

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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Abstract

This study is concerned with the description and discussion of liturgical literacy, in its Islamic form, in a UK Muslim community. Liturgical literacy is often marginalised, misunderstood and disparaged. The central thesis of this study seeks to demystify this literacy practice by subjecting it to a thick and detailed description, and, necessarily, includes an analysis of the multilingual and multiliterate nature of this community which is both complex and problematic. The data is explored to illustrate the complex role liturgical literacy plays within the community and elicits the tension that exists between liturgical literacy and other languages and literacies, and the intergenerational tension over pedagogy. This thesis presents liturgical literacy as an intense, vibrant and esteemed cultural practice, and seeks to lay to rest the pejorative notion that it is predominantly a matter of rote learning with little or no recourse to meaning.

Section I of this thesis consists of a definition of liturgical literacy and an exploration of its status and practice in different religious contexts. It also establishes the study of liturgical literacy within the tradition of literacy studies termed 'New Literacy Studies' and draws upon theoretical models from major works in this tradition. Thirdly, a description is given of the community in question followed by an explanation of the research methods employed. Section II uses data from interviews and observations to present the people involved: the children, their parents, their teachers and those who organise the teaching of liturgical literacy. Section III uses data from interviews, observations and historical documents to explore the institutions of liturgical literacy: the mosque, the home and, to a limited extent, the school. Section IV uses data from interviews to examine the languages of liturgical literacy and other languages within the community. Section V concludes with an analysis of the research findings and identifies key areas for more detailed investigation. It also includes tentative recommendations for mainstream education acknowledgement of liturgical literacy.

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Section I: The Study of Liturgical Literacy

1

Chapter 1: Introduction to liturgical literacy

1.1 Background to the Study

This study aims to explain the social and cultural processes which have given rise to what I shall call in the study 'liturgical literacy'. Wagner et al. (1986) use the term 'religious literacy' to describe having attended a Qur'anic school in urban or rural Morocco. Fishman (1989) uses 'religious classical' as a general category of language used for religious purposes only. I prefer 'liturgical' as it restricts the literacy involved to that used exclusively for ritual and devotional practices, and, in itself, is a word intimately linked with notions of words, texts and scripts.

The domain of liturgical literacy is wide and complex. It has a long and often controversial history. Its place in the twenty first century is also varied and contested. It has often had a bad press, particularly in its Islamic form, and held up in a bad light in comparison with other forms of literacy. MacDonald, for example, emphasises the 'rote' nature of the learning involved:

It trains the memory and the power of reasoning – always in formal methods – and then gives to neither any adequate material on which to work. The memory is burdened with verbatim knowledge of the Qur'an and some outlines of Theology and law, and the reason is exhausted in elaborate argumentations therefrom deduced. (MacDonald, 1916 pp 228-289)

Qur'anic school imposes on the child a purely mechanical, monotonous form of study in which nothing is likely to rouse his interest. (Zerdoumi, 1970, p 96)

And when an attack on such literacy is not intended, writers often reveal their subconscious distaste with value-laden words and expressions making invidious comparisons with Western learning, as in Bledsoe and Robey:

Arabic is traditionally studied from the Qur'an under a karamoko (Arabic teacher, Islamic scholar) who demands stringent discipline, laborious work, and long-term commitments from his students. (Bledsoe & Robey, 1993 p.116, my emphasis)

English (or any other non-liturgical literacy) is obviously taught and learnt effortlessly in an environment of perfect motivation needing only a short time for its mastery...

This point of view is, in many respects, an example of that dismissive or superior attitude to the East, and to Islam in particular, discussed by Said (1981), and although this study does not directly deal with Western attitudes to things oriental, it is relevant inasmuch as the marginalisation of literacies, which *is* one of the themes of this study, is a manifestation of a tendency in dominant cultures to emphasise, and thus exacerbate, cultural differences which, in turn, leads to an elected ignorance and deliberate sidelining of alternative cultural practices. A lack of detailed knowledge about other cultures, forgivable if confessed, but criminal if suppressed, inevitably leads to unfounded generalisations and platitudes which inform nobody. In the bigger picture which may involve communities, nations, or nation-blocs, this ignorance

leads to stand-off, distrust and suspicion, with all that these positions may entail. When discussing the Other in terms of literacy practices one is mindful of the responsibility to avoid short-cut assumptions and ascribing motives and to present as accurate and honest a description of the literacy practice as is possible whilst admitting any limitations on such a description as might arise.

Respect for the concrete detail of human experience, understanding that arises from viewing the Other compassionately, knowledge gained and diffused through moral and intellectual honesty: surely these are better, if not easier, goals at present than confrontation and reductive hostility. (Said, 1981, lxx)

However, it is not only Qur'anic liturgical literacy which is thus disparaged. Reder and Wikelund (1993) report that the Old Church Slavonic liturgy of the Russian Orthodox Church still present in Alaska is being slowly but surely replaced by the dominant English literacy introduced by Baptists.

The technology of the Baptists' literacy was English-based and used the Roman alphabet, whereas the Orthodox literacy used Cyrillic script in Slavonic and Alutiiq. Few if any Orthodox parishioners understood the Slavonic services they attended; participation was by rote, and comprehension of the oral languages was limited. (Reder and Wikelund, 1993, p. 184)

Note here the substitution of not only language but also script (there are no linguistic reasons why Alutiiq could not be maintained with a Slavonic script.) This colonizing aspect of the seemingly neutral technology of a script is expanded upon below (Chapter 5, *The Teachers*) where the script associated with a dominant language

comes to be used for other languages. One might argue that a single script, when dealing with several languages, would be economic and more practical, allowing for the transfer of skills learnt acquiring the script in one language to facilitate learning literacy in another. It is rare that such a decision, one that is likely to be made officially once official resources come into play, is made solely on linguistic grounds. Rather, the dominant script will be adopted by default for political reasons. Azerbaijan is currently experiencing its fourth major alphabet change in a century. Originally using an Arabic-Persian script reflecting its geographical position and political ties to the Ottoman Empire, the language briefly flirted with Roman script immediately following the Communist takeover, was obliged to conform with the rest of the Soviet Union and adopt a form of Cyrillic, and is now once again attempting to re-introduce a Roman script in the light of the break-up of the Soviet Union (Grimes, 1992). A script is rarely neutral. The use of other scripts is a vital issue for the community involved in this study (see Chapter 11, *Mirpuri-Punjabi*).

The ethnocentrism of the remarks made earlier is sometimes matched by the 'chronocentrism' of other writers describing literacy practices from the past. Graff (1979) argues that the claims for universal literacy in Sweden before the end of the eighteenth century are weakened when we bear in mind that the literacy in question was guided by religious considerations.

...good reading ability did not relate strongly to the ability to understand. Popular skills tested well in assessments of oral reading and in memorisation. They were, however, much less useful when it came to comprehension... (Graff, 1979, p.310)

With religion becoming less and less of an influence on the lives of many people living in the world today, particularly the Western world, it may seem bizarre to focus upon a literacy practice which, to some minds, appears irrelevant, outmoded and clearly unsatisfactory. As Frank Smith reminds us, exclusive attention to the phonic dimension of the reading act leads to what he terms ‘barking at print’.

Reading without meaning? Where is the point in that? (Smith, 1994, p.7)

But millions of people worldwide participate in this literacy practice, many on a daily basis, and do not, in the slightest, perceive their practice to be meaningless, but are obviously satisfied with it.

1.2 Liturgical Literacy: defining remarks

Liturgical literacy is understood as that use of reading, more rarely writing, which is essential to ritual and other devotional practices connected with an established religion, usually a ‘religion of the book’, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The language of the liturgy is often different to that spoken by the congregation, such as Arabic in non-Arab countries, Old Church Slavonic in the Russian Orthodox Church, or the retention of Latin in some aspects of Roman Catholicism¹. Even when the language of the liturgy is considered the same as the spoken tongue of the congregation, there is often a difference in register, style and vocabulary which can problematise meaning. This is the case in the Arabic speaking world where the Arabic of the Qur’an is not the same as the spoken Arabic of the congregation. That

¹ Of interest is the support the present Pope, John Paul II, is giving to the revival of Latin in many aspects of the Roman Catholic Church (*Catholic World News*, 13th May 2003)

there is a difference is due to the considerable passage of time that has elapsed from the period of the first scripted Qur'an (650 AD) to the present moment and to the extensive geographical spread of the Arabic language. Although the written form of the Qur'an crystallises a moment in the history of Arabic, and indeed has acted as a conservative force on the Arabic language throughout its history, the spoken language moves inexorably on through time and place. An English reader with little appreciation of the diglossic situation which exists with many languages in the world would do well to think of the differences between the language of Shakespeare, a version of English crystallised at a particular moment in history, and the spoken language of today four hundred years later. For a large part of the population, very little of what Shakespeare has written is comprehensible on first hearing without the aid of the text.

1.3 Islamic Liturgical Literacy

The liturgy often is derived from the central scripture of the religion involved. In the liturgical literacy in this study the liturgy is derived from the Qur'an. The Qur'an, according to Muslim belief, was a book revealed to the Arabian Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century AD. It was revealed in Arabic and committed to memory by the early followers of Islam, many of whom had memorised the entire book. Soon after the death of Muhammad, when many of the memorizers of the Qur'an had died and there was a fear that the Qur'an might be lost, the Prophet's inheritor, Abu Bakr, ordered the Qur'an to be written down. The first written version of the Qur'an is almost identical to any copy of the book found in any mosque today.

Islam is, *par excellence*, a religion centred on literacy. The first word revealed was the imperative ‘iqra’ (Read!)². This was, in Islamic tradition, a miraculous event in many ways. The Prophet Muhammad was unable to read having never been taught. Despite the primacy of the overwhelmingly oral culture of seventh century Arabia and the Prophet’s own lack of literacy, reading from very first days of Islam was always of the utmost importance and was considered a pathway to virtue. An early instruction of the Prophet was to free prisoners-of-war who were able to teach someone to read. Alongside memorisation of the Qur’an, a common practice was to memorise sayings of the Prophet. These too were eventually written down after the compilers of collections of these sayings³ devoted their lives to authenticating them and arranging them. In the Islamic religion, therefore, there are two scriptural sources. However, it is the Qur’an which is used most extensively in the liturgy in the mosques and in private devotions. Chapters and verses of the book are used regularly in congregational and individual prayers. Indeed, it is impossible for a Muslim to pray without reading the first chapter of the Qur’an, the Opening⁴, which is always followed by other verses.

The Opening

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate

Praise be to God, Lord of all worlds,

The Merciful, the Compassionate,

The King of the Day of Judgement.

² The verses traditionally understood to be the first of the Islamic revelation came to Muhammad whilst he was meditating in seclusion. The account relates how the Angel Gabriel appeared with a sheet in his hand and asked Muhammad to read. He answered, ‘What shall I read?’ and the command was repeated. This happened three times after which the first verse was revealed, ‘Read in the name of your Lord, the Creator, Who created man from a clot of blood. Read, for your Lord is Gracious. It is He who taught man by the pen that which he does not know.’ (Chapter 96 verses 1-5) (Haykal, 1976)

³ These are known as collections of ‘Hadith’ or sayings.

⁴ Known by Muslims as the ‘Fatihah’.

It is You we worship and it is from You we seek help.

Show us the straight path,

The path of those you have favoured

Not the path of those with whom you are angry, or of those who are astray

Amen (my translation)

The Qur'an is read individually as part of one's individual devotions. It can also be read in a group as part of group devotions. It is often read aloud for people to listen to. It is often read in its entirety during the month of Ramadan, either individually or by the congregation as a whole during the nightly extra prayers of tarawih⁵. It is read aloud to accompany birth and to accompany death. It is read in times of distress and in times of joy. It is referred to in nearly every sermon and religious talk with verses quoted and explained. In the Arabic-speaking world, its language has entered common parlance. As the human form is not generally depicted in art form, the words of the Qur'an have become of great significance in the Islamic art form of calligraphy. Most mosques will have decorations featuring Qur'anic verses and words. Copies of the Qur'an will also be very much in evidence on window shelves or in bookcases. The Qur'an will also feature in the home with decorative calligraphy on walls and copies of the Qur'an on shelves often decorated. The car will also usually contain a Qur'an. Wallets may have small credit-card size verses. Jewellery will often feature verses, in particular the 'Throne' verse for protection⁶ (see *Chapter 9, Homes*).

⁵ Extra prayers said in congregation in the mosque through the month of Ramadan.

⁶ Verse 255 of chapter 2 of the Qur'an.

The community who are the subject of this study do not speak or understand Arabic, the language of the Qur'an. For them, the language of the Qur'an has a sound they can replicate, a form they can recognise, but a meaning which eludes them. For an understanding of their religion, they have to be taught in their mother tongue by, in theory, someone with access to the meaning, or they have to read in a language they understand. When they pray, they use their liturgical language which is Arabic. They will also be able, at varying stages of proficiency, to read the Qur'an. This will be decoding and may be aloud or silent. They will probably also know a few common interjections and sayings in Arabic which they will use regularly in conversation such as '*al hamdu lillah*' (thanks be to God), '*subhan Allah*' (glory to God) and '*astaghfirullah*' (May God forgive us).

In order to be able to participate in this liturgical language considerable investment in terms of time and money has to be expended. Instruction is begun on a part time basis at the age of six and continues until a reasonable level of proficiency in decoding is achieved. At the end of this period a young person is left able to read the Qur'an and able to conduct his or her prayers correctly.

The meaning of the words which are read or recited in the prayer are usually not known apart from a general sense of 'these words are good and are directed to God'. In theory, the imam of the mosque, who is often the Qur'anic instructor as well, has a good enough command of Arabic to understand what he reads. In practice, this is not necessarily so. Many imams, though studying for many years a range of Islamic sciences, end up with an imprecise knowledge of Arabic that renders their interpretations insecure, were they to attempt them. Thankfully, it may be argued,

this they do not generally do. There is a lengthy and respectable tradition of commentaries in Urdu, their preferred literary language, which provides them with all the interpretations and explanations they will ever need. Sadly, for many of the members of the community involved, particularly the young, these Urdu commentaries and explanations are, too, beyond their understanding, as literacy in the mother tongue is often lacking. Such members of the congregation find themselves marginalized in their communities though without ever fully realising so.

