

# **Heavenly Readings:**

**A study of the place of liturgical literacy within a UK Muslim  
community and its relationship to other literacy practices**

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## **Section IV The Languages of Liturgical Literacy**

**10**

### **Chapter 10: Urdu**

#### **10.1 Introduction**

In this section we will provide the reader with a brief description of the languages involved in the literacies of the community in this study and an account of their respective functions, roles and interrelationships one with another.

Urdu is the national language of the Islamic republic of Pakistan. It enjoys this status alongside the 'official' languages of Sindhi and English. The population of Pakistan is approximately 148,166,000 of whom nearly eleven million consider themselves mother tongue speakers of Urdu. The worldwide figure for mother tongue Urdu speakers is 60,000,000 and includes substantial numbers of speakers in India, South Africa and Mauritius. If one were to include those who consider Urdu as their second spoken language, the number of Urdu speakers rises to 104,000,000.

Linguistically, Urdu belongs to that family of languages generally known as Indo-Aryan, which includes most of the languages spoken on the Indian sub-continent. Further back, Urdu is also part of a wider family of languages known as Indo-European. As such, as a language, it has more in common with English, which also belongs to the Indo-European family, than it does with, say, Arabic, with whose history it has become enmeshed.

It is intelligible with Hindi, the principal official language of India, but has a formal vocabulary borrowed from both Arabic and Persian. Traditionally associated with Islam, most Muslims from this part of the world, or whose families originate from there, will have knowledge of Urdu, either as a spoken language or as a language encountered and employed in education and other formal contexts. Most Pakistanis would consider Urdu as, at least, their third language, if not their second.

Urdu is always written in Arabic script with several extra characters added.

According to the latest UN statistics Pakistan at present has a literacy rate of only 26% of the adult population. As the majority of the population is having to acquire literacy in a second or third language (the largest language group in Pakistan is Punjabi), this is not altogether surprising. In fact, the driving force for the present campaign for a Punjabi-based literacy (see next chapter) is to increase the literacy rate of native Pakistanis as well as those based abroad.

## **10.2 Literacy campaigns in Pakistan**

In recent years (since the early nineteen-eighties) there have been numerous state and locally run literacy campaigns designed to increase the numbers of Pakistan adults who can read and write. These campaigns have had varying degrees of success. One major concern has been the number of rural female adults who remain illiterate.

Although the gap between male and female literacy rates is decreasing, there is still concern that female literacy rates remain alarmingly low.

One interesting example of these literacy campaigns has been the Qur'anic Literacy Project which ran between the years 1991-95. In this campaign, an attempt was made to employ the much greater mastery of Qur'anic literacy possessed by adult females in a number of districts including Islamabad and Rawalpindi to develop literacy in Urdu. It was hypothesised that the women's knowledge of the Arabic script would, with some additions, facilitate their learning of Urdu. Ten thousand women were admitted to the scheme and nearly seven thousand were deemed to have 'fully benefited' from the scheme (PMLC, 1996).

### **10.3 Urdu use in the community**

Although it was not part of the remit of this study to assess the Urdu literacy levels of the adults in the sample, it nevertheless arose as an issue in many of the interviews conducted with parents and other adults. Remembering that the majority of the adult males who arrived in the nineteen fifties and early sixties came from a rural background and that literacy rates among both men and women in rural areas of Pakistan were low at that time, it would not be a surprise to find Urdu illiterates among the Mirpuri community in South Yorkshire. On the other hand, it may be argued that the resourcefulness of those migrating to find work abroad is predicated upon, at least, some elemental literacy in order to facilitate the arrangements of such a venture.

**How old were you when you came to the UK?**

*About 17.*

**So all your education was in Pakistan?**

*I have never been to school! That time was war time you know. (Ghulam, translated by Hanif)*

In the case of this respondent it would not be too outrageous to conclude that his knowledge of Urdu was insecure. However, it is also probable that this man's knowledge of spoken Urdu is much more secure. The relationship between spoken Urdu and the Mirpuri-Punjabi mother tongue of the community will be explored more fully in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that Urdu and Punjabi are located upon a dialectal continuum which allows for some mutual comprehension at both ends and greater mutual intelligibility as the speaker becomes more familiar with each variant.

Literacy in Urdu among adult males in the community is correlated with level of education reached back home in Pakistan. We have already seen that it was quite possible for someone to arrive in the nineteen fifties with little or no Urdu literacy. This was because of the upheaval in India created by World War Two and partition. Later on, if a male arrived in the UK at the age of fifteen or more, it is fairly likely that an adequate level of literacy in Urdu had been reached for future use. However, boys arriving at a younger age ran the risk of having a rather insecure level of Urdu literacy which often manifested itself as a reluctance to read and write in Urdu or even wilful neglect.

Here is a typical response from someone who arrived at around the age 11:

*In Pakistan. Well, all I can remember is...In fact there isn't a great deal I can remember...Truthfully, I can't. I cannot remember. I can read. I can still read a little bit...if it has been written by a novice or if it has been written by...*

**Read in Urdu?**

*Yeah, in Urdu. But as far as my experience in Pakistan concerning school work...*

**So you can't, for example, remember how you learnt to read?**

*No, absolutely not.*

**Would you have gone to school in the village?**

*Yes. I remember the school. Just can't remember what we did in the classes (Akhtar)*

Other men who arrived at a similar age felt a need to continue working on their knowledge of Urdu despite an initial acquisition of Urdu literacy which was considered inadequate for adult purposes. The following responses are typical:

(i)

**When you left Pakistan, when you were 11, was that the end of your formal Urdu education?**

*Yes. That was the end of my formal education in Urdu.*

**And was that enough for you to be able to read and write in Urdu later, like reading the paper and books?**

*No, it wasn't enough, but I've been doing a lot of work in Urdu myself.*

**Was that your choice or your parents' choice?**

*I think it was my choice. I think...I can read and write. Maybe write wasn't that good but I could read pretty good Urdu. I could read almost anything in Urdu and quite understand it. Most of it. Spoken Urdu is maybe lacking a bit. Written Urdu is maybe lacking, but I can read. Because most of the books I have read were in Urdu. I carried on Urdu. (Wajib)*

(ii)

**So could you read and write in Urdu by the time you left and came to England?**

*Yes, I could. I polished it up later in life. I left it for English a bit. I polished it up later in life by reading books and the newspaper and things like that. Mainly my education level is primary level.*

*(Hanif)*

Purposes for using Urdu in the home were mainly for reading and writing letters from and to relatives back home in Pakistan though this was becoming, as elsewhere, less and less of a literacy practice as more electronic forms of communication have developed:

**Do you write in Urdu?**

*Letters, well only my brother's daughter is in Pakistan. She was married there. Anything that happens here, she just reads about it. (Munir)*

**Reading newspapers such as the Jang and other magazines:**

*I read the Daily Jang. That is our newspaper. (Qurban)*

Though this is not necessarily a literacy practice universally shared across the community:

*(i)*

**Do you read the Daily Jang?**

*Sometimes I buy that. Mostly I look at the TV. All the news is there. (Jabbar)*

*(ii)*

**If you bought a newspaper every day what would it be?**

*I don't know. It depends how I feel. One day I might buy the Daily Star, another day it could be The Times or something like that. In Urdu, there's no choice, only the Jang.*

**Do you read it every day?**

*No, very rarely. If I wanted to buy a paper I would buy an English paper. I wouldn't buy the Jang or any Urdu paper. (Wajib)*

(iii)

**Do you read the Jang?**

*The English section only. Excellent paper. That is the standard of the Times. I've met the editor. Very clever man. (Akhtar)*

If books were read in Urdu, they were often religious books which provided commentary or explanation of Arabic texts. Indeed, Urdu has an extremely rich tradition and history of religious literature including some of the most beautiful religious poetry. After Arabic, Urdu is considered, alongside Persian and Ottoman Turkish, to be one of the principal languages of the Islamic faith.

(i)

**What was the last book you read?**

*Islamic books.*

**In which language?**

*In Urdu.*

**Where do you get them from?**

*My brother left books, so his family are not reading them, so I brought them here. (Hameed)*

(ii)

**What was the last book you read?**

*At this time it is mostly religious books. Mostly study in Qur'an. In Urdu as well. For explain. I read that mostly. (Munir)*



Finally, the main role for Urdu within the wider community lies in its importance as a lingua franca, together with its close sister, Hindi, in the Bollywood film and music industry, which just may be the saviour for the language among young people in the UK:

**Which other languages do you know?**

*None.*

**What about Urdu, the actual language of books?**

*Yes. I would say I can understand that. I can't speak it as well as someone who is educated.*

**For example, if you went to Pakistan and watched the TV?**

*Yeah, oh yes. And the films... (Akhtar)*

A regular cultural and social activity for both boys and girls is to listen to songs in films or on the radio or on CD and transcribe the words to aid memorisation. The transcription, interestingly, is done mainly in Roman script.

#### **10.4 Urdu in the mosque**

Urdu is used almost exclusively in the mosque. On a Friday, the imam gives a sermon to the congregation just before the formal Friday prayer. This tends to last approximately thirty to forty minutes and is delivered in Urdu with Arabic verses and sayings quoted liberally within it. The sermon can often be a literary tour de force with Qur'anic verses quoted in the original Arabic followed by their Urdu translation, sayings of the Prophet, or *hadeeth*, quoted in Arabic and explained in Urdu. As the sermon proceeds, the subject matter moves from general principles introduced by scriptural references, to teaching stories involving historical

personages from the history of Islam. These may be named contemporary companions of the Prophet, or historically later figures who have achieved renown in the Islamic world for their piety. In the University Road mosque it is rare for the imam not to also include some religious poetry. Such verses may be in Urdu, Punjabi or even Persian. Even to someone with no knowledge of the individual languages spoken during the sermon, it is difficult not to be impressed with the imam's erudition as he effortlessly recites and declaims without the aid of any notes, and with no apparent speaking by rote.

Sadly, much of what he says is increasingly lost on the younger members of the congregation as they grow up without access to the wealth and history of this rich language.

(i)

**You know on a Friday, when the imam speaks before, what language is that in?**

*Urdu.*

**Pure Urdu, he doesn't use dialect?**

*No. Not as far as I know. I'm not the expert on this...*

**I do notice that some of the boys might sit towards the back. They can't follow it really...**

*Yeah, it is. Tanveer doesn't understand him.*

**Some do and some don't? Why is that?**

*Yeah, that's right. That's true.*

(ii)

**What about all the boys who come to Friday prayer and sit at the back?**

*I told them, and in the month of Ramadan, the imam from Eastwood Mosque, they used to come to taraweeh, and try to explain in English, but I think it is very very important, that our young boys, of 20 or 26 years old coming to the mosque, but our imam is only speaking Urdu. And it should be in*

*English. Then they can understand what Islam says. They are coming there and just sitting there.*

*(Akhtar)*

These young people are not only losing access to the meaning of much that is taught in the mosque, but are also losing access to a deeply-rooted and intensely-poetic branch of literature that has inspired Urdu speakers for generations.

Four or five times a year, the mosque will host a religious gathering to celebrate an important event on the Islamic calendar. This could be *Mawlid* (the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet), the *Laylat-ul-Miraj* (the Night of the Ascension), *Laylat-ul-Shaaban* (the middle night of the month of *Shabaan*) or *Laylat-ul-Qadr* (the Night of Power, 27<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan). These are all auspicious events in the Islamic calendar which are celebrated by a programme of Qur'anic and poetic recitations as well as speeches that may contain storytelling or prophetic accounts as well as exhortations, supplications and singing. The amount of the latter will vary from mosque to mosque as the more puritanical Deobandi variety of Islam will generally disapprove of singing and raised voices in the mosque believing them to be inappropriate. Nevertheless, both mosques will host gatherings.

### **10.5 Laylat-ul-Miraj at University Road – a literacy event**

This event is a very popular one throughout the Islamic world and is celebrated in all countries and in most mosques. The event commemorates the moment when the Prophet was taken by miraculous means from Mecca to Jerusalem and then onwards through the seven heavens to the presence of the Lord Almighty. There are many

accounts of this journey and it has been remembered also in poetry and depicted in paintings. There are, obviously, verses and a chapter of the Qur'an devoted to this incident.

The event is organised by the imam, who, with the permission of the committee, or in this case, the chairman of the trust, makes use of the local and regional network of imams to construct a viable programme for the event. He invites an imam from a mosque in a nearby town who is a *qari*, and, therefore, excels in the recitation of the Qur'an. The Imam, himself, could do this, but he knows that the event will last a long time, and he needs to have a variety of speakers and reciters in order to retain the congregation's attention. He invites an imam from Derby, who is particularly good at relating religious teaching stories, to relate the principal story of the celebration, the account of the Night Ascension. Although most of the congregation would be familiar with this narrative, there are a number of different versions of the story in existence in Urdu, and his narrative will be embellished with other sayings and poetic verses.

The imam also asks two of his students to take part in the proceedings. Rashid is 14 and is already an accomplished reciter of *naat*. The imam wants him to recite an ode, in Urdu, on the life of the Prophet before the congregation. Rashid understands the gist of what he is going to recite. Imran is 15 and is well on his way to becoming a *hafiz*, or memoriser, of the Qur'an. He is asked to prepare a very accurate recitation of the first eighteen verses of the Qur'anic chapter, *Najm*, the Star, as they refer to the Ascension of the Prophet. Imran understands none of the words of what he is asked to recite.

*By the Star when it sets,  
Your companion is neither astray nor misled  
Nor does he speak from himself  
It is but an inspiration to him,  
He was taught by One mighty in power,  
And in wisdom; for he appeared  
While he was at the height of the horizon,  
And he approached and came closer,  
And was at a distance of but two lengths or nearer,  
So did God convey the inspiration to His Servant  
What He meant to convey;  
His mind in no way falsified that which he saw  
Will you dispute with him concerning what he saw?  
For indeed he saw Him at a second descent,  
Near the lote-tree beyond which none can pass,  
Near it is the Garden of the Abode,  
Behold, the Lote tree was shrouded,  
His sight never swerved, nor faltered,  
For truly did he see,  
Of the Signs of his Lord,  
The Greatest!  
(Najm, or the Star, chapter 53, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 1934)*

The event is publicised in all the local mosques that share the same school of thought. The Church Walk event will be publicised in one other Riverton mosque as well as the mosque in Doncaster as well as three mosques in Sheffield. The University Road mosque publicises its event in two other Riverton mosques as well

as in four mosques in Sheffield. A poster is designed at a local Muslim run printers and is distributed to the mosques with the request that the event be mentioned during the announcements which take place after the sermon on Friday.

On the day of the event, the mosque is given a spring clean by helpers. Bashir, who designed the LED displays around the *mihrab* in the prayer hall, lends a hand with the Hoover and others tidy up, removing the teaching benches from the hall to create more room and rearranging the books on the shelves. Bashir also makes sure the public address system is working. The prayer hall is smaller than a school hall, but the mosque committee feels a need to demonstrate that it is in tune with modern technology. A place by the loudspeaker is not to be recommended.

Finally, no such event could take place without refreshments. A member of the congregation has offered to provide a meal at the end of the afternoon for all who attend. As sometimes the gathering could be attended by over a hundred people it is no mean feat to arrange for the catering which usually consists of savoury and sweet rice, a curry and chapattis all washed down with pop or water. Each mosque usually has in a cupboard somewhere a large roll of catering paper which is unrolled along the floor at the end of the proceedings to enable people to eat on the floor.

The event begins at two in the afternoon with the afternoon prayer. At the end of the prayer which lasts twenty minutes the congregation remains sitting as the guest speakers sit at or near the front. The imam begins by speaking in Urdu. He introduces the guests and outlines the programme for the afternoon. Most of the congregation can follow this; even the younger members sitting near the back of the prayer hall

can follow this simple information. Imran is then asked to recite his learned verses which he has spent a week preparing. He had to learn these verses from scratch because as yet he has not reached them in his gradual learning of the complete Qur'an. He has concentrated, with the help of the imam, on achieving as perfect a recitation as possible. This includes perfect pronunciation as well as the appropriate tone and rhythm. He is nervous as he has never recited in front of so many people before. Moreover, when he finishes at the mosque he has to go home and complete two outstanding pieces of English coursework.

The congregation listens attentively to Imran, and some of the elders, occasionally interject Arabic expressions such as '*subhan Allah* (glory to God!) in between verses, a customary practice during Qur'anic recitations in mosques all over the world. His father observes Imran proudly, whilst his brothers try to avoid looking him in the eye, as it might break his concentration, and they might start giggling. No one, neither reciter nor listeners, understand what is being recited.

The qari from the local mosque is then introduced by the imam and invited to begin his recitation. Again this is in Urdu and some of the elders in the congregation nod approvingly as the *qari's* credentials are listed during the imam's introduction. We learn that he is *Qari* (He who recites the Qur'an) *Hafiz* (He who has memorised the entire Qur'an) *Maulana* (our master) *Seyed* (honorific title for someone claiming lineage to the Prophet) *Muhammed Iqbal*, *Al-Hanifi* (announces the owner's allegiance to the Hanifi school of Islamic law) *Al-Qadiri* (this latter title announces the owner's allegiance to a prominent Sufi order). The Qari breathes deeply and begins to recite the first verse of the chapter in the Qur'an entitled, *Bani Isra'il*, the

Children of Israel, which is translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali in the following manner:

*In the name of God, most Gracious, Most Merciful*

*Glory to God Who did take His servant*

*For a journey by night*

*From the Sacred Mosque*

*To the Farthest Mosque,*

*Whose precincts We did*

*Bless, - in order that We*

*Might show him some*

*Of Our Signs: for He*

*Is the One Who hears and sees all things (Bani Isra'il, the Children of Israel, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 1934*

The reciter uses his breath to structure his recitation with his breaths becoming ever longer as he seeks to recite an ever longer string of words. As the convention whilst reciting is to only complete a phrase at a set point, when one's breath obliges the reciter to pause inappropriately, the reciter returns to the beginning of the phrase, takes a longer breath, and 'tries' again to reach the point in the verse convention has decided is an appropriate stopping point. However, this is not quite what it sounds, because this is not an exercise in trying and trying until eventual success, for this process has now become a very stylised and deliberate method of recitation and is expected at the beginning of every recitation. The Qari spends twenty minutes on this short verse and his extended recitation is punctuated with the interjections of the



congregation and the occasional feedback from the PA system. Again no one in the mosque understands what is being recited.

After the recitation, the imam thanks the *qari* and begins a short talk cum introduction to the next speaker, the imam from Derby. The imam's Urdu address includes Qur'anic verses and Prophetic sayings and lasts for about fifteen minutes before the introduction is made. Again, most of the imam's address is understood by the members of the congregation, but as he begins to include Arabic verses and sayings and their more formal translations and explanations, the Urdu used begins to be rather hard to follow for some of the younger boys. The imam who takes over has an equally long name and proceeds to relate the story of how the Prophet travelled to Jerusalem upon a magical flying beast and then ascended to the heavens accompanied by the Angel Gabriel. The imam is wise and canny. He knows that the majority of the congregation are Punjabi-speakers, and intersperses Punjabi words and phrases into his formal Urdu account. This makes for much more audience attention especially among the younger members who are more familiar with the Punjabi language than they are with Urdu. The speaker uses humour and pathos to engage his audience and accompanies his words with extravagant arm gestures and facial gesturing. He is able to deliver a very serious and important religious message with vivacity and empathy. At many points in his talk, the audience will laugh or express surprise or wonder. The Ascension account contains many descriptions of marvellous and horrific sights as the reader or listener is taken on a journey of the Heavens and Hell too.

Those who do understand Urdu well are very appreciative of the speaker's use of poetry during his talk. Whenever he arrives at a point in the narrative which lends itself to a particular poetic verse, the imam declaims the verse with gusto and enthusiasm. Those who recognise a verse will occasionally recite with the imam and for some very well-known verses up to half of the congregation will join in in chorus fashion.

The younger members of the congregation can participate in this part of the afternoon for there is enough meaningful discourse happening to engage their attention. They are also helped by the speaker's talents in performance. However, it should be noted that not all speakers will be as sensitive to their audiences as the imam from Derby. In Church Walk, the imam, through no fault of his own, for he originates from a non-Punjabi speaking part of Pakistan and only speaks in Urdu, is unable to communicate to the young boys who attend on Fridays and on other occasions such as the event described here.

