39	Bus driver	Hasanabdal Area Pakistan	At school till 18

40	Unemployed	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
41	Bus driver	Jhelum District Pakistan	Left school at 14
42	Factory work	Kerala District India	Left school at 16
43	Security van driver	Gujrat District Pakistan	Left school at 15
44	Helper at restaurant	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 10
45	Deceased	Sylhet Bangladesh	—
46	Retired from casual work	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 10
47	Unemployed	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
48	Waiter	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 8
49	Catering in hospital	Jullunder District India	Left school at 12
50	Waiter	Sylhet Bangladesh	Left school at 9

\* Urban migrants



## APPENDIX: 4E

### Mothers' occupation, origin and education

Family	Occupation	Origin	Education
1	Helper in shop	Gujrat District Pakistan	Middle school can read and write Urdu
2	Shop Owner	Gujrat District Pakistan	Matric
3	Cleaner	Jhelum District Pakistan	Never went to school, can recite Quran
4	Launderette work	Jhelum District Pakistan	Can read Urdu Taught herself to speak English
5	Housewife catering from home	Jhelum District Pakistan	Illiterate
6	Cleaner	Kerala District India	Intermediate Arts
7	Housewife	Mirpur District Pakistan	Never went to school, can recite Quran
8 *	Part-time cleaner	Karachi Pakistan	Intermediate Arts
9 *	Part-time adult education worker	Gujrat Pakistan	Intermediate Arts
10	Helper in shop	Faisalabad District Pakistan	Middle school Can read and write Urdu
11	Housewife	Faisalabad District Pakistan	Illiterate
12	Housewife lampshade making	Jhelum District Pakistan	Matric
13	Creche worker	Jhelum District Pakistan	Matric

14	Housewife catering from home	Jhelum District Pakistan	Matric
15	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
16	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
17	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
18	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
19	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
20	Cook	Kerala District India	Matric
21	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Can recite Quran
22	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Can recite Quran
23	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Can recite Quran
24	Shop owner	Mirpur District Pakistan	Middle school
25	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Can recite Quran
26	Cleaner	Jullunder District India	Left school at 12
27	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Intermediate Arts
28	Housewife & lampshade making	Jhelum District Pakistan	Left school at 14
29	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Can recite Quran
30	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
31	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
32	Shop owner	Jhelum District Pakistan	Left school at 8
33	Catering	Kerala District India	Left school at 12
34	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
35	Housewife	Jhelum District Pakistan	Matric
36	Launderette work	Mirpur District Pakistan	Illiterate
37	Housewife	Jhelum District Pakistan	At school till 15

38	Housewife	Wazirabad District Pakistan	Never went to school, can recite Quran
39	Housewife	Hasanabdal Area Pakistan	Left school at 9
40	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
41	Housewife	Jhelum District Pakistan	Matric
42	Cleaner	Kerala District India	Left school at 10
43	Housewife	Gujrat District Pakistan	Can recite Quran
44	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
45	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
46	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
47	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
48	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate
49	Cleaner	Jullunder District India	Left school at 15
50	Housewife	Sylhet Bangladesh	Illiterate

\* Urban migrants

## APPENDIX: 4F

### Labour market participation by ethnic group and gender, Great Britain 1991

Ethnic group	Males (M) (000s)	Economically active (M) %	Economically inactive (M) %	Females (F) (000s)	Economically active (F) %	Economically inactive (F) %
White	14,577.8	88.2	26.8	10,897.4	71.4	50.3
Ethnic Minorities	761.9	80.2	23.9	539.8	57.6	47.0
Black	233.7	82.6	22.5	212.1	70.9	35.2
Black Carrib	147.4	87.5	19.9	138.0	75.7	33.1
Black-African	52.0	70.8	31.0	44.9	61.9	39.9
Black Other	34.3	84.1	18.1	29.1	65.5	37.1
South Asian	367.6	80.1	23.9	208.4	48.1	55.5
Indian	231.5	82.8	21.9	163.6	61.1	44.6
Pakis tani	103.4	76.0	26.7	35.9	28.6	72.9
Bangla seshi	32.8	74.4	27.6	8.9	22.4	78.2
Chinese & others	160.6	77.2	25.8	119.4	58.0	46.3
Chinese	41.2	72.9	29.9	32.7	57.6	46.9
Other Asian	52.8	78.5	23.8	43.2	57.0	46.1
Other other	66.6	79.2	24.6	43.5	59.4	46.1
<b>Entire population</b>	<b>15,339.6</b>	<b>88.2</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>11,437.2</b>	<b>70.6</b>	<b>50.1</b>

Source: 1991 Census Local Base Statistics (ESRC purchase)

From: David Owen (March 1993)

Ethnic minorities in Great Britain, Economic characteristics, p.2.