This particular form of liturgical literacy, where the language of the literacy is removed both geographically and temporally from the language of the participants, is not that uncommon, and can be found in many other examples from around the world. For example, the Jewish community in the United Kingdom, although not native speakers of Hebrew, learn to read and recite Biblical Hebrew in order to allow them to fulfil their religious responsibilities. Until recently, Latin was an integral part of the liturgy in both the English and French Catholic Churches. The Coptic Church in Egypt has a liturgy in Copt, a language not spoken for over 1500 years.

However, the liturgical literacy does not exist in a vacuum, there to be learnt and used regardless of the social context in which it finds itself. In this community, alongside the role of the liturgical literacy, there are other languages and literacies, each with its varying social role and function. The fate of the liturgical literacy is intimately linked with the fates of those other literacies, and the interplay among them is crucial in any understanding of the literacy practices of this community. Thus it is important to note the respective importance given to liturgical literacy in regard to literacy in English or literacy in Urdu, or knowledge of poetry in Punjabi. Gregory

and Williams (2000) have used a model of *contrasting* literacies in order to illustrate this interplay and have suggested that teachers in mainstream schools who ignore community-based literacy practices deprive themselves of important knowledge about the children they teach:

It is a model based on the belief that contrasting rather than similar home and school strategies and practices provide a child with a larger treasure trove from which to draw for school learning. The key task for teachers is to tap into this knowledge and to teach children to become conscious of existing knowledge and skills, to enable children to compare and contrast different languages and literacy practices. It is a model that is particularly relevant for children whose families do not share the literacy practices of the teachers and the school and whose reading skills, therefore, risk remaining invisible. (Gregory and Williams, 2000, pp 10-11)

A substantial part of this study is devoted to the ‘invisible’ reading skills mentioned above.

The amount of time and effort devoted by this community to liturgical literacy suggests that it has a very high priority. This is not to say that the community does not value other literacies. In fact, it is fundamentally unfair to claim that this community, or any other similar community, can make a genuine choice regarding preferred cultural and social practices when its marginalized position militates against realistic choices. Would not every community, given the appropriate amount of resources and support, wish to maintain and nourish its cultural heritage, as well as confidently adapting to new situations, preserving literacies as well as developing new ones? However, Fishman (1989), reminds us that, universally, the status of liturgical literacy, which he categorises linguistically as a *religious classical*, once in

competition with other languages (vernaculars) and literacies for community support, is privileged:

Ethnocultural minorities with religious classical are engaged in a two-front struggle. Not only must they seek to maintain control of their intergroup and intragroup boundaries insofar as their vernaculars are concerned...but they must also seek to do the same insofar as their religious classical are concerned...[W]hen differentials develop, it is recurringly the religious classical that is retained longer than the vernacular. The religious domain has more authoritative (and, therefore, more resistant) boundaries than does the minority ethnocultural system as a whole, it is less exposed to majority society, its language use is more ritualised and more sanctified, and its whole tradition is more tradition-and-stability oriented. (Fishman, 1989, p.229, my emphasis)

In *Chapters 10 and 11, Urdu and Mirpuri-Punjabi*, I will show that the ‘two-front’ (or ‘three-front’) struggle taking place at present within the community of this study is being clearly won by the religious classical to the detriment of the vernacular languages.

1.4 Scope of this study

This study will begin by situating itself within a tradition of literacy studies that understands literacy to be, above all, a social practice (Street, 1984, Gee, 1990, Lankshear, 1997, Lankshear and MacLaren, 1993, Barton, 1994). It will explore the nature of literacy practices as social acts and attempt to locate the practice of liturgical literacy within the broader definition of multiple literacies (Street, 1999a, Gregory and Williams, 2000). However, the complex nature of liturgical literacy will also require an acknowledgement of the complementary fields of, firstly, literacy as a cognitive skill and, secondly, literacy in its pedagogical guise, both of which have important things to say about liturgical literacy as it exists today. For example, the grasp of the alphabetic principle, which Liberman and Liberman (1992) declare a necessary cognitive precondition for learning a script, finds significant support in the age-old pedagogical principles employed in the institutions responsible for teaching liturgical literacy whilst the ‘look-and-say’ method of teaching reading is rarely found (see *Chapter 5, The Teachers*).

The context for the present study (an urbanised, ethnic minority in economic deprivation) also brings into focus the marginalized nature of many groups living in western countries that have a strongly developed liturgical literacy. Many, if not most, of the literacy studies which emphasise the social nature of literacy practices have chosen to explore the literacies of the marginalized, those whose literacies are not recognised in dominant discourses. For example, Barton and Hamilton conducted their research within a working-class inner city community in the north of England among people whose literacy practices were traditionally less visible:

[W] e are trying to reveal and question the traditional assumptions which frame literacy, to expose the ways in which it is ideologically constructed and embedded in power relationships[.] (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, p.4)

Nothing is straightforward. In its wider social context, the liturgical literacy in this study is positioned marginally in respect to the prevailing dominant literacy.

However, in a narrower social context, that of the mosque (the institution) and the imam (privileged elite), the congregation is often disempowered through lack of access to the meaning of the texts in use, and, obliged to yield to the authority of their imam, who may, or may not, or may claim to, have the knowledge necessary to mediate the text (see *Chapter 5, The Teachers*). This is, of course, not unique to Islamic liturgical literacy and there are ample examples in Christendom of similar situations. The Reformation was shaped by the pressure to render the Holy Writ more accessible and, therefore, not mediated by a powerful elite. Yet at the same time it was important that Protestant authorities maintained a close control over the 'correct' interpretation of scripture lest their congregations had ideas of their own. Gee (1990), discussing scriptures now translated, as a result of the Reformation, into vernacular languages reminds us that this *per se* does not lead to informed and individual reflection and interpretation:

The people are given the text for themselves, but then something must ensure they see it 'right' (not in reality through their own eyes, but rather from the perspective of an authoritative institution that delimits correct interpretations). In this case, the individual reader does not need any very deep comprehension skills, and surely doesn't need to write. (Gee, p.37, 1990)

The Alaskan study mentioned above (Reder and Wikelund, 1993) describes the disappearance of the need for literacy specialists because of the shift from Old Church Slavonic to English. That it is possible for a literacy to be both dominant and **dominated** at one and the same time, and in the same context, is a topic to which we shall return later in this study.

1.5 Community Literacy and its Study

As in Barton and Hamilton's work amongst the working class communities of Lancaster (1998), this study will include a very necessary historical account of the community involved and this, in its turn, will involve us in struggling to define the true nature of community. This particular community, and perhaps all communities, do not present us with a neatly rounded entity, situated as it is at a particular geographical and chronological juncture which faces both backwards and forwards in time as well as sideways across borders and national frontiers. When describing the use of literacy in such a community, we need to keep one eye on the community's links to its point of origin and the use of literacy there – both in the past and in the present –and another eye on the use of literacy in similar communities matched for beliefs, culture and language.

There are few studies directly concerned with liturgical literacy in the sense outlined above. Studies which have focused on religion and literacy have tended to concentrate on monolingual settings (Kapitzke, 1995, Zinsser, 1986, Johansson, 1977, Fishman, 1988), whilst others have had wider, or sometimes more limited,

aims. For example, Wagner (1993), although focusing in a significant way on the liturgical literacy provided by the Moroccan *kutaab*⁷, sought also to elucidate the wider literacy practices, both religious and secular, of modern Morocco. More finely focused, Bledsoe and Robey (1993) explored the potential for secrecy among the Mende created by the use of Arabic liturgical literacy among non-Arabic speaking people. Baker (1993) wanted to focus on the significance of proper nouns in the practice of Arabic liturgical literacy, hypothesising that this grammatical category served an important function in the apprehension of meaning for those not understanding Arabic.

The multidisciplinary nature of examining literacy as a social practice makes for a very complex and, at times, confusing field of study. The challenge is to come at one's chosen topic in such a way that always allows for new and different perspectives to be formed. The methodology selected needs to be as transparent as possible in order to allow for specialists in many areas to interpret the data presented within their own particular frameworks.

This study uses, in the main, ethnographic techniques (see *Chapter 2*), and has adopted for its guiding theoretical orientation the six propositions outlined in Barton and Hamilton's *Local Literacies* (1998).

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.

⁷ The *kutaab*, in Arabic-speaking countries, is an elementary school, usually rurally located, for the teaching and learning of the Qur'an.

- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
 - Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others.
 - Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
 - Literacy is historically situated.
 - Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.
- (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p.7)

This is, of course, an overwhelmingly qualitative research paradigm, for we are interested in what occurs in real social settings in real time. Decontextualised tests and experiments should play little part in such a description. However, there are certain data revealed by quantitative methods which do provide relevant insights. For example, tests of reading which account for reading accuracy as well as reading comprehension will show that young children who have experienced Qur'anic literacy on a regular basis also develop into very competent decoders of other scripts, including English. It has been shown that there is significant reading behaviour transfer between mosque school and mainstream school, and that a significant problem faced by these young learners is the gap between reading accuracy and reading comprehension (Rosowsky, 2001).

It is also important that the study is not merely an observer's description of a literacy practice with little or no acknowledgement of the real lives, beliefs, feelings, thoughts and opinions of those involved. Wagner (1993) warns us that we must allow for understandings of literacy practices which may differ from those presupposed by the researcher, and that these must be given voice. The study allows for what Wagner terms emic and etic interpretations of the literacy described. Emic interpretations are those which make sense to those who participate in the literacy practices without any recourse to more general and universal meanings. Etic concepts are those that can be generalised from literacy practices in different societies and communities:

An etic perspective on literacy assumes that such skills as decoding, picture matching, and reading instructions on a medicine bottle have substantially the same meaning and cultural functions for all individuals and cultural groups. An emic perspective on literacy assumes that different types of meanings, social functions, and skills are associated with literacy in different societies. (Wagner, 1993, p. 3)

In his research, Wagner ensures that the meanings and interpretations of liturgical literacy held by its participants are presented alongside any general observations regarding liturgical literacy in other settings and contexts.

Although recognising the strengths of qualitative methods, and the power they have in specific situations and contexts, Wagner points out that they do not often permit a more global analysis across contexts, domains and levels in a complex society. He uses a three-part framework for his Moroccan study. He calls these 'Users and Mediators of Literacy' where he examines societal structures and individual

circumstances shaping and informing literacy practices (cf. *Section II* in this study). 'Institutions of transmission' allow for the examination of the home, the school and the mosque (cf. *Section III* in this study). His final heading is the 'Material Culture of Literacy' which includes a historical inventory of instruments and artefacts of literate activity in any given society.

To study literacy in Morocco is to discover that the concept of literacy itself may be defined by knowledge and belief as well as the presence or absence of particular skills. (p.259)

Literacy may be mandated by government authorities, but its acquisition and maintenance are surely dependent on the cultural beliefs, practices and history within which it resides. (ibid)

Luke (1996) draws on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of a cultural capital conceptual framework within which we may examine literacy practices where cultural capital takes on three forms: embodied, objectified and institutional (Luke, 1996).

Embodied cultural capital is the sum total of active and tacit knowledges, skills, and dispositions, internalised by the bodily habitus in the processes of socialisation and education... (Luke, 1996, p 328)

In this study I show how the acquisition of liturgical literacy is not only the process of developing a discrete linguistic skill based on the accurate decoding and reciting of an alien script and language, but also constitutes an

essential part in the formation of identity for those concerned. As Falk (2001) reminds us, literacy learning is bound up intimately with identity:

[S]haping old identities and developing new identities, as well as skills and knowledge, is part of the process of learning literacy (Falk, 2001, p 314)

The young Muslim, in his or her, daily attendance at the mosque internalises a mode of being and acting. The 'capital' value of this experience rises and falls dependent on the institutional context within which it is located. I will show that its value outside of the community and its institutions is considered low (see *Chapter 9, The School*) whereas within them its 'capital' is transferable but only within a very narrow set of parameters (see *Chapter 5, The Teachers*).

Cultural capital is also 'objectified' in cultural goods, specific 'material objects and media' (e.g., writings, paintings, monuments, instruments) that are physically transmissible to others. (Luke, 1996, p 328)

I will show in *Section III* how the text of the Qur'an, and other texts, is employed in many ways in the mosque and in the home as backdrop and decoration.

Finally, cultural capital can take the form of 'institutionalised capital', for example, in the form of academic qualifications, professional certification, and other credentials. (Luke, 1996 p. 328).

In *Chapter 5, The Teachers* and *Chapter 6, The Organisers*, I explore how the cultural capital of liturgical literacy is valued in the institutional context of the mosque and the role it plays in the assigning of authority and status.

There is, thankfully, considerable overlap in the three theoretical frameworks outlined above (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, Wagner, 1993, and Luke, 1996), but this study will, at times, employ all elements of these frameworks in order to bring order to the data collected.

1.6 Liturgical Literacy as a social practice

This study positions itself squarely within that branch of literacy studies which foregrounds the social and cultural context in which a literacy is practised. This is distinct from those branches of literacy studies which isolate literacy as a skill either to be analysed in term of pedagogy (Adams, 1990) or examined for its place within cognitive development (Gough, 1992).

Good literacy study is multidisciplinary and those studies which treat literacy within its social context, sometimes called the 'new literacy studies' (Gee, 1990; Street, 1993; New London Group, 1996), all draw upon a range of research disciplines in order to broaden our understanding of literacy as a social phenomenon.

Anthropology (Street, 1984, 1993; Boyarin 1993), psychology (Scribner and Cole, 1981), sociology (Heath, 1993) and linguistics (Gee, 1990) all have made major contributions to this field.

The two distinct ways of viewing literacy are reflected in a number of different ways, within the separate disciplines as well as between them. Thus those who view literacy as simply a skill are often very pre-eminent in the field of education where debate has persisted for a long time over the best way of teaching initial reading. The skill/social act division here manifests itself as the phonics/real books debate where much ink has been expended on the advantages of teaching reading as a set of sub-skills (Adams, 1990) versus an approach which favours promoting the notion of real stories and real books (Smith, 1994, Meek, 1982).