By now it is four in the afternoon and it is time for the late afternoon prayer. Some take this opportunity to leave the mosque but most stay and some newcomers arrive. After the prayer, the congregation stand and a *naat* session takes place. *Naat* are religious devotional verse which are declaimed or sung on auspicious occasions such as those mentioned above, though some mosques will have *naat* sessions at the end of every Friday prayer.

The imam is an accomplished *naat* reciter and he begins with a well-known Urdu *naat* that nearly every one in the congregation knows. This means that the verses are

mainly declaimed by the imam and the entire congregation responds with the chorus. In some traditions, but not represented in this mosque, this form of recitation is accompanied by the beating of a drum. After the imam, with the congregation still on its feet, Rashid has his opportunity to recite the *naat* that he has learnt. His voice is still unbroken and his tenor notes ring out across the prayer hall. Through careful control of his breathing Rashid is able to deal with the tricky rhythm and cadence of his verses. At the end of his performance, many of the elders mutter the congratulatory '*ma sha'Allah*' (What God has willed (is good)).

This is an opportunity for more humble members of the congregation to contribute to the proceedings. Many of the worshippers, young and old, have learnt various *naat* and are asked to recite. The collecting of *naat* is an activity which is being given a recent burst by the internet. In the next chapter we will describe the cultural phenomenon that is electronic *naat* swapping which is currently engaging many younger members of the UK Mirpuri communities.

The *naat* at this recital are all in Urdu, although such is the relationship between Urdu and Arabic that some of the refrains sound almost totally in Arabic. Again, in the next chapter we will discover the use of Punjabi *naat* within similar settings. It is also worth recording that occasionally Persian *naat* are heard recited at events such as this.

The Urdu *naat* session is followed by the end-of-event dua', or supplication, session. It is customary to ask the most prestigious guest to undertake this supplication on behalf of the congregation. The imam asks the Derby imam to make the supplication

on behalf of everyone. He begins by supplicating in Arabic using well-known Arabic verses from the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet. The congregation, despite not understanding most of these pleas and requests, respond with the universal 'ameen!' The language of the supplication changes into Urdu and the congregation, understandably, become more responsive as they react to meaningful phrases and expressions. Sometimes the supplication session can last for as long as twenty minutes.

Finally, the congregation is asked to recite the '*Fatihah*', the first short chapter of the Qur'an, which serves as a seal on all that has preceded it. Some members of the congregation stand up and start sorting out the eating arrangements and everyone else lines up on either side of the spread out catering roll and sits down opposite someone else. There are so many people in attendance that there are three lengths of catering roll running lengthways towards the back wall of the prayer hall and one more running at right angles to them across the back wall. With a minimum of fuss and an efficiency born of many previous similar events, the food is distributed and the congregation eats.

I have thought to include a detailed description of this particular literacy event in order to portray the richness and creativity of the Mirpuri community as it engages in a religious celebration common to the Islamic world. The literacies which are encountered in such an event are complex, rich and diverse. No participant has full access to all the potentiality of any particular literacy here represented. The Arabic, much in evidence, is understood by few, and even then, in a limited way. The Urdu is understood fully by some, partially by others and not at all by some others. Punjabi, a

language which the community speaks, makes its first full appearance at the meal at the end of the afternoon. English, the language of the wider society outside the mosque, remains an interloper, spoken in snatches by some of the younger members of the congregation.

## **10.6 Future status of Urdu in the community**

The key language, here, is Urdu. Without knowledge of Urdu much of the above is incomprehensible. There is obviously no danger of the disappearance of Urdu back home in Pakistan where its role as the national language and its role in education and the media secure its position and ensure its development. In the UK, within Mirpuri communities, struggling to maintain their liturgical literacy in the mosque, and adamant about ensuring their children succeed at school, in English, the decision to support the development of Urdu is a difficult one. I end this chapter with the words of one parent that encapsulate the dilemma all these parents and their children are facing in respect of language maintenance:

*One way, actually, if I try to learn here, it is very difficult for the children. Because sometimes parents do not give pressure on children to carry on with our language, Arabic, Urdu, and they go to an English school as well. I myself think that if they link with the school, there is this Urdu language, then children will try to learn, that because it comes into his mind, that is one subject actually. And when I have tried at home, they think we give to them pressure. And they are confused like. They say too much work in school, then going to mosque, then Dad asking about our language...*

**Do you think they could do it in the mosque?**

*Well, actually, before they tried to teach it on a Sunday. Children come Sunday and try to teach them Urdu. But sometimes children want to play...And to go for seven days is very hard for the children. But we are British, so why don't the British accept our language into education? I think myself, that Urdu is very important in school, you know. When they finish school, they are here only one hour and then they are going to the mosque. It's too much. He says if he goes to mosque then he has no time for homework. That's why he is going to leave maybe next year. (Munir)*

## **10.7 Summary**

At the end of the literacy event described above the congregation sat down to eat. At this juncture it was possible to discern the encroachment of other languages into the proceedings. The formality of Urdu is reserved at present for those occasions which demand it and will be maintained for as long as there is a critical mass of Urdu users within the community. The vital and necessary languages for everyday communication fill the space Urdu leaves behind when these occasions of formality end. At present there are two such lingua francas in use within the community, Mirpuri-Punjabi and English. The next two chapters examine the role these languages play in the life and literacies of the community.

## Chapter 11: Mirpuri-Punjabi

### 11.1 Introduction

Despite being the largest language group in Pakistan, Punjabi, or more correctly, Western Punjabi, is not considered an official language. With up to 45,000,000 speakers according to the 1981 census, the language is spoken in the Punjab area of Pakistan. It is obviously linguistically related to Eastern Punjabi which is spoken in India. In fact, there is a continuum of varieties between Eastern and Western Punjabi and with Western Hindi and Urdu. There is also a variety of dialects within Western Punjabi, of which Mirpuri-Punjabi is one. Ethnologue<sup>32</sup> includes Mirpuri-Punjabi as a separate language distinct from the occasionally heard Potwari or Pahari, although Mirpuri is listed as a dialect of the latter.

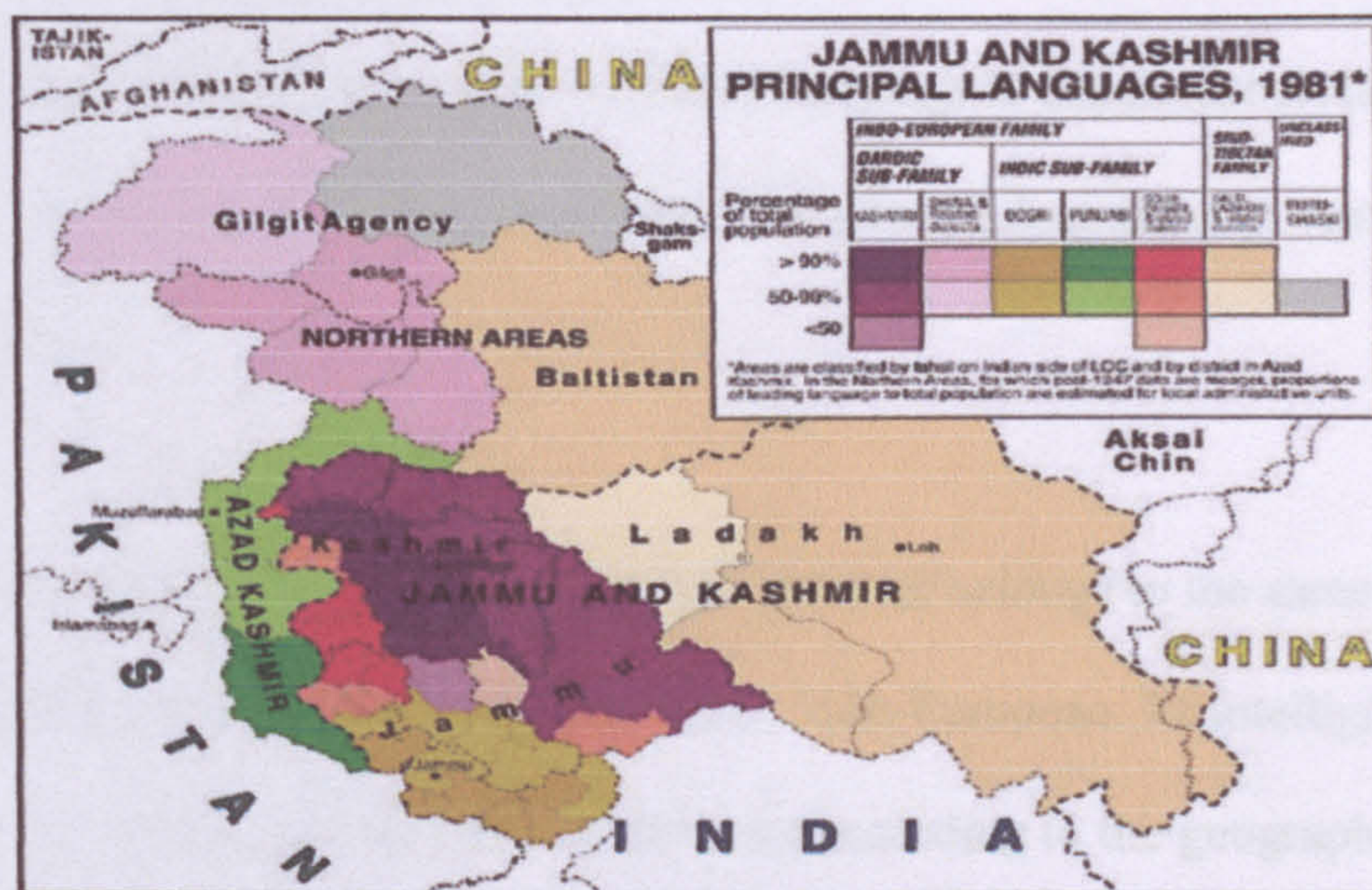


Figure 3 - Location of Mirpuri dialect

<sup>32</sup> Ethnologue: Languages of the World, 14<sup>th</sup> Edition

## 11.2 Mirpur, Punjabi and Mirpuri-Punjabi

The Mirpur area of Pakistan lies next to the border with India, and forms part of the Pakistani side of the disputed territory of Kashmir, in an area known as Azad Kashmir. This accounts for many UK-based Mirpuris claiming to be Kashmiri as well as Pakistani or Mirpuri. Mirpur itself is a relatively small area and officially has a population of only 30,000 or so. There are more Mirpuri speakers residing outside of Pakistan, particularly in the UK, than there are in Pakistan. However, other sources indicate there to be up to seven or eight million speakers of Mirpuri in Pakistan and up to a million in the UK. This discrepancy is explained by the uncertain status of dialects, in particular, the names given to dialects, in censuses and other linguistic surveys. Another contributing factor to the language's uncertain status is its lack of a recognised written form. A written form, with its associated literature and educational support, ensures a recognisable status for a language, providing it with legitimacy, a history and a material form capable of being preserved, analysed and developed. A spoken language is dependent on its speakers alone for its integrity and, if not supported officially or educationally, remains a low status language.

Linguistically, Western Punjabi, Mirpuri and Potwari belongs to the same language family as Urdu, Indo-Aryan and, further back, Indo-European. Its intelligibility with other varieties of Punjabi and Urdu itself varies according to the geographical extremes of the continuum. At its most extreme Western Hindi and Potwari dialects are the most removed from one another and speakers from each group would be the least intelligible to one another. The fact that Mirpuri, Potwari and northern Western



Punjabi dialects are so close to one another geographically explain their mutual intelligibility as well as the confusion around what to call them.

Unlike Eastern Punjabi which has a written form, and a rich literary tradition, Western Punjabi is rarely written. When it is, it uses the same Perso-Arabic script as is used for Urdu. The extant literature is limited at the present moment to poetry. Speakers of Western Punjabi are predominantly Muslims. Eastern Punjabi enjoys a much more enhanced status both in India and around the world because of its association with Sikhism. The gurmukhi script, used for all Sikh sacred scriptures, and for all Eastern Punjabi literature, serves as reinforcing and preserving factors in the status and development of the language.

### 11.3 Self-perception of language use

Confusion regarding the name of particular languages or dialects is common within the Mirpuri community, particularly among the young. Most adults refer to their spoken language as Punjabi. Their responses also reveal a certain awareness of the lack of prestige their own language possesses.

*(1) My language is not Urdu. It's like a Yorkshire, you know. (Munir)*

*(ii) My mother tongue is called Punjabi. This speech is like slang like (Jabbar)*

Most are aware that their spoken language is a variant of the more standard Punjabi and many draw a parallel between the differences between Mirpuri and standard Punjabi and the dialects of South Yorkshire and standard English.

*That (Punjabi) is not my language. It's like a Punjabi, you know.*

**Mirpur?**

*Mirpur language, yes. My mother language, you know, it's not a Punjabi, like a Yorkshire, you know. (Wajib)*

Sometimes, someone might suggest their mother tongue is Urdu. However, it is quite possible that the speaker may be intending to signal some form of cultural and educational status by doing so. There is no doubt that the community considers Urdu to be a much more prestigious language than their own.

*Urdu. (Wife interrupts) No, Punjabi. (Wife interrupts) We speak Punjabi at home.*

*(Wife: Some people speak Urdu.) Here we all speak Punjabi.*

*Urdu. I think it's a dialect, isn't it? Really. It's Punjabi I think.*

*(Consults wife here) Punjabi dialect. I speak more from the Mirpuri side and my wife from Deena is more from the Punjabi side. Different dialects but more or less the same. No big difference. (Jabbar and Rukshana)*

#### **11.4 Gender difference in language awareness**

In a significant number of interviews, where both husband and wife were present, it was soon apparent that the wife possessed a greater sensitivity to and awareness of

language difference than the husband. Indeed, what was obvious in a number of families was that the wife was generally more educated, and definitely more familiar with Urdu than her husband. It was also apparent that the wives tended to come from urban environments such as Lahore. Sociologically, what seemed to have happened is that Mirpuri males, despite originating from rural area with relatively low levels of education, because of their residence in the UK, were now esteemed to be suitable matches in terms of arranged marriages for more sophisticated and educated females from families in urban areas. This would definitely explain situations such as the comments from the family below when asked about their respective knowledge of Urdu and Punjabi. At first, the wife characterises the different language practices of her and her husband to be that between Mirpuri, or Pothwari, and standard Punjabi:

*(The daughter is speaking) My mum is just saying that she's from a city, my dad is from a village and they speak the Pothwari language, and my mum speaks the Punjabi language proper. Village people don't know that much, they don't go to school (wife interrupts) It's different – jaana – jaassa.*

**Is that an example of two words?**

*Yes, like 'we're going' in the two languages. (Nafisah and her mother, Rukshana)*

As the conversation proceeds, this distinction is made even clearer by references to Urdu and to education.

*She is just saying that people coming from Mirpur originally or somewhere like that, they speak Punjabi, the people coming from the cities, with a good education and that they speak Urdu. (Nafisah)*

The links between knowledge of and speaking Urdu to social manners and privileged language use are also very apparent within this family:

*My mum speaks Urdu, doesn't speak Punjabi, she speaks in a more mannered way. More than my dad. My mum speaks good Urdu so we all speak Urdu with her. So they (the children) come up with better language and that. (Nafisah)*

It is also obvious that Urdu maintenance is in the hands of the mother as she has the skill and knowledge to enable her to do this. Socially, girls in the Mirpuri community spend more time with their mothers than they do with their fathers and, this, by itself, is often sufficient reason to explain the more confident use of Urdu, and spoken Punjabi, among young females:

*I learnt it (Urdu) from my mum. Because she knows a lot.*

**When and who taught you?**

*At a small age.*

**Did she teach you to speak Urdu as well?**

*Reading and writing. She used to help us with that. She learnt us to speak a bit of Urdu, it's more in a mannered way. We speak a bit different from other girls and they always say you speak a bit...It's because my mum is a bit different you see. It's mixed Urdu and Punjabi, it's not full. Punjabi is like a slack language you see, and Urdu is more mannered. So we speak both.*

**Are there other families that speak Urdu?**

*Only one or two families. But not a lot. Most of them just don't care.*

**Is that because of your mum?**

*Yeah. Because she's from Lahore, if she was from Mirpur it would be different. (Nafisah)*

Perhaps the most perceptive comment about the confusing linguistic profile of the Mirpuri community came from this man, when asked for the name of his mother tongue. It was unusual for someone to have such explicit awareness of language and dialect:

*Punjabi. Or Mirpuri, a dialect of Punjabi. Yes. The language that we speak is very very similar to Pothwari. It would be the closest one linked. Pothwari is spoken in Pakistan, a few areas of Pakistan. Pothwari is spoken in Kashmir. And where we live, most people from that area*

**And is that the same for most of community?**

*Yes. Most of the community would speak that language. Some people might call it Pothwari. But Pothwari is basically spoken mainly in some area of Pakistan. The official language though of the whole area of Pakistan is Urdu. (Wajib)*

### **11.5 Pothwari or Mirpuri-Punjabi Literacy**

Pothwari is the name given to the variant of Western Punjabi spoken by people of Mirpuri origin resident in the UK by the language activist Tariq Mehmood, based in Manchester, UK. He uses the term to cover all the different dialects that might be spoken by UK-based Mirpuris. That his term is disputed by members of the Mirpuri community is indicative of the uncertainty that surrounds the language. However, it is a useful umbrella term for referring to the Mirpuri speakers in the UK and elsewhere. Mehmood (2001) characterises it as ‘an ancient language of the hill tracts of what is today Pakistan and Kashmir. Its general linguistic ‘border’ would start at the North bank of the river Jhelum going up to the south bank of the river Atack in

Punjab, Pakistan and eastwards towards the western face of the Pirpanjaal mountain range, crossing into Jammu Kashmir.'

Mehmood claims the number of active speakers of the language in the UK to number up to 700,000, which, after Welsh, would make it the most commonly spoken second language in the UK. He lists Bradford, Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Oldham and Birmingham as among the main British cities where the language is spoken.

*Our language has primarily been kept alive by workers and toilers, with the middle classes, following a policy left behind by the British, teaching their children Urdu, maintaining that the people's language is crude, rustic and worthless.(Mehmood, 2001)*

Mehmood is trying to address illiteracy within Mirpuri community both in the UK and in Pakistan by developing a Pothwari literature. By using the Perso-Arabic script used for Urdu, it is hoped that many more people will be able to develop literacy in their mother tongue. It should be remembered that the script, or at least the Arabic script from which it is derived, is known through the liturgical literacy acquired in the mosque. This is obviously akin to the Qur'anic literacy campaign carried out in Pakistan in the nineteen nineties. So far, some short stories and some children's books as well as a magazine, Chitka, have been published.

There is little doubt that the development of reading and writing is heavily influenced by a person's command of the language in question. To read initially in one's mother tongue is the ideal situation. A child's experience of the world is enmeshed with its language development. To begin reading in a second or even a third language is to

put that child at a considerable disadvantage. The CUP, (see *Chapter 9, School, page 240*) which might facilitate subsequent reading in different languages is less satisfactorily acquired when one is reading for the first time in a language which is not the mother tongue. Even in those specific situations where someone learns to read in a language which they do not know, for example, an English-speaking scientist learning to read academic Russian, they would be hard pressed to do this had they not learnt to read in their own language in the first instance. The strength in Mehmood's campaign is that, unlike the Pakistani government sponsored Qur'anic Literacy which aimed to develop Urdu literacy, he is attempting to develop literacy in the mother tongue. Set against him is a generations-old, and state-supported, prejudice against literacies other than Urdu and liturgical literacy in Arabic, originating in Pakistan and transferred to the UK. Linked to this are the community's own feelings of self-worth in respect of its mother tongue. Nearly all those questioned spoke in rather disparaging terms of their own language, likening it to 'village' or 'slang' language. Only occasionally, would a respondent speak positively about their own language:

*I only speak Punjabi, you see, I like my language. I like it. (Jabbar)*

There was also the strong feeling that were a language to be retained and preserved for the future generation's use, that language should be Urdu rather than Punjabi.

**How important do you consider your first language is for you? Your children?**

*Punjabi language I am not really, I think is important, but Urdu language is very important actually. Punjabi language is basically a village language. But if children get to know Urdu, Urdu is a proper language.*

**So do you don't think it is important for the children to know Punjabi?**

*The children catch Punjabi from us, how we speak, they speak in that way. But Urdu is a subject concerned with education. Punjabi is not just language. It is not mostly concerning writing and reading. Where we live in Kashmir, they speak Punjabi but all paper they write in Urdu, educational system in Urdu. I myself think in my opinion, if a child learns Urdu, it is better for them. (Fameeda)*

## **11.6 Mirpuri-Punjabi usages**

We have already described how the formal language of the mosque, Urdu, is employed and privileged. It is in the home that Mirpuri-Punjabi remains strongest. Among the first two generations of settlers, those that came as single males in the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties and those that came as children in the seventies, Mirpuri-Punjabi is still the dominant language of business and relationships. As children have been born here, English has begun to make serious inroads into this linguistic monopoly and this will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

It is in the home that Punjabi has its widest scope. When asked to whom, when and where they spoke Punjabi it was family and friends contexts which occurred the most regularly.



