

press may have formally rejected Powell's ideas but his racist views always managed to appear in print. (van Dijk, 1991:97) Thus, Powell was still being treated as an authority on race matters and, what is more significant, as a spokesman for a sector of the general public in spite of the fact that he did not represent any constituency by then. (Gordon & Rosenberg, 1989:3-5) In this way these opinions have been made respectable and therefore can be interpreted as being part of the in-group ideology.

By granting white leaders textual space, the kind of news relating to ethnic groups that makes the headlines is bound to be reported from a white perspective. White politicians or spokespeople have more access to the press than black people (van Dijk, 1991:18) which suggests the reason why cases of racial discrimination, racial attacks and the harassment of immigrants at airports by immigration authorities are seldom given the same front page treatment as cases of crimes committed by blacks or examples of the reluctance of members of the black community to conform to British standards. There is a discrepancy between the amount of newspaper space devoted to the situation of black people as victims of racial violence and the extent of such violence. The Commission for Racial Equality has published several booklets and pamphlets on discrimination, direct or indirect, in

employment and housing, which means that the black community is not always fairly treated. The Asian English-language newspaper, New Life, regularly reports on racial attacks, but these rarely reach the pages of the national newspapers, with the possible exception of The Guardian, Independent or The Observer.

Black women tend to be absent from press reports except when they can prove the oddity or backwardness of their culture, as when arranged marriages go wrong or the case of the two Yemeni sisters sold into marriage by their father while on holiday in North Yemen. ("DAD WHO SOLD HIS DAUGHTERS", Daily Mirror, 22.12.87) On the other hand, the brutalization of Asian women and girls at London's Heathrow airport after the 1971 Immigration Act, when they were subjected to degrading treatment, including the notorious 'virginity tests' to determine their age and relationship to their sponsor, was given only a brief mention in the quality papers and none at all in the popular press. Even when such practices were reported, the fact that white female immigrants were not screened so intimately, was not dwelt upon.<sup>35</sup> (CARF, 1981:38) The

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<sup>35</sup> On 2nd February 1979 It was officially announced that these gynaecological examinations would be stopped. (Miles & Phizacklea, 1984:96) However, in 1985 the Labour MP Denis Howell would complain of the degrading treatment of Asians with UK passports who were detained for up to 24 hours at the airport while "hundreds of white visitors,

careful and deliberate selection of racial events that tend to portray the black minority in accordance with the white community's preconception of them as backward, trouble-making scroungers does little to dispel such images, whereas the omission of discriminatory treatment of citizens who are legally entitled to live and work in the country only bolsters the belief in the innate tolerance and fairness of the British character and disqualifies those people, usually black, who challenge this belief and speak out against racism.

#### 5.4.2. Defining the Ethnic Situation.

A negative image of post-war migrants from the former colonies has not only been achieved by the foregrounding of certain issues, such as violence and strangeness, and the minimizing of cases of discrimination in employment and housing, among other areas. The actual language used to report racial events has forged an indissoluble link in people's minds between 'race' and an unsavoury mixture of conflict, criminality and violence. 1968 is a convenient year to choose as a kind of dividing line in the

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particularly Americans, .. go through immigration in a matter of minutes". (The Times, 15.7.85)

'official' media treatment of ethnic minorities. Coinciding with, and possibly inspired by, Enoch Powell's controversial speech, the press launched its own diatribe against the black migrants, portraying them as an internal threat to an otherwise harmonious white Britain. By the late sixties, and certainly after the 1971 Immigration Act, primary immigration from the New Commonwealth had practically ceased. The majority of people arriving from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent in the seventies were the dependants of the migrant workers who had entered Britain before the restrictions. Consequently, the black population were no longer seen as transient workers, but as permanent settlers, who could not or would not adapt to the British way of life.

If the various immigration laws were enacted basically to keep out the Asians, the number of potential migrants from the subcontinent being virtually unlimited, even after the restrictions, the fear of being outnumbered by Indians or Pakistanis was kept alive by the press. Taking their cue from Margaret Thatcher, who expressed the fears of the British people that their country "might be swamped by people of a different culture" (The Guardian, 31.1.78), the newspapers reported racial events in terms of war and conquest. (Gilroy, 1987:45) Military metaphors would abound in headlines to underline the non-Britishness

of these citizens, United Kingdom passports notwithstanding, forcing their way through immigration control.

Owing to a panic over Tamil refugees fleeing Sri Lanka for Britain in 1985, the British Government introduced a visa requirement for any prospective visitors from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ghana and Nigeria, all Commonwealth countries.<sup>36</sup> During the weeks before the visas were enforced, there was a spectacular increase in the number of people arriving in Britain. There had also been a considerable increase in the number of migrant workers arriving in Britain before the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, but these two phenomena were not seen as the result of people's concern that entry would be barred, either as workers or genuine visitors, but instead as proof that in the early case, restrictions were necessary to stop so many blacks coming in, and in the 1985 case, to prevent 'visitors' from overstaying their welcome. The press quickly embarked on a new racist campaign, with the blacks cast in the role as 'unarmed invaders'. (Gordon, 1987)

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<sup>36</sup> Pakistan had in fact left the Commonwealth in 1973 over Britain's recognition of Bangladesh, but it was readmitted in 1990.

"Migrants flood into Heathrow to beat visas" (Daily Mail, 14.10.86)

"Heathrow in visa flood" (Daily Mirror, 14.10.86)

"Asian flood swamps airport" (Daily Express, 15.10.86)

"3,000 Asians flood Britain" (Sun, 15.10.86)

"Asians' visa dash swamps Heathrow" (The Times, 15.10.86)

"Heathrow under siege by Asians" (The Daily Telegraph, 15-10-86)

Logically, echoes of Margaret Thatcher's warning, which was itself an echo of Enoch Powell's, that 'we' could be taken over by 'them' if we were not careful, was the subtext of the campaign. Even as recently as 1991, Graham Turner, in an article entitled "How can we stem this tide?" would use similar demagogic language when warning about the "tidal wave of immigrants from ... the Third World" and the "dire consequences" of allowing "these invaders" into the country. (Daily Mail, 10.10.91)

The media treatment of the urban unrest of 1980, 1981 and 1985 showed the press in its true colours. While such violence cannot be condoned, the image of innate black lawlessness in contrast to a just, tolerant, law-abiding white community was neither accurate nor justifiable. The 'race riots', as they were called, were extensively reported and only the quality papers made a serious attempt to understand the underlying causes of the

troubles. The tabloid press presented an overwhelming image of black criminality and alienation from mainstream British values through headlines such as the following:

"Rioters attack police after stabbing", (Daily Express, 11.4.81)

"BATTLE OF BRIXTON - 100 black youths in clash with the cops", (Sun, 11.4.81)

"150 black youths clash with police", (Daily Mail, 11.4.81)

"FLAMES OF HATE", (Daily Star, 13.4.81)

"Black War on the Police", (Daily Mail, 6.7.81)

The day after the outbreak of violence in Handsworth, Birmingham, 11th September 1985, a picture of a black petrol bomber accompanied these headlines:

"Bloodlust", (Daily Mail)

"Hate of Black Bomber", (Sun)

"War on the Streets", (Daily Mirror)

"Torch of Hate", (Daily Star)

"England, 1985", (Daily Express)

Thus, gradually and insidiously, several new elements were being added to the equation: Immigration = Race. From the eighties onwards, the equation would be  
Immigration/Race = Crime + Rebellion + Threat.

It has even been argued that by the 1985 riots, any previous understanding shown by the press of the situation of black people in inner-city areas, however limited, had been practically abandoned. (Gordon & Rosenberg, 1989:20) If the editorial of the Daily Express is in any way representative of the media opinion, it seems clear that the overall image of black unprincipled savages was rampant:

"Those who witter on about 'inner city deprivation' seem incapable of seeing that there are people who think of rioting as a form of fun and a source of profit." (30.9.85)<sup>37</sup>

The notion that white British citizens had nothing to do with any urban unrest, and that the riots were in no way due to social and economic discrimination, but were completely irrational, was transmitted to the public by the insistence on the 'inter-racial' character of the events. Afro-Caribbeans were portrayed as the aggressors and whites and Asians were seen as the victims, whereas in many cases the opposite was closer to the truth. (Gordon & Rosenberg, 1989:20; Solomos, 1990:163) In this respect, another stereotype, that of the 'hard-working Asian

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<sup>37</sup> The report produced by Lord Scarman after his investigation into the 1981 riots pointed to the social and economic deprivation suffered by young blacks as being one of the main causes of the violent protest. (See The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981: Report of an Inquiry by the Rt. Hon. The Lord Scarman OBE, HMSO, 1981)

'shopkeeper' was used to prove the indisputable 'truth' about the criminality of the Afro-Caribbean community. This does not mean to say that the West Indian community are seen as being more alien to the indigenous British population. While the Asians may be more economically and educationally integrated into mainstream British society, they are viewed as social outsiders for religious and linguistic reasons. The West Indians, who arrived in Britain speaking English and worshipping a Christian God, are theoretically more socially integrated, but have come to be associated with unsocial activities, especially mugging. The Afro-Caribbeans may be stereotyped as criminals, but the Asians are seen as a cultural threat to a supposedly culturally homogeneous British society.

The event which strengthened this idea of 'an enemy within' was the controversy surrounding the publication of The Satanic Verses in 1989. One would need a whole book to do justice to the press coverage of the so-called Rushdie affair,<sup>38</sup> but suffice it to say that the unfortunate incident did little to promote harmonious relations between the Muslim Asians and the predominantly

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<sup>38</sup> In fact two books have been written on the affair, Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, The Rushdie File (1989), which analyzes the press coverage and Malise Ruthven, A Satanic Affair (1990), which deals with the book itself and the accusation of blasphemy.

Christian white British. Hanif Kureishi believes that, in spite of the tragic and vicious aspect of the affair, it will have helped to educate people about the immense importance Islam exerts over Muslims and may have warned them about the incongruity between Islam and Western secular democratic societies. (Hand, 1993) Undeniably, the furore over the alleged blasphemy has awoken many people to the tenets of Islam and the vast majority of press articles have interpreted the Muslim response as a definite threat to British standards and morality.

Francis King, writing in the Daily Mail, stated that:

"What this Moslem minority has not realised is the harm which its hysterical protests are doing to Moslems in this country - exciting derision, anger and even hatred among non-Moslems who felt none for them before." (16.2.89)

In a similar vein, three days later the editorial of the Daily Mail asked "Who asked Muslims to run our lives?" and claimed that

"The Muslims are taking Bradford back to the Middle Ages ... though newcomers to Britain they think they have the right to turn the place into Teheran, Iran. ... It's intolerable for them to set up separate foreign countries here." (19.2.89)

Few people have bothered to attempt to understand the feelings of a minority community that has seen the very foundation of its religion attacked and ridiculed. Historian John Vincent has criticized the present blasphemy law which only covers offenses against

Christianity and, moreover, a very Anglican version of Christianity. He concludes his article stating that

"By comparison with the great Islamic teaching of brotherhood, our refusal to acknowledge Islam as a permanent element in our laws and society looks narrowly ethnocentric." (The Times, 2.3.89)

With the passage of time, the early uproar over the book burning and the almost universal condemnation of the fatwa have faded into oblivion, in spite of the fact that the death sentence on Salman Rushdie has not been revoked. However, since 1989 the British Muslim community, and in particular one of its leaders, Dr. Kalim Siddiqui, has reinforced the image of a cultural threat with the creation of the self-styled Muslim 'Parliament' in January 1992 and its intention to defy any British laws they may disapprove of. That the Muslims resident in Britain wish to set up their own Parliament, educational system, health centres and so forth is not in itself worrying, but the recent controversy over the size and wealth of British Muslims is being viewed with increasing concern. Research conducted by Ceri Peach in 1989 established the Muslim population of Great Britain to be between half and three quarters of a million. (Peach, 1990) In 1993 Siddiqui would be claiming that "three million may be an underestimate", but Dr. Zaki Baddawi, the moderate principal of the Muslim College in west London, puts the

figure much lower, "between a million and a million and a half." (The Daily Telegraph, 9.1.93) It must be remembered that the entire non-white population of Britain stands at some 2.6 million, a mere 5 percent of the total population, and includes a large number of Hindus and Sikhs and some Christians. Statistics are usually only resorted to when they prove the point one is trying to make, when the actual black presence in Britain is seen to be relatively small, albeit highly concentrated in certain areas, official calculations are waved aside as being irrelevant. Thus, Dr. Siddiqui has become the Nana Sahib of the nineties as far as the press is concerned. According to Dr. Baddawi, the British media go "hunting for people willing to endorse the Ayatollah's death threat", (The Sunday Telegraph, 5.3.89) only to prove their point about the fanaticism and dogmatism of ethnic minorities.