In anthropology, what may be termed a loftier version of this debate concerns the autonomous and ideological models of literacy. An earlier generation of anthropologists saw literacy as a cultural package which once introduced and developed in a culture will *ipso facto* lead to a host of intellectual, cognitive and social consequences. This is the autonomous model (Street, 1984) that conceives of literacy outside any cultural or social context. This model is a result of the creation of another great divide - that of orality and literacy which certain writers see as a major determining factor between cultures (Goody, 1977; Ong, 1982). Street (1984) argues that a more convincing description of literacy is provided by an 'ideological' perspective which allows for the significance of the social and cultural context to be considered. Occasionally, there is a cross over into another discipline. Street and MacCabe (1999) conducted a debate on the autonomous/ideological distinction on the pages of the UK English teachers' journal *English in Education*. In an impassioned plea for literacy to be researched, understood and taught as 'literacy practices' rather than the 'common sense' notion of an autonomous and context-free

literacy, Street (1998a) argues that the media fuelled debate taking place at the time within both political and academic circles regarding code-emphasis and meaning-emphasis approaches to the acquisition of literacy needs moving on to a consideration of what literacy is and how it is embodied in society in all its contexts and not just in schooled literacy practice.

If literacy is a social practice, then it varies with social context and is not the same, uniform thing in each case...I have described this latter view as an 'autonomous' model of literacy: the view that literacy in itself has consequences irrespective of, or autonomous, of context. In contrast with this view, I have posed an 'ideological' model of literacy, which argues that literacy not only varies with social context and with cultural norms and discourses regarding, for instance, identity, gender and belief, but that its uses and meanings are always embedded in relations of power. (Street, 1999a, p.48).

MacCabe ripostes by accusing Street of relativism by his suggesting that all literacy practices are worthy of research, and thus, the value of schooled literacy is questionable.

Street's answer effectively suggests that any use of reading and writing is as good as any other. The adjective that he constantly uses to describe literacy practice is 'rich' and it would be interesting to discover, given the range of examples he alludes to, what would qualify as 'poor'. If every literacy practice is as rich as every other then why should we bother to teach at all? (McCabe, 1998, p.26-27)

Finally, Street has the last word in this particular debate by affirming the importance of teacher knowledge of home literacy practices without which the

teacher is often ill-equipped to ease children's transition into schooled literacy practices.

One consequence of adopting MacCabe's position would be, perhaps unintentionally, to alienate pupils still further from engaging in schooled literacy practices. For if the home literacy practices, with which they have been brought up for the first four or five years of their lives, are simply rejected by the teacher in favour of 'schooled' literacy, then not only are home and school unnecessarily divided, but educationally the teacher is failing to use the learning base with which his (sic) pupils arrive. (Street, 1998b)

Suffice it to say the current governmental emphases in the UK upon literacy are very much a response fuelled by the autonomous perspective.

Five significant studies in the tradition that Street names the *New Literacy Studies* (1998a) are Street's own *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984), Wagner's *Literacy, Culture and Development* (1993), Heath's *Ways With Words* (1993), Barton and Hamilton's *Local Literacies* (1998) and Gregory and Williams' *City Literacies* (2000). What these studies have in common is a view of literacy which insists that literacy cannot be understood without close consideration of the lives, beliefs, values and customs of those whose literacy practice is being described.

Street (1984, 1993) stresses the link between literacy and authority and explains that literacy never exists as a neutrally available skill for all those who desire it:

It is not sufficient, however, to extol simply the richness and variety of literacy practices made accessible through such ethnographic detail: we also need bold theoretical models that recognise the central role of power relations in literacy practices...[T]he ideological model of literacy...enables us to focus on the ways in which the apparent neutrality of literacy practices disguises their significance for the distribution of power in society and for authority relations: the acquisition, use and meanings of different literacies have an ideological character that has not been sufficiently recognised until recently. (Street, 1993, p. 2)

In this study, the ideological character of liturgical literacy is revealed in two ways. Firstly, it is obvious that liturgical literacy as described here is a marginalised and invisible literacy practice when set against mainstream schooling and schooled literacy. Secondly, within the community itself the authority commanded by those who are employed to teach, and by those who employ those who teach, plays a not insignificant role in the potential for change within those institutions charged with transmitting liturgical literacy to future generations. (see *Chapters 5 and 6*)

Wagner (1993), whilst not totally at ease with literacy as social practice *per se*, still concedes the necessity to incorporate into any description of literacy practices social and cultural background. His work is characterised by a series of *vignettes* depicting everyday literacy practices in Morocco:

Because literacy is a cultural phenomenon, adequately defined and understood only within each culture, it is not surprising that definitions of literacy may never be permanently fixed. Whether literacy is thought of as including computer skills, mental arithmetic, or civic responsibility, for example, will vary across countries, depending on how leaders of each society define this most basic of skills. Researchers can help in this effort by trying to be clear about which definitions they choose to employ in their work. [O]ur work considers literacy to be both a social and an

individual phenomenon: social in that social practices are shared among members of a given culture, and individual in terms of the specific set of attitudes and learned behaviours and skills involved in encoding, decoding, and comprehending written language. (Wagner, 1993, p. 11)

I have chosen to follow Wagner's example and included *vignettes* at the beginning of selected chapters (see *Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7*).

Heath (1993) describes the particular literacy practices of different communities and shows how literacy is very much a matter of acculturation and not merely a matter of formal instruction. Indeed, the formal instruction element to literacy practices fails or succeeds on its awareness of these acculturation processes:

Both Trackton and Roadville are literate communities and each has its own traditions for structuring, using, and assessing reading and writing. The residents of each community are able to read printed and written materials in their daily lives and, on occasion, they produce written messages as part of the total pattern of communication in the community. (Heath, 1983, p. 230)

The young Muslims described in *Chapter 3* going to the mosque on a daily basis are very much involved in the process of acculturation and the formation of their own identities.

Barton and Hamilton (1998), through a 'thick' (Geertz, 1973) description of literacy practices in Lancashire, show us that literacy practices exist through people, with these literacy practices shaping lives and in turn the literacy practices being shaped by the people engaged in them:

Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analysed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, p. 3)

In *Chapter 5, The Teachers*, and *Chapter 10, Mirpuri-Punjabi*, I share two significant examples of literacy practices responding to changing social and linguistic conditions: the use of Roman script in the teaching of liturgical literacy and the need of young people to transcribe religious songs and poetry.

Finally, Gregory and Williams (2000) incorporate the anthropological perspective of syncretism into their model for studying literacies. In multilingual communities which have a number of literacy and language practices, it is not uncommon for learners to draw on their knowledge and experience in one language and literacy context when learning in another:

This view states that young learners are not entrapped within any single early childhood literacy practice. The families in the study certainly reveal a complex heterogeneity of traditions, whereby reading practices from different domains are blended resulting in a form of reinterpretation which is both new and dynamic. (Gregory and Williams, 2000, p 13)

Section II presents a number of examples of how learners draw on their knowledge of schooled practice to inform their learning in the mosque and at home (see *Chapters 3*, p 91 and pp 110-113). There is also discussion of how learned practice in the mosque influences literacy learning in the school (*Chapter 3*, p 97).

Integral to the present study is the importance of literacy practice and cultural identity. Ferdman and Weber (1994) in their study of US literacy policy highlight how literacy in discussion and in government and educational policy often means literacy in *English* only. As a result, those cultures and literacies which are non-dominant tend towards marginalisation. Later (see *Chapter 5, The Teachers*) we will see how the dominance of a particular script can lead to the marginalisation of all other scripts. Moreover, through examination of the literacies of other cultures we broaden our knowledge of what it is to be literate in different contexts of time and space. We should never use English literacy and our varying definitions of it as a yardstick by which to measure the literacy of the Other.

By seeing becoming literate and being literate as processes that are very much culturally framed, we can begin to consider their transactional and fluid nature.
(Ferdman and Weber, 1994, p.8)

Linked to both the notion of literacy and cultural identity and the notion of marginalisation is the area of literacy studies known as critical literacy, itself a sub-branch of critical pedagogy and critical educational theory. Essentially a narrative of liberation, critical literacy takes as its subject the marginalisation of the literacies of the Other. It takes for given that literacies are social constructs and that dominant literacies often disguise their privileged position. Critical literacy (Lankshear and MacLaren, 1993) operates at the nexus of important human experiences such as history, power relations, language and culture. It is at this point that identity (or subjectivity) is forged through constantly shifting processes of incorporation, accommodation and contestation (Lankshear and MacLaren, 1993, p.300). The roles

of the adults and children participating in liturgical literacy are determined by historical, cultural, linguistic, power and economic influences. For example, a Pakistani child in a northern UK city who is learning the Arabic script of the Qur'an is also, at the same time, acquiring a crucial element in her sense of identity, a 'this is what we do' sense of place and role. She is also becoming, linguistically and cognitively, differently literate⁸ to many of her monolingual non-Muslim peers. She is learning a script which places extra demands on the child's cognitive ability (Wagner, 1993, p.229) and increasing in awareness of languages beyond that of the home and the school. In the institution where she learns, the mosque, there are models of power and privilege which she has to recognise. The teacher will instruct in a manner noticeably different in style and content to that of her teacher in school:

There is an immediate contrast between Maruf's community classes and home reading sessions, and his English school. Unlike Maruf's Qur'anic, Bengali and home reading sessions, there is no common pattern or ritual of repeating words correctly after the 'teacher'... [W]e begin to see that Maruf will need to learn a whole variety of new strategies if he is to learn what counts as reading in his English class. (Rashid and Gregory, 1997, p.114).

She will also be aware that the teacher may also have a privileged role in the hierarchy of the mosque. Her own position in the mosque will also need to be learned. In most Pakistani-administered mosques women have little or no role in the day-to-day running of affairs (Anwar, 1985). She will almost certainly spend more time in the mosque as a child than she will as an adult. The written language most closely akin to her spoken language will, if there is no tradition of Urdu literacy in

⁸ With thanks to Dr Elaine Millard as the coiner of this term originally used to identify the differences in boys' and girls' acquisition of literacy (1997).

the home, perhaps be encountered for the first time in the mosque. In the case of Urdu, this will be another learning task, for the linguistic and stylistic differences are such as to present significant comprehension difficulties (Linguistic Minorities Project, 1983). As most of the children and adults attending the mosque either for instructions or for devotions are from the same community many aspects of their acquired identity are confirmed here.

At the same time a child is acquiring this identity through active learning and imitation, his identity is shaped, equally importantly, by what he is not, a 'this is what we are not' sense of place and role. The dominant literacy and culture of the school is contrasted with those of the home and the mosque. Physical manifestations of the dominant literacy, such as script, are all pervasive and, as we will show later (*Chapter 12, English*), encroach, colonise and even replace the less privileged. The child, and its parents, is aware of the power relations between the school, the home and the mosque. The school has a legal weight denied the mosque. The high stakes qualifications which allow admittance into economically and socially privileged career paths are won here. It could be argued that there are equally high stakes being presented as rewards in the mosque albeit these are other-worldly ones.

The language of school and the language of the mosque contrast in a number of ways. The language of instruction in both cases can be alien, acting as a barrier to full admittance until it is learnt. As touched on earlier, there are four languages, at least, in the Pakistani mosque. There is the formal Arabic of the Qur'an which dominates nearly all instruction and devotion. The Urdu of the imam may be evident in his Friday sermon or on the occasional wall poster. When not learning or listening,

the congregation may speak in Punjabi. The younger members may be conversing in English. In the English school, standard English is the language of instruction and colloquial English is spoken elsewhere among pupils and staff. Pakistani pupils may converse with one another in Mirpuri-Punjabi, English or a mixture of the two (Baynham, 1993). However, there is no place for the privileged languages of the mosque (Arabic and Urdu) in the school. The fact that often only Pakistani children study Urdu in secondary schools⁹ sends a clear and uncompromising message to the rest of the school about its linguistic and cultural merit (see *Section IV*).

The literacy practices so far described can be considered signifying practices (Lankshear and MacLaren, 1993) which determine what and who are privileged in society. An important aspect of critical literacy lies in its attention to the link between knowledge and power and to identifying where power is located. Through these practices it might be argued, and it is, that marginalized groups are actively silenced through the nature of their restricted literacy practices. The various subjectivities engendered by these complex interactions between people, literacies and institutions prevent us from ever claiming an autonomous perspective for literacy. The multi-literacies which exist mainly in our urban centres are always competing or, at least, contrasting (Gregory and Williams, 2000). The all-pervasive weight of the dominant literacy is always making inroads into the complex and variegated picture of 'multiliteracy'. As mentioned above, any community would wish to preserve and maintain its literacy heritage as well as develop a new one. This

⁹ There are some secondary schools in the UK which offer Urdu to all pupils. These more enlightened establishments are unfortunately in the minority.

cannot be achieved without a full awareness of the power relations involved in maintaining, preserving and marginalizing literacies.

The principal institution from which the Muslim community in this study derives its liturgical literacy is the mosque. Most of the Muslim children in the communities researched will attend the mosque on a regular basis and become proficient, to a lesser or greater degree, at reading the holy text of the Qur'an. To understand what role this institution plays in the life of the community it is necessary to look at the structure and history of the mosque both as a building and as an institution. The personnel, the finance, the administration, the physical structure and arrangement of the mosque are examined in order to show how the community interacts with it, shapes it and is, in turn, shaped by it. Only then is it appropriate to ask questions about the literacy practices that take place in the mosque (see *Chapter 7, The Mosques*).

The above description of the mosque as an institution necessarily involves discussions about power relations and cultural identities. The interface between the literacies practised in the mosque and the literacies encountered in the wider dominant community will be examined in the home, the school and in the world of work. Here, the issue of power relations turns not only on dominant and dominated literacies, but also on communities, institutions and stakeholders. It also demonstrates that the apparent neutral technology of a particular script plays its part in the complex picture created by different literacies.

1.7 Five Studies in Liturgical Literacy

There is a small number of significant short studies which treat, to a lesser or greater degree, the issue of liturgical literacy. Most of these come from the anthropological tradition sharing the ideological model of literacy (Street, 1993). All acknowledge the intimate link between literacies and power and address the issues thrown up by this relationship.

1.7(i) Bledsoe and Robey and the Mende (1993)

The Mende of Sierra Leone (Bledsoe and Robey, 1993) are a Muslim people and, as such, use Arabic as a liturgical language. Overshadowing this study is the longstanding debate regarding literacy and orality, or what has come to be known as 'the Great Divide'. Those (Goody and Watt, 1963, Goody, 1968, 1977, Ong, 1982, Olson et al., 1985) who have advocated a fundamental sea change in societies which become literate consider literacy itself to be an autonomous cultural development which has important social, economic and political implications for the society in which it happens. Literacy in this sense is neutral and technical: a discrete set of skills to be mastered through schooling and is uni-dimensional, *literacy*. Street (1984) opposes this with his ideological model, suggesting that literacy is always context bound, value laden, culturally influenced and is multi-dimensional, *literacies*. Moreover, in the autonomous model, literacy brings with it cognitive consequences, so that abstract thought is more readily communicated, clarity is more attainable in writing which is free from context and that logic and thought itself become more transparent and, therefore, more 'democratic'. An interesting aside to this debate is

that one of the more vociferous supporters of the autonomous model claimed all these benefits for Western Greek-based literacy only (Havelock, 1974); semitic literacy, as exemplified by the major alphabetic languages of Hebrew and Arabic, missed out. Whatever one may feel about Street's autonomous/ideological distinction, there is no doubting the ideological nature of the debate.