(i)

*Actually, mostly when we meet each other in the community, we speak to each other our language. Punjabi like. (Munir)*

(ii)

*With old people who have come from Pakistan. And a lot of the people living round here. From my family, you know. We speak our language. I mean a lot of my relatives don't know English fully. They can't understand. So also you know, language, if you speak English some other one does not understand, it's no good speaking English. I mean this is our mother language. When we speak to each other they can understand very well. And they can answer right. A lot of English words are very difficult to understand. And if I say people living in Riverton they are qualified and educated, no. They are not educated. (Hameed)*

(iii)

**With whom do you speak your first language?**

*At home.*

**Is it spoken in the mosque or do they use Urdu there?**

*Urdu (wife interrupts: No, Punjabi) Some they speak Punjabi, some they speak.*

*If you are sitting in the mosque after the namaz, and you are talking with your friends...*

*Punjabi. (Nafisah)*

However, even among those parents who speak exclusively with one another in Punjabi, there is not a straightforward choice of speaking Punjabi to their children.

**Do you speak to your children in Punjabi? All the time?**

*I myself sometimes speak to them in Punjabi language.*

*At home? Well, these all children they speak mostly English. To brother and sister, you know. When I speak to them, if they don't understand in my own language, in mother language, I speak to them English. I try to explain to them. So they understand. (Munir)*

As this parent recognised, it was quite common for siblings to converse in English at home. Sometimes this was denied by parents who prided themselves on running a purely Punjabi speaking household, but this was often in the face of direct evidence to the contrary. In this extract a mother is responding to questions on use of Punjabi whilst her teenage son (in brackets) is interjecting his own observations:

**So, for example, if you were arguing with your brother, you'd be doing it in Punjabi.**

*(Son: No, I'd be doing it in English! (laughter))*

**So when is English used in the house? When do you use English in the house?**

*I don't use English in the house. I only speak English when my English friends come or people who do not understand Punjabi. Or Urdu. Then I speak with them English. With the girls I strictly at home speak Urdu. Because English I know, my kids know. Everybody knows.*

**So who speaks English at home?**

*(Son: Actually, we speak among ourselves in English.)*

*Sometimes they do. (Son: A lot of the time) Oh, yes. But when we speak with the children we speak Urdu. I mean, my daughters, they speak very good Urdu. And now I am teaching my grandchildren to speak Urdu. And I taught all of them to speak in Urdu. (Fameeda and Munir)*

Among some of the younger parents, those who were born or, at least, educated here there is a greater tendency to rely on English. One young man whose wife was

educated in Pakistan was very aware of what was happening to his peers. Indeed, his having a wife from Pakistan rather than from the UK was a significant factor in his children growing up bilingual:

(i)

*The great majority of the time they are English speakers...I have a large family in Birmingham...and they go to the local mosque...they acquaint themselves with Asian children...but the majority of everything they speak is in English...they don't have a mother tongue like we do...if my wife spoke in English I don't think my children would know as much...of Urdu...this is what I am seeing with my family members in Birmingham...where their children have been brought up with this atmosphere and background where both parents speak English...the only time their parents speak Urdu, is possibly when they meet up with their parents...because our forefathers have started to disappear...the new generation...it's not a case they have no connection with their grandparents...the thing is they don't have to speak Urdu...they can speak English...and if both people know English...to read and write...say, for instance on the television remote control it says 'on', where you turn it on, so even if I were to speak in Urdu, I would say 'can you turn the television on', even to my wife, who doesn't speak a great deal of English...(Bashir)*

Another parent, from an older generation, with grown-up children, was keenly aware of the precarious status of their mother tongue:

*(ii) For example, take my son, and his wife, they're both English, she's a Muslim and Pakistani, but she's English, the same as my son is...And there's nothing to support it...they're kids who will speak even less Urdu than we do...(Akhtar)*

### 11.7 Mirpuri-Punjabi, Urdu and popular culture

Finally, in this section it is worth describing the growth of a recent cultural and religious activity which may contribute to a delay or even postpone the total loss of the Punjabi language from the Mirpuri community as the generations ensue. In the previous chapter a literacy event known as the Laylat-ul-Miraaaj was described in detail as an example of the use of Urdu within the community. In the final session of the event, a number of members of the congregation recited *naat*, or religious verses, in Urdu. It would have been equally possible for the *naat* to be in Punjabi. Many young people, both male and female, are now discovering, composing, transcribing, recording, learning and reciting privately and publicly religious *naat* in both Urdu and Punjabi. What is of most interest is that the transcription that takes place is in fact transliteration, and that these young people are making use of the more familiar, to them, Roman script.

A typical literacy event for one of these young people can look like this. Sitting at home listening to a *naat* on either a CD or downloaded MP3 file from the internet, the young person listens carefully to the Punjabi words and, with no recourse to Perso-Arabic script, he or she chooses to transcribe them using Roman letters. One *naat* follows another and soon a whole pocket-sized notebook is full of transcribed verses, some in Urdu, some in Punjabi, and some even in Arabic. When asked to recite a *naat* at a gathering, the notebook is carefully removed from a pocket and the *naat* is recited word for word. However, when asked to share one's transcribed *naat* with a friend, excuses are offered because the system used for transcription is a very personal and idiosyncratic one. No two people, as yet, have developed a common

method of transliterating the Urdu or Punjabi poetry. The only available official method of transliteration has been consulted by some of the young people, and discarded as too complicated and unhelpful. This is a truly living and elemental literacy which is arising from a practical need to record sound on paper, quickly and for a specific purpose.

Many gatherings of the kind described in the previous chapter take place in cities and towns up and down the UK. It is encouraging to witness so many young people involved and contributing to what are significant events of liturgical literacy. Muslim gatherings are usually gender specific and the gatherings observed and described here have been all-male events. However, all female events of a similar nature take place in homes within the community. Moreover, there are now a number of UK and even worldwide websites which assist people in collecting and downloading *naat* in a variety of languages. These sites, usually in English, also allow users to discuss through forums the relative merits of different *naat* and information about their provenance and country of origin.

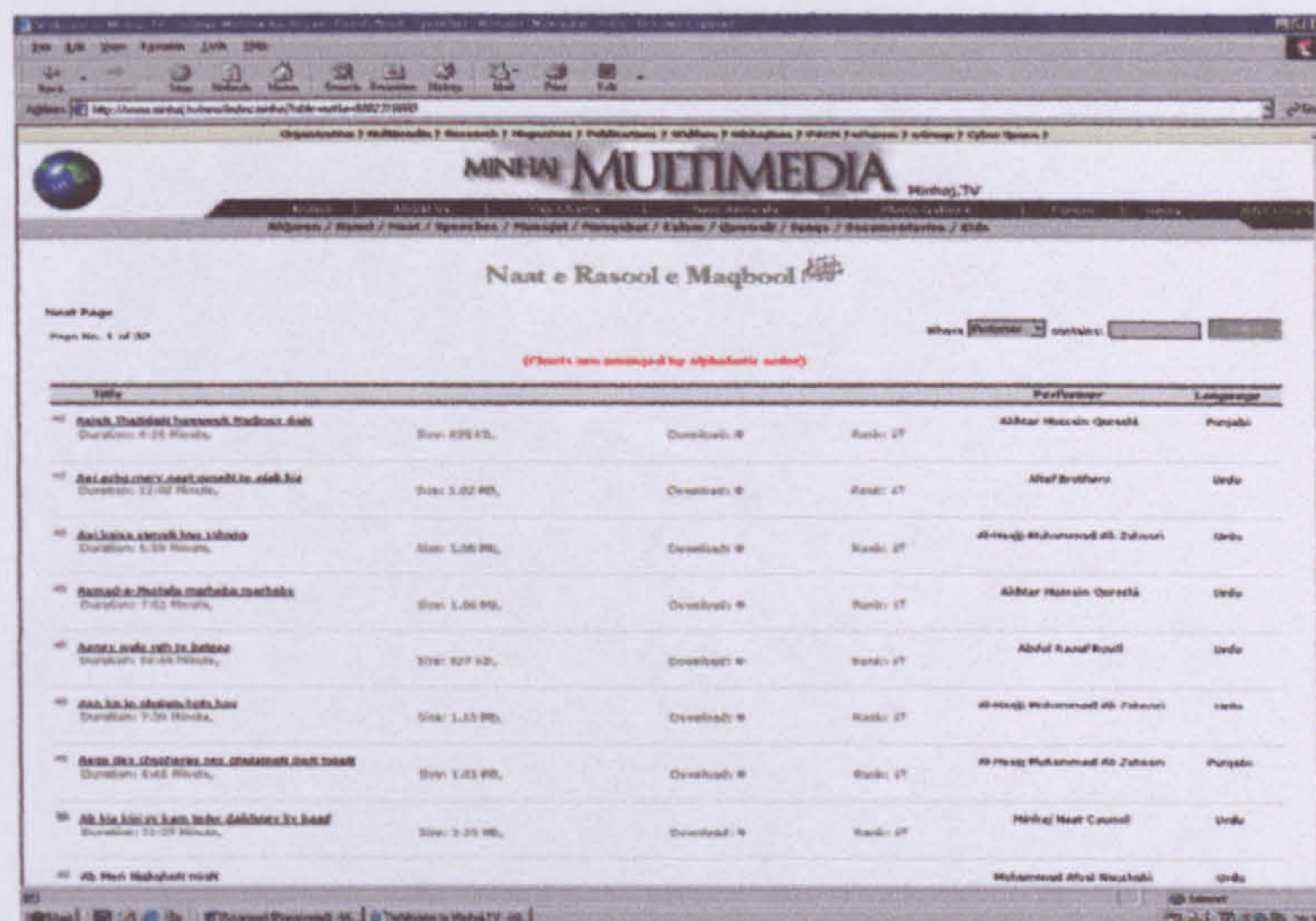


Plate 36 - Webpage offering naat downloads

## 11.8 Summary

Although the principal theme of this study is the acquisition and maintenance of liturgical literacy, it is impossible to examine this literacy practice in isolation from the other literacy practices with which it interacts. The future of the mother tongue of this community, Mirpuri-Punjabi, hangs in the balance. Its lack of an officially recognised script hinders its survival, though even that development is no guarantee of a future. The position within the community of Urdu, which does have a rich and strong literate and literary legacy, as I indicated in the last chapter, is uncertain. The growing use of Roman script to capture the sounds and words of popular religious songs and poems is helping the two languages to survive albeit in a transformed way. The younger generation are, in a true sense, using the linguistic resources it has at its disposal to harness and engage with an art form, and a literacy, which risked being beyond its linguistic reach. The community's relationship with its mother tongue is, therefore, an ambivalent one. This ambivalence is even more evident in its relationship with English, the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 12: English

### 12.1 Introduction

Of all the languages in use within the Mirpuri community at present, less concern is expressed by parents about English than any other. The parents have acquired enough English to enable them to work and function within and interact with the wider society. The children are growing up speaking English, both at school and at home. They even tend to speak English among themselves more and more. It is probable that in time English will become the principal language of the Muslim community in Riverton.

In this chapter we will examine further the role English plays within the educational provision of the mosque. There is no doubt, and hopefully previous chapters have demonstrated, that the liturgical literacy taught and practised in the mosque is focused fully on the acquisition and use of accurate decoding of Qur'anic Arabic. Where instruction in connection with this teaching takes place, it is done through the medium of Urdu. This is because, on the one hand, this is the tradition of the mosques in question, and, on the other, because the teachers themselves can only teach using Urdu, though sometimes recourse may be made to Mirpuri-Punjabi. Urdu remains the language most readily associated with learning and scholarship. Many imams are still recruited on the basis of their Islamic scholarship mediated through the Urdu language. The use of English in the mosque is now a controversial issue

with Home Secretaries (Blunkett, 2003) and European politicians (DR Nyheder, 2004) entering into the debate. What was a local and often parochial matter is starting to become a national and even international affair.

## **12.2 Parental feelings**

In discussions with parents it is apparent that many of them are dissatisfied with certain aspects of instruction in the mosques to which they send their children. In general, these parents are content with the manner in which children are taught how to read the Arabic of the Qur'an. It has been mentioned on a number of occasions already what an efficient and effective job the mosques do in terms of acquiring accurate and fluent decoding skills. However, most parents are united in their belief that this is not adequate to equip children with at least a basic understanding of their faith. They put this failing down to language. As more and more of the young people attending the mosque classes rely on English as their principal language for meaning-making both in and outside of school, there is more and more of a communication gap between teacher and student in the mosque.

## **12.3 Literacy learning and meaning-making**

In Chapter 5, *The Teachers*, we described briefly the methods of instruction in the mosque and the opportunities that exist for learning activities outside of the intensive decoding acquisition and practice. In the previous two chapters I have outlined the possible risks involved in the community losing its access to the rich heritage of the Urdu language and the potential contribution mother tongue Punjabi could make to



religious practice. However, the common element in all activities described in the previous two chapters - the sermons, the gatherings, the recitations - is the apparent lack of meaningful engagement with the texts employed. Beyond an intangible sense that one is reciting something holy and pure, which should not be underestimated as an authentic and genuine purpose, there is little or no sense of the words themselves. The *naat* provide a taste of meaning for those with enough Urdu and Punjabi to access them. Many in the audience, unfortunately, do not have such access.

Parents have expressed quite clearly their desire to include the English language within the mosque system of education and instruction. In this extract from Munir, he refers to a book called *Taalim ul Haq*. This is a book available in English which outlines the basic tenets of the Islamic faith for children. He is complaining that too much attention is paid to mere decoding.

*I have seen the system in the mosque is not very good. So I have discussed with the committee about the children. They should read Taalim ul Haq. Because lots of things in the Taalim ul Haq they can understand. And if they do not read Taalim ul Haq they don't know what Islam says. So Taalim ul Haq is very important for our conditions who born here. If they read the Qur'an they do not know what the Qur'an says. Because Arabic only they can read. But they don't know what is meaning of Qur'an. Because they don't understand. To read with English translation. If the teacher tries to explain the meaning then they can understand. Otherwise these children do not know anything about Islam.*

**What does the committee say when you tell them this?**

*They make an excuse. They say we are only paying £150 to £200 pounds a week to the imam. And they say this is too much for an imam. They have two teachers, one an imam, the other is a teacher. They pay him £50. And he knows English. He can understand Islam very well. He knows about Islam. But they don't give education of Taalim ul Haq. They are also saying*

*we need another teacher because there are so many children. So they want to make a separate group. Try to teach them Taalim ul Haq! If you are saying to them, you are sending your children to the mosque for teaching Islam. But they are only learning and reading the Qur'an. They don't know what the Qur'an says. So we want a teacher who can teach them, learn them good ways. They should understand, but our imam can't speak English, he knows only Arabic. He's a qari, you know. He knows about the Qur'an very well. This is very important for our young generation. If we don't do that, they won't know. It's wasting time. Only that Dars, Dar ul Uloom, of Shabbir, he's very good and is giving a good education. A lot of children are going there, 40 children are there and a waiting list of about 70. I'm not sure but he has eight teachers, and they are teaching. Because they know very well English. And about Islam. The children come from all over. All children are going one day, if they have a big hall for children, then all children will go there but he has no room, that's why there is a waiting list. He's going to extend the place for those children who are on the waiting list. And when he has got plenty room all children will go there. Because the people know he is giving a good education. He is trying to make a proper human, when he grows up he is not making bad things. (Munir)*

In this extract Munir mentions the success a former imam of the mosque is having through using English extensively to teach the children. Others are aware that Urdu is no longer an appropriate medium for teaching Islam to their children:

*Yes, because of the language as well. Because most of the kids, they are very fluent in English and were born here and most of the kids speak English and some of them have difficulty understanding Mirpuri or Urdu. Especially Urdu. Mainly Urdu they have difficulty understanding it. I mean if they don't understand it how are they going to learn? So what I have been suggesting is that the teachers can communicate well with kids and they get the message across. This is why we're falling behind. (Wajib)*

There is often poignancy in comments made about the community's loss of Urdu

*The biggest gripe I have with them is that they won't preach in English...*

*There's a guy, Mr Shabbir, who's got a private school. He's doing excellent work. Because it's in English! This is what you've got to do...They're preaching in Urdu...Urdu is not our language...Urdu is not the language of my children...although it is a beautiful language...beautiful language...and I regret not keeping it up...(Akhtar)*

There is also an awareness that the imam needs not only to be able to know English, but also needs to be knowledgeable about the society and environment his students inhabit:

*For the future of the kids yes, something like that, where the imam can speak English, translation, and taking both cultures into one and explain to them this is how it should be and this is Islam and all that. So the youngsters can understand. On a Friday they can't understand what the imam is saying. (Is that because he is speaking in Urdu?) Yes. Very like Shakespeare Urdu. If you know what I mean. Really deep Urdu that I have to listen to it carefully and it takes me a long time to understand some of the words. (So who is he speaking to? Who understands it?) Mainly the older generation. (Akhtar)*

#### **12.4 Parental acquisition of English**

The generation of parents who arrived in the fifties and early sixties in order to work often came with little or no knowledge of English, and there was little in the way of English classes to help them acquire the language. Most acquired their knowledge of English on the job and more widely in their interactions with the community.

**When you first came, was there any opportunity to learn English?**

*At that time, there was no option. I could write down my name and address.*

**Did you learn English at school?**

*Just from working with people. (Jabbar)*

The nature of the employment undertaken meant that language learning was not a priority at that time. The unsocial hours of shift work also militated against attending evening classes though some managed to do so:

*I came to England. I was only young at that time. 16 or 17 years old. That time when we came to this country we had no facilities like now, at that time people were thinking about jobs. I started in 1963. I went only a few days to that school in Park Street. Used to be a lot of people who couldn't read and write. Now in this country there are all facilities for people who don't speak English to learn.*

**Was the school in Park Street for everybody?**

*It was classes for our people at night. Evening lessons. (Hameed)*

Those who arrived in the late sixties and early seventies fared a little better. They came when they were still at school age, often just as they were finishing primary or beginning secondary schools, usually accompanying their mothers. There is clear evidence that this generation of men encountered considerable frustration in their educational experience. Their parents, particularly their fathers, who, of course, were based here, perhaps underestimated the difficulty their children would have learning English quickly enough in order to benefit

from a UK education. By bringing their children to the UK later, rather than earlier, a considerable language hurdle was placed before these young people who had to make up in four or five years what they had missed in the first six years or so of compulsory schooling.

(i)

**What about here, then did you just have to pick it up? Thrown into Kingswood school and just had to survive...?**

*That's why I was quite backward...because I wasn't thick or anything, but I was quite backward because it took me so long to pick up the language. To learn the language. When it came to Maths, I was always top of the class. Because that's the same. And when we were taught maths times tables up to 20x tables off by heart, we had to learn them, before we were 5 or 6 years old. We learnt before we were 10 or 11. We had to learn them off by heart. Whenever it came to maths I was top. But it took me so long to pick up the English. I was lacking in other subjects. So, when I did CSEs I mean some of the questions I couldn't understand so if you don't understand the question, just one word even, you don't understand the question do you? So obviously, I didn't do very well. That put me a lot back...*

**Is that typical? Of men of your generation?**

*Yes, it was typical. (Wajib)*

(ii)

*Here, I went to South Grove School, not comprehensive, I got some CSEs, that's about it, I didn't go to college. Started work in a garage. I left at 15, no 16, that was the year it changed. 1974-75. I wasn't urged to go into the academic side in them days for some reason. I still remember the careers adviser, he goes ...into the academic side, more told to work, don't know, some reason, I could just remember right if I get another chance I might have gone into college, or university, but them days, no. (Hanif)*

(iii)

**So how far did you go with school here?**

*CSEs. In those days, you either did CSEs or O levels. Depending on how bright you were. And I did CSEs.*

**So you left at 16?**

*Yeah. Because in them four years, I had to learn English, I had to learn the language, and then, I think without trying to sound pretentious, I did quite well. To get the CSEs in them four years. Thinking back I should have gone on to further college, further education, life is such. My dad was getting on a bit. So we decided to start working. (Akhtar)*

It is impossible to hear or read these words without identifying the very obvious feelings of regret and frustration of these men. There is strong sense of wasted ability behind these comments. The first man spent most of his working life as a taxi driver, the second is a car mechanic and only the third has managed to achieve some sense of fulfilment by becoming a councillor.