From the eighties onwards, the press has conveyed the impression that responsibility for any conflicts with British black communities may be laid at the door of anti-racists. Institutions like the Commission for Racial Equality and some Labour-controlled local authorities are systematically attacked for granting privileges to

minorities and discouraging them from assimilating into the British way of life.<sup>39</sup> (Gordon & Rosenberg, 1989: 39-48) Van Dijk claims that "racism for many whites is seen as a thing of the past" (1991:14) and success stories of blacks, such as the Sun's "Didn't Mr. Patel do well!" (24.3.87) in which it is stated that more than a hundred Asians called Patel are millionaires and "have little time for the race relations industry and loony Lefties", imply that those who do not triumph in Britain have no-one to blame but themselves. Furthermore, while racial discrimination officially no longer exists, racism, or 'tribalism' as it is often called in the press, has become understandable and, therefore, legitimate. In his article entitled "This talk of racism is nonsense" (The Sunday Telegraph, 24.4.88), Kenneth Minogue argues that "all human beings ... prefer their own kind, and show considerable enthusiasm for attacking outsiders". This discourse of 'our kith and kin', so passionately evoked during the Falklands crisis of 1982, has come to question the compatibility of black communities within British nationhood. (Saggar, 1992:195-6) As discussed in 4.2.3, the 'new racism' assumes categories that do not and cannot belong to the nation, although the excluding

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<sup>39</sup> By 'privileges' what is usually meant is providing ethnic food at schools and allowing Sikhs to wear their turbans to work.

criteria are no longer phenotypical. Profound differences in culture together with an unshared history are arguments used by Conservative politicians and the media to present the black minorities as the 'alien wedge' or the 'enemy within'.

The media has contributed to establishing an ideological framework with which the white reading public has defined the current ethnic situation in Britain. Although the British press can be roughly classified into quality and popular newspapers, as far as 'ethnic news' is concerned there is not a great deal of difference. The selection of racial news that tends to portray black people negatively, the emphasis given to the differences between the black migrants rather than their common humanity, the use of conflictive and violent language to report events concerning blacks, and the myth of a homogeneous, peace-loving, upright British citizenry have reinforced the stereotypes previously learned from school books and imperial fiction. The Asians are still backward, shown by their adherence to the tradition of arranged marriages; they are still wily, demonstrated by the 'swarms' of Indians and Pakistanis trying to sneak into the country illegally; and they are also violent and bloodthirsty, unquestioned after the response to

The Satanic Verses. The following chapter will look at some recent work by a selection of British Asian writers. It will discuss whether they break down the stereotypes that have been handed down from the days of the East India Company or whether they, perhaps unconsciously, keep them alive. Alternatively, they may even be seen to turn the tables on the old colonial masters and break down the false image the British have of themselves.

# 6. Overturning Imperial Views.

*"We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrant peoples".  
Salman Rushdie, 1985b.*

## 6.1. Colonizing the Colonizers.

### 6.1.1. Political Dominance.

As far as the size of the Asian community in Britain today is concerned, there are approximately one million Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, just over 2 per cent of the entire population.<sup>1</sup> However, the concentration of Asians in certain areas, such as Southall and Tower Hamlets in London and parts of cities like Bradford and Leicester has helped to foment the belief in an insidious occupation of the mother country by her former colonial subjects. (see figures 6.1. & 6.2.) As discussed in the two previous chapters, the settlement of non-white migrants has been seen by right-wing politicians

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<sup>1</sup> The total non-white population of the United Kingdom is estimated to be 2.6 millions, approximately 5 per cent of the whole. (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 1992)

# THE REGIONS OF BRITAIN

1. SCOTLAND
2. NORTH
3. YORKSHIRE / HUMBERSIDE
4. NORTH - WEST
5. EAST MIDLANDS
6. WEST MIDLANDS
7. WALES
8. EAST ANGLIA
9. SOUTH - EAST
10. SOUTH - WEST

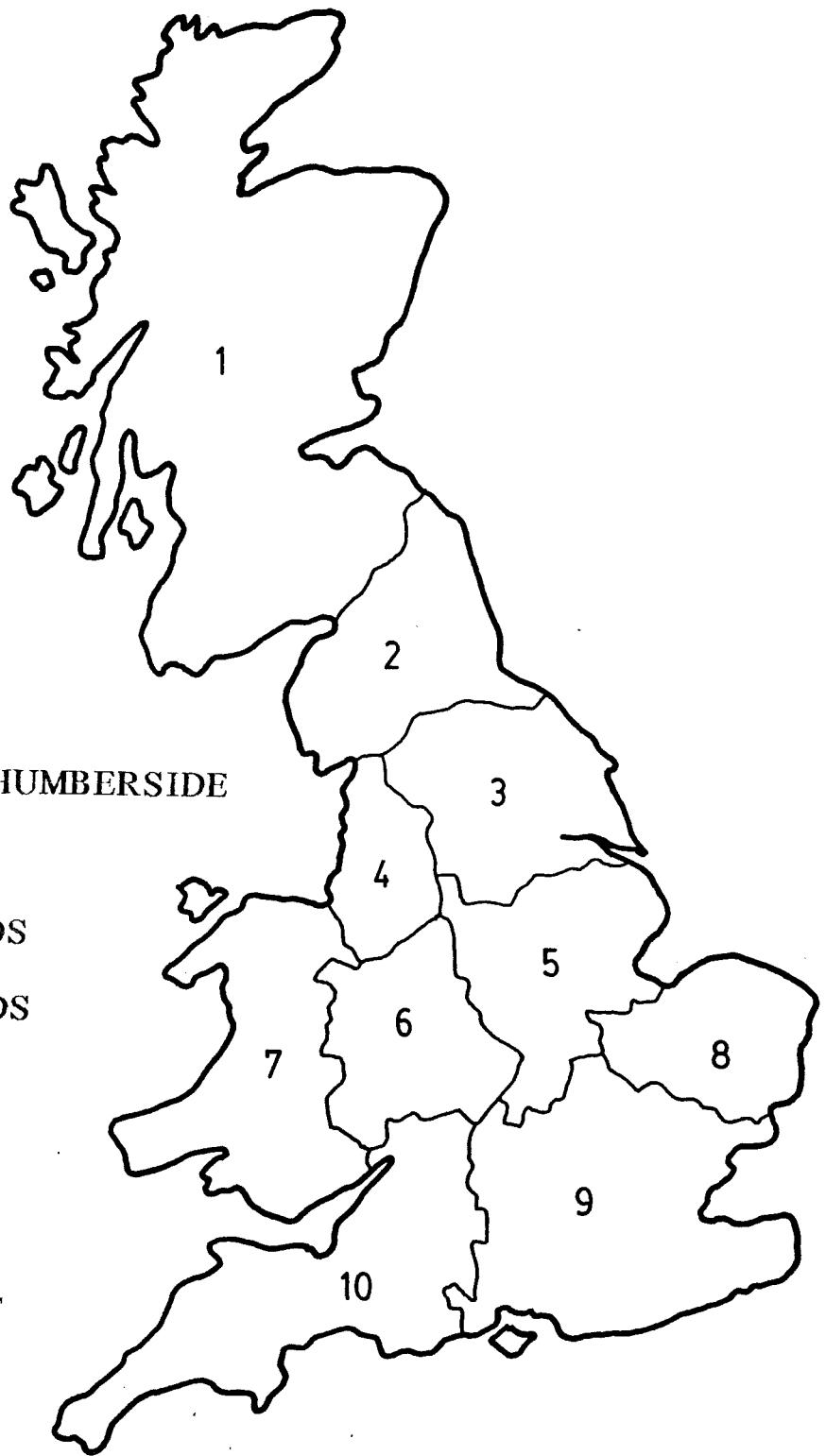


Figure 6.1

## The regional distribution of the black population of Britain

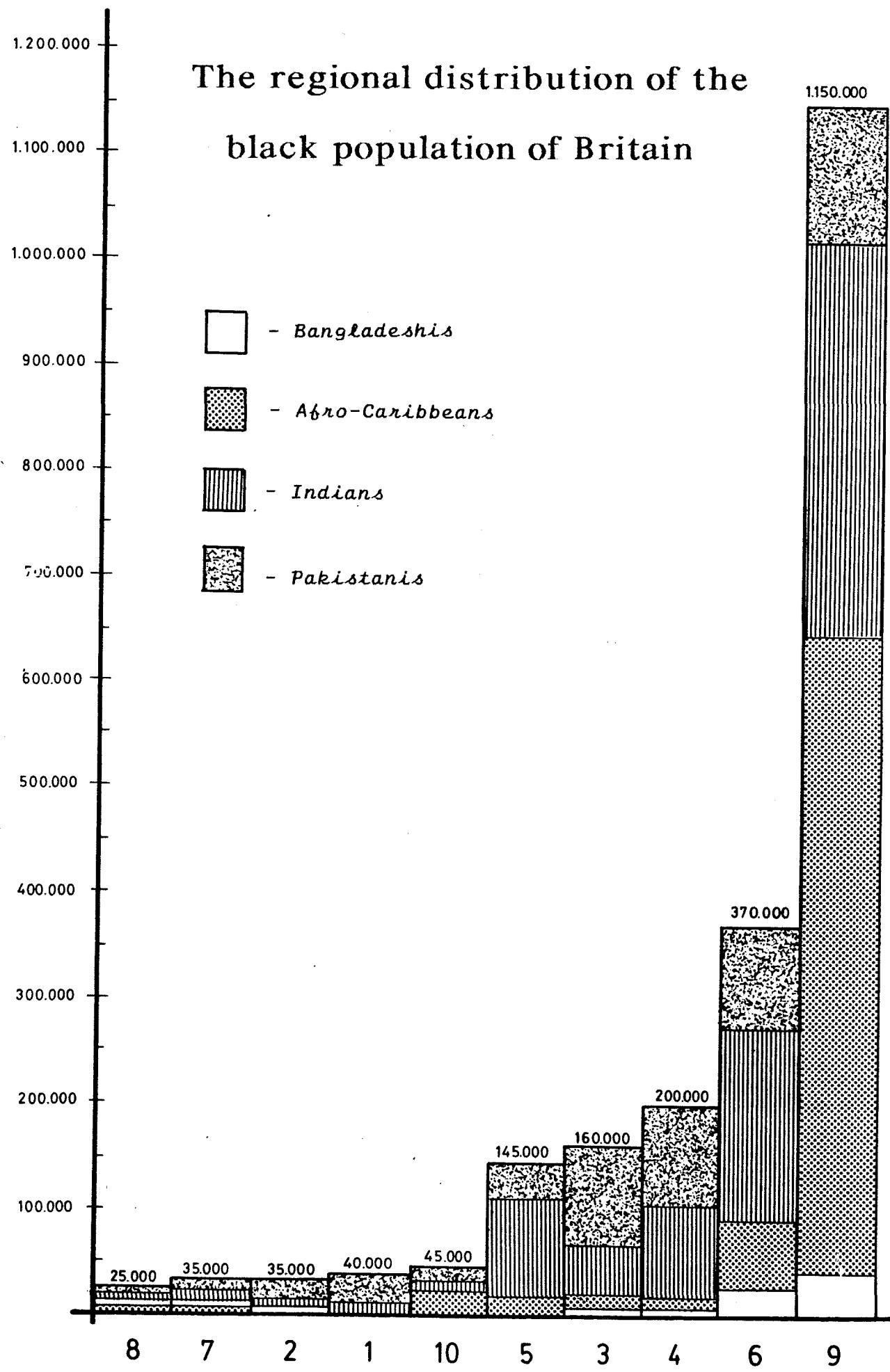


Figure 6.2

and the media in general as an unarmed invasion on what they have mythologized as a homogeneous, law-abiding, white society. The blame for any cracks or fissures appearing in this society is laid firmly at the door of the ethnic minorities, seen to embody the antithesis of those qualities that make up the British character. Racial ideas have been a long-established feature of British social and political history (see chapters 2 and 4) and in contemporary, post-colonial Britain, even making allowances for changing ideological constructions of race or ethnicity, whiteness is still seen to symbolize the 'British character'. The current racial debate is, therefore, whether blackness can be compatible with Britishness.