Of importance in the Mende study is the notion that, in terms of the autonomous model, written language tends towards clarity and 'truth' and that spoken language facilitates 'obfuscation and lying' (Bledsoe and Robey, 1993). However, the usage of written Arabic for purposes of liturgy among the Mende Muslims reveals the potential of written language for concealing ignorance and promoting secrecy and thus contradicts the idea that the written word, and therefore literacy, is in some sense naturally given to more lucidity and a promoter of abstract thought.

Written Arabic, or Qur'anic Arabic, is strictly the preserve of an educated elite who are able to use the prestige of this literacy to privilege their knowledge and their position within the Mende community. Indeed, what is happening is that instead of the Mende passively accepting the 'package' of literacy and being transformed by the experience, the Mende utilise and re-interpret aspects of literacy and mould it into their own cultural systems. Thus the Mende apply the literate skills to suit their own purposes and needs. Later we will show how this attitude to literacy is found among young Muslims in northern England when they freely adopt Roman script to transliterate Urdu and Punjabi poetry and songs (see *Chapter 11, Mirpuri-Punjabi*).

The use of literacy as the language of an elite and the book as secret and artefact is not unique to the Mende. The use of Latin in medieval Europe, as Cazal (1998) notes of Catholicism, restricted literacy to the few and often restricted literacy itself to decoding, rote learning and calligraphy:

Société chrétienne, elle réserve à un petit nombre de ses membres, l'élite professionnelle et intellectuelle des clercs, l'apprentissage de l'écriture et l'accès au savoir. Elle leur délègue surtout le soin de conserver un ensemble clos de textes hérités – à la première place desquels figure le texte sacré de l'Écriture sainte -, composés dans une langue, le latin, maintenue comme norme linguistique et outil conceptuel, en dépit – et contre – l'évolution et la diversification naturelles des langues parlées.

(Cazal, 1998, p.10)

Christian society restricts the right to teach writing and, hence, access to knowledge, to a small number of its members, the professional and intellectual clerical elite. It delegates to them the care of preserving a collection of inherited texts – the most important of which is the Holy Scripture -, written in one language, Latin, which is maintained as a linguistic norm and a conceptual tool, despite – and contrary to – the evolution and natural diversification of spoken vernaculars. (my translation)

However, the Mende study begs the question, is literacy deliberately used for secrecy? It is possibly more likely the case that as the liturgical language is not the spoken language of the community, the liturgical literacy becomes willy-nilly an arcane language, privileged to the few and interpreted for the masses. It accretes to itself and its knowers status, privilege, power and authority. This is not possible in the Arabic speaking world where despite the diglossic circumstances of classical and

colloquial Arabic, the general congregation can have access to the meaning of the liturgical literacy to a greater or lesser extent. They very rarely have no access.

Below (in *Section II*) we will discuss the very real issue in UK Pakistani communities of lack of access to the meanings behind the wealth of words commonly learnt and recited. There certainly is ‘power through ritual authority’ (Bledsoe and Robey, 1993), but added to that is even more power through linguistic, or liturgical, authority.

The secrecy factor is compounded by the nature of much Mende Islamic practice which tends, in their study at least, towards the mystical branch of the faith. In its more extreme and, in Islamic terms, corrupt forms, the mysticism found in many parts of the Islamic world exploits the ignorance of its adherents by nurturing an atmosphere of secrecy around the religious teacher, who may have an inner circle whom he allegedly initiates into arcane and secret knowledge. The liturgical literacy assists these teachers in preserving their authority as only a select few are instructed in literacy.

This study relies heavily upon the moriman – or magicians – of Mende society with the result that the liturgical literacy used, often in the form of amulets and secret formulae, itself becomes an arcane form invested with secrecy and esotericism. This form of liturgical literacy is equally at home in many UK Pakistani communities.

Of more significance to this present study, however, is the observation made by the Mende study that even the privileged elite are often poorly equipped to deal with the meaning of the words they are, in every other respect, quite comfortable with.

Some Arabic teachers never reach meaning because they can only decode at the phonetic or surface semantic level (p.123)

This is where the sensitive issue of bluffing comes in. In many parts of the non-Arabic Islamic world, but particularly among communities that are marginalized and lacking in education, it is relatively easy to become sufficiently 'literate' in the liturgy of the faith and therefore acquire a status which is open to abuse (see *Chapter 5*, page 168).

1.7(ii) Weinstein-Shr and the Hmong (1993)

The study of the Hmong (an immigrant community originating in Laos in SE Asia) in Philadelphia (Weinstein-Shr, 1993) poses some universal questions about literacy among migrant groups. How do social relationships within the community shape and influence the way that literacy is acquired and used, and, conversely, how does life in a literate environment effect or change social relationships.

I will argue here that anthropologists have an important contribution to make in informing literacy instruction and educational practice as urban society becomes increasingly culturally diverse. (Weinsten-Shr, 1993)

One of the central case studies featured Pao Youa Lo who used literacy to connect to the past and to Hmong tradition without ever engaging with the language and literacy of the host community. In his interface with the institutions and representatives of the dominant literacy, his role often appears unfocused and disempowered. Such is the lot of many members of marginalized communities, but this persona of Pao Youa disguised the significant power and influence he wielded in his own community. In the study below (*Chapter 5, The Teachers*, page 141-142) we will see how similar personalities to Pao Youa are represented in the Punjabi Muslim community where similar authority can not only be local, but national and even international, with no recourse at all to the dominant host community (cf. Mufti Siddiq in *Chapter 5*).

Younger members of the Hmong community, more comfortable with the language, literacy and customs of the host community, adopt the newer roles required by interfacing with its institutions and representatives. The elder Hmong maintain more traditional roles within the community, dealing with issues such as domestic disputes, marriages and traditional solutions to medical problems. Pao Youa, for example, favours preserving the shamanic tradition of the Hmong and is concerned about the westernisation and secularisation of the younger generation. We will see later how religious authority is employed to bolster position in other communities (*Chapter 5, The Teachers*)

1.7 (iii) Zinsser and the Fundamentalists (1986)

Zinsser (1986) describes the use of scripture in a fundamentalist American Christian setting. Using participant-observer methods this study shows the importance attached to not only the message of the scripture, but also the book as artefact. It allows an interesting comparison to be made between the handling practice of these Christian children and their Muslim peers, albeit in a different social setting far away. Important to the community was the need for every member to have his or her own copy of the Bible. This is a practice which used to be common in many state secondary schools in the UK until very recently. In fact, I recall a tradition in inner London in the nineteen fifties and sixties for pupils to be given a Bible at secondary school which was then ceremoniously signed by all his or her classmates on the day the pupil left school. Some of the comments inscribed were often strangely inappropriate for a religious text! Nowadays for this custom, the Holy Bible has been usurped by the more mundane school shirt, blouse or sweatshirt.

However, the children handled the Bible, as an object, very casually.

A boy chases a girl before class begins. Both hold Bibles. The boy hits the girl with his Bible.

During assembly time a girl sucks on the end of a Bible zipper which has torn loose.

Required to join hands in a circle, a girl holds her small Bible in her teeth.

During aggressive play two boys shove a Bible back and forth across a table. A boy sits on his Bible so he can use both hands to perform motions to a song. (Zinsser,

1984)

This contrasts dramatically with the use of the Qur'an as an object described below (see *Chapter 3, The Children*) where all the behaviour in the examples quoted would be considered anathema. I recall visiting a Quaker community with a group of Muslim mystics from Turkey and remember witnessing their shock to find the Bible on the floor in the middle of the room. Muslim children are taught from a very early age that the Qur'an in its printed form is to be revered at all times. Thus in most Pakistani households the family copy of the Qur'an will be on the highest shelf of the bookcase often covered in an embroidered covering (*Chapter 8, The Home*). In the mosques the copies of the Qur'an used by the children will, like the Bibles of their Christian peers, be individualised, but will not be handled so casually. This practice goes so far as forbidding destruction of old and damaged copies of the Qur'an. This leads to the practice of collecting old Qur'ans and odd pages together in a cupboard somewhere in the mosque (*Chapter 7, The Mosques*). In fact, in the Islamic world as a whole the appearance of Qur'anic verses in print can be a problematic issue. Many newspapers often contain quotations from the Qur'an and this can lead to the dilemma of what to do with the newspaper once it has been read. The ephemeral nature of newsprint presents an almost insurmountable problem. One way that is sometimes used to get round this problem is the use of numbers (numerology) to replace the ubiquitous '*bismillahi rahmani rahim*' (In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful) found at the beginning of many texts. All letters in the Arabic alphabet have a numerical equivalent and the formula '786' can often be found at the beginning of printed or written public notices and announcements.

However, a common experience in the Bible school described was the emphasis placed on rote memorisation where children were required to learn a verse a week

together with its citation. Unlike the Qur'anic school, stories were a staple fare of the curriculum followed with much attention placed upon listening to stories. Here we notice a key link with the primary school practice experienced by these children. Listening to stories in the Bible school is not a million miles away from listening to stories in regular school (Heath, 1993). There is no parallel practice in the traditional Qur'anic school (though see *Chapter 10, Urdu*, for a description of a context where stories are used extensively).

1.7 (iv) Baker and the Tidorese (1993)

Baker (1993) addresses the issue of decoding as a cultural practice among the Tidorese of Indonesia. Devout Muslims, the people of the village studied, Kalaodi, read the Arabic Qur'an in a manner very similar to millions of Muslims around the world. Baker deals directly with the thorny issue of reading without apparent meaning and claims for this literacy practice a socially significant value transcending the literal meaning of the text.

If at base we think of reading as an activity of interpretation that requires from the start some amount of language competence, then we would have to say that the uncomprehending recitation of written texts is something altogether different. But, if we also think of reading as the socially significant practice of taking up a text and going through the processes of actualising the inscribed words in a temporal sequence, expending real time and personal effort in doing so, then we have something essential to the activity of reading without yet concerning ourselves with comprehension and the interpretations that can follow from it.

(Baker, J.N., 1993, p. 98, my underlining)

Baker recognises that this literacy practice has a mnemonic function which links it diachronically with the practice of reading the Qur'an since the early days of Islam.

The invariant manuscript of the Koran serves to assure the verbatim accuracy of what is being recalled aloud in liturgical performance. Indeed, much of what is recited in Arabic is done so from memory. And, even though many of the verses that are regularly uttered aloud are learned from hearing others recite, their invariance across local communities and language boundaries is assured by the one written source against which they could always be checked. In this respect a performance from memory is still a form of reading aloud. (ibid. p. 103)

Baker draws a distinction between reading as a 'comprehending' activity and reading as 'apprehending' where apprehending means 'coming to grips with what there is to know without necessarily knowing how to subject it to predications, that is, to adequately comprehend it.' (ibid. p. 108). He also suggests that this apprehension has a lot more to do with substantive nouns than with verbs. He allows this perspective to direct the greater part of his commentary on the Kalaodi literacy practices and singles out names as playing an important part in the apprehension of the foreignness of the Arabic.

Not understanding Arabic myself, I can attest from listening to recitations that proper names flash out as recognisable entities in a stream of pleasingly lyrical but uncomprehended utterances. (ibid. p.110)

In the present study, it will not be claimed that oral decoding of the Qur'anic text holds meaning for the reciters in such a specific way, though some words, not all names, will resonate with meaning for some reciters (cf. Bashir in *The Parents*, page 293). In fact, it is questionable whether the Kalaodi themselves consider their oral decoding to be merely an 'apprehension of names'. Arabic, like all Semitic languages, operates by modifying its roots. Most verbs and nouns are derived from a root pattern which can generate a 'family' of words based on the same root. When decoding the Qur'an without comprehension, reciters will sometimes recognise words which belong to a known root. For example, the Arabic word for 'book' is 'kitaab' formed from the root pattern 'k-t-b'. Urdu contains many words borrowed from the Arabic, 'kitaab' being one of them. A reciter will therefore probably recognise the word 'kitaab' when orally decoding the Qur'an, and possibly recognise other derived words such as 'kutiba', 'kaatib', 'kaatiba' without really understanding the nuances of meaning produced by such morphology. There are many examples that one can give of words which, because of their use as daily references to religious matters, might be recognised when the Qur'an is orally decoded. This, it is argued, is a form of comprehension which needs to be taken into consideration.

1.7 (v) Wagner and Morocco (1982-1993)

Wagner (1982, 1986, 1993) describes the particular characteristics of Qur'anic schooling in Morocco.

The study of traditional Qur'anic schooling would be of considerable social significance if only for the fact that tens of millions of children in many nations of the world attend them. This statistic indicates that Qur'anic schooling is one of the largest relatively homogenous forms of preschooling in the world today [.] (Wagner, 1982)

In his major study on literacy in Morocco (1993), Wagner provides insightful data on the role of traditional Qur'anic pedagogy in a modernising setting. He argues against any malign effects of Qur'anic schooling and tackles head-on the common criticisms of such pedagogy that it leads to a smothering of the imagination (Hardy and Bruner, 1925), or that excessive memorisation displaces critical thinking (Miller, 1977). In a study which claims to be 'a project anchored in quantitative measures of language, reading and cognitive skills supported by several other modes of investigation', Wagner was able to compare the subsequent educational performance of children who had or had not experienced pre-school Qur'anic schooling as well as those whose first language was Moroccan Arabic and those whose first language was Berber. The author considers Qur'anic schooling to be a form of complementary schooling which is a potential resource for development.

1.8 Relevance of previous studies to this research

Until comparatively recently traditional Qur'anic schooling could be found only in countries with pre-dominantly Muslim populations. With the migration patterns of the twentieth century we now find many examples of traditional Qur'anic schooling in non-Muslim western countries. The same issues which have arisen in countries such as Morocco regarding the interaction between state formal education and traditional schooling are now beginning to be explored. This study is a contribution to this field and seeks to shed light on the intricate relationship between, on the one hand, the Muslim communities and the institutions from which they learn their liturgical literacy – and, in some cases, their literary vernacular language – and on the other, the relationship between this literacy and the dominant literacy encountered and acquired at school and in the wider community.