## APPENDIX: 5A

### Parallel jobs held by husbands and wives

Family	Husband	Wife (working outside home not including shop on domestic premises)
3	Security van driver	Cleaner
4	Unemployed	Cleaner
6	Catering in hospital	Cleaner
8	Odd jobs	Cleaner
9	Odd jobs	Adult basic literacy and sewing at home
13	Shop owner	Creche worker
20	Factory worker	Cook
26	Retired/casual work	Cleaner
33	Desk work	Catering
36	Cleaner	Launderette work
42	Factory work	Cleaner
49	Catering	Cleaner

## APPENDIX: 5B

### Asian parents' expressed attitudes to School events

Events publicised in the school calendar	Parents in my sample of 50 families who said 'yes' they would attend
Parents' Evening	26
School Play	0
Barn Dance	0
Cheese and wine evening	0
Open Day	8
School Fete	3
PTA meetings	0
Career teachers meetings	24 (on being told what a career teacher was)

## APPENDIX: 5C

### Asian parents and Cherrydale School

Parents who came to school events	0
Parents who invited teachers home	1
Parents who met teachers outside school	3
Parents who visited school on their own initiative	5
Parents who were not told about school functions other than parents' evenings by their children	40

## APPENDIX: 6A

### Primary and middle schools attended by Asian children

Family	Name	Sex	Attended primary school in Britain	Attended middle school in Britain
1	Naz	F	yes	yes
2	Qasim	M	yes Glasgow	yes
3	Manzar	M	yes	yes
4	Sohel	M	yes	yes
5	Asad	M	yes	yes
6	Bindya	F	yes	yes
7	Nazim	M	yes	yes
8	Parveen	F	yes	yes
9	Uzma	F	yes Bolton	yes
10	Shakir	M	yes	yes
11	Tasneem	F	yes	yes
12	Yusuf	M	yes	yes
13	Amina	F	yes	yes
14	Kaneez	F	yes	yes
15	Bali	F	yes	yes
16	Farhad	M	no	no
17	Zara	F	yes	yes
18	Bilaal	M	no	no
19	Saghar	M	no	no
20	Mala	F	yes	yes
21	Shamim	F	no	no
22	Zeeba	F	no	no



23	Monira	F	yes	yes
24	Kalsoom	F	yes	yes
25	Salman	M	yes	yes
26	Khushwant	M	yes	yes
27	Huma	F	yes	yes
28	Hina	F	yes Bradford	yes
29	Zeenat	F	yes	yes
30	Yunus	M	yes	yes
31	Jamila	F	no	yes
32	Zafar	M	no Pakistan	yes
33	Sunil	M	yes	yes
34	Shama	F	yes	yes
35	Shakeel	M	no Pakistan	yes
36	Amir	M	yes	yes
37	Maahin	F	yes Manchester	yes
38	Saira	F	yes	yes
39	Tahir	M	yes	yes
40	Maqbool	M	yes	yes
41	Rizwana	F	no	yes
42	Dilip	M	yes	yes
43	Aslam	M	no Pakistan	yes
44	Nazar	M	no	no
45	Daud	M	yes	yes
46	Abdul	M	yes	yes
47	Talib	M	yes	yes
48	Halima	F	yes	yes
49	Parminder	F	yes	yes
50	Hasina	F	no	no