Enoch Powell was possibly the first leading politician to define nationhood in cultural and ethnic terms when in 1969 he argued that

"The immigrants here are still in large numbers integral members of the communities from whence they came. Let another decade or so elapse, and this will no longer be so. The tragedy of a growing minority, alien here and yet homeless elsewhere, will have been fastened on them and us forever." (Quoted in Dummet & Dummet, 1987:137; emphasis theirs)

In more recent years the New Right has repeated and thus legitimized the view that the black community in Britain can never form part of the British landscape regardless of their legal status of United Kingdom citizens. It was

assumed that the Afro-Caribbeans and Asians would willingly shed their own cultural identity in order to embrace that of their former masters and blend in with the white indigenous population. What has occurred, to the dismay of many white British people, is that the ethnic minorities have retained their own culture, albeit a westernized version of it, which demands to be recognized as being British. The stubborn adherence to past imperial glories, encouraged by New Right zealots, is preventing the concept of Britishness in the post-colonial era from being redefined in realistic terms.

As long as the majority of black Britons remain in subordinate positions in society, there is no way that such a redefinition can be carried out. Upward social mobility is the sole path, not to what Enoch Powell dramatically called "the possession of [the Englishman's] native land" (4.11.71; quoted in Gilroy, 1987:45), but rather to fair representation in the workings of British life. It may be argued that Britain's blacks can and do participate in electoral processes and, consequently, are not denied the chance to assume political responsibility. However, whereas active participation among blacks in politics on a local level is increasing, (Ball & Solomos, 1990:15) the British electoral system does not facilitate the entry of minority groups into parliament. Compared to

other countries which hold elections to an Upper House, in Britain a relatively small number of seats are actually contested every four years, and of these 650 seats, vacancies are few and far between, caused by either retirement or deselection. (Saggar, 1992:161) Furthermore, the first-past-the-post system benefits larger parties over smaller ones. One need only observe the lack of electoral success of the Liberal Democrats to realize that a 'black party' would hold no chance of gaining a seat in Westminster.<sup>2</sup> Such a system naturally impedes the breakthrough of extremist parties, such as John Tyndall's right-wing British National Party, which is relegated to the political periphery, but it also makes any kind of ethnic political party a foregone electoral failure.<sup>3</sup>

Minority groups are obliged to seek support from the main parties and, likewise, budding black politicians have much more chance of achieving political prominence if they

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<sup>2</sup> Even within the Labour Party, attempts to create autonomous black organizations have met with little success. (Sagar, 1992:130-134)

<sup>3</sup> The poor electoral success of the Islamic Party of Great Britain in the by-election of Bradford North in 1990 proves the extreme unlikelihood of an ethnic minority party ever sitting in the House of Commons. Even nationalist parties, such as Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalist Party rarely gain more than a symbolic number of seats in the British parliament.

operate within either the Conservative or the Labour parties. In recent years, these two parties seem to have become more responsive to the electoral possibilities of the black vote and have appointed black candidates to stand at general elections. In spite of this apparent show of multiracial understanding, it should be noted that black candidates are invariably selected for 'safe seats'. Clearly, fielding a black candidate for a marginal seat involves too high a risk of local people's hidden prejudices rising to the surface and casting their vote simply to 'stop the niggers getting too powerful'. Thus, selection by the party is a bigger hurdle than actual election by the people. Again the British system ensures that political parties have to be sensitive to the floating voter because governments can change hands following the shift of a relatively small number of votes, which might mean a sufficient number of seats to guarantee the majority. Recent studies have shown that black votes are not floating, (Layton-Henry, 1992; Saggar, 1992) which means that both Conservatives and Labour prefer to woo the white 'don't knows' by keeping their token black MPs away from uncertain constituencies. The number of possible ethnic votes is, in fact, quite small, bearing in mind that of the approximately 2.6 million blacks, a considerable number are under voting age due to the

youthfulness of the Afro-Caribbean and Asian minorities. Consequently, it seems that there are more votes to be won from eliciting the support of indecisive, white voters than from courting ethnic voters by selecting a black candidate. Moreover, according to a 1987 poll conducted by the Harris Research Centre, 47 per cent of Asians and 35 per cent of Afro-Caribbeans claimed that they did not feel that an ethnic minority MP would represent their interests any better than a white MP and thus would not vote for the former out of principle. (Saggar, 1992:144; Bald, 1989:540 & 546)

Blacks are underrepresented at Westminster, as, of course, are women. If the ethnic minorities make up five per cent of the population, in order to keep the proportion, there should be approximately thirty black MPs in the House of Commons, whereas in the General Election of April 1992 only six were returned.<sup>4</sup> These figures seem to suggest that political power is denied to the black community, who are only represented by a token number of MPs. If that is the case, Powellite fears of a major

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<sup>4</sup> The six ethnic minority MPs are: Diana Abbott (Hackney South and Stoke Newington); Paul Boateng (Brent South); Bernie Grant (Tottenham); Keith Vaz (Leicester East); Piara Khabra (Ealing Southall) and Niranjan Deva (Brentford and Isleworth). All are Labour MPs except Deva, who is Conservative, and all the constituencies belong to the London area where over half of Britain's ethnic population lives. (see figure 6.2.)

black takeover appear somewhat unjustified. In his speech of 20th April 1968, part of which is quoted in Appendix 2, Powell referred to a conversation he had had with a white constituent, whom he reported as saying,

"I have three children, all of them been through grammar school and two of them married now, with family. I shan't be satisfied till I have seen them all settled overseas. In this country in fifteen or twenty years time the black man will have the whip-hand over the white man." (Quoted in Miles & Phizacklea, 1984:65)

This fear, expressed by the New Right, of actual domination of the white British by their former imperial subjects reeks of post-colonial guilt for past exploitation, but in the quarter of a century that has elapsed since black migrants were first identified as a threat by a leading politician, Britain is not being run by Afro-Caribbeans and Asians. If the truth be told, and in spite of what columnists in The Daily Telegraph would have their readers believe, Britain's blacks are still struggling to detach themselves from the black working class and very few actually occupy positions of power in British society. The Race Relations Acts of 1968 and 1976 (see 4.2.2. & 4.2.3.) made discrimination in employment on ethnic grounds unlawful but, as Ellis Cashmore points out, "getting in is not the problem for blacks; climbing up is." (1991:354; emphasis in original) Upward social

mobility for lower class blacks in Britain is far more complicated than for their white counterparts (Cross, 1987) and, despite their working class backgrounds, few members of the British black bourgeoisie seem willing to challenge the system in which they have prospered. (Cashmore, 1991:356)

The task of challenging the system has been taken up, not by those who have succeeded in it either economically or politically in spite of their ethnicity, but by the new generation of British Asian writers, who, together with other writers from a colonial background, have, in a sense, taken over the literary establishment.<sup>5</sup> By the term 'British Asian' I am referring to two kinds of people. On one hand, I am including the British-born children of citizens from the Indian subcontinent (that is India, Pakistan or Bangladesh) who emigrated to Britain in fairly large numbers during the fifties or sixties before the 1971 Immigration Act. On the other hand, as far as I am concerned, those Indians, Pakistanis or Bangladeshis who have made Britain their home and use Britain as a base for their creative writing are also 'British Asians'.

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<sup>5</sup> If Booker prize winners are anything to go by, since 1981 when Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children won, this prestigious literary award has been given to 6 writers born outside the United Kingdom, with numerous non-British authors being short-listed.

British Asian writers, like other writers in former British colonies, tend to be pigeon-holed as 'post-colonial'<sup>6</sup> writers, as if the category of post-colonial was a homogeneous one in all the countries that once belonged to the British Empire. Mishra and Hodge (1991) argue that the situation in white settler countries, such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand, is in no way comparable to that of black, non-settler countries, such as in the Indian subcontinent or Africa. They point out that writers of the former, like Patrick White or Margaret Lawrence, can be read as aspirants to the canon, who certainly extend the standards of the imperial centre but do not actually challenge it. (*ibid.*, 413) Writers from black, non-settler countries, however, have a very different task in hand. Their writing has to subvert received imperial notions of what constitutes human experience, which, for so many years, has been an essentially anglocentric one.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I am purposefully using the term 'post-colonial' with a hyphen to describe the situation *following* decolonization. Written as one word, the term also suggests divergent ideologies that coexisted with and were implicit in the discourse of colonialism.

<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Ashcroft et al. claim that writers from both the black and white Commonwealth restructure European realities "not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based". (1989:33)

While it is nonsensical to lump all Third World and Old Commonwealth writers under the umbrella heading of 'post-colonial', it is equally misleading to consider there to be any homogeneity even within any one society. Thus, Salman Rushdie and Farrukh Dhondy are representatives of the Indian diaspora, both having emigrated to Britain as young men, but there the similarities must end. Rushdie considers imperial attitudes to be rife in contemporary British society and writes from this perspective, whereas Dhondy confesses himself to be "anti-anti-racist" <sup>8</sup> and lays greater emphasis on the shortcomings of Asian society itself. Likewise, the term 'post-colonial' should be applied to any writer publishing in English after the dismantling of the Empire, as British writers have been as exposed to the effects of decolonization as their counterparts in the countries ruled by Britain. However, the post-colonial label is a convenient one as it foregrounds notions of conflict and opposition, and questions the relationship between the centre and the periphery. Furthermore, and as Mishra and Hodge stipulate, post-colonial writing is based on three fundamental principles: political struggle, racism and a second language. These three tenets of post-

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<sup>8</sup> Private communication.

colonialism may not always be present in the writing of the British Asians selected for this study, but at least one of them can be said to lurk beneath the veneer of flippancy of some of the plays, television series, films and novels chosen to represent the Asian reality in Britain today.

The concern over the swamping of Britain by alien people with alien cultures, which has reached almost obsessive heights is a recurrent theme with many British Asian authors. Salman Rushdie, probably the most influential and certainly the most (in)famous of all the writers who will be mentioned in this study, uses the colonized-turned-colonizer as a powerful leitmotif in his most controversial novel, The Satanic Verses (1988). This extremely complex work is not the first to deal with the immigrant experience in Britain,<sup>9</sup> but is possibly the most ambitious. It does not seem an exaggeration to say that the skeleton of the novel, that is the need to fight politicians in fiction and make all voices heard, was sketched out in his essay "Outside the Whale", written in 1983. (Brennan, 1989:148-9) The politicians Rushdie sets out to fight are those who would persist in the one-sided view of imperial history, the glamour of the Raj and the

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<sup>9</sup> With regard to Indian writers, G.V. Desani published his All About H. Hatterr as early as 1948.

essential evil of post-war immigration from the New Commonwealth.

In The Satanic Verses Salman Rushdie, playing on the underlying Powellite fear of post-colonial revenge in the shape of political domination, has his two main characters, Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha, miraculously saved from death after they plunge thirty thousand feet into the English Channel to be swept ashore at the same spot chosen by William the Conqueror, the last successful coloniser of Britain. Moreover, the aeroplane crash and the subsequent scattering of mechanical and human parts all over British airspace mimics the dispersal of empire builders and their European customs into the dark, remote areas of the globe. However, post-colonial history according to Rushdie takes a different turn. The two Indians, rather than avenge the two centuries of British rule over India, are punished for their very Indianness, as we have seen in the previous chapter, a signifier for barbarism, backwardness, irrationality and evil. Furthermore, the character who is punished more severely is, paradoxically, the more anglicized of the two. Saladin Chamcha, whose first name evokes medieval threats to the integrity of Europe and whose surname means 'flatterer' or 'crawler', is changed into a hairy demonic goat. Saladin, who in his previous 'life' had been a

convinced Anglophile, is now depicted as a dark, evil being, bent on the destruction of the peaceful, white British. Saladin had disowned his original homeland and had even broken with his father in order to become as British as possible, little suspecting that he would be blackballed from the 'club' by the very people he was striving to imitate. It seems that what Homi Bhabha calls 'mimic Englishmen', that is Indians educated in English who come to regard themselves as more English than Indian, present more of a threat to the imperial power than the unsophisticated Oriental. The resemblance is more menacing than reassuring as the mimicry is never complete: the Indian always remains 'not quite white'. (Young, 1990:147) The reflecting image, therefore, is distorted and threatens to reverse at any moment the carefully established power relationship. Such fears of an attack at the integrity of Britain are twisted by Rushdie to make the arrival of the incomplete Englishman in the person of the unfortunate Chamcha far more disturbing than the settlement of any number of non-English speaking, non-Christian, non-urban, non-anglicized Indians.

The immigration officers who arrest Chamcha, suspected of entering the country illegally, display no surprise whatsoever at discovering him to be a goat. The

bewildered Indian can find no logical explanation for the calm manner in which they treat his renewed circumstances.