Chapter 2 The Community and its Ethnography

2.1 Social context for the present study

The major migration movements into Western Europe which have taken place during the second half of the twentieth century, as a result of post-colonial re-alignments and global economic re-balancing, have led to a great many urban communities in these countries becoming linguistically and culturally diverse (ONS, 1996). Such large-scale human movement is no new phenomenon, but the close analysis of how these migrations interact with their host communities in a vast range of possible areas certainly is. Indeed, it is difficult to see how such analysis with its reliance on research techniques developed only relatively recently could have taken place any earlier (ONS, 1996).

The present study takes as its field of inquiry one of the large number of Muslim communities now present in many cities of western Europe, and, in particular, those communities of a south Asian origin which are found in many cities and towns, often in the Midlands and the north of the United Kingdom. The languages spoken by these communities are varied and fully support the notion of the United Kingdom as very much a multilingual society (Trudgill, 1984). The fact that they all share a common liturgical language, or more exactly a liturgical literacy, means that their linguistic profile is a complex one. The importance of language and religion for cultural identity are well-researched areas (Kapitzke, 1995). Usually, these have been

studied separately. Moreover, religion has often been treated as a cultural phenomenon not impinging too directly on the learning of students and pupils though there are, of course, many assumptions made and prejudices harboured regarding education arising from within and outside of these communities. For example, it is a commonly held view among educationalists that Muslim families discourage their daughters from pursuing higher education (Basit, 1997). This view will not directly enter this discussion, but is an example of commonly held assumptions which indirectly affect the teaching and learning of young Muslims in schools which are there to serve these communities, and is certainly contradicted by evidence collected by this researcher.

Recent studies (Baker, 1993, Cummins, 1989, Beech and Keys, 1997, Edwards, 1995) looking at bilingual and multilingual communities both here, elsewhere in Europe and the US have focused exclusively on either the phenomenon of community spoken and written languages and the roles they play in the cultural life and development of the community, or on the problems schools and teachers face when speakers of languages other than the standard one arrive at the school gate. For example, there are many studies in the US which deal with the particular issue of Spanish-speaking children in schools where English is the language of instruction (Ramirez, 1994, Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Here, the issue is both linguistic and socio-cultural, where the interaction that takes place has linguistic dimensions as well as socio-cultural ones. In the Netherlands and Germany, the presence of large numbers of Turkish-speaking children in school has given rise to studies (Verhoeven, 1987) seeking to explore the nature of second language learning and second language literacy. In the United Kingdom, there has been an equally enthusiastic response to

the large numbers of bilinguals in our schools and numerous studies have examined the varied linguistic situations currently existing in British schools. These have taken the particular needs bilinguals might have in learning in schools (Stuart-Smith and Martin, 1997, Phillips and Birrell, 1990). Other studies have explored the rich diversity of language experience such bilinguals bring with them (Martin-Jones, 1984, Gregory, 1996, 1997, 1998, Gregory and Williams, 2000). Studies have been, therefore, either educational or ethnographic.

Much has been made of late of the discrepancy that exists linguistically, both in terms of standard and non-standard forms of the same language, and in terms of mother tongues different from that of the school. Such a discrepancy is not just a linguistic one, and the values and attitudes attached to schooling by different social groupings has been a rich area for research. That the language of school (teachers, examinations, text books) represents a discourse that can admit or debar certain social groupings is an observation made relatively long ago. At the beginning of the twenty first century, teachers are faced with the added dimension of pupils in their classrooms who do not share the first language of the teacher. Moreover, educational achievement has been shown to vary dependent on the socio-economic status of the group with the other first language. It is still to be shown as to whether it is the linguistic factors or the socio-economic factors that dominate in any given situation. It has been shown, for example, that second language learners of English whose language and ethnic origin enjoys high status do not appear to suffer from the same degree of educational under-achievement that pupils with less favoured languages and backgrounds experience (De Vos, 1980).

Whatever the underlying reasons for educational achievement by children in certain socio-economic or cultural or linguistic groupings, educationalists have a duty to understand the complexity of the linguistic and cultural experience brought to the school. The present study concerns reading. Whatever reading is in school, and here it is already an infinitely complex experience, it is not what reading is in the world in its entirety. The world of reading is much more complex than that which is represented in the classroom, where despite all the best efforts of teachers to be *authentique*¹⁰ only a limited range of experiences can be engendered and developed. This is not to belittle what goes on in the reading classroom, but rather it is to underline the infinite complexity of what reading is in the world outside of the school. Experiences of reading which take place out of school are no more real than those at school, for who can deny the reality or importance of reading and understanding a question in an examination, but the reading which takes place in the home, in the workplace, in the leisure place, in the place of worship, is a reading which is intimately linked with the reader's needs, duties, desires and feelings in a way school-based reading can rarely achieve. The present study concerns reading in a place of worship. This, of course, means that the dominant mode of enquiry will be an ethnographic one. Yet, from the outset, it will be stressed that the experience of reading being described is not, by any means, distant and, therefore, unrelated, to the reading experiences of school.

¹⁰ The term Eric Hawkins (1984) uses to denote the use of real-life texts (newspapers, magazines, tickets, labels, etc.) and objects into the classroom.

2.2 The community of the present study

The community in question has its origins in the Mirpur province of Pakistani Punjab and Azad Kashmir. From the 1950s onwards men came from this province¹¹, sometimes via the British merchant navy, to work in the steelworks and related industries in South Yorkshire. Wives and sometimes other family members followed later. The community settled in cheaper, inner city, mainly terraced housing in east Sheffield and either side of Riverton city centre. Nowadays, most of the jobs which brought them to the UK have gone. Many males now work in the taxi industry. Others are unemployed. The national statistics for ethnic minority unemployment apply strongly in the area. Children attend local primary and secondary schools. In the late seventies, recognition of the educational needs of these children meant that additional resources were provided to Local Education Authorities (LEA) in the form of Section 11 of the Commonwealth Immigration Act which later became the Ethnic Minority and Travellers Achievement Grant (EMTAG). As the community has become more affluent, as UK society has become more affluent, travel to and from Pakistan has increased for adults and for children with long spells out of the classroom affecting educational progress. However, it is also true that, with each new generation born in the UK, links with Pakistan, and, as a result, reasons for travel, are becoming weaker.

The language spoken by the community is generally Mirpuri-Punjabi, a dialect spoken in the corresponding region in Pakistan. The dialect has a written form which

¹¹ Abdullah Hussein has written an interesting fictional account of this experience in *Emigré Journeys* (2000).

uses the Urdu script (which in turn is derived from Arabic script via Persian). However, this written form is generally only encountered in poetry. The principal literary language is Urdu which is the literary language of the state of Pakistan, and before that the written language of the Muslims in pre-partition India. Hindi and Urdu are mutually intelligible. Not all of the community will speak Mirpuri-Punjabi as their mother tongue. In addition, there are a number of Pushto speakers who originate from the Pathan province of Pakistan.

Among the younger generation, particularly, the grandchildren of the first immigrants (third generation), there is much greater use of English at home, particularly when conversing with siblings, though it would be more accurate to describe this use of English as elaborate code-switching (Baynham, 1993). At school, Mirpuri-Punjabi is used freely among friends, though schools (and teachers) vary in their response to its use, with some warmly celebrating the linguistic repertoire of their pupils, whereas others feel the need to restrict its use in the classroom. Urdu is now being offered to pupils, though again schools vary in their provision. Some are very imaginative and offer the language as a second language to all pupils regardless of ethnic background. Other schools target the language at only 'relevant' pupils and thus underline their marginalisation.

Other studies to this one will have to plot the development of the Mirpuri-Punjabi dialect in this country, but, with its close proximity to English, and distance from its geographical roots, it is highly unlikely that it will follow the same course as the same dialect in Pakistan. However, it also apparent that this dialect is now very much part of the linguistic tapestry of the United Kingdom. It is incumbent upon us all that

we do not create circumstances where this dialect, and others, are left to wither and die.

It says something about the community and its religion when it is obvious that it invests considerably more time, and money, to developing literacy in the Qur'an than it does to developing literacy in the most appropriate literary language, Urdu.

Although Urdu is taught in the mosques (though not in all), it is always subordinate to Qur'anic Arabic (see *Section III* for a fuller discussion of the languages used in the community).

2.3 Researcher as Participant Observer

The principal research tool has been that of the participant-observer. This has enabled me to build up a picture of exactly how liturgical literacy is acquired, supported and maintained within the community, explore the issues of privilege and power within the institutions of transmission, and make clear the power relationship between this marginalized literacy practice and mainstream advantaged literacies. As a researcher sharing the same faith, and who has worked within the community in question for many years, I have been able to access the homes and institutions quite easily. The ten families chosen for detailed investigation were self-selected on the basis of convenience inasmuch as they had children at the school I worked at, and, in two cases out of the ten, were related to a longstanding friend of mine who has died. I also ensured that the ten families had a link to the two mosques described below. Each family has and has had a number of children go through the local primary schools and the local secondary school. In this latter context, I taught some of them

personally, but not others. The children had had various careers at school with some succeeding academically and others not. The children were interviewed at home, at the mosque and at school. Before the research took place, I was on 'nodding' terms with eight of the fathers and a friend of the other two (though strictly speaking I had been a friend of their dead brother). I had met some of the mothers at parents' evenings at the school. The main method of collecting data from the family was by initial questionnaire followed up by group semi-structured interview with the family as a whole as much as that was possible. All names of interviewees, respondents and community members have been anonymised. Permission for all interviews and conversations were arranged through parents, in the case of children, and through direct approach, in the case of adults. Permission for all photography was granted by the trustees of the mosques.

The names of the two main locations, Riverton and Midbrough, are made up. However, it has been impossible to avoid references to the real place names in images and plates within the body of the text. I have done my best to minimise these references.

The strengths of participant observation as a primary research tool are that information is gathered first-hand and that understanding is informed by a much richer experience than that informed by questionnaires, interviews or outsider observations. Participant observation in this study has enabled the researcher to choose and refine topics which focus in on the research questions, select carefully respondents for interview, and provide opportunities for observations to be shared with respondents. Although I share the faith of the community, I did not live within it

and shared neither its language nor its cultural profile. I did share with it the same liturgical literacy and it is this social practice which allows for the researcher as participant. Yet, I, as the researcher, was still an outsider. During the course of the field work I was aware of my growing involvement with the life of the community, but was still cognisant that there would have to be a withdrawal at some stage; what Bruyn (1966) has called being an 'imminent migrant'.

Bruyn (1966) goes on to describe three more elements in what he terms the phenomenological approach to participant observation. As well as the awareness of the temporal phases of the research, there is also the awareness on the part of the participant researcher of the physical environment. Thus the physical features of the mosque, say, are recorded as they are perceived by the congregation, and not by the outside observer.

The awareness of contrasting experiences is reflected in this study by the attempt to legitimise the opinions of the various stakeholders within liturgical literacy. In the role of researcher as participant, I could relate to the parents through a considerable amount of shared experience and practice. My experience as teacher was also a key element in the establishment of common ground between myself and the imams.

A significant part of this study has been inspired by the Gregory and Williams' longitudinal study of the Spitalfields area of London (2000). Although not sharing the more ambitious longitudinal aims of that study, this study also uses documentary and picture evidence to provide a mini-history of the community and its institutions. Another difference is that this study necessarily focuses sharply on one particularly

under-researched literacy practice. Nevertheless, many of the ethnographic methods used in the Spitalfields study have been employed here: participant observation, interviews, life histories and the use of historical documents and images. I feel I share their aim:

[O]ur aim [is] to investigate the role, scope and nature of literacy in people's lives as well as in the histories and traditions of which these are a part (Gregory and Williams, 2000, p 14)

Finally, it is crucial for the participant researcher to be aware of social openings and barriers. A defining moment during fieldwork has been when one of the respondents in *Sample 2*, a father, asked me, 'I hope you don't mind me asking, but where do you come from?' This was after having spent an hour with me being asked all sorts of questions about himself and his family quite openly. This brought home to me very clearly the privileged nature of my position as researcher, which in turn was now being viewed by the community as an extension of my position as a teacher.

2.4 Research Methodology

2.5 The Research Questions

This study has its origins in my own professional experience. I have spent the majority of my career teaching English in UK secondary schools with significant numbers of pupils who have English as an additional language and, significantly, who are Muslim. As a teacher of reading, I noted quite quickly that these pupils were able to decode text in English very proficiently, in a manner well in advance of their comprehension ability, and often in advance of their chronological ages or even their monolingual non-Muslim peers. Initially, I naïvely put this down to a successful programme of bilingual support provided by a team of Section 11 peripatetic teachers. For instance, in the mid-nineteen eighties it was still quite common for LEAs to have a separate centre where English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils followed an intense programme of English away from their peers until such a time as was considered appropriate for them to be admitted to mainstream classes. However, when this method of support fell from favour, in the interests of inclusivity, these pupils were managed within the secondary school through a balanced programme of in-class support and occasional withdrawal. As the perceived advanced decoding continued to manifest itself in the reading behaviour of these pupils, my original conclusions as to where this superior decoding was developed had to be re-assessed.

Alongside this professional experience, I was also able to draw on my own experience of learning to read in other languages, and more significantly, in different

scripts. Having learnt Russian, and therefore the Cyrillic alphabet, at secondary school, and Arabic whilst teaching in Egypt, and, as a consequence of embracing Islam, the written Arabic of the Qur'an, it became apparent that mastery of a code was a linguistic skill often easily developed in isolation from other skills such as reading for meaning. If you also add to this exotic mixture my self-taught musical notation, without being able to create music in any form whatsoever, then it became equally apparent that it was possible to develop a highly developed skill which, for cultural or religious reasons, was often detached from more meaning-laden aspects of language such as creativity and comprehension.

Furthermore, teaching practice in the mosque which I observed in the course of my own visits, and also, in my own experience of teaching adults and children to read the Qur'an in an informal manner at home or in other houses, led me to reflect on the nature of learning to read the Qur'an for the pupils in the school who shared this religious practice. This led to a small-scale quantitative study undertaken to demonstrate the advanced decoding ability of Muslim secondary school pupils when reading texts in English, and the discrepancy between it and the same pupils' comprehension ability (Rosowsky, 2001).