## APPENDIX: 6B

### Households experiencing physical housing problems by ethnic group in Great Britain, 1991

Ethnic group	More than 1 person per room (%)	Not self-contained accom (%)	Without use of bath/wc (%)	Without use of bath/wc (persons per hhd)	Without Central Heating (%)	Without Central Heating (persons per hhd)
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White	1.8	0.9	1.2	1.50	18.9	2.16
<b>Ethnic Minorities</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.09</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>3.33</b>
Black	7.2	3.1	2.3	1.69	17.4	2.33
Black-Caribbean	4.7	2.0	1.4	1.65	17.4	2.30
Black-African	15.1	6.5	5.1	1.73	15.8	2.46
Black Other	5.6	3.2	2.4	1.67	20.2	2.27
South Asian	20.5	1.1	1.4	3.08	19.5	4.43
Indian	12.8	1.0	1.1	2.65	12.4	3.59
Pakistani	29.7	1.2	1.7	3.31	34.2	4.95
Bangladeshi	47.1	1.3	2.0	4.17	23.6	5.19
Chinese & Others	9.4	3.6	3.0	1.78	15.0	2.62
Chinese	10.6	3.5	3.2	1.95	16.0	2.82
Other Asian	11.0	3.7	3.0	1.79	12.1	2.83

Other other	7.4	3.7	3.0	1.67	16.7	2.39
<b>Entire populati on</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.54</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>2.21</b>

Source: 1991 Census Local Base Statistics (ESRC purchase)

From: David Owen (April 1993)

Ethnic Minorities in Great Britain: Housing and family characteristics, p. 9

## APPENDIX: 7A

### Parents' occupations and their children's job prospects

sex	ethnic origin	father's job	mother's job	what I'd like to do	job I may end up doing
1 female	Pakistani	shop owner	helper in shop	further education	probably get married
2 male	Pakistani	factory worker	shop owner	degree in engineering	don't know
3 male	Pakistani	van driver	cleaner	degree	don't know
4 male	Pakistani	unemployed	laundrette	further education ??	shop assistant
5 male	Pakistani	unemployed	housewife	further education ??	don't know
6 female	Indian	catering	cleaner	degree	further education
7 male	Pakistani	unemployed	housewife	garage work	tool maker
8 female	Pakistani	odd jobs	part-time cleaner	degree in medicine	university
9 female	Pakistani	odd jobs	part-time adult education	degree in medicine	university
10 male	Pakistani	shop owner	helper in shop	computer course	reluctant shopkeeper
11 female	Pakistani	unemployed	housewife	college	don't know
12 male	Pakistani	deceased	housewife	mum wants me to be a big man	leave school and do work

13 female	Pakistani	shop owner	creche worker	further education	don't know depends on exam results
14 female	Pakistani	bus driver	housewife	solicitor may be	university may be
15 female	Bangladeshi	waiter	housewife	don't know	don't know
16 male	Bangladeshi	waiter	housewife	be a big man, get a good job	restaurant work
17 female	Bangladeshi	unemployed	housewife	lawyer	get married I suppose
18 male	Bangladeshi	deceased	housewife	mechanical work	further education, depends on exam results
19 male	Bangladeshi	odd jobs	housewife	don't know NOT restaurant work	depends on exams
20 female	Indian	factory work	cook	bank work	don't know
21 female	Bangladeshi	restaur-ant owner	housewife	no idea	don't know may be get married
22 female	Bangladeshi	unemployed	housewife	no idea	don't know
23 female	Bangladeshi	waiter	housewife	job	don't know
24 female	Pakistani	factory worker	shop owner	law degree	may be get married
25 male	Bangladeshi	waiter	housewife	accountanta-ncy	restaurant
26 male	Indian	casual work	cleaner	degree in medicine	university
27 female	Bangladeshi	restaur-ant owner	housewife	further education	don't know
28 female	Pakistani	post office	housewife & making lamp shades	university	don't know

29 female	Bangladeshi	restaurant owner	housewife	air hostess	probably get married
30 male	Bangladeshi	unemployed	housewife	further education	don't know
31 female	Bangladeshi	porter	housewife	bank work	get a job help mum out
32 male	Pakistani	factory worker	shop owner	more studies	haven't thought about it
33 male	Indian	desk-work ex-factory worker	catering	apprentice ship	no idea
34 female	Bangladeshi	unemployed	housewife	degree in Maths	shop assistant
35 male	Pakistani	milk man	housewife	become a big man	don't know
36 male	Pakistani	cleaner	laundrette work	graphic design	further education
37 female	Pakistani	post office	housewife	degree in law	further education
38 female	Pakistani	bus driver	housewife	degree in medicine	university
39 male	Pakistani	bus driver	housewife	degree in computer	don't know
40 male	Bangladeshi	unemployed	housewife	be a big man	restaurant
41 female	Pakistani	bus driver	housewife	degree in law	mum wants to get me married we are 4 sisters in the family
42 male	Indian	factory worker	cleaner	garage owner	apprentice
43 male	Pakistani	security van driver	housewife	computer course	further education
44 male	Bangladeshi	restaurant work	housewife	study more	waiter
45 male	Bangladeshi	deceased	house wife	art & design	don't know