"'This isn't England,' he thought, not for the first or last time. How could it be, after all; where in all that moderate and common-sensical land was there room for such a police van in whose interior such events as these might plausibly transpire?" (p. 158) <sup>10</sup>

Much more humiliating for Chamcha than his transformation into a "supernatural imp" is the immigration authorities' classification of him with "riff-raff from villages in Sylhet or the bicycle-repair shops of Gujranwala". (p.159) When he is forced to seek asylum in the Shaandaar Café, run by an ex-school teacher from Dhaka, and the haunt of many former Bangladeshi peasants, he is ashamed to admit that

"I'm not your kind...You're not my people. I've spent half my life trying to get away from you." (p.253)

Equally condescending is Hanif Kureishi's Asif in his play Birds of Passage (1983) who refuses to be lumped together with what he calls "the scum of Pakistan". He complains that the British still continue to see all Asians as a mass of brown faces, devoid of individuality and rank.

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<sup>10</sup> As in the previous chapter, all quotations from the texts under discussion are cited parenthetically with the page numbers only.

"the sweepers, the peasants, the drivers. They've never seen toilets. They've given us all a bad reputation because they don't know how to behave. I couldn't talk to them there, except to give them orders. And I won't be solid with them here." (p.40)

Likewise, Farrukh Dhondy's middle-class suburbanite Indians in his play, Romance, Romance (1985b) scorn uneducated, low-class Asians. For Chaddha, Patel and Bunny Singh any discrimination suffered by their less affluent countrymen is owing to the illusions they harbour of British fair play.

BUNNY "The mistake our community makes is to imagine they can get something out of the Labour Party. Who passed the first discriminatory laws?"

CHADDHA "Quite, quite. The reason why our people go that way is because they are mostly peasants."

PATEL "Those people, they give us such a bad name. They spit here, there, everywhere".

(p.16)

Rushdie's description of immigrants as 'translated people', does not merely refer to the physical displacement of people from one side of the globe to another, but also to the enormous readjustment that has to be undertaken in order to learn a new language and emit alien sounds, and to rethink and redesign one's frameworks of reference. In The Satanic Verses Rushdie takes this to the extreme of having his two migrants metamorphosed: Gibreel into his angelic namesake, and Saladin into Shaitan, the devil. Thus, the immigrant experience in Rushdie's novel is seen as much more than an uprooting

from a familiar environment. Migrants are, as it were, reborn into a new existence. A new world may come into existence for them, but for the British they continue to be coolies and ayahs. When Saladin Chamcha is taken to the hospital for immigrants while his real identity as a bona fide British subject is being established, he is horrified to find his fellow patients have all suffered some kind of eerie physical transformation: Senegalese holiday-makers are turned into slippery snakes, Nigerian businessmen sprout tails and an Indian male model sports a tiger's head.

"But how do they do it? Chamcha wanted to know. 'They describe us', the other whispered solemnly. 'That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.' " (p.168)

The much publicized image of the migrant as a threat to the very notion of Britishness is shown by Rushdie to mirror the upheaval caused by British colonial expansion:

"We are here to change things. ... African, Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Cypriot, Chinese, we are other than what we would have been if we had not crossed the oceans, if our mothers and fathers had not crossed the skies in search of work and dignity and a better life for their children. We have been made again: but I say that we shall also be the ones to remake this society, to shape it from the bottom to the top." (p.414)

In Rushdie's world the brutalization of immigrants reaches unforeseen limits. Nocturnal raids on alleged

illegal immigrant hideouts, not to mention virginity tests systematically carried out on frightened country women and girls in the wake of the 1971 Immigration Act to determine their age and relationship to their sponsor, all pale into nothingness compared with the power of the word of the white elite. And it is this all-powerful white word that defines the migrant as an aberration, because s/he is judged in terms of the received British national standard.

Saladin's first experience of England, when a boy at boarding school, had been an embarrassingly painful one. He had struggled with a kipper for ninety minutes, not knowing how to eat the fish without filling his mouth with tiny bones. That he did succeed in eating the kipper was the "first step in his conquest of England." (p.44) This incident, no doubt taken from Salman Rushdie's own personal experience at Rugby school, instead of discouraging the boy, made him even more determined to show the British what he was made of. Unfortunately, when his pyjamas are rudely pulled down by the immigration officers with the cry of "Opening time, Packy; let's see what you're made of!" (p.157), Saladin can no longer aspire to conquer his holy land, the England he so passionately believed in. In spite of the laboriously learnt signs of Englishness, his colour acts as a much more powerful signifier for the police, who read him as

just another 'Paki'. The much longed for metamorphosis is frustrated when the debonair Englishman, bent on the conquest of his blessed plot, is replaced by a foul smelling freak.

#### 6.1.2. Economic Dominance.

On the first anniversary of his arrival at № 10 Downing Street, John Major hosted a dinner for Britain's Asian multi-millionaires, "together worth £1.5 billion". (Roy, 1991) No doubt, Major had Asian votes in mind and hoped that by wooing Asian businessmen, a more sympathetic climate could be created for the Conservatives even among working-class, Labour-voting members of their ethnic community. In August of the previous year, Today and the Sun both reported that there were no less than three hundred Asian millionaires in Britain. Today claimed that "between them their wealth is £2.6 billion (enough to finance 10% of the defence budget)" (25 August 1990), whereas the Sun calculated the spending power of Britain's 1.5 million Asians to be in the region of £5 billion. (27 August 1990) All the figures quoted may be debatable, but

what cannot be overlooked is the growing economic potential of the Asian community in contemporary Britain.

Money matters continued to figure in the press in October 1990 when Iqbal Wahhab reported an unprecedented Diwala celebration party, hosted by the Hinduja brothers, the richest Indian family in Britain and possibly in the world, for the benefit of British businessmen. Diwala, the festival of lights, is the traditional Hindu New Year celebration and is essentially a family affair. The situation was an ironic reversal of the previous status quo with the former Indian subjects clearly laying down the law and the pound notes.

"It was a telling contrast to historical common perceptions of Anglo-Indian relations to see the British with the begging bowls and the Indians dispensing the money and advice." (Wahhab, 1990:17)

In economic terms, rather than political terms, it could be argued that a certain amount of 'colonization' has thus been carried out by the Asians and with hardly any resistance by the British. In contrast to Rushdie's Saladin, Asif the lodger in Kureishi's Birds of Passage does act the part of neo-colonizer by taking over the house and politely but firmly throwing his former landlord out. However, it is in Kureishi's film My Beautiful Laundrette (1986) that the Asians really turn the tables on their former rulers. Johnny the fascist, who once

paraded through the streets of Lewisham crying 'Immigrants Out', ends up working for his Pakistani school friend, Omar, in his laundrette. The efficient ethnic network, in which members of the extended family are bound to help one another to find their economic feet, has enabled Omar to take his personal revenge on Johnny and his kind.

"I'm not gonna be beat down by this country. When we were at school, you and your lot kicked me all round the place. And what are you doing now? Washing my floor. That's how I like it. Now get to work. Get to work I said. Or you're fired!" (p.92)

Access to the power houses of Britain implies the possibility of subversive manoeuvres from within the system as opposed to mutinous attacks from without. Kureishi's characters speak the language of economic power and, as Omar's uncle, Nasser, tells Johnny, have no time for positive discrimination and Commissions for Racial Equality.

"We're professional businessmen. Not professional Pakistanis. There's no race question in the new enterprise culture." (p.82)

Kureishi breaks down the stereotype image of passive Indians, meekly awaiting the hand of British justice. Asif, Nasser and Omar himself have learnt the Thatcherite lesson of self-help better than the Iron Lady's own kith and kin.

One of the legacies of British colonialism, particularly in the Indian subcontinent, was the

fragmentation of previously homogeneous populations into atomized groups, thereby discouraging any kind of solidarity. However, the 'divide and rule' principle practised by the British in India does not seem to have survived decolonization among the Asian community in Britain. The extent of the Asian communal spirit may, of course, be exaggerated, their patronage and support to fellow Asians being offered out of convenience or necessity, (Cashmore, 1991:353) but the rising power of many of Britain's Asians owes a great deal to their strong family ties together with individual hard work and thrift. If Enoch Powell's forebodings are correct and the black man ever does have the whip-hand over the white man, the latter will have no-one to blame but himself. The Asian corner shop, open all day every day, may be viewed with condescension by the white British, but many now affluent Indians and Pakistanis spent the first years of their new lives in Britain virtually behind the counter of their grocery shops. High motivation and covert racism are factors which have often spurred many Asians onto success and the willingness to take advantage of the opportunities that are available, often ignored by the indigenous population, must be acknowledged as the key to their prosperity. (Forester, 1978) Kureishi's Asif in Birds of Passage can see that "there's plenty of

opportunities for Asians in this country" (p.37) and while white anti-racist sympathizers are prepared to disrupt a meeting of local anti-black residents, he retorts that

"... we don't need your help. We'll protect ourselves against boots with our brains. We won't be on the street because we'll be in cars. We won't be throwing bricks because we'll be building houses with them. They won't abuse us in factories because we'll own the factories and we'll sack people." (p.57)

Paul's sly question as regards who is actually included in Asif's "we",

"Will everyone own factories or only those of you with wealthy fathers in Western-supported fascist countries?" (p.58)

does not alter the golden rule of immigrant life in Britain: "You have to make money, that's all" (p.36)

The final 'takeover' of Britain by Asian businessmen may yet materialise, but at the moment a possible reluctance to patronise may be hindering the awaited Indian reprisals. Kureishi's Haroon (Harry) Amir in The Buddha of Suburbia (1990) is far from being a successful businessman, but he does make a modest contribution to the reversal of the master/servant relationship of the Raj. He readily exchanges profound Eastern wisdom for his English brother-in-law's practical skill at household repairs, since Ted

" 'can talk and work at the same time, can't he?' " (p.35) Besides which, he overcomes his mid-life crisis by setting himself up as an Oriental mystic, the 'Buddha' of the title, for groups of enthralled English people, who are not too well versed in non-Christian religions and are incapable of seeing through the "renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist". (p.16) Haroon's personal revenge on the ex-colonialists stems from a refusal to allow himself to be acknowledged a failure by people he had learnt to hold in the utmost contempt. Now that the Empire was gone and the British were struggling for survival, he, an Indian, could not grovel, precisely because that is what they would expect of him.

Grovelling is definitely out of the question, instead of which economic independence appears to be the path chosen by the Asian community to stake their claim in their country of adoption. Recognition as equal British citizens through the channels of the Commission for Racial Equality is seen to be slow-moving and idealistic, as two hundred years of imperial rhetoric cannot be removed simply by passing a law forbidding it. British society has been loath to acknowledge the Asian contribution to British medicine, commerce and industry and Asians themselves have failed to call attention to the large numbers of doctors trained in the subcontinent, now

practising in the United Kingdom, and the fact that Asians control virtually half the retail trade in Britain today. (Parekh, 1989:15) Moreover, organizations like the Commission for Racial Equality run the risk of stifling ethnic initiatives by lulling blacks into the illusion that any setback is attributable to white racism and, conversely, by providing them with an all too convenient tool with which to wreak colonial revenge.<sup>11</sup>

Farrukh Dhondy's television series Tandoori Nights (1985a) is a humorous poke at British images of post-war Asian migrants. The choice of name for the two rival Indian restaurants, around which the series evolves, "The Jewel in the Crown" and "The Far Pavilions", can be seen as a mockery of British insistence at the survival of imperial stereotypes. The novels which the restaurants bring to mind, are themselves 'remakes' of two earlier novels, A Passage to India and Kim, respectively, (Rushdie, 1983b:127) A crucial difference between the novels in question, apart from any superior literary merit, lies in the period in which they were written. Forster's and Kipling's works, for all their shortcomings,

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<sup>11</sup> Nanton and Fitzgerald quote a case of a black tenant who had asked the local housing officer for a transfer because of racial harassment by neighbours. Once this had been agreed, the woman admitted to the authors that she had herself painted 'KKK' on her wall. (1990:173)

belong to the British Raj, whereas Scott's and Kaye's were both written well after the withdrawal of the British from India and after the arrival of Asian migrants in Britain. Nevertheless, the virtual absence of Indians from The Jewel in the Crown and the cringing, fanatical, primitive natives in M. M. Kaye's The Far Pavilions reinforce the imperial belief that the Indian version of the Raj never really mattered. In Rushdie's very scathing article, "Outside the Whale", he attributes the popularity of the Raj revival to "the phantom twitchings of an amputated limb" (*ibid*, 129) and Dhondy's series is one of the many palliatives that nostalgic imperialists need.