It was clear that a probable reason for this advanced decoding ability was the intense decoding activity experienced by these pupils on an almost daily basis from the age of six until thirteen, albeit in a language other than English. It was also clear that the liturgical literacy learnt in the mosque, in the eyes of the dominant community, was a marginalised and under-reported social and educational practice which deserved a more just and detailed description. As a form of community education, it had

provoked little research, either in terms of community culture and identity or in terms of its relationship with other, including schooled, literacies.

This study, therefore, attempts to address three related questions:

What is liturgical literacy generally and in this community?

What role does it play in this community?

How does it interact with and relate to other literacies?

2.6 The Pilot Study

I decided to select a family who did not form part of this community for the pilot study. However, they did belong to a very similar community in terms of social and economic status, ethnicity, religion and language in a neighbouring town. I had been introduced to the family through the elder son who attended the mosque where I was a trustee. As one of the major research tools employed was the semi-structured interview, I needed to pilot an interview schedule which I hoped to use in the full scale study.

The use of semi-structured interviews, with their general and open-ended questions, allow for a more conversational discussion to develop between interviewer and respondent (Smith, 1995). They also encourage two-way communication where respondents can ask questions of the interviewer. Moreover, questions do not have to

be asked in the same order for each interview as responses may pre-empt later questions. Likewise, questions can be omitted from the schedule if they have been anticipated by the respondents in their answers. It is also possible for a respondent to move away from the questions on the schedule and enter an area not foreseen by the interviewer. It is then up to the interviewer's own judgement to decide if the respondent's new direction is worth pursuing and to decide when and how to return to the schedule.

Disadvantages of using semi-structured interviews include the possibility of eliciting extra information in the course of the interview which may be irrelevant, or when interviewing a group, as in this study, the possibility of respondents taking 'a back seat' and allowing others to dominate the discussion. These drawbacks can be obviated through the skills of the interviewer who must ensure that all respondents are given the opportunity to speak and that s/he has the necessary skill to move discussion back to the schedule.

2.7 The interview schedules

Although the intention of a semi-structured (and unstructured) interview is to engender a discussion which verges on the conversational, and is designed to elicit thoughts, feelings, views, predilections and attitudes in a quasi-naturalistic manner, the preparation of an interview schedule in advance is essential (Drever, 1995). This allows the interviewer to think explicitly about what the interview might cover, and, more vitally, anticipate any difficulties that might occur in respect of question wording or sensitive areas that might be covered in the discussion. However, as already suggested, it is important to realise that the questions on the interview schedule are to be handled flexibly allowing the interviewer to respond to unanticipated responses and unforeseen avenues of discussion. Moreover, if the object of this type of interviewing is to try and encourage respondents to speak about a topic with as little prompting from the interviewer as possible, then questions need to be kept to the minimum necessary to guide the discussion in the directions appropriate to the topic. In the interview schedule included in the appendices (see *Appendix 1*), the sets of questions are those developed for the pilot study. Questions marked with an asterisk are those deemed unnecessary, repetitious or misleading in the light of responses elicited in the pilot.

The initial questions were directed at parents and I decided that it would be best to interview the mother and father separately from their children. It would have been most inappropriate culturally to ask to interview the mother alone. However, the parents were quite happy to be interviewed together. Although it was not the case in the pilot study, the parents could support each other linguistically, the father often

being the stronger English speaker and the mother often being the authority on Urdu. The questions were designed to elicit responses ranging from personal information regarding education and employment, through family and travel to issues of language, literacy and religion. For example, the questions regarding language are designed to provoke discussion around the sometimes complex interrelationship between mother tongue spoken languages such as Mirpuri-Punjabi and literary or languages of education such as Urdu and English as well as the special role played by Arabic in the community's liturgical literacy. The questions regarding family origin are there to illustrate the commonality of background of the community in question.

The questions were not designed to produce a set of predicted responses which could be quantified on any sort of scale. Rather, the purpose behind the questions was to provoke discussion between interviewer and interviewee, and significantly, between participants in the discussion. Thus, in the pilot study it was usual for the participants to prompt each other as well as seek clarification from each other and, at times, engage in discussion with one another. At these moments the interviewer becomes observer, though ever ready to move discussion on when necessary. For genuine qualitative data, the author considers it vital that the narratives given up in the course of the interviews are those intended by the participants, and not narratives determined by the prejudices or preconceived notions of the researcher. In such a way, the emic perspective on the research questions is made possible. This is, therefore, the rationale for presenting quite lengthy extracts from the interviews in the body of the text in *Sections II-IV*.

Where did you learn to read the Qur'an?

'That's what I learnt in Pakistan, when I was small. I learned at home...no...no in somebody's house. Because in Pakistan we usually have a girls' madrassah...different, separate from the boys. And obviously my parents were religious people and they put us in school as well and then they decided to teach us Qur'an when we come back from school...every morning when we wake up my father makes sure that we pray namaz and read Qur'an before we went to school...so it was from childhood... We just start from the alphabet..aleph..ba...ta..tha..Then you come onto the Yusu Qur'an¹². And then because aleph...ba...ta... is the beginning of the alphabet. Then when you are joining the words to read it...Then it is easy for you to read the Qur'an. So that's how we read it.

How long does it usually take?

It's up to the child. If he's clever he can pick it up very quickly, and if he's a dummy he's going to take more years. It depends.' (Shaheeda)

Indeed, the responses which arose during the course of the pilot interview made it clear that any discussion of the role of liturgical literacy within the community inevitably draws in issues around mother tongue and other literacies and languages and, as a consequence, an extra research question evolved.

What is the significance of liturgical literacy for the study of literacy and the linguistic future of this community?

¹² Another term for the Qaidah, or primer for learning Qur'anic Arabic (see *Chapter 3, The Children*)

2.8 The Sample

The next stage of the research involved identifying an appropriate sample.

Sample 1

The sample chosen for this study is drawn from the families of the children attending the secondary school featured in Rosowsky, 2001. The first sample consists of the Muslim boys and girls in the Y9 (ages 13-14) cohort. These pupils were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview with the author. They were interviewed in groups of four or five and the interview took place in the school. This was done deliberately in order to encourage discussion around the questions and prompts of the **Interview Schedule 1** (see *Appendix 1*) At the risk of losing individual responses, or encouraging 'parrot'-like responses encouraged by one another, it was felt that such a grouping would allow pupils to articulate their thoughts in a mutually supportive way. The questions cover personal details (mainly closed questions), questions designed to elicit discussion around languages known, questions about the mosques attended and, finally, some questions asking respondents to speculate about their experience of reading.

Sample 2

The second sample consists of ten families whose children attend or have attended the secondary school. Furthermore, these ten families can be sub-divided into five families who are affiliated to University Road Mosque and five families affiliated to Church Walk Mosque. The ten families were interviewed using **Interview Schedule 2** (see *Appendix 1*). The families were interviewed in their homes. Usually, the parents were interviewed together. When there was more than one child present in

the house the children¹³ were interviewed together. On other occasions a solitary child, if young, was interviewed in the presence of a parent. The children covered a wide age range from primary age pupils to university students, though the majority of respondents were teenagers.

Sample 3

Sample 3 consisted of the three local imams, two associated with Church Walk Mosque and one associated with University Road Mosque. One imam, Mufti Siddiq, was also one of the fathers from one of the families in Sample 2. Apart from Mufti Siddiq, the imams were interviewed in the mosque using **Interview Schedule 3** (see *Appendix 1*). The questions cover personal details, questions regarding education and training, questions prompting discussion about the role of the imam in respect of duties and responsibilities and questions about the use of Arabic, Urdu and English.

Sample 4

Sample 4 comprised the trustees of the two mosques featured in this study. It was decided that an overview of the mosque as an institution was necessary in order to provide useful background knowledge for readers of the study, as well as serving as an extra source of information on the role of liturgical literacy within the community. The politics and doctrinal differences of the mosque are not a concern of this study so **Interview Schedule 4** (see *Appendix 1*) focuses on the history of the mosque as a physical building, as a cultural and religious resource and as an educational facility.

¹³ They were not always 'children'. It was possible to interview sons and daughters who had already left school but were still living at home.

The two trustees interviewed had been involved with their respective mosques since their establishment and were, in fact, the only source of information on these important community institutions. This study will be the first written account of their respective histories.

Sample 5 and Observation Schedules

Finally, many of the young people interviewed as members of Samples 1 and 2 feature in Sample Five. This sample consists of those young people who were attending the mosque on a regular basis and were engaged in the learning of their liturgical literacy. The main research tool used with this sample is **Observation Schedule 2** (see *Appendix 2*) which records the behaviour of the young people whilst they were in the mosque. I used this to observe the two hour Qur'anic class for a week in each mosque. The schedule allows for the creation of a 'thick' description. This type of description is typical of much ethnographic work (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1996) where the researcher seeks to strike a balance between description and interpretation always mindful of the need to build in validity. Here validity is provided by others having access to the data in the form of this thick description from which it is possible to draw alternative conclusions. **Interview Schedule 5** (see *Appendix 1*) is a shorter set of questions than other interview schedules and was intended to be used in a minimal fashion by the researcher when observing Sample 5. Although there was the risk of disturbing the observation process, there were occasions during this period when it was necessary to ask questions of and seek clarifications from the young learners as to behaviour and practice.

Observation Schedule 1 (see *Appendix 2*) is a tool used to describe the physical environment of the mosque and provides the backdrop for what was recorded using **Observation Schedule 2**. It was used for both mosques and was designed to illustrate the literacy environment of both buildings. The observations were done when the mosque was relatively empty. **Observation Schedule 3** (see *Appendix 2*) is a similar tool used to describe the home environment of the families interviewed as part of **Sample 2**. This observation took place during the interviews of **Sample 2** and was recorded in note form as soon as possible after the interviewer had left the respondents' home.

2.9 Other sources of data

In any ethnographic study the sources of data are varied and multifaceted. A rich description of a literacy practice will include examples of texts utilised, but also attempt to provide a description through photographs of locations, people and artefacts as well as other graphical aids such as maps, leaflets and posters (Wagner, 1993; Gregory and Williams, 2000). I ensured such a 'rich' mixture by incorporating spoken, written and visual documentation. *Appendix 5* is a list of these material sources of data and contains a number of examples.

2.10 Rationale for using case study

The two institutions chosen for this study are the two mosques which serve the community whose children attend the local schools. There is a doctrinal difference of opinion regarding certain matters of faith which has no bearing on this study but which keeps the two congregations separate, though at school, at least, this makes for no disagreements. Socially, too, the two congregations seem to cooperate. Both mosques organise regular Qur'anic instruction for both children and adults. The imams of the two mosques are responsible for leading the prayer and Qur'anic instruction. They also prepare and deliver the Friday sermon. Data collected from the institutions includes interviews with imams and assistants, trustees and secretaries of the two mosques, observed teaching sessions, prayers and sermons, and occasional gatherings.

Further data is provided by the artefacts of this form of liturgical literacy (Wagner, 1986, p. 254). Homes, mosques and rooms are described together with the personal manifestations of the liturgy on jewellery and in wallets. The use of amulets and the use of the written word for supernatural purposes have also been included.

2.11 The value of qualitative data

This study is designed to shed light on the complex role liturgical literacy plays in the life of a community and how that literacy practice contrasts (Gregory and Williams, 2000) and interacts with other literacy practices in the community. This

overarching question will be addressed by means of an ethnographic case study involving individuals, families and institutions.

This case study will be a qualitative investigation that has as its aim the production of a report which provides the reader with a detailed insight into the place of liturgical literacy in the community. Of the two main traditions in social science research, quantitative and qualitative, the first represented best by Emile Durkheim's *Suicide* (1897), and the second by Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* (1930), only the latter can provide the reader with the level of detail and description necessary for understanding the 'meaningful character of human life' (Travers, 2001, p.9). Human life in all its complexity, diversity and richness can best be revealed by a qualitative approach. A quantitative study, with its underlying assumption that knowledge about social conditions can be objectively determined, has no match for the understanding and interpretation of social events afforded by a qualitative study in which the participants and the researcher have an active role in the forming and shaping of meaning around social practices. Travers summarises the two positions as follows:

One might note, for example, that Durkheim seems to be suggesting that there are sure and objective grounds for knowledge, as in natural science. Weber's position, on the other hand, seems to lead towards the view that we can only describe or appreciate different viewpoints. (Travers, 2001, p.9)

It is true, however, that the researcher can have more than one epistemological position and, although this study will reflect, in the main, the interpretive position of qualitative research, it will also, in places, adopt a more critical position. Although it

is recognised that the literacy practice which lies at the heart of this study is much misunderstood and under-researched and that, therefore, there is a necessary and worthwhile job to be done in a 'thick' description of this literacy practice, it is also recognised that this is a literacy practice which is marginalised and, in some sense, threatened, and thus the social conditions in which it finds itself need critique.

This critical perspective, therefore, needs to place the particular social event being described in the context of a wider social environment. The interpretive researcher can sometimes be accused of operating only at the 'micro' levels of society and is not disposed to applying what s/he describes to wider social structures. As Travers opines,

For the critical researcher, context is conceptualised as the workings of society as a whole, and the aim of the analysis is to show how the actions and beliefs of people in particular situations are shaped by wider Durkheimian social structures, which exist separately from individuals. This is often conceptualised in terms of making a distinction between 'micro' and 'macro' levels of society (...). The interpretive researcher, on the other hand, is only interested in how people understand what they are doing in any social setting, and does not accept that there is a 'macro' level of analysis, or that the analyst knows more about society than the people he or she is studying. (Travers, 2001, p.123)

In making that step from describing the world to engaging in critique this study moves from a description of the role played in the community by liturgical literacy to the issues of marginalised and endangered literacy practices, the lack of state support for language and literacy maintenance, and, in this particular community, issues around Othering and islamophobia (Said, 1981).

for language and literacy maintenance, and, in this particular community, issues around Othering and islamophobia (Said, 1981).

Threading its way through the presentation and discussion of the data will be the premise that there is no 'neutral' method of 'describing' literate behaviours. Issues such as language rights and empowerment must always be to the forefront when describing literacy practices lest we be implicated in preserving the status quo regarding monolingual and monocultural literacy. Literacy is always entwined with a cultural struggle. Pennycook (2000) reminds us that language death does not happen in privileged communities and that language, and literacy, maintenance is a matter of social justice. As this study will show, there are already signs that the linguistic hegemony of the English language is making inroads into the cultural heritage of recently established non-Anglo-Saxon communities in the UK, particularly in terms of preferred scripts.