## **12.5 Parental opinion about children's progress in English**

However, despite their own unfulfilled experiences of UK schooling, they have not developed a negative attitude towards UK schools in general and consider their own children to have had all the opportunities they were denied.

**What is your opinion about schools in UK?**

*(i) I think they're doing a good job. Most of my children did well. For themselves. So obviously I can't blame schools as regard that obviously. Pupils have to try themselves and parents have to force it...I think we're lacking in that respect as well. Parenting. (Wajib)*

*(ii) That's an interesting one. I think by all accounts from my own experiences I think they do a very good job. As far as the educational standards are concerned, I can't really comment that much because my children have done very well at school. They have all done exceedingly well. They have not gone on to build on that, the two of them, the third one, God willing is going to be a barrister. She is doing very well in her A-levels. (Akhtar)*

There is also a very strong sense of a generation of parents desiring for their children something better than they had or experienced.

*The thing is all the work that my father did. He worked 16 hours a day, six days a week. If I don't make my life more comfortable than his, he has failed. I'm the second generation. And, alhamdulillah, Allah has been very good to me. More than I deserve. A lot more than I deserve! Now for us to... as a family, and as a race as well, for us to make my dad's sacrifice worth it, my children must go to the next level...*

**Do better than you?**

*Absolutely, that's when I will think of my life as a success...Now unless I get someone professional from my family, I don't think I will have failed but, the next day I want him an MP, and maybe the next generation a minister. That was my hope and my dreams for my kids and for my people. (Akhtar)*

To a certain extent, one can understand the positive slant these parents place upon the education their children have received. Their children, in general, have succeeded at school with a number of them going on to higher education. Yet, there is also the sense that their opinion of UK education and schools is a rather benign one. When problems do arise, it is not unusual for the source of the problem to be from within the community rather than one which the school might be able to do something about.

*Most of the young people in this area are going haywire because most of the Asian people from Kashmir just I think they ...I think that's bad upbringing personally.(Wajib)*

The national picture regarding the educational achievement within this minority ethnic group is not one about which there seems to be a great deal of awareness (see *Appendix 4*). The majority of parents spoken to had only good things to say about their local schools.

In respect of learning English, it would appear that most parents are content with a natural acquisition of the language that takes place through attending school and interacting with others. They claim that there is no real problem with learning English because their children will pick it up willy-nilly. There is an obvious link to be made here with Cummins' theories (1984) on bilingual development where he makes a distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS is that variety of a spoken language one acquires relatively quickly when living among speakers of that language. It is a 'survival' and social form of the language that enables users to interact with and 'fit in' with that language community as quickly as possible. For children, the desire to 'fit in' is often paramount, particularly in a school context. As a result it often takes a short amount of time for learners to develop BICS. CALP, on the other hand, is that variety of a language most closely associated with formal and literate contexts. The language of school, and particularly, the language of success at school, is very much an example of CALP. This academic variety of a language takes considerably longer to acquire. Parents witness their children speaking and



interacting in English with their friends, their siblings and sometimes even insisting on speaking English with them. They conclude, quite naturally, that their children cannot be experiencing any problems with English at school because of the apparent ease in English they demonstrate.

*(i) Actually I am not worried about language, English. Mother tongue. These are good for our children. (Nageena)*

*(ii) Not really, no. Personally I consider this country to be home, our country, so I don't think language makes any difference to them. (Munir)*

*(iii) Yeah, because, I know they can pick up English quite well, I mean obviously their English is quite good (Hameed)*

*(iv) No, no, no. I don't have worries about my children or any children. They learn enough English. I am more worried about them losing out on their own mother tongue. (Wajib)*

Indeed, there is a great deal of concern that children are relying too much on English and are, therefore, neglecting their mother tongue of Mirpuri-Punjabi.

*My own idea was that children are quite capable in English, and should be encouraged to speak Mirpuri, or Pothwari, at home, amongst themselves as well as their parents, you know, and that way they don't use it. Because they have already picked up English, so they don't need to improve English as much. They do need it academically, but at home, if they carried on.... That's why I encouraged my children not to speak English... (Wajib)*

This would all seem rather strange to the UK Home Secretary who, in early 2003, claimed that British Asian families speak too little English at home and that this was partly responsible for the community's isolation from mainstream society. On the one hand, we have a generation of frustrated parents whose children are leaving their language and culture behind them and, on the other, what appears to be an ill-informed minister complaining that the same community is reducing its employment and educational opportunities by jealously guarding its language and culture.

## 12.6 Summary

We have mentioned in previous chapters the various uses of English within the educational provision provided by the mosques. There is no doubt that the mosques, their teachers and their students are entering a period of significant transition. With the gradual replacement of mother tongue Mirpuri-Punjabi by spoken English, and with the weakening of Urdu as the community's literary language, the language of communication and instruction is likely to be English. We have already seen evidence of this in the breakaway school of Maulana Shabbir where English is the principal language of instruction for teaching the tenets of the faith and also in the gradual encroachment of Roman script into some methods of teaching Arabic. The political interference into the language issue relating to liturgical literacy which has arisen since September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 is one example of the scrutiny the Muslim community of the UK and elsewhere has come under. There are strong arguments for an increased use of English in UK mosque schools. It is to be hoped that such arguments can be conducted on a

purely educational and sociolinguistic basis without outside political influence. However, whatever the future role of English may look like within the mosque school, there is little possibility of the central role and position of Arabic being affected in a similar way to that of Urdu and Mirpuri-Punjabi. The place of Arabic is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 13: Arabic

### 13.1 Introduction

Standard Arabic is the official language of the Arab world. It is the national language of all Arab countries and is used for education, all official purposes, written materials and formal speeches. Classical Arabic is used for religious and ceremonial purposes and has, in comparison with Standard Arabic, an archaic vocabulary. Standard Arabic is a modernised variety of Classical Arabic. Standard Arabic is not a mother tongue. In each Arab country there is a spoken variety of Arabic which is spoken by most people. Some varieties of spoken Arabic are more intelligible across the Arab world than others. This is due to a particular country's role and status within the Arab region. For example, Egyptian spoken Arabic is known practically everywhere in the Arab world because of the widespread popularity of the Egyptian film and music industries. Standard Arabic acts as the lingua franca for the Arab world but only among the well-educated.

Arabic-speakers, therefore, grow up with a mother-tongue variety of Arabic and an educated variety, Standard Arabic. The language itself, unlike the other languages which feature in this study, traces its origins to the Semitic family of languages which, in turn, is part of the much broader Afro-Asiatic language group.

There are approximately 260 million Arabic speakers around the world. It is estimated that only about half of these have adequate proficiency in Standard Arabic as well. Classical Arabic, which is the Arabic of the Qur'an, as a written language is known throughout the Islamic world of approximately one billion people. It is known by most Muslims in the same form and to the same proficiency as the liturgical literacy described in this study. Only Arabic-speaking Muslims have a linguistic advantage over the rest of the Muslim world. There is enough similarity between the different varieties of Arabic, both Standard and spoken, to allow for some comprehension when someone reads the Qur'an. However, this should not be overestimated for Classical Arabic still differs significantly from most varieties of modern written and spoken Arabic.

### **13.2 Qur'anic Arabic**

The Qur'anic Arabic which has been one of the subjects of this study is acquired by Muslims throughout the world in a manner very similar to that described here. A competent reciter of the Qur'an in the UK would sound very similar to a competent reciter from Malaysia. Both would be understood by Qur'anic scholars from the Arabic world. Its importance and role as a liturgical language means that as a written language it rivals Mandarin, with one billion speakers, as the most widely known language in the world.

### 13.3 The value placed upon the Qur'an

Its position within the community of this study is valued and supported. There is little doubt that of the four languages which interplay within the community, it is the Arabic of the Qur'an that is the most closely preserved and nurtured. If one measures the importance of a cultural practice of a community by the amount of time, effort and resources given to it by members of that community, it is overwhelmingly evident that liturgical literacy is its most important cultural practice. This study has demonstrated the complex and extensive arrangements that have been and are in place for the continuance of this practice:

**How long have they been teaching children in the mosque?**

*From the beginning, but mostly when we had the mosque at Church Walk. At that time not mostly families, all single men, families started coming to this country in 1965/1967, after that start to come in this country. And when children arrived, need to be Muslim, realised that there needs to be teaching in the mosque. And they started teaching.*

**In the Midboro area what percentage of children attend the mosque classes, do you think?**

*At the early age of 5 or 6, I think all children.*

**Are there any families who do not send their children to the mosque school?**

*As far as I know, I think it is all families. No one refuses to send their children. They contribute money as well for reading. One pound a week for each child.*

**Your brother mentioned about how hard it is to pay the imam a decent wage...**

*All the people who go to the mosque they pay everything.*

**Does the mosque have to pay for the imam's house?**

*Actually, they do. They pay wages which includes rent and everything. (Mahmood)*

We can see from this brief exchange the commitment that is given to liturgical literacy within the community. Of course, the principal advantage liturgical literacy has over its secular rivals in the language maintenance race is that liturgical literacy is an essential part of the community's deeply held religious faith. We have already seen that knowledge of liturgical literacy is necessary in order for a Muslim to pray. Reading, in the decoding sense outlined in this study, is a cultural activity not about seeking knowledge from books in order to inform faith, but is the very stuff of religious worship. A Muslim believes that he or she is participating in a sacred act whilst reciting the Qur'an. With religion being the principal identifying factor within the community it is no surprise that the community's resources are directed towards liturgical literacy.

**How important is it for your children to learn the Qur'an?**

*(i) Very very important, this is our religion you see. Qur'an is part of our life. And there is a big thawab (reward), you know. For reading the Qur'an. When I was young, I didn't know anything about this Qur'an. Now I understand, I am a Muslim, I should know. (Munir)*

*(ii) We are Muslims, I myself think so it is very important for Muslim children actually. Because we are here and we live, children need to learn the Qur'an, no matter where they are, this country, or somewhere else. This is very important. (Hameed)*

*(iii) Very, very important. To the children. Especially on the religious side. More important than Urdu or Punjabi. The Qur'an. I tend to believe it is very important. It doesn't matter where you live, to keep one's religion is very important. (Hanif)*

Furthermore, there is evidence in the comments made by interviewees that this particular religious and literacy practice is, unlike spoken Mirpuri and written Urdu, gaining strength within the community. Many of the fathers mentioned how their experience of liturgical literacy as a child was less intensive and more casual than that experienced by their own children.

**Where did you learn to read the Qur'an?**

*I learnt in Church Walk mosque.*

**So you didn't learn when you were a child?**

*No, no. At that time actually, I was only young and nobody guided me, this is very important...*

**You grew up in a village, and you had a school, did they do the Qur'an in the school?**

*Yes, they used to give a lesson in middle school. Not in primary school. When I went to middle school at about 12 years old, I finished after about 3 or 4 years, and they used to give a lesson, and I can't understand at that time, I was young.*

**So the young ones didn't go to the mosque after school to learn Qur'an like they do here?**

*At that time, the children used to go the mosque, but our father used to work at sea, on a ship, and nobody in our family told us to go the mosque it is very important. It's like now, the children go the mosque and they go to school as well. And at that time, we weren't bothered about it. And now I am grown up and I understand this is very important, you know, reading the Qur'an. Very, very important. (Munir)*

In addition, they, too, had taken advantage of the arrangements made for their children to learn or re-learn liturgical literacy. With the presence in the community of scholars and qualified imams, they could, for the first time, benefit from informed



and experienced teaching. This was not necessarily the case back home when they were children themselves where facilities and personnel were not always available:

*When you came to England when you were 16, was that it, you could read the Qur'an, or have you learned more while you have been here?*

*I have learned in the last two years in here. I have tried to learn it for about two months.*

*With the imam in Church Walk mosque. And they teach very very different there than how we read in our village. He teaches us very different there...*

**Does he teach you more accurate pronunciation?**

*Yeah, more accurate...because the reading of the Qur'an is where the words come out from the throat, the nose. And he tries to explain that. It is not easy for us...*

**Did he just teach you or was there a group?**

*We were a group of 5 or 6. Same as my age. 50-55.*

**Once a week?**

*No, every day we did that. (Hameed)*

Therefore, not only are the children of the community benefiting from the expertise of experienced scholars and teachers, but so are their parents. Mufti Siddiq, who we met in *The Teachers*, finds time every week to provide lessons in Islam to those attending afternoon prayers. The imam at University Road mosque not only teaches the children but also adults in the afternoons.

#### **13.4 Knowledge of the Qur'an**

The limitations of their knowledge of Qur'anic Arabic are admitted by those who practise liturgical literacy:

**So your knowledge of just reading the Qur'an, you wouldn't consider that knowing Arabic?**

*No, no. Not at all. Nowhere near. Not even basics. Though I'd like to learn Arabic. Because I went to Hajj and...I was lost. Because last year I went to Hajj I was lost, I couldn't ...I didn't know....what I was talking to...what I was saying...you know, picked up a few words here and there while I was there...(Wajib)*

Knowledge in liturgical literacy is bound up, not with understanding, but with accurate and precise pronunciation and melodious and correct recitation. Thus, expertise in Classical Arabic is to do with, within the community, the beauty of the sound of the Qur'an. The recitations which took place at the *Laylat-ul-Miraaj* celebration are listened to for their sound and the association they have with the word of God, not for the profundity of their words.

*Do you see, so the child, I want for Qur'an better Arabic teacher. With better pronunciation (Mahmood)*

**What are the qualifications for an imam?**

*He reads the Qur'an well, (Ghulam)*

*The main duty of an imam is...his recitation of the Qur'an has to be perfect...(Maulana Shabbir)*

For those who take an active interest in their faith, and who read more widely, in English or in Urdu, a restricted comprehension of Arabic words and phrases develops which can give satisfaction to the reader.

**How much do you understand? You have already touched on this when you said that you recognise names...anything else?**

*I recognise the names...there are some landmarks I recognise...like, Bayt ul Quds<sup>33</sup>, Masjid al Haram<sup>34</sup>, even other people, not only including rasools<sup>35</sup> of Allah, I'm talking about Nabis<sup>36</sup>, I'm talking about the people of the Book as well, whether they be good-doers or evildoers...the places...like as I said, Bayt ul Muqadus, Bani Israil<sup>37</sup>, the children of Israel, basically the connections between what I have just read, until I read it in English, it doesn't come into any focus...there are some sayings like, 'ghafoor ar-raheem<sup>38</sup>', 'rabbi alameen<sup>39</sup>', where you do have this basic understanding that 'the most gracious, the most merciful'. There are so many different ...(Bashir)*

### **13.5 The Qur'an in English translation**

There is growing evidence that Mirpuri-speaking Muslims, both adults and children are beginning to make much more use of translations of the Qur'an available in English. Born of a desire to reach the meaning of the texts they are reading, and a growing availability of Islamic texts in English and inability to read Urdu translations and commentaries, many families now have access to English translations of the Qur'an generally on bookshelves at home or sometimes on the internet.

(i)

**Could you read it in the Urdu translation like your mum or dad?**

*We can read the English off the Internet but we haven't got it at home.(Shazad)*

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<sup>33</sup> The Holy Mosque in Jerusalem

<sup>34</sup> The Holy Mosque in Mecca

<sup>35</sup> Messengers of God

<sup>36</sup> Prophets of God

<sup>37</sup> The Children of Israel

<sup>38</sup> The Forgiving, the Compassionate

<sup>39</sup> Lord of all worlds

(ii)

**Can you understand, for example, the Fatihah?**

*Only now though, because I have been reading that in translation recently... (Akhtar)*

(iii)

*Then I've got my Qur'an, which is translated into English...I have another one which is in Urdu...that's for my wife...*

**Do you prefer to read the Qur'an in an English rather than Urdu translation?**

*I can't read the Urdu translation, but the thing is because I understand everything that is thrown at me, I accept it in English, I accept it in Urdu, it means the same to me as in English as it would do to me in Urdu...as in Punjabi... (Bashir)*

As more and more recourse is made to these translations, a word needs to be said about their quality and overall usefulness. For much of the twentieth century, anyone wishing to gain access to the meaning of the Qur'an through the English language would have had a very limited choice in translations available. Moreover, within this limited choice there were even more restrictions imposed by publishers. The best-known translation and the one which is seen in most Muslim homes in the UK, is the 1934 translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Because of its ubiquity, and there are copies of it in all Riverton mosques, there are a number of observations that should be made about this translation and its usefulness to modern readers, and particularly children, wanting to seek the meaning of the original Arabic. Notwithstanding that the original Arabic of the Qur'an originates from the seventh century and is a highly poetic and elaborate text, which itself poses plenty of comprehension issues for Arabic scholars, the intention of Ali, and his contemporaries, was to render the Arabic into an English

text which caught the original meaning but which also attempted to emulate one of the greatest ever English texts in style and tone, the King James's Bible. Consequently, we are left with a text which serves the first aim reasonably well, but in striving for the second aim, seeking validity and credibility, the text ends up obscuring any clarity of translation that might have been achieved. The text abounds in 'lo's, 'behold's, 'verily's, forsooth's and has no end of 'thereof's and 'herein's. The Elizabethan second and third person pronouns and verb inflections are used throughout.

*God doeth What He willeth (Chapter 14, verse 27)*

*Seest thou not how God sets forth a parable (Chapter 14, verse 24)*

*It is God Who hath created the heavens and the earth and sendeth down rain from the skies, and with it bringeth out fruits wherewith to feed you (Chapter 14, verse 32)*

Unfortunately, the Ali translation, though of interest and useful to enthusiasts and those whose faith allows them to be forgiving about the quality of the translation, has become somewhat of a classic, and, therefore, now serves as a yardstick against which other translations are measured. As a result many more modern translations still cannot avoid 'doffing their caps' to Ali's work and vestiges of his archaic and anachronistic style pop up everywhere. A very recent translation of the Qur'an, and one that has found its way into many mosques as a free gift from the publishers, is a committee-translated version which, despite its recent date, cannot avoid looking over its shoulder at Ali.

*'O my Lord! They have indeed led astray many among mankind. But whoso follows me, he verily is of me. And whoso disobeys me, still You are indeed Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Chapter 14, verse 36)*

As we can see, the text includes the superfluous 'indeed' (twice) which is non-existent in the original Arabic. The archaic 'whoso' (twice) and the Biblical 'verily' are present when modern English would suggest 'whoever' and 'truly'.

The trouble with these well-intentioned translations is that they assume a particular kind of educated reader. This reader is familiar with Shakespearean English and has a decent store of archaic metaphysical and Biblical expressions and phrases. Such a reader is also not put off by a plethora of brackets which are there to allow the translators to paraphrase wherever he or they see fit.

There are some decent, readable translations available but, unfortunately not published widely. As I have shown previously, the Muslim communities have begun to employ English more and more both in the home and in the mosque, and so they will need the most accessible and readable translations in order to bring meaning-making into the process of acquiring liturgical literacy. Compare these two translations, the first by Ali (1934) and the second by Aisha Bewley (2002).

*(i) Such as fear not*

*The meeting with Us*

*(for Judgment) say:*

*"Why are not the angels*

*Sent down to us, or*

*(Why) do we not see*

*Our Lord?" Indeed they*

*Have an arrogant conceit*

*Of themselves, and mighty*

*Is the insolence of their impiety! (Chapter 25, verse 21)*

*(ii) Those who do not expect to meet Us say,*

*'Why have angels not been sent down to us?*

*Why do we not see our Lord?'*

*They have become arrogant about themselves*

*And are excessively insolent. (Chapter 25, verse 21)*

One wonders what the eleven-year old boy or girl curious as to the sense of what he or she is reciting might make of the excruciating syntax of 'Such as fear not the meeting with Us say' or the preponderance of nouns in 'mighty is the insolence of their impiety!'

### **13.6 Summary**

The primacy of Arabic in Islamic liturgical literacy is self-evident. The tradition of insisting on the use of Arabic in prayer and other ritualised practices ensures that all Muslims are initiated into the written code of Qur'anic Arabic. Even if a Muslim never reads the Qur'an, he or she will only ever be able to perform prayer in Arabic. These restrictions ensure that the ability to decode and recite Arabic is at the heart of the process of acquiring liturgical literacy. The educational process involved in its acquisition is a time-honoured and universal

literacy practice, and as Wagner reminds us (1982), is one of the largest forms of alternative schooling in the world today.