In the episode "Apart from the Kama Sutra", a Mr. Gupta is being interviewed for a job as waiter in "The Jewel in the Crown", a high-class restaurant owned by Jimmy, a thoroughly anglicized Punjabi.<sup>12</sup> The interview is being conducted by Allaudin, a Bangladeshi waiter with a strong 'Indian' accent. When discovering that Mr. Gupta has a PhD from Calcutta, Allaudin immediately asks, "How

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<sup>12</sup> Jimmy was played by the well-known Indian actor Saeed Jaffrey, who also played the part of Nasser in My Beautiful Laundrette. Jaffrey has featured in so many films and television series about India and Indians that Salman Rushdie remarked that he had "turned the Raj revival into a personal cottage industry". (Rushdie, 1983b:125)

much did you buy it for?", which, on one hand, suggests the corruption and bribery that was rampant in British India, and doubtless still exists in independent India, and, on the other hand, recalls the close-knit ethnic network of Asian societies. Underneath the jest, lies the crude reality for many post-war migrants who were obliged to seek unskilled jobs when their qualifications were not recognized or simply ignored by British employers. Mr. Gupta's "much reduced circumstances", however, are not sufficient to secure him the job because Allaudin explains that the boss, Jimmy, wants someone with no pride who "he can kick around". Jimmy is now a prosperous restaurant owner and, having learnt his lesson from his imperial masters, can exploit his own 'coolies'.

What Jimmy finds hard to accept is the lack of gratitude shown to him by a former waiter, Rashid, who has set up his own restaurant, "The Far Pavilions", almost opposite Jimmy's. In the same way the British could never tolerate native ingratitude from their racial inferiors, Jimmy finds Rashid's defection an act of treachery. He swears to "run the bastard out of town" and almost succeeds in a later episode. In "A Little Free Enterprise", Rashid is falsely arrested for attacking a white man outside his restaurant. Unfortunately the only person who can provide an alibi for him is his rival in

business, Jimmy. Despite accusations of disloyalty by the Asian community, Jimmy is adamant in his decision to see Rashid rot in prison, which he sees as the ideal way to rid himself of unwanted competition. However, the first week that "The Far Pavilions" is closed, Jimmy's posh restaurant is overcrowded with punks and other undesirable customers, with his high-class regulars being forced to queue up or go elsewhere. Finally business acumen wins the battle over ethnic solidarity. Jimmy testifies in Rashid's favour, keeps his customers and the trust of his Asian neighbours. Dhondy appears to scoff at the idea of Asians being willing and cooperative comrades and, according to Ellis Cashmore, one-upmanship seems to be the general tonic among Asian businessmen. (1991:352-3) Dhondy's successful Asians, like Kureishi's, demonstrate how, in the business world, Indians and Pakistanis are very much part of 'our' culture.

Furthermore, the fact that two Indian restaurants in the same street can both be successful business ventures underlines the extent to which Indian food has become an inseparable part of British culture, high and low. Jimmy, a middle-class Punjabi, caters for the rich and sophisticated; Rashid, a barely literate Bangladeshi, welcomes less refined customers. With one in three Britons regularly eating out in Britain's seven thousand

Indian restaurants, Asians have created a need for an important part of their culture in Britain, having subtly turned the Indian food market into a billion-pound trade.

(Wahhab, 1991:34)

## 6.2. Deepening British Culture.

### 6.2.1. Discovering the Asian Experience.

Indian cuisine may already have become an integral part of British life, but other aspects of Asian culture have not been welcomed so enthusiastically. Many Asian customs and traditions still remain mysterious and incomprehensible to the white British and migrants' unremitting adherence to subcontinental celebrations has often been viewed by the former as a stubborn refusal to adapt to British ways. Both communities, Asian and British, have, in part, avoided crossing over to the other side, for fear of contamination, loss of identity or, possibly, owing to a belief in the inherent inferiority of the culture of the Other. In Atima Srivastava's Transmission (1992), the white residents of Finchley were "bewildered at the lit up houses and continuing barrage of fireworks that lasted for a week, yet they were too polite to investigate the ritual". (p.49)

It is unlikely that the secrets of Diwala festivities would ever be revealed to such discreet neighbours who lack the courage to adventure into unknown territory. Likewise, first generation migrants, often through a lack of linguistic skills or distrust of Western standards of

behaviour, had to wait for their British-born children to explain to them the 'hidden' meaning behind so many culturally loaded remarks. Having heard the Asian workers being labelled as Scrooges for begging for overtime, Ravinder Randhawa's unnamed father in A Wicked Old Woman (1987)

"wasn't to find out who Scrooge was until his daughter took part in a Christmas play". (p.129)

Large-scale Asian gatherings, such as Diwala festivals, are too easily interpreted as proof of the essentially primitive nature of the Asian migrants, who, despite the availability of a civilized (British) tradition, cling, child-like, to their pagan superstitions.

To a greater or lesser extent, Asian writers in Britain have felt a certain responsibility towards the marginalized, being themselves categorized in the ethnic minority group. They have responded by describing the immigrant situation and by expressing Asian reality both for their own community and for British society at large.

In the post-colonial world where "destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms" (Ashcroft, et al., 1989:36) Asian writers have insisted on these very differences. Superficially, many, if not all, texts by British Asians stress two factors above all others: race and culture. A concern

with achieving a balance between the dictates of the society in which they live and the dictates of their Asian heritage features as a recurrent theme. Likewise, racial antagonism and actual physical abuse frequently figure as an essential part of life for Asian migrants in post-war Britain. While these thematic parallels clearly exist, the aim of British Asian writing is not simply to denounce racial attacks and to defend unfamiliar customs. According to the Guyanese novelist and critic, Wilson Harris, post-colonial texts all contain a seed of that particular community's ethnic experience, which, by germinating and growing in the mind of the reader will finally "crack asunder the apparently inescapable dialectic of history". (*ibid.*, 35) Provided the Asian reality was told by their colonial masters, non-European cultures could be dismissed as primitive oddities. Asians themselves could only be approached with caution, as the well-meaning English lady in the Oxfam shop in Ravinder Randhawa's A Wicked Old Woman knew only too well:

"wanting to suggest to the [Indian] lady that she could have one of the better coats and with a wink and a nod the price could be adjusted but wary of wading into waters unknown for these Asians were particular about their pride; for losing face was social calamity as anyone who'd read John Masters should know." (p.3)

Thus, before attempting to describe the reality of their community, British Asian writers are obliged to break down

the received version of Indians, by no means an easy task.

Afro-Caribbean and Asian writers cannot easily avoid the subject of racism in their work because the social circumstances in which they operate are charged with 'race'. His or her colour should not be a writer's main experience in a white society as this can only be a limitation on his/her creativity, but it seems that black writers feel a moral obligation to draw attention to the racial antagonisms that, unfortunately, persist. In this respect, the Guyanese novelist and poet of Asian descent, David Dabydeen, argues that black writers should ultimately write "out of experience, rather than from experience" (Hand, 1992), meaning that they have to transcend the designation of 'black writer' to be simply a 'writer'. They have to overcome the many constraints imposed on them by white society in order to write, or rewrite, their own history. On the other hand, Dabydeen admits that one does have a certain responsibility to one's community and if blacks do not write about their ethnic experiences, these experiences will remain untapped, unrecorded, and, as far as the white majority are concerned, non-existent. (*ibid.*) Consequently, ethnic experiences feature prominently in all the works selected in this chapter. Even Farrukh Dhondy, who denies

that Britain is a racist country,<sup>13</sup> cannot keep racism out of his writing. His most poignant descriptions of racism in Britain are to be found in his children's novels and short stories which he wrote while working as a schoolteacher in East London. Possibly the most moving and at the same time distressing story is "KBW", from the collection East End At Your Feet (1988) in which a Bangladeshi family is forced to move away from their council house flat in London's East End after continuous abuse and intimidation. "KBW" stands for Keep Britain White and is painted on their door by their intolerant neighbours. Dhondy's story is narrated by a white teenage boy, next-door neighbour to the Habib family, who makes friends with Tahir Habib, but who fails to support him when the young Bangladeshi most needed a friend.

One of the most obvious stereotypes to be broken down is the notion that Asians lack in initiative and Asian women, in particular, are meek and submissive. To a certain extent, the growing success of Asian businessmen is gradually demonstrating the fallacy of the cliché, and in recent years the presence of an increasing number

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly enough, Dhondy admits to having been the object of several clearly racist attacks himself. On one occasion, in March 1973, his house in Brixton was fire-bombed along with five others. However, he attaches little importance to such incidences saying that "it's almost worse in India". (Private communication).

of black women in positions of responsibility will finally destroy the image of the passive and subservient Asian and Afro-Caribbean woman. (Palmer, 1990) Women writers are not the only ones to destroy the myths surrounding Asian womanhood and Asian marriage customs as both Hanif Kureishi and Farrukh Dhondy incorporate the theme of arranged marriages into their writing. The institution of arranged marriage is used by both writers to highlight one of the most contentious issues separating the Asian community from the white British.

Dhondy claims that he dislikes the subject but does enjoy using the theme with a twist.<sup>14</sup> His television play Romance, Romance (1985b) concerns a father's futile attempt to arrange a marriage for his 'rebellious fibre' of a daughter. In spite of, or rather, because of, Chaddha's efforts to show his daughter, Satinder, off to a highly eligible bachelor, the girl deliberately embarrasses her parents by treating the audience at the Third Annual Gala of the Asian Arts and Cultural Association with a very lowbrow chorus girl act. Her father, secretary of the association, had commissioned her to stage a short, intellectual play, ostensibly to encourage her dramatic

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<sup>14</sup> For this and the following comments I have drawn on an interview I obtained with Farrukh Dhondy in July 1991 at Channel Four Studios.

leanings but really to impress Bunny Singh, the 'good catch'. Satinder justifies her conduct by asking how else "do you expect a showgirl to behave? [After all] I was on show". (p.28) The irony of the situation is that Satinder does in fact receive a proposal from Bunny Singh, not of marriage as her father would have desired, but of work, in "one of his movie deals". (ibid.)

Dhondy's play The Bride (1985b) touches on what he calls "the corrupt fringe of the system". A Sikh father forces his daughter to marry a rich, old man instead of allowing her to marry the Muslim boy of her choice. The play actually centres around the love of Tony, a white boy, for Jaswinder, who decides to kill herself rather than do her filial duty. The character Tony voices a typically 'white' British reaction to the Indian girl's plight:

"Listen to me. This is bloody England. You don't have to marry this geezer. Your dad can't tell you what to do". (p.43)

However, Jaswinder reminds him of the multicultural situation in present-day Britain and the weight of parental authority in Asian families:

"It's England and I can't do what I like". (ibid.)

In Hanif Kureishi's film My Beautiful Laundrette (1986) the Ali family, in particular Omar's father and

uncle, demonstrate the workings of the extended family, not only as far as fixing up the younger generation in business but also with a marriage partner. Papa contacts his brother asking him to give Omar some work in his garage and also to "Try and fix him with a nice girl". (p.52) This "nice girl" will turn out to be none other than Tania, Omar's first cousin, in true Pakistani tradition. However, not only is there a struggle for power between Omar and his ex-fascist friend Johnny, but Tania also struggles to assert her own will and refuses to conform to the expected mores of Asian womanhood. She deliberately flirts with Johnny, much to her mother's consternation and, openly acknowledges her father's long-lasting affair with Rachel, a white Englishwoman. In this way she is rebelling against the chauvinistic double standard underlying the arranged marriage system. Nasser, her father, presumably married to his wife Bilquis on the recommendation of both families, seeks his pleasure outside with a mistress. Pakistani men have no objection to extramarital liaisons themselves, but their womenfolk, sisters, wives and daughters, are to remain chaste and faithful. At the end of the film Tania is seen to be running away from home and from any attempt by her parents to arrange her life or her marriage.

Kureishi denies having any real knowledge about the current situation of Asian girls in Britain and yet he does admit to feeling strongly about the topic of arranged marriage. When a teenager, he knew of a young girl who was being hauled into an arranged marriage and whose father had gone on a hunger strike, which of course gave him the idea for The Buddha of Suburbia (1990) He confesses that

"It was something that seemed very shocking to me at the time because the amount of oppression that was involved in it, the amount of power that was being put on her, seemed to me to be quite frightening." (Hand, 1993)

This may well be an isolated and rather dramatic incident, but it proves the amount of prestige that would be lost if the daughter refuses to give in. Jamila's father in the novel carries out his hunger strike in the hope that he will be able to

"get my family to obey me ... [and] marry the boy I have selected with my brother". (p.60)

No matter how hard Karim pleads with his uncle that it's "old-fashioned, ... out of date, ... no one does that kind of thing now", Uncle Anwar insists that his daughter "must do what I say or I will die". (ibid.)