2.12 Themes that emerged

There are, therefore, a clearly identifiable set of themes which emerge from the discussion above. These are indicated below:

- The importance attached within the community to liturgical literacy.
- The attitudes in the community towards other literacies including the mainstream one.
- The capacity of the community to support and nurture its own language and literacy.

- The link between literacy and authority as manifested in the relationship between the imam and his congregation.
- The role of liturgical literacy in formation of identity.
- Liturgical literacy and secrecy.
- The place of texts in the home.

There is little doubt that the community in question values highly the acquisition of its liturgical literacy and expends considerable effort in this respect to ensure its continuation through successive generations. We will see how this manifests itself in both institutional structures and personnel and in notions of cultural capital which informs identity.

The value placed upon liturgical literacy has to compete with a range of other literacies which are also deemed important. The relative weight given to each literacy is demonstrated in the amount of time, resources and energy given to it by the community. In an ideal situation, each one would complement the other, but as the study hopes to illustrate, there are limiting factors affecting each literacy.

Linked to the above is the complex picture emerging of the home language, in this case Mirpuri-Punjabi, and its past, present and future role in the linguistic and literate development of the community. In this instance, the situation has much in common with mother tongue maintenance in any recently settled community within the UK. However, its lack of an orthodox literacy adds to its precarious position.¹⁴

¹⁴ Time will be found within the body of the study for a discussion of an interesting UK development to promote Mirpuri-Punjabi literacy using Urdu script (see Chapter 11, *Mirpuri-Punjabi*).

The teaching of the liturgical literacy is intimately linked with the role played by the imam in the Qur'anic school. The authority inherent in the relationship of pupil and teacher is extended to the congregation as a whole. The close link between liturgy and authority is partially derived, and maintained, through the complex relationship between the languages involved: Arabic, Urdu, Mirpuri-Punjabi and English (see *Section IV*).

The Muslim identity of the community is also partially determined by its common use of the liturgical language. It is one of the unifying elements which this community shares with the Islamic world. In terms of embodied cultural capital (Luke, 1996) it is an aspect of literacy which shapes people's lives for those both acquiring it and those who have it. To watch a young Muslim boy or girl reading Roald Dahl in the school library, and then observe the bodily movements associated with reading the liturgical language in the mosque is to realise quickly how literacy can be 'embodied' (Rosowsky, 2001).

The link between authority and literacy mentioned above finds another manifestation in the common association of scripture and secrecy. The reasonably widespread use of amulets within the community is another reflection of its reliance on textual authority and, by extension, the institution which embodies it.

An important part of this ethnographic study will be devoted to what Wagner terms the 'Material Culture of Literacy' (Wagner, 1993) and what Luke calls 'objectified cultural capital'. The literate environment of both the home and the mosque are

telling factors in any consideration of the role played by liturgical literacy in the community. The books, plaques, posters, artefacts and decoration described form part of the backdrop in front of which liturgical literacy takes place.

2.13 Themes and Issues that arose out of Pilot interviews

The themes above have emerged in the course of related reading. To these can be added the themes which arose during the course of the pilot interviews.

- The precarious position of Arab-Urdu script in the teaching and in the use of liturgical literacy.
- The negative attitudes towards quality of education provided by the mosque.
- The positive attitudes towards quality of education provided by school.

In discussions with parents and imams it is quite apparent that traditional forms of Qur'anic education are being questioned. One significant development is the erosion taking place of the central role played by the Arabic-Urdu script. This manifests itself in both use of Roman script for mother tongue and Urdu texts, and in the increasingly more common use of Roman script in the mosque to facilitate learning the liturgical language. This is a relatively recent development, but can be interpreted not only as an aspect of the complex tension between home literacies and mainstream literacy, but also as a local example of the more general linguistic move to prioritise the English language, and in this case, its Roman orthography.

The opinions expressed in the pilot interviews regarding the quality of education provided by the mosque, reflect a similar anxiety linked to linguistic issues.

Although generally satisfied with the success of the mosque in teaching its young people liturgical literacy, a widespread concern emerges with the lack of understanding both of the liturgical language and of Urdu, or even Mirpuri-Punjabi, in instruction and in the general ritual. There is a growing demand for the use of English in the mosque.

Finally, it is noted that there is a significant gap in the perception of the community's educational achievement between the community itself and local schools and the local education authority. When prompted for comments on the quality of education provided by the local schools (primary and secondary), the response is generally a favourable one. This contrasts with the data shared in schools and LEAs regarding ethnic minority achievement, in this case the achievement of the Pakistani community (*see Appendix 4*). The concerns raised by this data, which shows significant underachievement, are rarely, if at all, shared with the local community, leaving its members with a rather benign opinion of their own and their children's educational experience in maintained schools.

Chapter 3: The Children

Vignette

Sageer is 13 and is in Year 9 in his mixed comprehensive secondary school. He wakes at around eight, gets ready for school and sets off from his house in Midborough at about eight thirty. His house is in a road dissected by a busy dual carriageway leading into the town centre. This dual carriageway was not there when his grandfather bought the house in the 1970s. His walk to school takes him past the University Road mosque, which he will attend later that day, a small park where he plays football and cricket and across another busy road, up a steep hill to the school, an early twentieth century, brick-built main building with a nineteen seventies extension. His day is spent following a timetable of English, Maths, PE, Geography, lunch, for which he goes home, Science and Art. The school day finishes at three twenty five and he has been given homework in Science and English. He walks down the hill and gets home at about three fifty. His mum has a small meal ready for him and he watches television until four forty five. He goes to the bathroom where he undertakes his ritual ablution in preparation for going to University Road mosque for five o' clock. He must make sure his private parts have been washed with water and his hands, mouth, nose, face, arms, head, ears, nape of neck and feet are then washed three times with running water. He collects his skull cap from the table where he left it last night, puts it on and walks the three minute walk to the mosque. He enters the mosque and finds a place to sit and begins to read from the Qur'an that he keeps in a cloth cover on a bookshelf in the corner of the mosque prayer hall. Before him there is a low, long floor table which supports the holy book and those of the boys sitting to his right and to his left. He begins to read from the second to last siparah (thirtieth part) of the

Qur'an. He reads aloud, but not too loudly, and begins to gently rock backwards and forwards on his haunches as he reads, matching his rocking with the regular rhythm of the uttered Arabic words. Much of what he reads he does not understand, but he is aware of the beauty of the sound of the words and he knows that he is engaged in an important aspect of his religion, Islam. Occasionally, he will utter a word which he does recognise. This will generally be a proper name such as Allah or Musa (the Arabic for Moses – the prophet named most often in the Qur'an). The ustad, or teacher, asks Sageer to come and sit by him as he checks his recitation. Sageer reads fluently and accurately. He is nearing his third complete recitation of the Qur'an and will soon no longer be attending in the evenings. Some of his friends will stay on because they have been identified as boys who have the capacity to memorise large parts of the Qur'an. Some of his friends have already stopped attending, their parents having decided they have learnt enough. Sageer is good at recitation but finds it hard to memorise beyond a few pages at a time. His teacher praises him for his reading and he returns to his place. At seven o' clock, he replaces his Qur'an on the shelf and, as it is September, and the sunset prayer is at seven o' clock, he joins in the congregation who have gathered in the mosque. He stands with his friends near the back and completes the prayer. By the time he gets home, it is seven fifteen, and, although he would like to watch Eastenders, he knows he has to do his Science and English homeworks. By nine o'clock, he has finished. He watches television for an hour or so with his parents and goes to bed at ten thirty.



Plate 1 – Sageer in the mosque

3.1 Introduction

The routine just described is a routine familiar to thousands of boys and girls, along with their parents, all over the UK. In most towns in the Midlands and in the north of England as well as in the urban areas of Scotland and Wales, the presence of large numbers of Muslim children is an increasingly obvious fact of life. As communities have established since the early nineteen fifties, and the communities have grown more numerous and more settled, the need has arisen for the essential aspects of their religious and cultural identity to be passed on to the future generation. The mosque, and the education provided by the mosque, is the subject of this study. This chapter deals exclusively with the experiences of those most closely involved with the acquisition and transmission of liturgical literacy, namely the children who attend for two hours a day, five days a week, from the age of around 6, until the early years of secondary school.

This chapter will begin with a detailed description of the manner in which children are acculturated into the social practice of liturgical literacy and will allow the reader an insight into, on the one hand, the rich and vibrant cultural activity that liturgical literacy represents, and on the other hand, the strain and pressure placed upon these children as they attempt to juggle such important aspects of their lives in the context of finite time and resources.

Secondly, through liberal recourse to the words of the children themselves, it is hoped that the reader will grow to appreciate the role liturgical literacy plays in the

lives of these young people as well as allowing an insight into the complex relationship which exists between it and the other languages and literacies they use.

Finally, this chapter will shed extra light on yet another crucial relationship – that of learning in the mosque and learning in the school. We will see how both locations of learning can and should complement each other, though, at present, little is done or said which might facilitate such a coming together.

3.2 Readiness for liturgical literacy

From a child's perspective, the initial acquisition of liturgical literacy which takes place mainly in the mosque or mosque school is linked very much with their own acculturation as a Muslim child growing up and developing an identity and being initiated into the principal cultural characteristics of his or her community. In most Muslim communities, whether they are south Asian in origin, Middle Eastern, or even native converts, the acquisition of the liturgical literacy based on the Arabic Qur'an is a key element. A young Muslim child, regardless of the language spoken at home, will soon develop an awareness of, at first, the presence of Qur'anic Arabic – the environmental print of a Muslim community will invariably be permeated by Arabic script and Arabic language. Again the spoken language of the community is intimately linked to Arabic where even the daily greeting of '*Salaam alaykum*' is Arabic in origin. A knowledge of Arabic, however basic or minimal, will accrue as a child is initiated into the culture practices and language of the community. By the time a child is ready to attend the daily two-hour lesson in the mosque, there has

been enough linguistic spadework to allow for an effective readiness for learning to read in Arabic.

Bashir, a father of two boys and two girls, is happy to leave the job of teaching his children liturgical literacy to the teachers in the mosque. He sees no need for him to provide any sort of foundation before they begin at the age of 5. He is, however, despite himself, doing an extremely important job in making sure his children are familiar with aspects of their religious practice and language by serving as a role model within the home. He will recite his evening and dawn prayers out loud when he is not at the mosque and his children from an early age will be exposed to the sounds and cadence of this different tongue. His home has many artefacts, printed materials and wall designs which feature Arabic script. His spoken language is punctuated reasonably regularly with words and phrases which are Arabic. When he sneezes he says, '*Al hamdu lillah*' (Praise be to God) and when he talks about doing things in the future he will say '*Insha-Allah*' (If God wills it to be so). Bashir is only doing what his parents did for him:

...I used to copy what my parents did when they were reading salah (prayer)...but what I actually acknowledged as what was actually read in between, for the first time, was in the mosque ...so I knew my salah, 'al hamdu lillah rabbi-alameen'¹⁵. I knew my salah...(Bashir)

At approximately the age of five, the same age as when they go to school, the Muslim children begin to attend the mosque school. They will either walk there with

¹⁵ This is the opening line of the first chapter of the Qur'an, al Fatihah – 'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds', *my translation*)

their parents, or more often, with their older brothers and sisters. Occasionally, they will be driven there if they live on the other side of town and their parents have a reason for them attending a mosque other than the local one. As families move outside of the area, being driven to the mosque is becoming more common, although, at the same time, more mosques in other areas of the town are being opened as well. In 1980 there was only one mosque in the town. There are now seven.

Interestingly, this pattern of attendance is not one necessarily copied from Pakistan where attendance at mosque school, as commented on by a number of parents who were born in Pakistan, was not as diligently insisted upon as it is here and now:

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 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)

The daily routine of two hours after school, five days a week, was not one necessarily copied from back home. It was often the case that Qur'anic instruction took place in the mornings before school and for only two days a week:

Where did you learn to read the Qur'an?

Mosque. In Pakistan.

Not at school?

No.

Every day like here?

Couple of days like. After school. Morning time go school. ,I then come back.

At what age?

About 10.

Same for your wife?

No, at home. Private teacher used to come. At about 12.

Now that's much later than here, isn't it?

Here the children go earlier. (Munir)

It is interesting also to note that many parents, particularly the fathers, learnt to read the Qur'an principally in the UK, where the local imam would provide lessons for adults as well as the children. It was also very much the custom that girls in Pakistan at that time learnt to read the Qur'an in the house of a teacher rather than at the mosque. In this extract, a mother and a father reflect on where they were taught how to read the Qur'an:

Where did you learn to read the Qur'an?

(consults wife) In Pakistan. In the ...like they doing here

So it was separate to school?

Yes, separate. In somebody's house.

Same for you?

I learnt it a bit in Pakistan in somebody's house but when I came here, Church Walk.

So if you went to somebody's house, does that mean you didn't go to the mosque, like they do here?

Not really, no. The girls couldn't go to the mosque anyway.

The boys?

Errr, yes. In the towns maybe, but not in the villages. In the village you had to go to somebody's house I think. From what I can remember. I had to walk a few miles to go to somebody's house, to read.

In the UK the mosque has two jobs, a place of worship and a place to teach the children the Qur'an. That's not always the case in Pakistan?

No, it's not the case. It's just for prayer. I think most mosques...It was at Church Walk mosque that I learnt it. (Morneeb)

It is worth noting that the picture painted by parents of their experiences learning the Qur'an back home in Pakistan contrasted significantly with the experiences of their own children. On the one hand, there did not appear to be the same level of urgency and commitment to this practice when they were children, and, on the other, there was no set age at which children would begin attending the mosque school. To a large extent, this can be explained by the presence of a state education system, however rudimentary, which also supported some instruction in Qur'anic recitation. However, it is also possible that the community is demonstrating that well-known cultural phenomenon of intensifying its own culture, once faced with the prospect of being far from home and alienated and marginalised by the host community. The acquisition of liturgical literacy, if it is to be achieved in such a perceived hostile environment, cannot be left to chance and the community accords it such an important part of its cultural capital that it invests a great deal, in terms of money and time, in the maintenance and preservation of this cultural activity.