## **Section V Concluding Remarks and Implications**

**14**

### **Chapter 14: Concluding Remarks**

#### **14.1 Introduction**

Clearly emerging from this study has been the prestigious and valued position liturgical literacy maintains within this Muslim community. Children, parents, their teachers and those charged with the responsibility of the two mosques studied all see this literacy practice as central to their lives. For the children, attending the mosque and acquiring Islamic liturgical literacy is an important formative experience in their forging of a cultural identity. For the parents, ensuring their sons and daughters acquire liturgical literacy is a central element in their role as parents and, in contrast with their desire to maintain either the mother tongue of the community, Mirpuri-Punjabi, or the literary language of Urdu, the process of acquisition, on the evidence of this study, is well-supported and administered. Indeed, throughout my discussions with all members of the community, the forging of a religious identity was far more essential to them than developing feelings of common ethnicity or nationality suggesting that the place of liturgical literacy within the community is more secure than Urdu and Mirpuri-Punjabi.

But, within this strong sense of importance and value, there is, equally clearly, emerging a significant tension between advocates of traditional liturgical literacy teaching and those calling for more accommodating, more modern approaches

involving pedagogy, curriculum and language. To a certain extent, such tension can be explained by generational differences. An older generation, keen to preserve tradition and valuing continuity and fearing innovation and change which might damage their religious and cultural heritage, is pitted against a younger generation, much more at ease with life outside the community, and with a broader outlook in regard to language and learning.

When this study began, the tensions just referred to were a product of local origin derived in the main from the playing out of generational attitudes within the community. True, a similar situation applied to a lesser or greater degree in many other UK Muslim communities and one might, therefore, safely generalise across many towns and cities.

Since September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the issues raised in this study have been brought sharply into focus throughout the world. The Muslim community, both locally and globally, has had many of its religious and cultural practices exposed to the glare of media spotlight and to the soundbites of political opinion. It has been rather disconcerting for me as a researcher, and definitely uncomfortable for me as a Muslim, to have both my research and my faith so 'in the news'.

As I write this, Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, is reported to have said:

*It is sad to relate that no great invention has come for many hundreds of years from Muslim countries... (Daily Telegraph, 26/03/2004)*

The Home Secretary, David Blunkett, has made a number of interventions regarding the language of Muslim communities as well as directly referring to the languages spoken by imams in UK mosques:

*At the moment in France, 60% of Muslim preachers do not speak French. We should be working together with the Muslim community in Britain to ensure we are not going down the same road... (Blunkett, 2003)*

The ministerial advice that British imams should speak English in the mosque is echoed across Europe. In Denmark, Integration Minister, Bertel Haarder, has completed a bill which is to clamp down on Muslim imams who propagate fundamentalist views and so slow down the integration of Muslim immigrants. Under the new regulations, imams who have the right to marry Muslim couples must be fluent in Danish or take classes in Danish language and culture. (Nyheder, 11/02/2004)

His counterpart in Holland had earlier set this precedent:

*"Imams have a duty to convince their fellow Muslims that [they] have to be loyal to the values and norms of Dutch civil society," the immigration minister, Hilbrand Nawijn, said at the opening of a controversial new college to instruct imams in Dutch attitudes towards homosexuality and women's rights... The college... will give imams intensive Dutch language lessons... (The Guardian, 01/10/2002)*

In an earlier speech organised with sub-headings such as '11 September', 'Defending Democracy' and 'Security and social order', the same Home Secretary chooses to criticise the Asian community for not speaking English at home. It is no wonder that the UK Muslim community at the present moment feels beleaguered when even its language use is linked indirectly with international terrorism in such a way.

*[S]peaking English enables parents to converse with their children in English as well as their historic mother tongue, at home and to participate in wider modern culture. It helps overcome the schizophrenia which bedevils generational relationships. In as many as 30% of British Asian households English is not spoken at home. (Blunkett, 2002)*

As this study has demonstrated, the issue within the communities to which Blunkett is referring is not, ironically, the lack of English in the home, but rather its dominance which is resulting in the loss of heritage languages among the younger generations.

Disparaging remarks about forms of liturgical literacy similar to those quoted at the beginning of this thesis (*page 5*), in the light of the political atmosphere created by September 11<sup>th</sup>, and to a lesser extent, by the riots involving Muslim youths in Oldham, Bury and Bradford in the summer of 2001, are beginning to be heard more and more once again. On an international level, schools in Pakistan which promote 'rote memorization of Arabic texts' turn out students who 'are ignorant of basic events in human history such as the moon landing' and are, of course, actually 'terrorist training schools' (Singer, 2001).

The Christian Science Monitor juxtaposes these comments and the reader cannot but draw negative conclusions:

*As in most Madrassahs, or Islamic religious schools, rote memorisation is the key method of learning the Koran and virtually no other subjects are tackled.*

*This is Islamic scholarship as it should be, argues Zarif, who supports the Taliban.*

*(Christian Science Monitor(electronic edition)30/01/2002)*

What should be a matter for Muslims and Muslim educationalists has suddenly become the business of the entire world.

The irony is that the Muslim community itself, and the data in this study supports this, has for some time been aware of a need for change in the content and language profile of the mosque. Zaki Badawi, the principal of the Muslim College, has long advocated improving the quality of leadership of British mosques.

Among the younger generation there is also concern that liturgical literacy, on its own, will not fulfil the needs of the new generations of Muslim youth.

*'Inevitably, their experiences of rote learning without any understanding left them bored and alienated not only from the madrassah but from religion itself (Q-News, 2000, quoted in Lewis (2001))*

This comment, from a young journalist writing for British young Muslims echoes the fears and concerns of many of the parents in Chapter 4, *The Parents* who whilst

acknowledging the importance of liturgical literacy realised their children needed more in order to hold onto their faith.

*There is an urgency to discuss openly the problems of criminality and drug dealing... to appoint English-speaking Imams as a matter of priority, and to conduct as many programmes as possible in English which deal directly with issues facing young Muslims today. Imams should be properly paid, and they should also be expected to take up pastoral youth work outside the mosque. It is a crime that many of the young scholars who have graduated from British seminaries have not been able to find employment as imams. (Q-News, 2000)*

Again, the comments about English-speaking imams reflect the concerns of the parents in Chapter 4 and I described the success that Maulana Shabbir was having in Riverton by incorporating English into the life of the mosque. He was one of the lucky graduates of a British seminary to find employment although he did have to set up his own school and mosque to do so.

## **14.2 The Research Questions**

This study has presented a detailed description of the literacy practice I have termed liturgical literacy as practised within a typical UK Muslim community in the north of England. Hitherto, this literacy practice has been analysed and referred to only in respect of other literacy practices, usually schooled and mainstream practices. The liturgical literacy of Mumtaz, in Barton and Hamilton's *Local Literacies* (1998, pp 182-187)), is touched on briefly as one of a number of literacy practices with which

she is associated. The Qur'anic classes Gregory describes (1996, 1997) are contrasted immediately with reading practices at mainstream school. This study has deemed it timely and necessary to dwell a little on the practice of liturgical literacy, with its participants and its institutions, in order to provide future researchers with a fuller picture of its nature, its acquisition and its role within communities. Of course, liturgical literacy in this community is not identical to that in all Muslim communities. However, it is safe to assume that many Muslim communities seeking to establish themselves within a mainly non-Muslim wider community, and originating from outside the UK, face similar issues regarding the maintenance of liturgical literacy, as well as other literacy or language, maintenance. Nevertheless, it would be a valuable development of this study to carry out similar studies of other communities where liturgical literacy is central.

I hope this study has shown what a rich and complex practice liturgical literacy is. There is little doubt that this form of literacy has its opponents. The first quote on page 5 of this thesis is separated from the Q-News quote above (page 312) by nearly a century and reflects a view which is still very much apparent in the words of politicians and in the media. The literacy practice of acquiring a thorough command of a script and learning to decode accurately a foreign language based on the central scripture of one's religion is, I have argued, a laudable skill and, for its practitioners, a highly rewarding cultural and religious activity. That it is a literacy practice which is generally absent from mainstream schooled literacy practices should not suggest any unfavourable comparisons. In fact, as I have shown elsewhere (Rosowsky 2001), this form of accurate decoding can be a very significant cultural practice outside of religion too:

*There are many instances of using decoding bereft of understanding in many cultural practices around the world. In the Western cultural tradition, professional opera singers spend considerable time being coached in the ability to decode accurately libretti in a range of languages... Gone are the days when a singer would limit him- or herself to their language of birth or known languages. A modern professional now has to sing in a whole host of European languages. A few of them become proficient in the language, but many of them, and all of them for certain languages, are merely learning the skill of decoding. When Domingo sings the role of Hermann in the original language at La Scala or Covent Garden, he is decoding the text as he sings. Does he communicate meaning, and is meaning communicated to the non-Russian members of the audience? The answer must be yes. Yet through the art form of opera a meaning is communicated which transcends the literal meaning of the words sung. The same is true, only more so, for the member of the professional choir, who may be asked to sing, and initially read, texts in a number of languages, both living and dead, including the High Latin of masses and the vulgar Latin of Carmina Burana. Whilst agreeing with Smith's statement, 'What is the point of any activity if there is no understanding?'<sup>40</sup>, one has to admit to the possibility that our definition of understanding must be sufficiently broad to accommodate those reading activities which appear, on the surface, to be divorced from meaning. (Rosowsky, 2001, p 60)*

Likewise, the complexity of this literacy practice and its cognitive demands must also not be understated. The attention paid to accuracy and the fine distinctions that are made in the teaching of decoding and recitation by teacher and student alike require concentration and application. This has been remarked upon by Robertson:

*Somewhere at the back of my mind – though I was only aware of it later on – I had simplified this kind of reading. I had simplified the nature of the task, the range of words, sounds and nuances of sound, to a meaningless mumble. And the fact that the girls were keen to test each*

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, F (1994) *Understanding Reading*, page 7



*other, that they took a firm view when they disagreed, surprised me, but revealed the depth of their engagement in their reading. (Robertson, 1997)*

I hope I have also shown the tension that exists between safeguarding the maintenance of liturgical literacy and other community-based literacies. *Sections 2 and 3* of this thesis have illustrated the considerable resources invested by the community in the maintenance of liturgical literacy. This, it would appear, has been at the expense of the maintenance of Urdu literacy and Mirpuri-Punjabi oracy, particularly among the younger generations. However, causes of language loss are complex and beyond the remit of this study and it would be unfair to post such a development solely at the door of liturgical literacy. Fishman (1989) informs us that American Jews are much more protective of Prayer book/Biblical Hebrew than they are of their Yiddish vernacular and that Palestinian Arab-Americans continue to maintain their children in Qur'anic Arabic even after they are fully and exclusively English-speaking third generation.

*Because religion is concerned with eternal rather than external, it is more conservative, less compromising and more compelling insofar as boundary maintenance is concerned. (Fishman, 1989, p 229)*

And although the future maintenance of other literacy and language practices was not the central question of this study, it was impossible to focus solely on the community's liturgical literacy without discussing its relationship with Urdu and Mirpuri-Punjabi. Indeed, Urdu literacy, when present, plays a significant role in the community's religious practices, though as I showed in *Chapter 10*, is becoming less

and less accessible to the younger generation. The use of Mirpuri-Punjabi in the transcribing and memorisation of religious poetry (*naat*) is also a form of what is best termed *religious* literacy, in contrast to liturgical literacy. The support the community can provide for the maintenance of Urdu literacy is affected by limited resources, personnel and time. The community values highly the effectiveness and efficiency with which liturgical literacy is acquired. They are reluctant to introduce anything that might disturb this equilibrium – increased teaching of Urdu or more expansive teaching curriculum (see *Chapter 4, The Parents*).

### **14.3 Implications for the community**

I have shown how there is, at present, a tension within the community regarding the use of the English language in the mosque context. This is linked to a need, expressed by many parents, to provide a fuller Islamic education than that which is available. This tension can be understood not only in terms of different opinions regarding the aims of children attending the mosque on a regular basis, but also as an inevitable consequence of generational differences within the community. In the light of the heightened political interest in Islam and Muslim cultural and religious practices, it is perhaps more urgent that the community resolves this tension sooner rather than later. However, at the same time, the community needs to feel secure and confident about the value of its liturgical literacy practice. It must withstand the accusation of it being ‘mechanical’ and ‘monotonous’ (Zerdoumi, 1970), and be able to articulate its strength as a cultural and literacy practice which engages and enriches the religious life of the community

#### **14.4 Implications for the wider society and its schools**

As the community and its mosques set about resolving the tensions they perceive in the maintenance of liturgical literacy, mainstream society and, in particular, its schools should adopt a more positive and inclusive attitude to this literacy practice children bring with them to the school gates. It is not helpful for schools and teachers to recognise this important religious and cultural only as a nuisance or distracting element in the lives of their young students. The community has demonstrated its fidelity to liturgical literacy by assigning resources and time to its maintenance. Schools should be aware of the importance attached to this literacy practice within the community and seek to accommodate its demands in a more conciliatory fashion than at present. For example, Maulana Shabbir has had a room at his centre equipped with computers and is offering his students a place to complete homework. Although he has undertaken this independently of the local schools, there is here obvious potential for cooperation and collaboration.

There is a rich and longstanding tradition of supplementary, or complementary (Martin et al., 2003), schooling within ethnic minority communities in the United Kingdom. Those that feature in studies (Martin et al., 2003) or government reports (Strand, 2002) are generally focused on mother tongue maintenance and provide education on cultural history and identity. Few studies or agencies include Qur'anic schools as supplementary schools. It is interesting to note that a recent study (Martin et al., 2003, p. 9) found that only a minority of these supplementary schools had contact with state schools. There is much less reported about the educational provided by places of worship but the lack of contact remains the same. Yet the same

educational benefits that can be identified for mother tongue supplementary schools are there in the mosque schools too:

*The skills learnt in these contexts are transferable to other learning contexts. The multilingual experiences students have in the schools, then, provide important learning experiences and an improvement in cognitive and academic achievement. (Martin et al., 2003)*

Although it is not appropriate here to advocate a particular method in the teaching of initial reading in the mainstream school context, it is right to acknowledge that the methods used in the mosque for the acquisition of liturgical literacy could have something important to contribute to the ongoing debate about preferred methods of teaching reading. I have shown that the age-old methods employed in the acquisition of liturgical literacy are without any doubt both efficient and effective.

The emphasis on memorisation so often disparaged and devalued in modern pedagogy is another area which could have important and fruitful benefits for schools. I never cease to be staggered by the prodigious amounts of text the young people featuring in this study have learnt by heart. Although the true *hafiz* of the Qur'an is a rare individual, many Muslims have learnt by heart pages and pages of Qur'anic verses. For example, many children claim to have learnt a *siparah* by heart. This amounts to approximately 40 pages of closely printed text which corresponds to one third of the Alexander edition of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Being able to memorise large amounts of detail is not an insignificant skill and one which could be employed to a much greater extent than at present in school.

There is the possibility, sad but true, that the place of Urdu literacy within the community is seriously under threat. Without a sufficient support network for the maintenance of Urdu within the community, it is difficult for the language and its literacy to survive. The support network is there for liturgical literacy because, mainly, it has the institutional base of the mosque to provide and support it. The secondary school that features in this study provides Urdu GCSE courses but finds it hard to find suitably qualified staff and struggles to deal with the extremely varied range of prior knowledge of Urdu students demonstrate. The obvious confusion that exists within school among teachers between Urdu and Mirpuri-Punjabi also reflects a lack of awareness of the community and its cultural and linguistic make-up. A serious and determined effort by schools to support Urdu would have to begin much earlier than GCSE and probably begin in the primary school. More importantly, the school would need to feel confident that the community supported such an enterprise. In *Chapter 4, The Parents* and *Chapters 10 and 11, Urdu and Mirpuri-Punjabi*, I hope to have conveyed some of the ambivalence that exists within the community regarding Urdu where many parents have less concern about the maintenance of Urdu than they do about the maintenance of liturgical literacy.

Culturally, it is significant that the community, in particular, the younger members of the community are making use of the literacy resources they have in order to engage with the literacy practice of *naat* recitation. Just as the Mende of Sierra Leone (Bledsoe and Robey, 1993) utilise and re-interpret aspects of literacy moulding them into their own cultural systems, these young Muslims are applying their literate skills to suit their own purposes and needs.

It would also behove schools to have a greater knowledge of the cultural and intellectual resources within the community. As indicated in *Chapter 5, The Teachers*, the Muslim community can boast of personnel with qualifications, expertise and status sufficient to place them among the most prestigious scholars nationally, and occasionally, internationally. Mufti Siddiq's prestigious position nationally is ignored in the schools attended by his children. The poetry and oratory of Hafiz Shakeel could be an invaluable resource locally outside of the Muslim community. Schools work on poetry could be dramatically enhanced by careful links with a local imam who excelled in religious verse in Urdu, Punjabi and, even, Persian.

#### **14.5 Final Comments**

What initiated this study was my concern over the discrepancy between reading accuracy and meaning among young Muslim students. I have sought in this thesis to reveal the concerns there are within the community about the lack of meaning that characterises much teaching of liturgical literacy. The call for greater use of English in the mosque in order to improve the basic understanding of Islam was made by each parent interviewed. It is obvious that any increase in the role of English will not only placate parental concerns about religious knowledge, but will also complement the students' acquisition and use of English more widely. The fear that an increased role for English might erode the primacy of Arabic or affect adversely the hitherto very successful acquisition of liturgical literacy contributes to the tension that presently exists.

Finally, I hope to have shown in this study that it is impossible to analyse the practice of liturgical literacy without taking into account also the competing, or contrasting, literacy practices evident within this community. The complex picture these languages and literacies create require a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary approach which brings out the tension that exists between them and the fluidity of those who practise them. I end with a brief comment from a respondent which captures this tension and fluidity:

*Very, very important. To the children. Especially on the religious side. The Qur'an is more important than Urdu or Punjabi. The Qur'an. I tend to believe it is very important. It doesn't matter where you live, to keep one's religion is very important. I think myself, if children go to the mosque, they should read in Arabic and also in English as well. They should understand what is the meaning of this word. I mean, if they are reading that, and they don't understand, don't know what is the meaning of this, they are just wasting time. We want proper teachers, qualified teachers, who can teach these children born in this country(Hameed)*

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# Appendices

- I. Interview Schedules
- II. Observation Schedules
- III. Glossary of Arabic/Urdu/Punjabi words
- IV Data on ethnic minority achievement
- V. Other sources of data
- VI Example interview



# Appendix I

## Interview Schedule 1

### *Questions for Muslim pupils in school*

Here are some questions that I would like you to answer.

Your answers will help me decide how best to help young people like yourselves to read.

#### **Personal Details**

Name:

Age:

Dale of birth:

Where were you born?

How many brothers and sisters have you got?

What are their ages?

Address:

Telephone number:

If I phoned who should I ask to speak to?

Have you ever moved house?

What is your dad's job? How old is he?

What is your mother's job? How old is she?

Have you ever been to Pakistan?

Have you ever been to Mecca'?

Have you been to any other country?

#### **Language details**

What do you call the languages you know?

Which language do you speak:

At home?

With friends?

With parents?

With grandparents?

At school?

In the mosque?

In the youth club?

When did you first learn English?

Where did you learn to read and write in English?

Can you read or write in Urdu?

Can you read Arabic?  
Do you know Urdu? Where did you learn it?  
Does anyone read Urdu at home?  
Where did you learn Arabic?

### **Mosque details**

Which mosque do you go to?  
How old were you when you started?  
What is the name of your teacher?  
What days do you go?  
What time do you start?  
What time do you end?  
How far have you got?  
Are you good at it?  
Have you memorised any of the Qur'an?  
Do you know anything else by heart? (eg. Naat?)  
Do you read Qur'an at home?  
Do you read namaaz'?'  
What is the name of your imam? Does he teach you Qur'an?  
Do your parents help you?  
Can they read well?  
Have you got your own Qur'an? Where do you keep it? When do you read it?