46 male	Bangladeshi	retired	housewife	don't know	no idea
47 male	Bangladeshi	unemployed	housewife	don't know	no idea
48 female	Bangladeshi	waiter	housewife	computer course	probably get married
49 female	Indian	catering	cleaner	bank job	till work
50 female	Bangladeshi	waiter	housewife	don't know	shop work reluctantly

## APPENDIX: 7B

Casual and part-time jobs undertaken by Asian children while still at school

sex	father's job	mother's job	ethnicity	child's job
1 female	shop owner	helper in shop	Pakistani	none
2 male	factory worker	shop owner	Pakistani	none
3 male	van driver	cleaner	Pakistani	none
4 male	unemployed	laundry work	Pakistani	catering
5 male	unemployed	housewife	Pakistani	selling food in mobile van
6 female	catering	cleaning	Indian	newspaper distribution
7 male	unemployed	housewife	Pakistani	shop assistant
8 female	odd jobs	part-time cleaner	Pakistani	none
9 female	odd jobs	part-time adult education	Pakistani	none
10 male	shop owner	helper in shop	Pakistani	helps in shop
11 female	unemployed	housewife	Pakistani	helps mum
12 male	deceased	housewife	Pakistani	none
13 female	shop owner	creche worker	Pakistani	helps mum
14 female	bus driver	housewife	Pakistani	none
15 female	waiter	housewife	Bangladeshi	looking for work
16 male	waiter	housewife	Bangladeshi	none
17 female	unemployed	housewife	Bangladeshi	part-time clerical
18 male	deceased	housewife	Bangladeshi	none



19 male	odd jobs	housewife	Bangladeshi	none
20 female	factory worker	catering	Indian	none
21 female	restaurant owner	housewife	Bangladeshi	none
22 female	unemployed	housewife	Bangladeshi	none
23 female	waiter	housewife	Bangladeshi	super market till
24 female	factory worker	shop owner	Pakistani	helps mum
25 male	waiter	housewife	Bangladeshi	restaurant work
26 male	casual work	cleaner	Indian	none
27 female	restaurant owner	housewife	Bangladeshi	none
28 female	post office work	housewife & making lamp shades	Pakistani	selling Avon cosmetics
29 female	restaurant owner	housewife	Bangladeshi	none
30 male	unemployed	housewife	Bangladeshi	restaurant work
31 female	hospital porter	housewife	Bangladeshi	super market till
32 male	factory worker	shop owner	Pakistani	helps in shop
33 male	desk work ex-factory worker	catering	Indian	none
34 female	unemployed	housewife	Bangladeshi	super market till
35 male	milkman	housewife & sewing	Pakistani	none
36 male	cleaner	launder-ette work	Pakistani	odd jobs
37 female	post office work	housewife & catering	Pakistani	helps mum
38 female	bus driver	housewife	Pakistani	none
39 male	bus driver	housewife	Pakistani	odd jobs
40 male	unemployed	housewife	Bangladeshi	restaurant work

41 female	bus driver	housewife	Pakistani	helps mum
42 male	factory worker	cleaner	Indian	car body repair
43 male	security van driver	housewife	Pakistani	car body repair
44 male	restaurant work	housewife	Bangladeshi	none
45 male	deceased	housewife	Bangladeshi	restaurant work
46 male	retired	housewife	Bangladeshi	none
47 male	unemployed	housewife	Bangladeshi	super market till
48 female	waiter	housewife	Bangladeshi	super market till
49 female	catering	cleaner	Indian	super market till
50 female	waiter	housewife	Bangladeshi	lamp shade making