Jamila is a conflicting character. Kureishi denies that she gives in out of loyalty to her family or her traditions, but instead does it out of sheer perversity. She herself confesses that

"our culture [seems to white Britons] ridiculous, and our people ... old-fashioned, extreme and narrow-minded". (p.71)

Yet the truth is that the marriage Anwar had so laboriously planned with his brother in Pakistan is a disaster. Jamila and Changez are practically the most unsuited couple a father could imagine. Anwar's izzat (family pride) remains intact but any hopes he may have harboured to become a grandfather are soon shattered as his headstrong daughter refuses to allow her husband anywhere near her.

It may seem from this that Kureishi has set out to prove the failings of the arranged marriage system but he is not trying to represent the Asian community at large in his writing. It would be absurd to extrapolate from his work to make generalizations about marriage traditions and hence, family and cultural loyalties, among British Asians. Instead, he is drawing attention to an extreme case which can be found in all societies. However, the British press, and in particular those newspapers that insist on the 'alien wedge' inside Britain, are apparently determined to keep such stereotypes alive by faithfully continuing to report cases of (mis)arranged Asian

marriages.<sup>15</sup> No doubt, as Dhondy and Kureishi show, there are dramatic abuses of parental power among Asian families, but the media do little to encourage a deeper understanding of a system that is still widely practised among the Asian community in Britain. Extreme cases are inevitable and in the wake of the separation of the Duke and Duchess of York and the Prince and Princess of Wales, many white Britons have ceased to question the validity of arranged marriages among members of the royal family. Yet, it is left to the spokespeople of the Asian community to point out the other side to a tradition that is frowned upon in a country that sets the greatest store on individual liberties.

Asian women writers, rather than denounce the abuses of the system, tend to portray the positive features of arranged marriages. They emphasize the security behind a choice made after careful consideration by both families, the trust in parental wisdom and the strong sense of loyalty that glues the Asian community together. The expectation that everyone should marry is not necessarily

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<sup>15</sup> See for example "Asian child bride wins key verdict", The Weekly Telegraph, October 11th 1992; "Legal victory on arranged marriage", The Daily Telegraph, November 5th 1992; "Asian husband in virgin bride case is cleared", The Daily Telegraph, November 26th 1992 and "Blessing for an arranged marriage without love", The Daily Telegraph, December 12th 1992 as recent examples.

interpreted as an attempt to subjugate women. In fact for many Asian women the Western concept of feminism with its tendency to place priority upon acquiring political and economic equality undermines the high status accorded to motherhood in the Indian subcontinent. (Gifford, 1990: 154-6) In Hindu culture women figure as powerful and resourceful role models. Durga, Kali, Laxshmi and Saraswati are some of the goddesses that belie the passive image of the Indian female. Despite these mighty signifiers of feminine authority, traditional Western representations of submission have survived to be associated with Asian women's compliance with the arranged marriage system.

Ravinder Randhawa shows the reverse side to the situation of unwilling teenage girls being dragged into alliances with middle-aged strangers from the subcontinent. Maya, now well past twenty, has lived an independent life, free from the restraints of her community. Life has not worked out exactly as she had planned and in A Wicked Old Woman she is presented as "moneyless, manless" (p.57) Her refusal to conform to accepted patterns of Asian womanhood has not satisfied her and she debates the possibility of returning to the fold:

"Do you reckon it's too late for an arranged marriage? My Dad imagines he could still pull it off. Not that I have the choice I did. Dad gets the blame. Daddy's spoilt daughter spoilt for life. ... I used to think I'd won the war. ... Is there time to back-track. Pick someone from the DEAD bunch: The Doctor-Engineer- Accountant- Dentist." (ibid; emphasis in original)

As far as Angie is concerned in Atima Srivastava's Transmission marriage is still a faraway prospect. Her mother and aunts scorn her Westernized association of marriage with love, which they consider to be "a very over-estimated thing" that only exists in the pages of Cosmopolitan. (p.52) Auntie Roshni is the envy of her (English) work mates because she has no problems in her (arranged) marriage, while they are continually battling with their husbands and boyfriends over equal rights. Auntie Roshni has no power struggle with her husband: she is the one who rules the roost. Angie, however, is too wrapped up in her career as a television researcher and too aware of her own individuality to feel any need for the respectability and peace of mind that marriage means to her Indian family.

The real twist to the accepted belief in the tyranny of Asian parents is given by Kulwant, the wicked old woman of the title of Randhawa's novel. When a young girl in Britain in the late fifties, she was the only Asian in her class. She longed to be English and proved herself by

finding a boyfriend, one of the sure signs of integration into English life. Her class mates applaud this defiance against her backward and traditional society, but Kulwant is tormented by her own treachery. Her secret meetings with Michael come to an abrupt end when he proposes to her and she cannot bring herself to forsake her Indian heritage. Not only does she give up her English boyfriend, she also disappoints her ambitious parents by announcing her decision to leave school and have an early arranged marriage. No amount of persuading will deter her from the course she is determined to take and her mother and father, who had wanted their daughter to have wider horizons than the kitchen sink, cannot keep pace with the unexpected turn of events:

" 'We're supposed to force you, not you us,' they complained, perplexed and angry." (p.52)

The young Kulwant's predicament represents the cliché of second generation migrants 'torn between two cultures'. Having been brought up in Britain by Asian parents, often unfamiliar with the ways of their adopted country, she had believed that she could be Indian and English at the same time, taking the best from each. Her decision to remain on the Indian side is forced by her skin colour, which she regards as the crucial factor that tips the scales in favour of Indianness.

In contrast to Kulwant, Farrukh Dhondy's Sonya in his first adult novel, Bombay Duck, (1990) is an extreme case of a second generation migrant desperately searching for identity. She feels she is "culturally deprived" (p.185) as she has been brought up in a mainly white atmosphere. Her parents never encouraged her to identify with her Indian self in the hope that she would merge better with the white British community. However, their good intentions for her integration are not viewed sympathetically by Sonya, who goes to India to search for her Indian roots. Dhondy claims he is depicting the dilemma of second or third generation migrants through the character of Sonya. She represents the person in a state of transition, not completely confident about being British, and yet proud of having access to another culture. The trap these people, including Sonya, fall into is that they fail to make an objective assessment of this second culture, but instead regard it as a great art treasure. Often the long-awaited trip to the subcontinent rudely dispels any romantic notion they may have had about their Asianness.

Unlike Sonya, both Angie and Rax in Transmission only appear to pay lip service to their Indianness, having anglicized themselves as much as possible. Ungelliee calls herself Angie, wears Western clothes, talks North

London slang like her brother, Rax (Rakesh), rejects the view of marriage as a deal between two families and unsuccessfully tries to wean her parents from their un-English ways. Despite her convinced hard-headed realism, she proves to lack the media ethos of Madeleine and Charles, the producer and director of the Contemporary Dilemmas series. She becomes too involved with Kathi and Lol, both HIV positive, and when Kathi develops AIDS and wishes to withdraw from the series, Angie is incapable of proceeding with it. Throwing the master copy on the dustcart is almost a liberation for her and on the night bus home, carrying only black passengers, she feels "uplifted, exhilarated. I was young, gifted and ... brown! Hell, I could always go back to waitressing." (p.261; emphasis in original)

Her brother Rax, likewise, fails in his endeavour to stake a claim in the business underworld of London. Two black eyes are enough to persuade him that there is more money to be made from something more "cool and legal" (p.263) like videoing Indian weddings. Consequently, the 'transmission' of the title of Srivastava's novel has more to do with the power of transference from generation to generation of a set of standards and a code of conduct than the HIV virus the story is ostensibly about.

To a large extent as a buffer to the hostile world outside, Asian migrants have clung to reminders of the

country they left behind and, by recreating a patch of the subcontinent on British soil, have reared a generation of people seemingly more Indian than the Indians and yet unmistakably British. Few, if any, British Asians are brought up to reject their Asian heritage and therefore are obliged to make a fair number of choices throughout their lives concerning their identity and their allegiance to a series of cultural norms. Although these Brown Britons are emotionally attached to their parents' social and religious values, they are also British in education and outlook. In The Buddha of Suburbia Karim Amir's destiny might have been to be "a half-caste in England. ... belonging nowhere, wanted nowhere" (p.141) but the second and third generation are aware of their collective identity as British Asians, and are forging an awakening political consciousness of their twofold ethnicity. Nevertheless, whereas second and third generation British Asians have no doubt about their Britishness, they still find themselves ridiculed and rejected by white society.

#### 6.2.2. Discovering the Immigrant Experience.

The paradox of post-war immigration lies in the much criticized failure of black people and, in particular the Asians, to assimilate into the British way of life when it was the indigenous population itself and its successive governments that did nothing in the crucial early years to facilitate any integration into mainstream British life. When large numbers of migrants arrived in Britain answering the demand for labour in the fifties and sixties no provisions for accommodation or language training were made. Even when wives and children began to join their husbands and fathers in the sixties and seventies, any attempt to aid these often bewildered people was left to the local authorities to make. Thus, the immigrants themselves tended to be blamed for the social problems that arose from official neglect. Furthermore, their different colour acted as a powerful signifier for backwardness, savagery and strangeness, images handed down through imperial representations of the colonized Other. Acceptance of the loss of mythical colonial glories and the influx of flesh-and-blood colonial peoples became too much to bear and resulted in overt hostility towards the human reminder of the decline of Britain's world power.

Former Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, architect of the Race Relations Act 1968, emphasized the positive contribution of immigrants to Britain and spoke of the goal of integration

"not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance". (Quoted in Layton-Henry, 1984:66)

Unfortunately, Jenkins' words were not heeded by all British citizens, some of whom found the very presence of non-white migrants almost an insult. Racial attacks became a part of British life for a large number of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans and British Asian writers reflect as much in their work. To a greater or lesser extent, all the authors selected mention racism and treat it as an integral part of the ethnic experience.

The Asian presence was often identified as a threat at all levels of society, to the extent that racial antagonism even became another part of the school curriculum for the children of the early migrants. The young Kulwant in A Wicked Old Woman is treated as a novelty by her class mates, as yet unaccustomed to seeing a brown face, but once the novelty wore off, fear of the unknown stepped in, hindering understanding between the white and the black children. The fundamental problem appeared to be "not the colour of the immigrants but their

numbers" (Elton, 1965:11) and once Asian children began to attend school in considerable numbers, friction between the two groups often ended in violence.

In Farhana Sheikh's The Red Box (1991) there is little interracial solidarity in the East London comprehensive school. In a comically grotesque reversal of the post-Mutiny situation where the memsahibs were constantly afraid of being sexually assaulted by the Indians, a gang of white girls taunt Jamshid, a Pakistani boy, until he is goaded into insulting them.

" 'He can't look at us, Michelle. He might get all excited. You know what they say about darkies,' said Julie. ...  
'Tell us. What do they say about darkies?' asked Michelle.  
'Well, you know, about their you know whats,' continued Julie.  
'What, pricks?' said Michelle. 'Big pricks? Nah, that's about the other darkies. Pakis don't have big pricks.'  
(p.10-11; emphasis in original)

The white girls object to his qualification of them as "prostitutes" and physically attack him, inflicting on him an enormous humiliation that only other Pakistanis could appreciate.

"Girls and boys who knew his brothers and mother and father had seen the white girls beating him. It was the mark of his weakness. The girls had hit him because they could. He hated everything: the girls, the school, the country, and his family who didn't fight back." (p.11)

The young Angie in Transmission is thrown into a large metal rubbish bin in the school playground by a gang of 'bovver girls' after having dared to talk to the boyfriend of one of them. The white girls' aggressive exterior in both cases is only a thin disguise for their feeling of powerlessness at their own lack of resources to deal with a new, mystifying situation, rather than contempt for the 'Pakis' themselves. The teenagers' racism merely reflects the bewilderment of their parents at the post-colonial world in which black men and women are competing as equals with whites for jobs and houses. During the Raj the poverty and squalor of the workers of Britain could be mitigated by thoughts of imperial grandeur in countries where the white man lorded it over the black.