### **Reading**

When you read the Qur'an in Arabic what do you think about?  
When you read in English what do you think about?  
If you read in Urdu, what do you think about?  
Are you a good reader in English?  
What are you reading at the moment?  
What was the last thing you read'?'  
How many books do you have at home?  
below 10  
10-30  
More than 30  
Do you have books in Urdu?  
Do you have books in English?  
Which newspapers or magazines could be found in your house?  
What do you find hardest about reading?  
What do you find easiest about reading?  
Is there any question you wish to ask me about reading?

**Thank you for helping me with these questions.**

## **Interview Schedule 2**

### **Personal details**

#### **Father and Mother**

How old are you?

Where and when were you born? (How would you describe your nationality?)

What is your full name?

Tell me about your schooling?

Qualifications? (Where, at what level)

Work?

When did you come to the UK?

Employment here? (Any education, courses here?)

Where have you lived in the UK?

Returned to Pakistan?

Married when and where?

How many children have you?

Ages?

Grandchildren?

Have you a community role? Council? Mosque? Other?

What is your opinion about schools in UK?

What is your opinion about education provided by the mosque?

What do you feel about the community in which you live? The wider community and your own community?

## **Language Information**

### **Father and mother**

What is the name of your first language?

Which other languages do you know?

How and where did you learn English? Any formal education in English?

With whom do you speak your first language?

With whom do you speak English?

Can you read and/or write in your first language?

In English?

In any other language?

Do you read a daily newspaper? Magazine?

What was the last book you read?

How were you taught to read in your first language?

How were you taught to read in English? Any other language?

### **Attitudes to language**

How important do you consider your first language is for you? Your children?

How important do you consider your second language is for you? Your children?

Which concerns or worries do you have about your first language?

Which concerns or worries do you have about your second language?

What would assist you in solving these problems? Who might help?

Which language do you consider the most important and why?

What about the wider community? What do you think is their opinion of your language(s)?

## **Mosque information**

### **Father and mother**

Where did you learn to read the Qur'an?

At what age?

Brief description of how?

Do you read Qur'an now? How often? When and where?

Do you read anything else in Arabic (eg. Durood Sharif, etc.)

How much do you understand?

Have you ever taught it?

How important is it for your children to learn the Qur'an?

What do you think about the way the Qur'an is taught in the mosque?

Is there anything you would like to change?

## **Urdu**

### **Father and mother**

Where and when did you learn Urdu?

Do you read Urdu now?

When and where?

Have you ever taught it to anyone?

Can you write in it?

How important do you consider learning Urdu for you and your children?

### **Questions for children**

What are your names?

Ages? What year are you in at school?

What age did you start learning the Qur'an?

Where?

Who taught you?

How much progress have you made? (whole Qur'an, so many siparas, etc.)

Do you ever read outside of the mosque? When and where?

How much do you understand?

How were you taught to read? Give brief description.

### **Attitudes**

How important is it for you to go to the mosque?

Why do you learn the Qur'an?

What do you think about the way you are taught in the mosque?

Is there any difference between learning to read in the mosque and learning to read in school? How might you explain this difference?

How could learning to read the Qur'an be easier or better?

How could learning to read in schools be easier or better?

How do you know how good you are at reading the Qur'an?

Do you have tests? Prizes? Performances?

## **Children questions**

Where did you learn Urdu?

When and who taught you?

How good are you at Urdu?

What could schools do to make learning Urdu easier?

What does your school, teachers and pupils, think about Urdu?

How important is Urdu for you?

## **Interview Schedule 3**

### Questions for imams

What is your full name and how old are you?

Where were you born?

What about your family? Where do you live?

What links do you have with your family in UK and abroad?

Tell me about your education.

Here and elsewhere?

Secular and religious?

Arrival in UK (if appropriate)

When did you start work as an imam?

If not your first post, where have you worked before?

What are your responsibilities in the mosque and in the community?

If this is not a rude question, what is your salary? Perks?

Which languages do you speak?

Which languages are you literate in?

When and in which contexts do you use these languages?

Knowledge of Arabic and Urdu

What are your formal qualifications?

Where did you train to be an imam?

Tell me briefly what this involves.

Did your training involve pedagogy?

What is your opinion of the congregation here?

In any other place you have been? Back home (if appropriate)?



## **Teaching questions**

How many hours a week are you teaching?

Who do you teach?

Children and adults?

Only in the mosque or elsewhere as well?

What do you teach? Qur'an? Urdu? Religion in general?

Explain briefly the process of teaching the Qur'an. Methodology?

What is the overall aim in the teaching?

What would be the ideal outcome?

What do parents expect? Want?

What about catering for children of different abilities?

What rewards and sanctions do you use?

What are the difficulties involved in teaching in the mosque?

What developments have there been in the way the Qur'an is taught?

Have you any knowledge of the use of Latin script as a short cut?

Which resources do you use? Would you like to have?

What about facilities? Could these be improved?

Tell me about children's attitudes to learning the Qur'an.

What is their behaviour like? What about problematic behaviour?

Do parents take a lot of interest in the progress of their children?

Does the mosque employ other teaching staff? Who teaches the older girls?

Do some receive extra tuition? Why?

What do you do about pupils with learning difficulties?

What do you do about children who excel?

What is the importance of learning the Qur'an for you?

For the community?

For the children?

### **Urdu questions for imam**

If you teach Urdu, when, where and to whom?

How do you teach Urdu? Any similarities to teaching Qur'an?

What resources do you use?

What are your aims for teaching Urdu?

Do you link with any outside agencies?

In which language do you deliver the Friday sermon?

Does everyone understand?

In which language do you give out general messages?

In which other situations do you talk to people in Urdu?

Are you a member of any network of imams in UK or abroad?

## **Interview Schedule 4**

### **Questions for trustees of mosques**

What is your name?

When did you arrive in the UK (if appropriate)?

Which languages do you speak?

What is your occupation?

Tell me briefly about your education? Where did you learn to read and write in Urdu, in Arabic, in English?

### **History of the mosque**

Pre-history. What was used for prayer before the building was acquired?

When was it purchased?

How was it purchased? How were funds organised?

Any help from council? Any help from outside the community? From abroad?

Describe physical development of building. What was it before?

Describe administration of the mosque – historically and at present.

What is the precise role of the imam? How did you recruit him?

How many imams have there been (roughly)?

What about relationships with outside agencies?

Secular ones – schools and the council?

Religious ones – wider organisations, UK and other?

What are the different uses of the mosque?

What are the different purposes of the mosque?

What is the role of a trustee?

Who are the other trustees?

What have been the main conflict issues now and in the past?\*

With the wider community?\*

With officialdom?\*

Within the community?\*

Within the mosque itself?\*

Describe the relations between your mosque and the others in Riverton\*

What is the future of the mosque?

What plans have you for the future of the building?

Of the community? Physically, educationally, religiously?

# Appendix II

## Observation Schedule 1

For use in the mosque

### Exterior of the mosque –

- façade,
- door,
- windows,
- signs,
- neighbouring buildings,
- roof,
- loudspeaker

### Entrance to the mosque –

- shoe racks,
- signs,
- floor covering

### Interior of the mosque –

- size and shape,
- floor and ceiling,
- light fittings, windows,
- prayer niche,
- orientation

### Walls of the mosque –

- signs,
- posters,
- pictures,
- photographs,
- calligraphy,
- notices,
- time pieces,
- calendars,
- tapestries

### Furniture –

- minbar (pulpit),
- bookcases,
- bookstands,
- lectern

Technology – light fittings, fans, decorative lights, LED displays, microphone, speakers

## **Observation Schedule 2**

For use during teaching

- Arrangement of mosque for teaching
- Pupils' appearance– ages, dress, any accessories
- Pupils' behaviour on entry
- Pupils' behaviour on exit
- How is study (reading) initiated?
- How is study maintained?
- How is study terminated?
- How do pupils interact one with another? Verbally? Non-verbally?
- How is the session stepped? How is this achieved?
- How often pupils on/off task?
- Movement during the session – how negotiated?
- Physical position of teacher in respect of pupils – always static?
- Interaction with pupils – how managed?
- Verbal interactions and non-verbal interactions
- Interaction with assistant teachers/helpers
- List activities of teacher
- List activities of pupils
- Who else is present?
- How is misbehaviour dealt with?
- What form does misbehaviour take?

## **Observation Schedule 3**

For use at homes of Sample 2

Characteristics of type of dwelling and description of location

Room where interview takes place

- Furniture
- Floor coverings
- Light fittings
- Decoration
- Pictures on walls
- Calligraphy
- Tapestries
- Books on display – English, Arabic, Urdu, other languages (Pushto)
- Other texts evident
- Other objects – ornaments, trophies, timepieces
- Children's toys
- Technology – TV, computer



## Appendix III

### Glossary of Arabic/Urdu/Punjabi words and phrases used in text

*All words listed are Arabic unless indicated*

<i>Abu Bakr</i>	Companion of Prophet Muhammad and his successor
<i>al hamdu lillah</i>	thanks be to God
<i>al hamdu lillah rabbi-alameen</i>	thanks be to God, Lord of the worlds – first verse of Fatihah (see below)
<i>alif, bah, tah</i>	First three letters of Arabic alphabet (cf. ABC)
<i>ash-hadu-a-laa ilaaha ill-allah,</i> <i>as-hadu ana muhammada-astaghfirullah</i>	I testify there is no god except Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah – the first kalimah (see below)
<i>Azad Kashmir (Urdu)</i>	Free Kashmir
<i>bismillahi rahmani rahim</i>	in the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate
<i>dars</i>	lesson
<i>dar-ul-uloom</i>	College of Religious Sciences
<i>dhikr</i>	the practice of repeating liturgical verses or formulations on a regular basis
<i>dua'</i>	prayer
<i>durood sharif (Urdu)</i>	see <i>salawat</i>
<i>eid</i>	Islamic festival
<i>fajr</i>	dawn prayer
<i>fatihah</i>	opening chapter of the Qur'an, the Opening
<i>fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
<i>hadith</i>	sayings of the Prophet
<i>hafiz</i>	someone who has memorised the Qur'an
<i>harakat</i>	letters
<i>hifz</i>	memorisation
<i>hizb</i>	one sixtieth of the Qur'an
<i>hufaaz</i>	plural of <i>hafiz</i>
<i>imam</i>	the man who leads the prayer in a mosque
<i>imamat</i>	imam-hood – learning to be an imam
<i>iqra'</i>	'read' – the first word of the Qur'an revealed
<i>insh'allah</i>	'if God wills it so'
<i>juz'</i>	one thirtieth of the Qur'an
<i>kalimah</i>	a formulation learnt as part of Islamic credo
<i>khutbah</i>	sermon
<i>kutaab</i>	school for learning the Qur'an (Arabic-speaking world)
<i>madrassah</i>	school
<i>ma sha'allah</i>	'what Allah wills'
<i>masjid</i>	mosque
<i>mawlid</i>	birthday of the Prophet
<i>mihrab</i>	prayer niche
<i>minbar</i>	pulpit
<i>moulvi (Urdu)</i>	imam

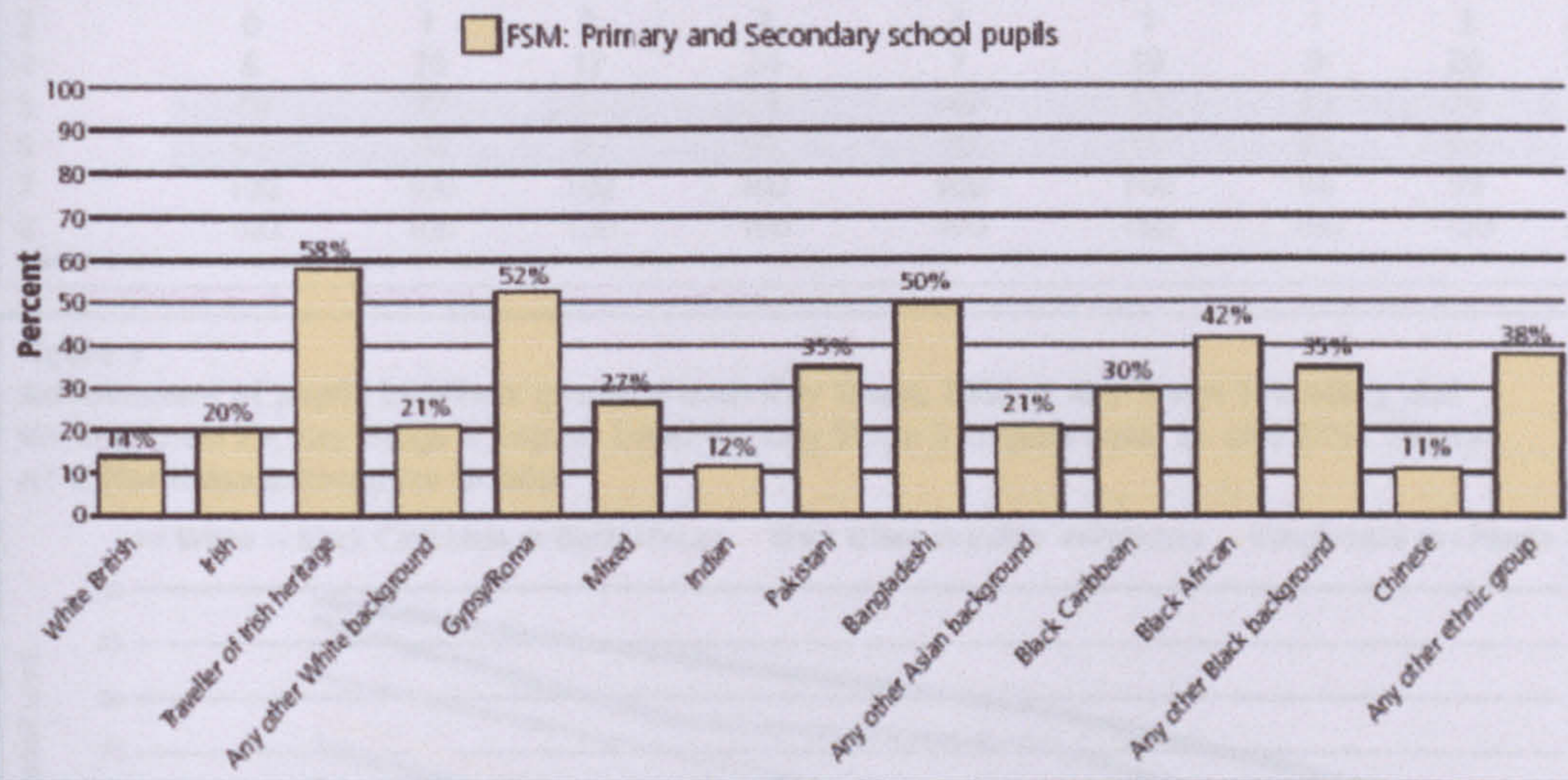
<i>mufti</i>	religious title designating authority to make legal judgements
<i>Musa</i>	Moses
<i>naat</i> (Urdu)	religious poetry
<i>namaz</i> (Urdu)	prayer
<i>Pothwari</i>	sometimes used for Mirpuri-Punjabi
<i>Puhtee</i> (Urdu, Mirpuri-Punjabi)	shortened version of Qai'dah
<i>Pushto</i>	language spoken by Pathans
<i>qai'dah</i>	primer for learning how to read the Qur'an
<i>qari</i>	qualified reciter of the Qur'an
<i>Qur'an</i>	The Holy Book of Islam; literally 'the Reading'
<i>rasool allah</i>	'Messenger of God'
<i>salaam alaykum</i>	peace be upon you
<i>salah</i>	prayers
<i>salawat</i>	prayers asking God to bless Muhammad
<i>siparah</i> (Urdu)	one thirtieth of the Qur'an
<i>sirah</i>	the biography of the Prophet
<i>subhah</i>	rosary
<i>subhan allah</i>	glory to God
<i>tafseer</i>	exegetis of the Qur'an
<i>Taalim ul-Haq</i>	a children's book which teaches the basics of Islam
<i>tarawih</i>	the special night prayers which take place in the month of Ramadan
<i>tasbih</i>	rosary
<i>tashkeel</i>	the diacritic marks around letters which aid pronunciation of the Qur'an
<i>thawab</i>	reward
<i>ustaad</i>	teacher
<i>wudu'</i>	ritual ablution
<i>Yasin</i>	chapter of the Qur'an known as the 'heart' of book

## Appendix IV

### Extracts from *Ethnic Minority Attainment and Participation in Education and Training: The Evidence*

University of Birmingham and the Department for Education and Skills (2003)

**Figure 2**  
Proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals by ethnic group



Source: PLASC 2003, provisional figures, DFES

#### 4.2 What is the attainment of different ethnic groups?

Until 2002, national level ethnicity linked attainment data for key stage results was not available. Data from the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) of 2002 has allowed the analysis of attainment by ethnic group at the end of Key Stage 1, 2, 3 and GCSE, providing a comprehensive picture of national attainment<sup>14</sup>.

Some of this data is illustrated in Figure 3 and shows attainment by ethnic group in English. It shows provisional figures for attainment in 2001/02 for each ethnic group. Indian and Chinese pupils outperform other groups in all assessments; Black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils perform less well than White pupils throughout compulsory schooling. Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils perform the least well at Key Stage 1. At GCSE, Black Caribbean and Pakistani pupils are the worst performing groups, with Black Caribbean pupils showing the greatest change in levels of attainment during compulsory schooling. Overall, the disparity in achievement between ethnic groups increases significantly over the course of schooling. There is more inequality in attainment between ethnic groups after their time in compulsory education than there is at entry to school.

Examining pupil progress between key stages<sup>15</sup> substantiates the trends shown in Figure 3. Chinese and Indian pupils make good progress between key stages (KS), e.g. 70 percent of Chinese pupils and 72 percent of Indian pupils who achieved the expected level at key stage 3 (i.e. level 5), went on to gain the expected level of five or more A\*-C GCSEs at key stage 4. Black Caribbean pupils make the least progress between key stages, e.g. only 48 percent of those who achieved the expected level at KS3 went on to gain five or more A\*-C GCSEs. Black Other and White pupils also make relatively less progress between KS3 and GCSE, with only 49 percent of each group making progress at the expected rate. However, Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils make relatively better progress, particularly, between key stage 3 and GCSE (the figures are 68 percent, 67 percent and 71 percent respectively).

<sup>14</sup> Extensive data and analyses of pupil progress can be found in *Pupil progress by pupil characteristics: 2002*, DFES 2003

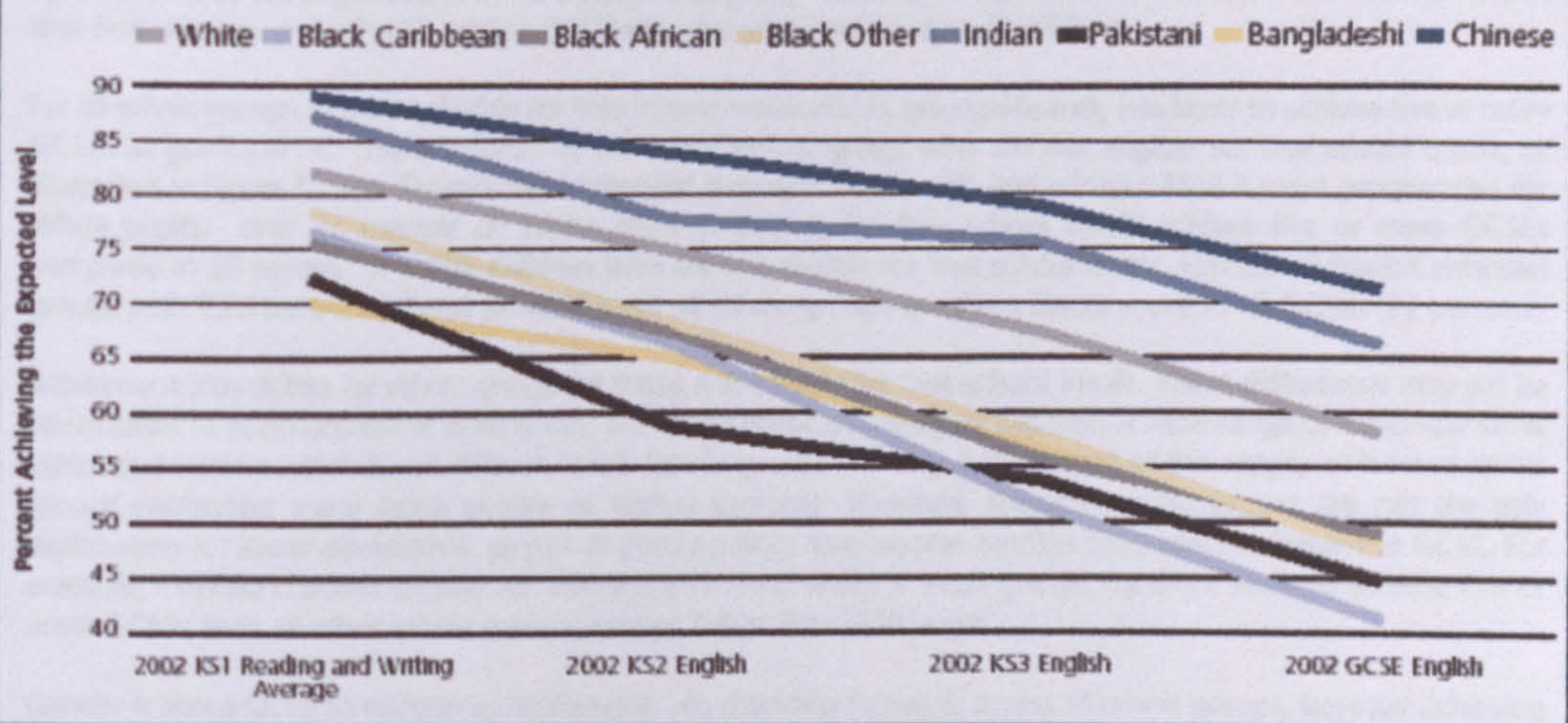
<sup>15</sup> *Pupil progress by pupil characteristics: 2002*, DFES 2003

Data from the Youth Cohort Study (YCS)<sup>16</sup> allows for comparison of changes in GCSE attainment over time. Attainment rates at GCSE have risen in general. It shows that, while attainment continues to rise for White, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils, in 2002, it fell for Black pupils<sup>17</sup> and remained the same for Indian pupils. In 2002, approximately a third of Black pupils achieved five or more A\*-C GCSEs compared to half of White pupils. In addition, of those Black pupils who achieved 5 or more GCSEs A\*-C, about half achieved very high results (8 or more A\*-C) compared to two-thirds of all other ethnic groups.