The frequently violent reaction of the host population towards the black migrants not only failed to stimulate their faster integration into British ways, but also brought about a deliberate assertion of their difference. Racial antipathy has prevented many Asians from becoming fully anglicized as, like Tahira in The Red Box, they need their Asian identity to act as a shield against the verbal and physical abuse of some whites.

"I used to think I was English; I wanted to be a goree. [white girl] But when my mum goes out, when somebody says something horrible to her, like the time when she was

coming home from work, some bastards pushed into her and spat on her, when that happens ... I went upstairs and cried. I was shamed and angry. Now, ... if you really want to know, I don't mind wearing Asian clothes, ... because I am who I am. First of all I was embarrassed: I'd wear trousers and I wouldn't care what my mum'd say ... But now, it really makes you think. And then I said to myself - I don't care, I'll wear my clothes 'cos that's who I am, a Pakistani." (p.17)

Despite the crude, harsh reality of racial attacks, British Asian writers can deal with this very traumatic experience from varying perspectives. Hanif Kureishi's Changez In The Buddha of Suburbia is attacked by a gang of Paki-bashers, who start to carve the initials of the National Front into his stomach. Changez's Muslim warrior's cry scares the thugs away but the police fail to take any serious action. His unfortunate encounter a few weeks before with his father-in-law, which would end in Anwar being knocked unconscious by a sex aid recently purchased by Changez, gives the police the opportunity to shower Changez with abuse, "immigrant, paki, scum, wog," (p.211) and, after the second attack, suggest that he has inflicted it on himself. The humour of the bizarre situation does not hide the fact that Paki-bashing was by no means an isolated phenomenon and the culprits were rarely, if ever, apprehended.

The Satanic Verses, and in particular the chapter entitled "The Angel Azraeel", bursts at the seams with racial attacks, harassment of black schoolchildren, police

brutality, verbal abuse, even the mysterious death in police custody of a black leader. Margaret Thatcher's Britain is burning, not from the flames of the riots, but with a violent and passionate hatred, a hatred which is born from the textual misrepresentations of black people discussed in the previous chapter. As one of the patrons of the Shaandaar Café says:

"sometimes the level of aggression bubbling just under the skin of this town gets me really scared. ... It's everywhere. You bump into a guy's newspaper in a rush-hour train and you can get your face broken. Everybody's so goddamn angry..." (p.287)

Angry at what, or at whom? The arrival in Britain of people from the former colonies coincided with the demise of the Empire and the gradual loss of Britain's role as a leader in world politics. The scapegoating of the Afro-Caribbeans and Asians for the current ills of British society is parodied by Saladin's transformation into a real, live goat. Curiously, when he discovers how his arch-enemy, Gibreel, has decided to come out of hiding and return to his acting career he falls into a fearful rage, the outcome of which is a gradual recuperation of his human form. The greater his power to hate, the less goatish he becomes and he finally recovers his human shape only after he has melted a wax effigy of Gibreel with his demonic breath.

The migrant experience according to The Satanic Verses is a constant battle of wits against a hostile white majority. So strong is the resentment of the white population that an enforced ghettoization in "Brickhall" has been brought about in an attempt to circumvent the exclusionary pressures from without. Rushdie mimics Frantz Fanon's map of the colonial city, in his division of London into two separate halves, one inhabited by settlers and the other by natives. The two zones are opposed and non-complementary, one being clearly superfluous. (Fanon, 1968) Unlike Fanon's natives, Rushdie's are white, but both resort to violence as the only logical means of communication with the uninvited settlers. This violence has progressed qualitatively, having succumbed to the influence of Thatcherism:

"'No pitched battles these days ... the emphasis is on small-scale enterprises and the cult of the individual, right? In other words, five or six white bastards murdering us, one individual at a time.' " (p.284)

Having one's face slashed or being beaten up are by no means the only shape racial hostility can take. A much more subtle means of intimidating unwanted migrants figures in Transmission, when Angie's mother is terrified by an anonymous telephone call received late at night by a man threatening to kill all 'Pakis'. The Indian woman despairs of ever feeling at home in England:

"Twenty years in this country and you still have to be scared of the telephone," (p.144)

whereas her daughter cannot equate such an outburst of hatred with the middle-class slot she and her family had come to occupy:

"We weren't poor Indians living in the East End having petrol bombs thrown through the windows. That's something you read about. This was bloody Finchley for God's sake. ... Tescos even stocked a range of Indian vegetables and delicacies." (ibid.)

The upward mobility of many Asians has prevented them from being permanently relegated to a subordinate social status, which leaves the excluding majority no alternative but to deny them any place in the society of which they are in fact already a part. (Ballard, 1992:486-488)

The predicament of exile and the plight of the translated person are too easily dismissed with the well-worn solution: "they can always go back to where they belong". Few white Britons probably realise that increased prosperity and acquired physical comforts cannot always compensate for the upheaval of established values. For Hind, the proprietress of the Shaandaar Café in The Satanic Verses, the process of immigration had been a series of constant humiliations:

"they had come into a demon city in which anything could happen, your windows shattered in the middle of the night without any cause, you were knocked over in the street by invisible hands, in the shops you heard such abuse you felt like your ears would drop off ... and worst of all, there was not one new thing about her complaints, this is

how it was for women like her, so now she was no longer just one... she had sunk into the anonymity, the characterless plurality, of being merely one-of-the-women-like-her." (p.250)

As far as the white majority are concerned, all Asians are to be judged by the same set of criteria and even for the more liberal-minded whites, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis can be reduced to two groups: those that have integrated and those that have not. Nevertheless, despite such reductionism, the ethnic network has worked towards maintaining a positive sense of personal identity and self-worth, which, in turn, acts as a buffer against the scorn shown by less successful members of the white working class.

The contemptuous attitude of some members of the white majority is often a thinly disguised envy of the resourcefulness of the Asians to survive adversity and, in many cases, climb out of their initial condition of deprivation, which is still suffered by large numbers of white, unskilled workers. As Roger Ballard points out "It is precisely the minorities' reluctance to adopt the lifestyles and cultural conventions of their immediate white neighbours which has ensured that they have not shared their fate." (Ballard, 1992:489)

It seems that Britons could indeed learn a great deal about survival from the Asian community, but pride and a reluctance to begin a new chapter in post-imperial history will not allow them to accept anything that smacks of

cultural colonization. Rushdie's well-adapted immigrant, Saladin Chamcha, relentlessly pursues his hate campaign on Gibreel Farishta, the migrant who remains an untranslated man. Gibreel wishes to remain totally Indian and when he is transformed into the Archangel Gabriel his first proposed angelic deed consists in tropicalizing London.

" ... No more British reserve; hot-water bottles to be banished forever, replaced in the foetid nights by the making of slow and odorous love. Emergence of new social values: friends to commence dropping in on one another without making appointments, closure of old folks' homes, emphasis on the extended family. Spicier food; the use of water as well as toilet paper in English toilets; the joy of running fully dressed through the first rains of the monsoon.

Disadvantages: cholera, typhoid, legionnaires' disease, cockroaches, dust, noise, a culture of excess." (p.353)

Physical categories no longer serve as the basis for racism, but people can legitimately be rejected for apparent 'cultural' differences such as those enumerated in the last sentence of the previous quotation. Saladin's anonymous telephone calls to Gibreel, in order to take his revenge on him for betraying him to the British police, while serving as a reminder of this particularly cowardly kind of racial bullying, somehow parallel the successive insidious media campaigns to alienate the black community and identify them as a cultural threat bent on the Indianization of England.

Farrukh Dhondy's portrayal of the Bangladeshi community in London's East End in his play Vigilantes (1988) differs a great deal from Rushdie's Brickhall migrants. For Dhondy racism is alive and well in post-colonial Britain, but it is of a much more virulent nature inside the Asian communities than between whites and blacks. As the title suggests, Vigilantes deals with a self-appointed group of Bangladeshis who set out to protect their community from white muggers. However, it turns out that the Bangladeshis also need protection from their own people, especially those who do not act according to the established norms of Asian conduct. Gita, an Indian woman, and Hasna, a Bangladeshi girl, are both involved in making a film about the drought hit areas of Eastern Bangladesh. Their intention to highlight the adulteration of powdered milk, which arrived in India in perfect condition, becomes a bone of contention that separates the men from the women. The fact that Hasna had run away from her husband on her wedding night has already branded her as an outcast in both Tower Hamlets and Sylhet. Her determination to tell the truth about the evident corruption that took place in India over the distribution of relief sent by the West is seen as an act of treachery by the male vigilantes. Hasna's response to their disgust

epitomizes Dhondy's own impatience at the fear of some members of the Asian community of showing themselves as they really are.

"Asians don't like Asians telling the truth. It's like looking in the mirror for the first time, because you've been brought up without one". (p.44)

Asian values are not so fragile that they can be destroyed by public examination of them. It is all too easy for blacks to hide behind Commissions for Racial Equality and act the role of the perpetual victims of Western imposed deprivation. Hasna goes on to urge her community to take charge of their own destinies as this is the only way to become a fully-fledged member of British society:

"You ... all of you, you're just bothered about how we're seen, instead of being bothered about how we are. 'Stereotypes' - everybody talks about stereotypes as though we only exist when a camera is focused on us, or somebody writes something. We've got bloody starvation, death, illiteracy, stupidity, hundreds of years of junk superstitions to fight, and what're you doing? Joining the grant aided brigade to fight stereotypes!" (p.50)

In spite of Farrukh Dhondy's insistence that Britain is probably the least racist society in the world and that the number of people who express their objections to black people in a violent manner are only a small percentage of

a liberal-minded majority,<sup>16</sup> his optimism is not typical of British Asian writers in general. Salman Rushdie stands out as being the one who has most eloquently made a plea to the white British to recognize the historical debt owing to the former colonized peoples of the Empire who have settled as citizens of equal standing in Britain. His novel, The Satanic Verses, presents a fragmented experience, that of migrants in an alien and hostile environment, in a structurally fragmented way. (Bardolph, 1989:7) The actual migrant experience is recounted in alternate chapters but the two main story lines, the rebirth of Saladin and Gibreel and Rushdie's version of the origin of Islam, converge at the end to be condensed into a cry for tolerance and forgiveness, virtues which

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<sup>16</sup> When asked about white viewers' response to Indian films shown on television in Bengali or Hindi, Dhondy, who is Commissioning Editor for Channel Four, replied that out of between 600,000 and a million viewers, a mere two or three would feel strongly enough to write complaining letters. Curiously, the Asian soap opera, Family Pride, first shown on Channel Four on 30 June 1991, incited the anger of some viewers, although it was entirely in English. As an example of the irate reaction of one anonymous male caller, the answerphone of Channel Four recorded the following message on 30 June 1991:

"Why have we got to listen and watch those bloody paki programmes all the time. This is an English country. I want to watch programmes about English people. They should all bugger off back to Bangladesh or wherever it is they come from." (Duty Office Report. Channel Four Television)

### 6.3. More British than the British.

#### 6.3.1. Challenging the Centre.

Salman Rushdie was already at the hub of a post-colonial controversy even before many Westerners knew the meaning of the word fatwa. As an author writing from within the centre, although he ostensibly criticizes it, he has also been attacked for collaborating with the imperialists. His novels, Midnight's Children (1981) and Shame (1983), which show that independent India and Pakistan "can act as abominably as the British did" (Brennan, 1989:27), are cited as examples of his "complicity with the values of the colonizer". (Mishra & Hodge, 1991:400) Rushdie himself has argued that the British Empire could not have survived without native collaborators (Rushdie, 1982a:8), but from here to casting him into the role of 'chamcha' (sycophant) merely because he writes in the language and country of the colonizer can only be a deliberate misunderstanding of his aims and those of the British Asian literary community.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as Rukmini Bhaya Nair and Rimli Bhattacharya point out, since the furore over The Satanic Verses Rushdie "seems to be an immigrant from the immigrant community, and an outsider among outcastes." (Nair & Bhattacharya, 1990:29)

Writing from Britain was equated with writing from the centre and although London was without doubt the economic and political centre of the Empire, Britain and British values did not have the same impact on Indian culture, the colonial conquest remaining very much a superficial contact. In modern-day India, English language speakers are a small minority, and literature in English

"represents a small and marginal aspect of the practice of contemporary Indian writing". (Ashcroft, et al., 1989: 122)

British customs and Christianity did not replace traditional Indian values and religions, and, in general terms, life goes on in the twentieth century in a very Indian way, as it had done before the arrival of the East India Company. Thus, the centre of the British Empire remained peripheral as far as India was culturally concerned, while the reverse is far from being true.