**Table 2**  
Pupil progression from Key Stage 3 2000 to 5+ A\*-C at GCSE/GNVQ 2002 by ethnicity

Level	Percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A* to C at GCSE							
	White	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Black Caribbean	Black African	Black Other	Chinese
Below 3	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	0
3	0	1	2	3	1	1	1	3
4	6	20	17	24	7	19	9	20
5	49	72	67	71	48	68	49	70
6	93	98	96	97	90	95	91	97
7	100	100	100	100	100	100	98	99
8	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

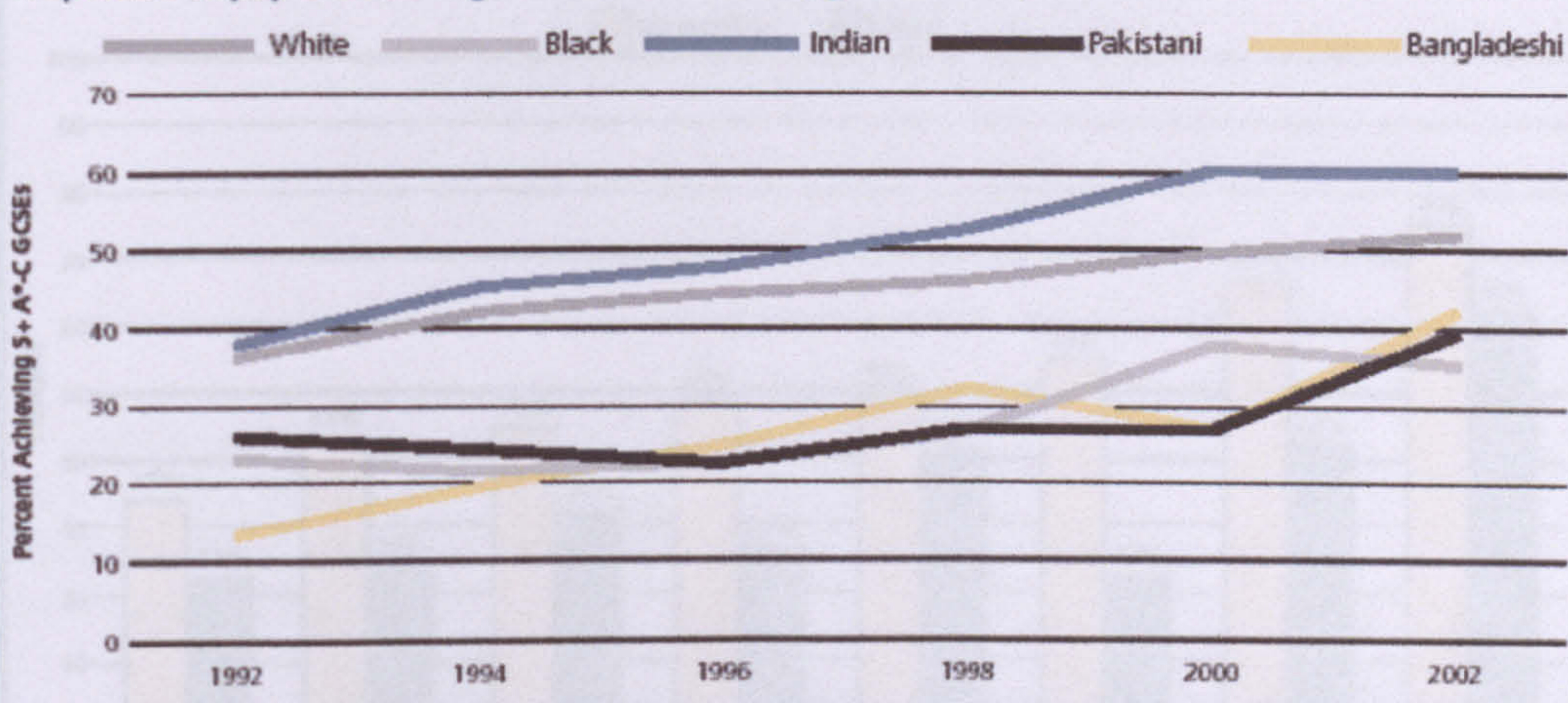
**Figure 3**  
Achievement of pupils by ethnic group at each Key Stage, 2002 at Key Stage 1 Reading and Writing Level 2+, Key Stage 2 English Level 4+, Key Stage 3 English Level 5+ and GCSE English A\*-C (for those entered for GCSEs)



Source: National Pupil Database (NPD), version 2, all pupils with a PLASC record (2002 attainment data is provisional)  
Note: old ethnic codes are used

<sup>16</sup> The YCS surveys a representative sample of approximately 30,000 young people in England and Wales in the spring following completion of compulsory education.  
<sup>17</sup> The YCS uses a single category for Black students.

**Figure 4**  
**Proportion of pupils obtaining five or more GCSEs, grades A\*-C, 1992-2002**



Source: figures from *Statistical First Release, Youth Cohort Study: the activities and experiences of 16 year olds: England and Wales 2002*

The reasons for these disparities in attainment are complex and cannot be linked to any one factor (see section 4.8 for further discussion). It is clear, however, that economic disadvantage<sup>18</sup> has a very significant impact on the educational attainment of children. An analysis of the attainment levels of different ethnic groups disaggregated by children who are eligible for free school meals (a proxy for socio-economic level) and those who are not shows that both income and ethnicity shape the likely educational outcomes of children.

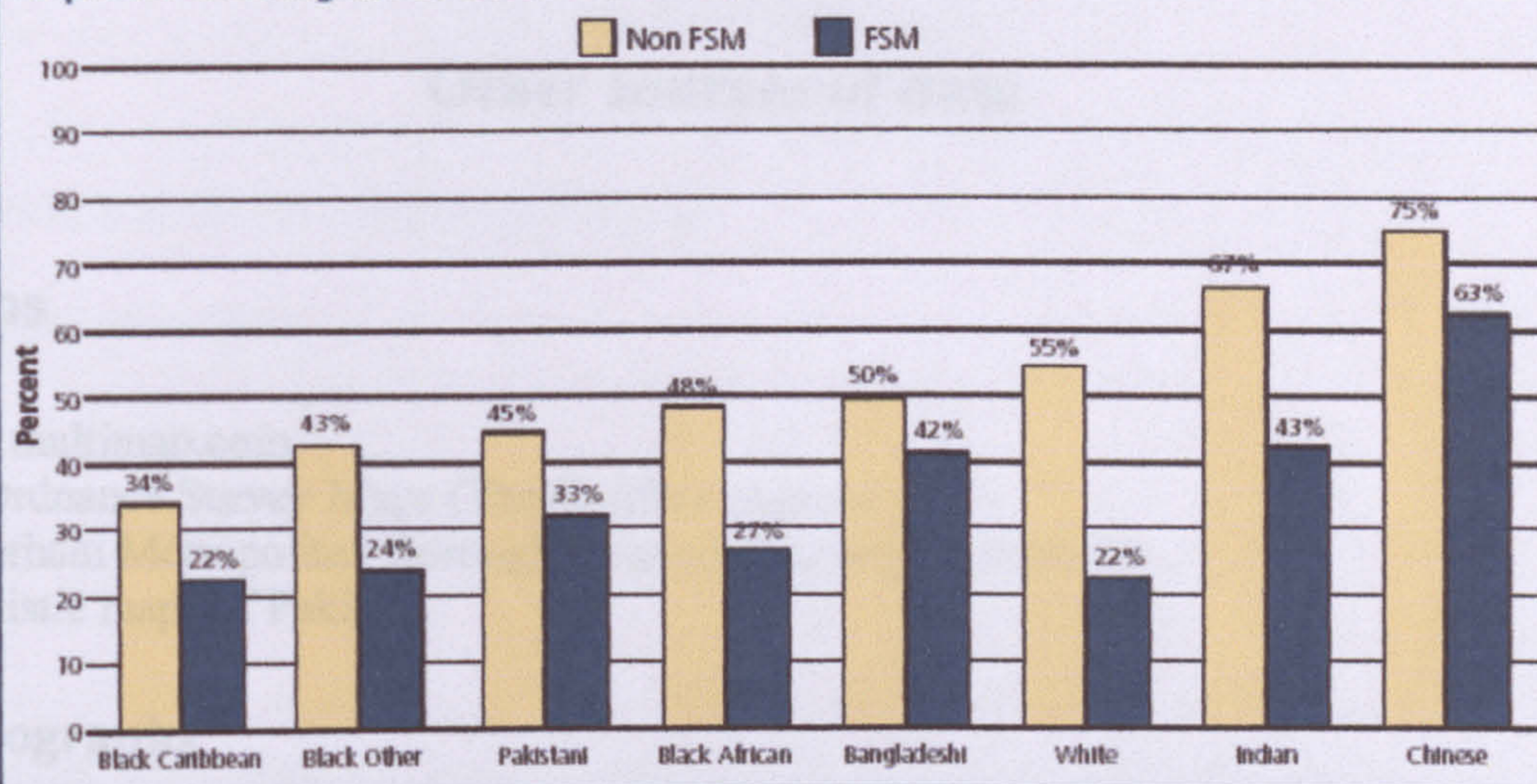
For all ethnic groups, children eligible for free school meals (FSM), are significantly less likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C than children of the same ethnic group who are not eligible for free school meals, as illustrated in Figure 5. The disparity of attainment between pupils with and without FSM is most pronounced for White pupils: only 22 percent of White children eligible for free school meals achieve five or more GCSEs compared to 56 percent of White children who are not eligible for free school meals. White and Black Caribbean groups with FSM have the lowest proportion of all ethnic groups attaining five or more A\*-C GCSEs (22 percent).

Attainment also differs by ethnic group for those not eligible for free school meals. These differences may yet be attributable to socio-economic differences: the broad non-FSM category captures a wide range of socio-economic status and income which is not differentiated. Ethnic groups will vary in the extent of this range, with some ethnic groups containing many more people of higher incomes. However, socio-economic factors are not the sole explanation for lower attainment, as not all children from low-income families have low attainment at GCSE. For example, Chinese children eligible for free school meals, whilst a small group, are more likely to achieve five or more GCSEs than all other ethnic groups, except Indian non-FSM pupils.

Gender is also a factor in relation to attainment. As shown in Figure 6, across all ethnic groups, boys are achieving less well than girls, with girls more likely to achieve five or more GCSEs than boys. This disparity is most marked amongst Black Caribbean and Black Other boys and girls, with a 15 percent discrepancy, and amongst Black African boys and girls with a 14 percent discrepancy.

<sup>18</sup> Gillborn, D. & Mirza, H. *Educational Inequality*, Ofsted 2000, HMI 232

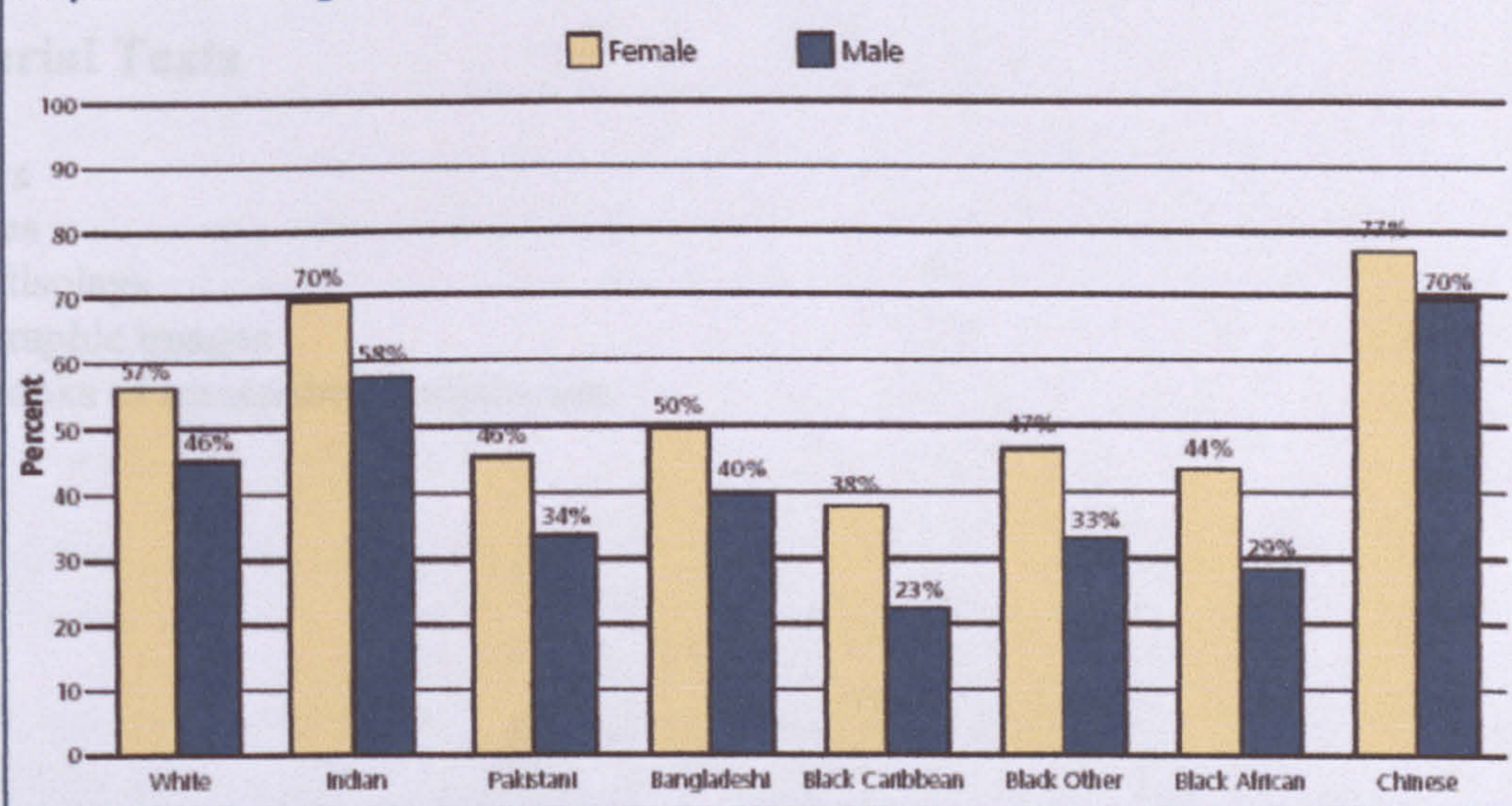
**Figure 5**  
Proportion achieving five or more A\*-C GCSEs, FSM and non-FSM, 2002



Source: National Pupil Database (NPD) version 2, those entered for GCSEs, having a PLASC record (2002 attainment data is provisional)

Note: FSM = eligibility for free school meals

**Figure 6**  
Proportion achieving five or more A\*-C GCSEs, female and male, 2002



Source: National Pupil Database (NPD) version 2, those entered for GCSEs, having a PLASC record (2002 attainment data is provisional)

# Appendix V

## Other sources of data

### Maps

www.multimap.com

Old Ordnance Survey Maps (The Godfrey edition)

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Planning Department

Linguistic maps of Pakistan

### Photographs

Interior and exterior of mosques

Digital images from Local Studies archive of Wesleyan Reform Chapel

Interior of houses – plaques, images, texts

### Material Texts

Posters

Plaques

Wall displays

Calligraphic images

Notebooks of transcribed Punjabi *naat*

## Appendix VI

### Example interview

#### Interview with Muhammad Hanif

27<sup>th</sup> December 2001

Father

How old are you?

44

Where and when were you born? (How would you describe your nationality?)

*I was born in Pakistan, in Kashmir, a village called Portapanish, nearest town Didiar. A dam in between. That's where I was born.*

What is your full name?

*Muhammad Hanif*

How would you describe your nationality?

*I'd say I'm British.*

Tell me about your schooling?

*I had difficulties when I first started school over here. When I came over here I was about 11 years old.*

So you had some schooling in Pakistan, and some schooling here. Do you remember much about the school in Pakistan?

*Very basic. Remember very little about it. It was in the village. We had to walk for about 15 minutes. Every day.*

Can you remember what you learnt? For example, did you learn to read and write there?

*Oh, yes.*

So you learnt to read and write in Urdu. What about the Arabic of the Qur'an? Was that in school or extra to school?



*We had both. In the juniors you don't get taught...I came over here...I started secondary school, first year of secondary school. That's when the main basic teachings of the Qur'an are taught over there in Pakistan. That's when they start. But they don't start in the juniors. In the juniors you learn Urdu.*

*So you don't start, like, if you compare it with here, where some children go when they are 6, that doesn't happen in Pakistan, or didn't happen when you were at school.*

*You do start, the Qur'an itself, the scriptures of the Qur'an are taught at the early stages, but there's a...I don't know how if I can describe it, it's another subject what the Qur'an says, the translation of the Qur'an, that doesn't start until 10 or 11. At that time it didn't start, but I don't know now. Because I have been here 30 odd years.*

What about the actual reading of the script?

*The reading begins when you're five or six years old (like here).*

You left Pakistan when you were 10 and came to Rotherham. Which school did you go to?

*Ashwood.*

When did you leave?

*I left school in 1973.*

Qualifications? (Where, at what level)

*I got some GCEs.*

Did you go to work or carry on with education?

*No, I carried on in further education. I went to college. To get some O-levels and CSEs. Got them and went to college and got some O-levels. Then I tried my A-levels and I failed my A-levels, same sort of study period as O-levels then I started working.*

Employment here? (Any education, courses here?)

*I went factory work, I worked in the Riverton Race Relations Office. (How did you get that job?) Through the race relations unit..*

How long did you work there?

*For two to three years. Then I worked at the Law Centre in Sheffield. I worked with Nigel Beeley. (Was that again to do with community relations?) Yes. It was an advice work office. I worked in there. I worked in a lot of ...I spent a lot of time in advice with the community, the Asian community.*

And you did that for a time and then went to the taxis?

*Yes, I started doing taxis in 1991, I think.*

Have you ever done any courses as an adult? Or picked up any other qualifications?

*No.*

Have you lived all the time in Riverton?

*Yes. All the time in Riverton.*

Returned to Pakistan at all?

*Yes, I've been to Pakistan. Last time I went to Pakistan was about 20 years ago. (Not many times, then?) No. Before that I went two or three times. I've been here in Riverton about 33 years. And been to Pakistan about 4 or 5 times.*

Married when and where?

*I married in Pakistan in 1977 in Daka...*

How many children have you?

*I have 5 children.*

Ages?