The periphery, in particular India, had an enormous impact on Britain and the British. The encounter with India was treated as a predominantly aesthetic experience, with Oriental styled architecture and paintings first appearing in the latter part of the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The best known example of Oriental architecture in Britain is probably the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, which was built by John Nash in 1817 for the Prince of Wales, the future George IV, in a basically Indian style.

British tastes in furniture and decoration have been strongly influenced by the Indian connection as the many examples of Indian miniature paintings, tapestries, carpets and china exhibited in museums can prove. (Visram, 1986:193) "To do an Indian" has come to mean cooking a spicy meal, often with curry sauce, and has ceased to be regarded as a foreign dish.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Indian curries have become so ingrained in British culture that they are even available in pubs, possibly the last bastions of Olde England. The English language contains a large number of Hindi and Urdu words, many of which are used by speakers unconscious of their Indian origin.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, as David Dabydeen points out, it is unlikely that a writer like Laurence Sterne could have produced his saga-like style with its numerous digressions had he not been influenced by the Indian oral tradition and the Oriental

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<sup>19</sup> Many typical 'British' foods and flavourings originally came from India, such as *milagu tannir*, a Tamil word for pepper-water, more commonly known as mulligatawny soup; *chatni*, (chutney) Hindi for a mixture of fruits and spices cooked together to make a side dish for curries; and ketchup or catsup arrived in Britain from China (*ke-tsiap*) via the Indian subcontinent. (see The Sunday Telegraph, 3.2.91)

<sup>20</sup> *Bungalow*, *pyjamas*, *loot*, and *thug* are just a few examples of words of Indian origin in English. The adjective *posh* is supposedly derived from the term used by army officers and Indian Civil Service employees to describe the coolest sides of the ship, naturally reserved for them for their voyages to and from India: "Port Out, Starboard Home". (see Allen, 1992)

way of telling stories. (Hand, 1992) In that respect, Salman Rushdie has acknowledged his own literary debt to Sterne, among other Western writers, but hastens to add that his Eastern literary ancestors have influenced his work far more. (see Rushdie, 1985a) It seems, therefore, that if one delves deeply enough, India has influenced many aspects of British culture far more profoundly than is generally conceded, making the periphery more central to Britain than is apparent at first glance. In post-colonial Britain this 'takeover' of the centre by the periphery is becoming even more noticeable with burgeoning groups of innovative writers from colonial backgrounds clearly challenging the very notion of a standard English and a single English culture.

Post-colonialism opposes a monocentric view of human experience. Assimilation is rejected outright because it requires the subordination of one culture to another, the dominant one being, inevitably, that of the former imperial power. Instead, the emphasis is placed on hybridity or multiculturalism, which allows several world views to coexist but which prevents any one achieving dominance over the other. Interestingly, the growing number of British Asian writers use a number of varied discourses to transmit their ideas about the migrant experience and the new ethnic communities in Britain.

Stereotypes of Indians have been handed down through a number of different genres (novels, newspapers, textbooks) and, consequently, the Asian response cannot be limited to any one genre. Moreover, this multiplicity of discourses could almost be said to represent the multicultural character of post-colonial Britain.

Nevertheless, in contemporary Britain assimilation is still the goal for many blacks, who see a multicultural society as a utopian dream. In A Wicked Old Woman Kulwant's eldest son, Anup, is planning to write a book outlining the Indian contribution to England's economy and society, appropriately entitled The Invisible Indian. However, this half-hearted peace offering to the shrine of syncretism is only an attempt to extend, rather than subvert, the boundaries of the centre. Anup, a prosperous research scientist, is a clear example of the Buppies he wishes to focus on in his study. As a 'black yuppie', his "longing for respectability" will never allow him to "turn round and kick the system that made him feel successful, an achiever, part of an elite". (p.100)

Kulwant, on the other hand, believes that black people have to join the mainstream in order to challenge the system and make room for another view of Britishness. Working from the periphery is a useless effort, condemned to perpetual marginality, whereas working within

the system means being able to redefine British culture from a distinctly post-colonial perspective. As far as Kulwant is concerned, the centre

"is where the power lies. To get some of it, we have to be part of it; to influence it we have to go in there and change them." (p.144)

British Asian writers explore these two alternatives and present both the 'ideal' migrant and the 'problem' migrant as two opposing forces at work among the black population of present-day Britain.

Salman Rushdie, in particular, and in spite of its overwhelming plurality, structures The Satanic Verses around the duality of the migrant and his/her experience by providing two versions of virtually everything. (Spivak, 1990:43) Not only does he create two opposing characters, Saladin and Gibreel, to incarnate good and evil, and whose roles overlap and are interchanged, but he also accommodates two versions of the prophet, Mahound and Mohammed and two versions of Ayesha's story: she and her followers either drown in the Indian Ocean or reach Mecca completely dry, the waters having parted before the strength of her faith. (Bardolph, 1989:7) The fact that neither version ever achieves recognition, neither the migrant nor the 'native' is ever assumed and much less judged as the standard, (Spivak, 1990:45) can only

underline the unresolved dilemma of many migrants: to translate or be translated?

In a similar way, the growing ethnic community is attacking the fabled homogeneity of British culture on one of its proudest spots: the English language. During the colonial period, the language that was spoken at the metropolitan centre was the norm and any variants, such as the English that was in current use in India or even the white Commonwealth countries, were deemed inferior and were consequently marginalized. The placing of the English spoken in the South East of Great Britain on a kind of cultural pedestal has been one of the main features of imperial oppression. Through a British-oriented educational system, the language of the Empire could be carefully controlled, assuring a continued acceptance of the established hierarchy of power. Conceptions of 'truth' or 'reality' were not open to debate as the British version of colonial reality was the one transmitted to the people. (Ashcroft, et al., 1989:7-8) Part of the discourse of post-colonial writers is the attempt to overturn accepted imperial views by questioning the process by which the language has authorized the domination of black men and women by whites. These 'new' English speakers are thus challenging ideas about correct English usage in the same way that migrants have to face

the challenge of a new and bewildering language. The Satanic Verses is an obvious textual demonstration of the migrant's, or the post-colonial writer's, "inhibition in the use of the English language", (Nair & Bhattacharya, 1990:24) which enables the newcomers to create their own variety of language, recognizable as English, but which responds to their own specificities and their freedom from the constraints of history.

A successful encounter with the language of the host country can, however, sometimes carry with it a cultural loss. The two British-born daughters of Muhammad Sufyan in The Satanic Verses are, according to Saladin Chamcha, not British, "not really, not in any way he could recognize" (p.259; emphasis in original) and yet they fail to identify with their parents' homeland:

"... Mishal confided: 'Bangladesh in't nothing to me. Just some place Dad and Mum keep banging on about.' - And Anahita, conclusively: 'Bungleditch'. -With a satisfied nod. -'What I call it, anyhow'." (ibid.)

Saladin himself has taken on a new identity, part of the migrant's baggage:

"An Indian translated into English medium. When I attempt Hindustani these days, people look polite. This is me." (p.58)

Saladin may be the exception that proves the rule, that once the frontier has been crossed there is no turning

back,<sup>21</sup> but Salman Rushdie's "multilingual project" in The Satanic Verses, with its "linguistic decolonization" (Booker, 1991:202) demonstrates what Yasmine Gooneratne calls

"the ceaseless linguistic trading that is presently occurring between the metropolitan "centre" and the ex-colonial 'periphery'." (1990:16)

The Satanic Verses is replete with the heteroglossia of the metropolitan city, in which Gibreel Farishta, like any migrant, "wanders through a confusion of languages. ... Babylondon." (p.459) This new hybridized language that results from the mingling of the English language and the colonial experience does not pretend to humbly occupy a second or third rate category, but rather boldly interrogates and may even finally subvert the dominant culture. (Parry, 1991:89)

Such a resistance to a homogeneous metropolitan culture is the only feasible alternative open to the migrant, assimilation being, in the words of Peregrine Worsthorne, writing in The Sunday Telegraph, only possible "on our terms not theirs". (15.4.81) Migrants who are not grateful for being allowed into the country that once exploited their own have no choice but to

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<sup>21</sup> At the end of the novel Saladin goes back to India, to his father's deathbed, and is thus reconciled with both.

resist, and one of the most subtle and effective ways of resistance is, of course, through language. The Satanic Verses and David Dabydeen's first novel, The Intended (1991) both outline the two alternatives available to resisting migrants: joining the mainstream culture or remaining on the margins of society. A limited access to English, as is the case of Dabydeen's Joseph, confines them to an eternal periphery, while mastery of proper English is seen to be the real passport to Britishness, and thus to the centre of power.

#### 6.3.2. Rethinking Britishness.

David Dabydeen's nameless narrator in The Intended<sup>22</sup> aspires to join the British establishment via one of its still coveted symbols of prestige: Oxford University. His desire is for complete assimilation into Britishness, but, like Rushdie's Saladin Chamcha, he is in love with an idea of Britain and not the reality of Britain. He is deluded into believing all the myths propagated by the

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<sup>22</sup> For many of the points raised in the discussion of The Intended I have drawn on conversation with David Dabydeen at the University of Warwick in June 1992 and Benita Parry's article (1991).

imperial masters of decency and fair-play. He cannot see the violence and philistinism of the Britain he lives in and, like Chamcha, he repudiates his Asianness. Dabydeen has created a character that reacts against the reaction against stereotypes. His narrator does not want to assert his ethnicity in a defiant way, as perhaps one would expect from a black narrator. On the contrary, he shudders at any contact with the country and culture of his ancestors, even throwing away the chapattis and samosas given to him as a parting gift from the mother of his friend Nasim, "not wanting my Oxford room to smell with curry and spices". (p.215)

He discovers that he feels no solidarity for Asians after visiting his friend Nasim in hospital, victim of a gang of Paki-bashers. The superiority in numbers of the white thugs does not alter the fact that Nasim has shown himself to be weak, defenceless and vulnerable. Such a display of un-English qualities turns the narrator against Nasim and all the Asian community. Whenever an Asian happened to sit next to him on the tube, he would "squirm with embarrassment" (p.15) lest he should be identified with such an oddity. And yet his convinced Britishness stems from his West Indian upbringing, itself a result of the colonial diaspora.

"[My] shame relieved by a vague wondering as I sat next to the Asian whether I too would have been wearing a turban if the British had not taken us away to the Caribbean." (p.17-8)

He believes that his liberation from his colonial past can only be achieved by imitating the language of his former masters. Consequently, his English betrays nothing of the Creole of his Caribbean upbringing and he equates lack of fluency in the language with inability to integrate into British society. A shopkeeper's perpetual fear of being deported on account of his mistaken interpretation of the stamp in his passport, "permitted to remain in the United Kingdom for an indefinite period", relegates him in the narrator's mind to the status of permanent immigrant:

"He [the shopkeeper] would grow dismal, muttering about how English was so hard, how every word had a dozen different understandings, how he could barely pronounce the words, never mind glean their multiple meanings." (p.124)

The narrator himself is a fully-fledged member of the official centre by his own definition:

"I am no longer an immigrant here, for I can decipher the texts," (p.195)

while his illiterate Rastafarian friend, Joseph, with his non-standardized English, shuns the centripetal forces of assimilation to such an extent that he leaves himself no choice but suicide. Joseph, whose death can be read as an apology of assimilation, represents the final incapacity of immigrants in Britain. His only survival skills are

those required to force open locks, which will take him from borstal to borstal, and from a living symbol of the exotic and irrational Other to the media-created image of a 'problem black'.

"When I [Joseph] was in borstal I was rumour. They look at me and see ape, trouble, fist. ... You can't even see yourself, even if you stand in front of mirror, all you seeing is shape. But all the time they seeing you as animal. riot, nigger, but you know you is nothing, atoms, only image and legend in their minds." (p.101)

In the same way that Joseph refuses to accept the identity thrust upon him by the dominant white culture, the narrator desperately seeks to rid himself of any connection with his own native beginnings. Throughout The Intended he is obsessed by the perfections of the English 'race'.

"I suddenly long to be white, to be calm, to write with grace and clarity, to make words which have status, to shape them into the craftsmanship of English china, coaches, period furniture, harpsichords, wigs, English anything, for whatever they put their hands and minds to worked wonderfully. Everything they produced was fine and lasted for ever. We are mud, they are the chiselled stone of Oxford that has survived centuries and will always be here." (p.198)

He is, however, reminded of the illusory nature of the world he is inhabiting by the constant taunts of his Asian friends. What Patel and the others see as a betrayal of his colour and his history is interpreted by the narrator as a longed for escape from