*9, 17, 19, 20, 24.*

Grandchildren?

*No.*

Have you a community role? Council? Mosque? Other?

*I haven't got much of a role, except at going to the mosque. (Do people come to you ask you for advice because they know that you've done that job in the past?) They do come down, for one-off like. They don't come down on a regular basis. They come down if they want some forms filling in, things like that, because they do often do these things like so...you know... those sort of people who are good friends of mine come down. Not very often because with the taxi driving I'm a busy man...*

---

What about the mosque then, what's your role there?

*Ah well, I help there. I do the collection on Friday, the money collection, and count the money, that's all I have. I do give some advice... (You're not a trustee then...)  
No, I'm not a trustee at all. (How do you become a trustee?) I think you get invited,*

*people choose you as well. Bit of both. Mostly invited. (And how often does this happen? I mean, are the trustees you have been trustees for a long time?) Oh yeah, a long time. My father was a trustee. But he's dead now. In 1997. He was a trustee and a founder of the mosque.*

When did your father come here?

*I think he came here in 1956. (Alone?) Yeah, alone. (And how long was he alone until his family came?) We came in 1968. So about 12 years. His situation was such that he couldn't invite his family over.*

What was there before the mosque? Before the community was able to buy that building?

*I don't know, I think it was some sort of a bar or something and there was a bicycle shop... (How long has it been mosque?) 1979...I think 80. Because I was in Pakistan when it was converted.*

What did the community do before?

*We used to share the Church Walk mosque. All the people of Riverton had one mosque. The Church Walk mosque. There was a fall-out, some fighting as well. I was in Pakistan at that time. I used to joke with my friends, I used to say I can't leave you alone for one minute. I went to Pakistan and you start fighting against each other.*

So all the community used the same mosque...

*Yeah, it was one mosque originally. We used the same mosque. But religion-wise there was a difference (I know the difference, the Berelvi-Deobandi difference ) Yes, that's the difference... (But for many years they must have all been together...) There were all together. Our father went to that mosque. When I was young and I used to pray there... (People seem to have become more extreme and separate than they were beforehand) Oh, yes. Some people were, I mean originally as I said there was only one mosque and they were all there...*

How long has Church Walk been a mosque?

*A lot longer, I mean, when I came in 1968 there was no mosque...early seventies they bought that mosque...because my father was an original founder member of that mosque also. When there were few community leaders as such if you can call them that. A few people prominent in the community, yes? (Would Amjad Hussain been one of them?) Amjad Hussain, Mr Pasha, he's died as well. My father. The Moorfield Mosque, a couple of people from there. All the trustees at the mosque as well.*

What is your opinion about schools in UK?

*I think they're doing a good job. Most of my children did well. For themselves. So obviously I can't blame schools as regard that obviously. Pupils have to try*

*themselves and parents have to force it...I think we're lacking in that respect as well. Parenting.*

I don't know, but I assume that you as parents did quite a lot regarding your children's education...

*Yes, we did quite a lot. We had to push the children and tried to help them as well. And it helps if a parent knows as well. Most of the young people in this area are going haywire because most of the Asian people from Kashmir just I think they ...I think that's bad upbringing personally.*

What is your opinion about education provided by the mosque?

*What about it? I think a lot more could be done to improve it. I think we're lacking. I think that's one of the things we're falling behind on. Because the Qur'an is recited and memorised in the mosque...I don't think that's good enough just memorising the Qur'an. Especially this society that we are living in. These days. We need to go deep into the...I don't know if we can do that the amount of time the kids have in the mosque it's limited time as well, isn't it? They only have two hours, maybe an hour and a half afternoon every day five days a week. I think we need to go deeply into the teachings of Islam because that's where we're lacking as well...Church Walk mosque committee...our mosque committee there's only one person who's the committee and everything...Mr Nawaiz... who always wears a scarf...(The one who sits at the side?) Aha. (He's a trustee...and he's the committee...) He's the chairman, he's everything. At the moment.*

Why's that? Historical reasons? Because he's always been involved?

*He's always been involved and all the other trustees have died off. Original trustees. You know the Gerald Road mosque? There's a mosque on Gerald Road (In Eastfield?) No, Wellfield. Originally, the idea was that it would be a branch of this one, University Road mosque. I mean they spent good money from this one, about £100,000. (So people didn't have to keep coming all the way over...?) But they've split up now and they're separate as well...I mean beliefs are the same, but the running of the mosque and everything they've fallen out. That was there were some trustees in that mosque who were trustees in this mosque, so they have become separate as well you see. These are the original founder members left in this mosque.*

Would the original trustees have also put quite a lot of their own personal money into the purchase?

*Oh yes. They put their own money. They put quite a lot of effort. Obviously. We always used to go with my father to different towns to collect money, knock on people's doors, we're building a mosque. I can remember that. We went to Derby, Bolton, around the Midlands.*

Do you think that the imam and the people in the mosque teach the Qur'an well?

*I think they do pretty well. I mean as far as it goes. They do it pretty well. But, as I said, as far as it goes because I can't blame the imam with 60 kids and one imam. So we have limited resources. As regards that I would say we should have more teachers.*

Who teaches the girls?

*The imam's wife.*

Wasn't there a time when Tariq's sisters used to do it?

*Yes, his sisters used to do it. (They don't do it anymore then?) No.*

Where does the imam come from? Is he British born?

*No, Pakistani. (Speak English?) Very little. He's only been here about a year or so. Over a year maybe.*

What happened to Sageer's father?

*He emigrated to... (Went back home?)...No...Preston (laughter) Near Blackburn, down that end. All the family, Sageer, I think he got a job down there. All the family moved. He used to live across the road from me. (They weren't Pakistani, were they?) No. They were Indian. (They seemed quite a respected family). Yes. The children were good. The imam was very good as well. We have a lot of respect for our teachers...I mean my own age group, I don't mean youngsters these days, who have been brought up over here. My age group who were brought up over there we have a lot of respect for our teachers....we used to have it I don't know where it's gone now.*

What do you feel about the community in which you live? The wider community and your own community?

*I think relations are pretty good. So far so good. I think this September 11<sup>th</sup> thing has had a bit of a bad effect on it, but basically they're pretty good community relations. You know, when I first came to this country, to Ashwood school, that's where I started. And you know, they used to say 'come and sit with me you sat with him yesterday sit with me today'. That's how they used to be. Obviously, it's not as good as that nowadays.*

For example, when you were 10 or 11 you went straight into Ashwood school. If that happened nowadays, coming straight from Pakistan, there would be some sort of extra help. Was there anything like that then? For learning English.

*I used to attend evening classes, there were a couple of ....I went in there...they were basically for adults, but some of my cousins used to go so I went with them to the evening classes. They were mainly for adults, who didn't know English. And there was one day when we went into a different school. And a couple of hours we used to get extra help. In English. One day a week. An afternoon say. I remember going to Derham school.*

## Language Information

### Father and mother

What is the name of your first language?

*Punjabi. Or Mirpuri, a dialect of Punjabi.*

Have you ever come across the term Pothwari?

*Yes. The language that we speak is very very similar to Pothwari. It would be the closest one linked. Pothwari is spoken in Pakistan, a few areas of Pakistan. Pothwari is spoken in Kashmir. And where we live, most people from that area ... (and is that the same for most of community?) Yes. Most of the community would speak that language. Some people might call it Pothwari. But Pothwari is basically spoken mainly in some area of Pakistan. The official language though of the whole area of Pakistan is Urdu.*

Which other languages do you know?

*Urdu. English.*

Would you say you know Arabic?

*No. I'd wish to learn Arabic.*

So your knowledge of just reading the Qur'an, you wouldn't consider that knowing Arabic?

*No, no. Not at all. Nowhere near. Not even basics. Though I'd like to learn Arabic. Because I went to Hajj and...I was lost. (They have Arabic evening classes, at Richmond College for example...) Because last year I went to Hajj I was lost, I couldn't ...I didn't know....what I was talking to...what I was saying...you know, picked up a few words here and there while I was there...*

How and where did you learn English? Any formal education in English?

*I started in the first year of secondary school in Pakistan. (So you got a year...) Half a year. Basics. Two or three words. Bat and mat...That's all I knew in English. Till I came over here. That's when they started teaching me English.*

What about here, then did you just have to pick it up? Thrown into Ashwood school and just had to survive...

*That's why I was quite backward...because I wasn't thick or anything, but I was quite backward because it took me so long to pick up the language. To learn the language. When it came to Maths, I was always top of the class. Because that's the same. And when we were taught maths times tables up to 20x tables off by heart, we had to learn them, before we were 5 or 6 years old. We learnt before we were 10 or*

*11. We had to learn them off by heart. Whenever it came to maths I was top. But it took me so long to pick up the English. I was lacking in other subjects. So, when I did CSEs I mean some of the questions I couldn't understand so if you don't understand the question, just one word even, you don't understand the question do you? So obviously, I didn't do very well. That put me a lot back...*

Is that typical? Of men of your generation?

*Yes, it was typical.*

With whom do you speak your first language?

*At home. My mum. Yes, all the family. (Children?) Yes, the children. All the family over here. Friends. All the community. 95% of the community in Riverton, in Sheffield.*

The reason I ask that question is because I know that I will get a different answer from younger children, the younger generation. When I ask that question to the younger ones, they speak their first language to some people, and they don't speak it to other people...among themselves, brothers and sisters, will often speak English...

With whom do you speak English?

*At work with my customers. I might speak it with my children sometimes, though I personally at home try to discourage speaking English. (So you made a deliberate choice when they were young to not speak English?)*

*Yeah, because, I know they can pick up English quite well, I mean obviously their English is quite good. Secondly, their mother couldn't speak English very well. So it wasn't fair on her. So I tried to discourage it. They still used to speak it, among themselves.*

When they went to school at 5 did they know any English?

*Yes, they knew English. I mean initially I spoke to them in English when they were younger. When they had a good command of English, then I discouraged the English! Not initially, I didn't say you can't speak, no, no...Because I mean obviously, if they got lost they knew what their address was and things like that...*

So when they went to school at 5 knowing their home language and went knowing English, you didn't think in any way this was a disadvantage?

*Not at all, no. Not at that stage. Because at early stages you can pick up quite a lot.*

Can you read and/or write in your first language?

*Very little, there's not much written in it anyway.*

There's a chap in Manchester who has started to publish books in Pothwari (basically, Pothwari...you can get poetry, right?)

*Yes, that's the only thing I know about.*

In English? How do you feel about your reading and writing in English?

*Well, I think I am still lacking with regards that...I think personally I think about that, you know I think some of the people who come over after me they speak better English than me. Because I seem to get stuck on what it is sometimes...Sometimes if I'm having a conversation...*

*It can be to do with age, as well...There's a big difference between coming over at the age of 7 and coming at the age of 10...*

*No, because I picked up a Swiss girl, I pick up all walks of life in my job, and she had been here only a year or so and her English was brilliant. She was so good. Seriously. I'm not joking. I was very surprised. For her to pick up...She must have been 18 or 19 years old. So I don't know why other people pick up so quickly...*

*My father, for example, who is Ukrainian, I didn't realise my father had difficulty with English until I was 15 years old... You don't notice...you go through 'that's your father' and you only notice it later, and then as I got older I noticed yes, his English isn't really perfect, because he came, like many Pakistani people, after the war, straight into a factory, worked in a factory for most of his life, and so his environment for speaking and developing English was quite limited. You get to the stage, like my French, where you can get by, where you can manage, once you get to that manage stage, sometimes the motivation to learn any more isn't there.*

*I think I was trapped at that stage, maybe a little further, but...*

Do you read in any other language? Do you read in Urdu?

*Yes.*

Do you read a daily newspaper? Magazine?

*Yes. (Which one?) I read both, English and Urdu. Not regularly.*

If you bought a newspaper every day what would it be?

*I don't know. It depends how I feel. One day I might buy the Daily Star, another day it could be The Times or something like that. In Urdu, there's no choice, only the Jang. (Do you read it every day?) No, very rarely. If I wanted to buy a paper I would buy an English paper. I wouldn't buy the Jang or any Urdu paper.*

What was the last book you read?

*(laughter) Most of the books I read would be Urdu. I haven't read one for a while.*



Have you ever used the library service in Riverton?

*Yes, I have been once or twice. My card's expired. I don't have much time to read. Because...plus I have had so many problems as regards family. That's affecting me as well, you know what I mean.*

When you left Pakistan when you were 11 was that the end of your formal Urdu education?

*Yes. That was the end of my formal education in Urdu.*

And was that enough for you to be able to read and write in Urdu later, like reading the paper and books?

*No, it wasn't enough, but I've been doing a lot of work in Urdu myself.*

Was that your choice or your parents' choice?

*I think it was my choice. I think...I can read and write. Maybe write wasn't that good but I could read pretty good Urdu. I could read almost anything in Urdu and quite understand it. Most of it. Spoken Urdu is maybe lacking a bit. Written Urdu is maybe lacking, but I can read. Because most of the books I have read were in Urdu. I carried on Urdu.*

### **Attitudes to language**

How important do you consider your first language is for you? Your children?

*I don't think it is that important personally as long as you can get by in it. You should know basic....*

What do you mean by 'get by in it'? When would you need to know it?

*When you go to Pakistan basically. To Kashmir. (When speaking with relatives?)  
Yes, relatives. And plus people over there. All people in that area would speak that so if my kids went over there – I don't know if they'd slap me or not – would have difficulty, so that's what I mean when I say get by. Plus there's a lot of the older people over here would speak that...language. But I mean I don't think it's all that important because it's not being taught over here, it's not being taught over in Pakistan as well. Because we are living in that kind of area...*

What is your opinion then, for example, say, your children's generation didn't encourage it with their children, there's a possibility that it would be lost (died out, yeah).

*Yeah, I mean, it would be a shame if it did get lost, be a big loss, but, I mean if I try my best...*

Same question then about English...?

*It's important...It's the same, you need to get by...*

What about Urdu then? Another variation on the same question – how important is it for your children and your grandchildren to know Urdu more than the local Mirpuri-Punjabi?

*I would say it is about 50-50. Because Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, right, they need to know Urdu if they are going to work over in Pakistan. Settle down in Pakistan. To do well over there it's compulsory that they know Urdu. But if they want to spend most of their life here in England or some other country and they can communicate in Urdu then that's good enough.*

From what I know of your children, they were all good at Urdu. Where did they learn it?

*At home. Mostly. (Not in the mosque?) No.*

The worries that you had about English holding you back, are there still those worries among parents?

*No, no, no. I don't have worries about my children or any children. They learn enough English. I am more worried about them losing out on their own mother tongue.*

What would assist you in solving these problems? Who might help?

*Encourage it. I mean it's basically at home. Taught at home. And to get by on it. Their children are willing to learn only that much. Like you say it could be lost. I don't think there's any way round it except at home. My own idea was that children are quite capable in English, and should be encouraged to speak Mirpuri, or Pothwari, at home, amongst themselves as well as their parents, you know, and that way they don't use it. Because they have already picked up English, so they don't need to improve English as much. They do need it academically, but at home, if they carried on.... That's why I encouraged my children not to speak English...*

What about schools? Could they do anything about Urdu?

*They could teach Urdu. If there was a large population of people from Kashmir in the school they could introduce Urdu as a second language. Because there is German and French but they hardly use German and French in their lifetime...I see no benefit from learning German, Spanish or French. That's what we were taught. That's what is taught in English schools. All the time.*

## Mosque information

### Father

Where did you learn to read the Qur'an?

*In a mosque (in Pakistan?) In Pakistan initially, I used to go the mosque and then over here in Church Walk mosque.*

How was it taught? What method was used?

*Basically what is being used now. Same sort of methods. Alphabet first. Then syllables together. Then words. That's it. That's how we were taught.*

*Yes, the same. It was worse. The imam now hasn't got 60, because it's three teachers e other nowadays. The imam stays in the mosque all the time and there's 2 or 3 others who come. One from...the other local...This imam, the three teachers, this has come about after a lot of discussion in the mosque with people like myself, you know, telling the imam, this is not on like, how can the imam teach 60-70 people in one go. Nobody is going to learn anything are they. So, as regards that I feel very strongly about that personally.*

Do you think the teachers who come, the teachers that you've got are capable?

*No. (Is it because of the language?) Yes, because of the language as well. Because most of the kids, they are very fluent in English and were born here and most of the kids speak English and some of them have difficulty understanding Mirpuri or Urdu. Even Urdu. Mainly Urdu they have difficulty understanding it. I mean if they don't understand it how are they going to learn? So what I have been suggesting is that the teachers can communicate well with kids and they get the message across. This is why we're falling behind.*

Were materials and books better now than when you were learning in the mosque?

*Now it's a lot easier but then we had a limited amount of books. We're talking about sheets of paper rather than books.*

Did you have those small books which are like primers where you go through a little book like that?

*Yeah, that's all we had. We didn't have much. El hamdu lillah now we have the computers and everything with a lot of information on.*

Do you read Qur'an now? How often? When and where?

*Yes, I do read. (How often?) In Ramadan I read it quite often, rest of time I don't read so much. (Would you do that at home or in the mosque?) Mostly at home.*

Do you read anything else in Arabic (eg. Durood Sharif, etc.)

*No. No, just the Qur'an. I read surah Yasin when I go to my father's grave.*

How much do you understand?

*Very little, maybe 5% or even less.*

Have you ever taught it?

*No. (Never taught it to your children?) I leave that to the mosque. Obviously if they were struggling a bit...I would give them help. If they were saying some of the syllables wrong, I'd put them the right way. I listen to what they have learnt in the mosque...if you can call that teaching...*

How important is it for your children to learn the Qur'an? (or was it?)

*I think it is very important as a muslim you need to learn the Qur'an. Personally, I feel very strongly about that.*

Is there anything you would like to change?

*The teachers need to teach the basic teachings of Islam. This is what we lack. (In English?) Bilingual. Urdu and Pothwari as well.*

If this meant they would spend less time learning how to read the Qur'an, would this matter?

*I have been saying that, for the past, since my father died, 10 years. I have been trying without any luck.*

Is English used in the mosque at all?

*I think one of the lads who is teaching he speaks English. The imam doesn't speak any English, might speak some broken English, might try and communicate in broken English, but it doesn't have the same effect, does it?*

What would have to happen for it to change?

*A lot. You tell me. (laughter)*

Who's got the power in the mosque? Who can make things change? That chap you were talking about?

*Yes. He's got the power. I mean...I don't think he's personally interested in that matter. I have mentioned it in front of him and I have mentioned it in front of other people as well that we're lacking and I think it's like knocking my head against a brick wall. I've given up on it now.*

Have you spoken with the imam?

*The imam is in favour of it. The others are in favour of it.*

What about parents? Would they support you?

*They would support me, but I know for a fact that if the system I was thinking about was introduced and it started showing results sooner than later then the parents would support me as well because they need to see some results. Positive results for parents. You know what I mean? If there are no results, I mean, parents contribute towards the mosque...the running of the mosque...I don't know...I don't think there is any extra income from outside the mosque...from the government or anything like that...if there is I don't know anything about it...it's run on voluntary contributions...*

How much do the classes cost? How much do parents pay a week?

*I think each kid pays about £1.50 per week. But I was saying to Mr Sandal who is the chairman, if the results started coming through the parents would be willing to pay about 4 or 5 pounds a week. If they could see improvement in their kids because no parent wants their kids to go astray from Islam. They are not in favour of that. But we know, as a community, like I myself, and the majority of parents, know that their kids are going astray. And that's one of the reasons why they are going astray because they are not communicating very well, they are not taught. Because I myself personally don't know even the basics of Islam – how can I teach that to my children? If I don't know it myself. And that's why I feel that strongly about it. Because I think there should be more emphasis on that instead, as you said, you know...I suggested that, you know, you can teach and recite the Qur'an two or three times a week, and the teachings of Islam, what Islam says, why are we fasting, why do we pray, what are the benefits of all these things? They don't know that. I don't know that. How can I tell my kids? The majority of the parents in my age group don't know that. So they can't communicate that to them. When in Pakistan, when the kids are in Kashmir or Pakistan, I mean you don't have to know really all parts of it because you pick it up from the people around you...But over here what you pick up are bad things...*

Do the children understand the sermon on Fridays?

*I don't think they do. They might be able to understand it, but not fully. The older people can understand it, but what's the point of ...*

It's in Urdu, isn't it?

*What's the point of trying, as they say, to teach old dogs new tricks? What's the point of teaching the old people? They know most of it. Why not have more emphasis on the children?*