3.3 Children and their language use

Interview Schedule 1 (see Appendix 1) is an attempt to elicit from Muslim pupils in the local secondary school perceptions about themselves as Muslim children attending the local mosque schools, as speakers and users of a range of different languages and literacies, and as readers in a general sense.

The twenty children (six girls, fourteen boys) interviewed were all in Year 9 (13 or 14 years of age) and attended the interview in small single-sex groups of three or four. With the exception of one boy, all pupils came from large families with at least four other siblings. Only one pupil was not born in Riverton and so the majority had spent their entire education in the UK. The range of employment of fathers in the sample was very narrow. Two owned takeaway restaurants, four were taxi drivers, two were car mechanics, and twelve were unemployed. The children indicated that their mothers were either unemployed or housewives. They had all been to Pakistan on at least one occasion, but had never been to any other country.

When asked which languages they knew and what they were called all pupils named Punjabi and English, though two pupils omitted English no doubt thinking the question concerned languages other than English. All pupils used the term 'Punjabi' for their home language and seemed unaware of the more linguistically correct 'Mirpuri' or Mirpuri-Punjabi'. Just over half claimed knowledge of Arabic. Worryingly for the long-term future of the community's main literary language only six pupils claimed to have knowledge of Urdu. However, this may be down to the pupils' confusion over terminology. Even when talking with adults, there is

sometimes a tendency to blur the distinction between the two languages, and some of the children may also have this imprecise distinction between their spoken variety of Punjabi and knowledge of Urdu.

Almost all pupils claimed to have knowledge of the language taught at school, Spanish.

Table 1 - Pupils' Claims for Language Use

Child	Punjabi	English	Arabic	Spanish	Urdu
A	x	x		x	
B	x	x	x	x	
C	x	x	x	x	x
D	x	x	x	x	
E	x	x		x	x
F	x	x		x	
G	x	x		x	
H	x		x	x	
I	x		x	x	
J	x	x	x	x	
K	x	x		x	x
L	x	x	x	x	
M	x	x		x	
N	x	x			
O	x	x		x	x
P	x	x		x	x
Q	x	x	x	x	
R	x		x	x	
S	x	x	x	x	
T	x	x	x	x	x
Total	20	17	11	19	6

When pupils were asked about their pattern of language use, all pupils claimed to be using both English and Punjabi at home. This seems to be the present pattern in homes in the town. There are, however, signs that in the larger conurbations such as Birmingham and Manchester, particularly in families where parents were born in the UK, that English is beginning to predominate. Bashir reveals his sensitivity to sociolinguistic change when discussing his extended family in Birmingham:

I have got some family members who don't even know how to speak what I would call my mother tongue...they've got a basic understanding like I have of French...of Spanish...

Are they just English speakers then?

The great majority of the time they are English speakers...I have a large family in Birmingham...and they go 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... (Bashir)

Even in families which go to great efforts to maintain the mother tongue, there is evidence that the overwhelming power of the host community language, English, to usurp the community language, is changing patterns of language use in the home. In the following exchange the principal speaker is a Pakistani mother who has spent considerable effort in ensuring the preservation in the family of both Urdu and Punjabi. The non-italicised comments are made by her twenty-year old son and are a

striking example of the fluid changes that are happening across the generations in respect to language use:

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

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?

Actually, we speak among ourselves in English.

Sometimes they do. (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)

When the pupils were asked to refine their answers by thinking about specific audiences, it was clear that Punjabi was used when conversing with parents and grandparents, though two pupils still mentioned using English as well as Punjabi in this context. With Punjabi-speaking friends, conversations were almost exclusively either in English (40%) or in English and Punjabi (60%).

Locations are as important a factor in language use as audience and the four locations mentioned in the questionnaire were: home, school, mosque and youth club.

Table 2 - Languages and locations and language use

Language/Location	Home	School	Mosque	Youth Club ¹⁶	Total
English	0	12	0	12	24
Punjabi	2		10		12
English and Punjabi	18	8	4	6	36
English, Punjabi and Arabic			2		2
Punjabi and Arabic			2		2
Urdu and Punjabi			2		2

Table 2 indicates a clear distinction made between the languages spoken at home and the languages spoken at school. The majority of children at school use English exclusively and a significant minority use both. Obviously, one has to take into consideration the considerable amount of code-switching (Baynham, 1993) which takes place with this type of language use. However, the exclusive use of Punjabi is rare with only two pupils claiming exclusive use of Punjabi at home. In the mosque the picture is less clear and reflects an interesting linguistic picture. No child claims to use only English in the mosque although a number of pupils use English alongside Punjabi. Although reading Arabic is the central focus for time spent in the mosque school, only four pupils claim to use Arabic in the mosque. Again, only two pupils indicating use of Urdu in the mosque reveals the present precariousness of this language within the community.

¹⁶ Two pupils had never attended the local youth club

Although the membership of the youth club is predominantly British Asian and the leadership of the club is made up of British Asian youth workers, the principal language of choice is English.

Fifty percent of the pupils claim to have learnt English at home before starting school whilst the rest acknowledged school as the location for the acquisition of English. However, it is clear that in families with a number of siblings the acculturation into school practices as well as rudimentary learning takes place regularly at home regardless of the principal spoken language in use. As Gregory (1998) reminds us, it is sometimes the role played by siblings in an individual's acquisition of literacy, and schooled practices, which is crucial. Bashir is acutely aware of the role his sister played in his acquisition of English literacy:

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

English? I learnt it from my uncles, I learnt it from my older sister. She started school as soon as she came to England. We all basically came at the same time. She started teaching me what she was learning straightaway at school. I was two years of age, two and a half, and she'd come home and tell me everything that she was taught. My older brother, he didn't tell me anything. My sister, she was very very good in teaching. She taught us a lot before we actually started school.(Bashir)

Despite their indicating that they rarely used Urdu, twelve pupils claimed to be able to read in Urdu, often qualifying their response with 'a little bit' or words to that effect. Of those who claimed some knowledge of Urdu, most said they had learnt it at home from their parents or even grandparents. Only two pupils said they had learnt

Urdu in the mosque. As we will show later, the teaching of Urdu and where it happens is a significant issue for the community as it seeks to preserve and maintain its cultural heritage. In *Section IV, Languages*, we will explore in greater length the position of Urdu, as well as other languages, in the community.

3.4 Children's perspectives on literacy, liturgical and secular

The set of questions on the mosque were designed to elicit responses which might highlight the centrality of attending mosque and learning to read the Qur'an in the lives of these young people. It is revealing to note that in all interviews conducted during the course of this study, I found no child who had not attended an intensive course of Qur'anic instruction in the manner described herein.

Most pupils started attending the mosque when they were five or six years old with only one pupil starting at as late as nine. They all named the mosque imam as their teacher, though three girls omitted the name of their teacher for they attend a house for Qur'anic instruction rather than the local mosque. They all attend five days a week for an average of two hours. Some start at four and finish at six, others start at four thirty and finish at six thirty, and others from five until seven.

These pupils were all aged either 13 or 14 and, therefore, in terms of Qur'anic instruction were nearing the time when their mosque education would end. In fact, with the exception of a few boys who were going on to memorise, most of this group would no longer be attending the mosque by the end of the year. It is no surprise that these boys and girls had made significant progress with the Qur'anic recitation. The

question 'How far have you got?' is one which seeks a quantitative reply, for children of this age will express their progress by indicating how many times the Qur'an has actually been read. The more times the Qur'an has been read, the greater the child's perception that he or she has made good progress. When Kamran declares that he has 'finished 9 times', he is indicating that he has read the Holy Book from cover to cover, out loud, correctly, nine times. The number of complete recitations of the Qur'an recorded by this group ranged from twice to nine times. When asked about memorisation, most children claimed to have learnt by heart significant portions of the book. For example, Wakas had memorised the 'first and thirtieth siparabs'¹⁷, which amounts to approximately fifty pages of Arabic script. The thirtieth siparah is the last siparah of the Qur'an and is made up of a number of smaller chapters and is traditionally memorised by Muslims as it provides a good supply of shorter chapters which can be recited in the prayer. Many children also claimed to have memorised some *naat*, which are religious poems and often recited on festive occasions. These would not be in Arabic, but in Urdu, and occasionally in Punjabi, and sometimes even in Persian.

Most pupils claim to read the Qur'an at home sometimes and most pupils will pray either 'sometimes' or 'at weekends' or 'only in Ramadan'. All pupils claim ownership of a Qur'an and can describe where it is kept either in the house or in the mosque:

¹⁷ The Qur'an is traditionally divided into smaller parts of equal length to facilitate regular recitation. The most commonly used division is into thirty parts, called in Arabic, 'juz', and in Urdu, 'siparah'. However, there are other divisions such as the division into sixty parts, called 'hizb' both in Arabic and in Urdu.

'I keep it very high' (Ashraf)

'In the mosque and at home on top of a wardrobe' (Wakas)

'In a basement where nobody can get it' (Akbar)

'I leave it in the basement. Nobody can touch it.' (Ferzana)

'In a cupboard' (Amjid)

'I leave it in the mosque but my auntie leaves hers in the drawer very high' (Samina)

'I have got my own Qur'an on the high shelf' (Rukshana)

'I keep the Qur'an in the mosque' (Rashid)

'I keep it as high as possible. It is on the top of the cupboard in the front room'

(Ghazanfar)

'On top of the wardrobe' (Noreen)

This illustrates the importance of the book as artefact and in all Muslim societies copies of the Qur'an are revered and carefully handled. Moreover, children are taught from young age that they must not handle the Qur'an if they have not undertaken the ritual purification described at the beginning of this chapter. This leads to copies of the Qur'an being placed in cloth covers and on high places so that they will not be inadvertently touched or handled.

The set of questions concerning reading are designed to elicit any common experiences the children might have in respect of reading. When asked about their thoughts whilst reading Arabic in the Qur'an, the assumption is there that children do not, in this context, read for meaning. The responses to this question can be categorised three ways. Firstly, there are those responses which might be termed 'thought by association' though there is the distinct possibility here that some of

these responses, if not all, are prompted by feelings of wanting to give the right answer or of trying to guess what the questioner is after. Here are some examples of the first category:

'Allah, His Prophets and the life after death' (Ghazanfar)

'Allah and Prophets' (Rukhsana)

'Allah and His Prophets and the Day of Judgement' (Jameel)

'Allah and good things' (Shakeel)

The second type of comment pupils made focuses on thoughts that may occur whilst reading relating to the child's daily life:

'I think about what is going to happen on that particular day' (Samina)

'I think of my future' (Razaq)

The third category of comment is linked to the reading act itself:

'I think the reading is ok and I am doing it right' (Noreen)

'I think about what I am going to be reading next' (Ferzana)

Interestingly, for reading in English, where we might expect there to be more focus on the meaning of the text being read, there is evidence of the above three categories in the responses of the children.

There is the expected focus on the text with comments such as:

'I think about the characters in the book' (Ferzana)

There is the focus on school and competency:

'I think about school and my level' (Ghazanfar)

'I think about school and my skills of reading' (Amjid)

More surprisingly, there are comments which are, like in the reading of the Qur'an, linked to the everyday lives of the children, and may be considered as thoughts detached from the reading process. Here, the reading process creates a space for the reader to think and reflect on events unlinked to the text being read:

'I think about food, drink and school' (Akbar)

'I think about food' (Noreen)

'Drinks and food' (Rashid)

'I think about what's happening at home and about football' (Fiaz)

This lack of attention to meaning during the reading act can and does result in pupils in school being perceived as having problems with comprehension. Many of the pupils featuring in this sample demonstrated a significant disparity between their reading comprehension and their skills as decoders when they were in Year 7. It is quite possible that this lack of attention to meaning which occurs whilst reading in English is influenced by the regular practice of reading without meaning in Arabic.

I have reported elsewhere (Rosowsky, 2001) how many pupils with a similar background will demonstrate a significant divide between their reading comprehension and their reading accuracy (decoding):

There is one element of the cultural experience of these particular pupils which, on the one hand, promotes a specific reading skill, and, on the other, serves to depress the necessary accompanying skills needed for reading effectively. The reading accuracy scores of these children are almost certainly affected by their reading experience in the mosque Qur'anic schools. It is easy to discover that, in comparison with the time spent learning to read and reading in school, much more 'real time and personal effort' is spent learning to read and reading of the Qur'an. Teachers who have similar bilingual pupils in their classes will have noticed that the reading behaviour learnt in the mosque can often overflow into their classrooms and libraries. Because of the poetic rhythm of the Arabic text, and as an aid to recitation, children, and adults, when reading the Qur'an, will often rock the upper part of the body backwards and forwards as they read. Many of these children do this when reading their English books, particularly in the library, if there is no need to sit at a desk or a table. The physical manifestation of the transfer of a reading behaviour such as this suggests that this is surely not the only transfer taking place. The fact that graphophonic reliance in the reading of Arabic is so heavily stressed cannot but affect the place of graphophonic reliance in the reading of English. (Rosowsky, 2001, page 68)

Although children had claimed knowledge of reading Urdu in an earlier question, they all omitted to respond to the question on their thoughts when reading Urdu.

The range of books and other reading materials in the home was limited. The most commonly cited newspaper was the freely delivered *Riverton Record*. Only one pupil claimed to have the Urdu-language newspaper, *Jang*, in the house. Half the group estimated the number of books, of any kind, in the house to be less than ten. Some of the boys mentioned body-building magazines. Books read were school-based and included either typical Y9 class readers such as *Buddy* and *The Machine Gunners*, or personally chosen titles such as *Killer Mushrooms Ate my Grandma*, *The Twits*, *The BFG*, *Pokemon Strikes Back*, *Football Fever*, or just simply, 'my library book'. More than half of the pupils claimed to have no Urdu books at home.

The link between availability of reading materials at home and progress in schooled literacy has been made on many occasions. Suffice it to say in this particular context, the apparent lack of reading materials would not support the acquisition of English, Urdu or Arabic in the home, and to some extent reflects an attitude to learning which while positive, locates learning outside of the home into the institutions of learning such as the mosque and the school.

Have you ever helped your children?

Erm, I have not actually taught them...anything in Arabic.

You left it to the mosque?

I have left that to the mosque...(Wajib)

3.5 Acquisition of liturgical literacy – the process

Children were also interviewed in the context of the family interview which forms part of *Interview Schedule 2* (see *Appendix 1*). The range of ages was wider than for this first group and included older boys and girls, sometimes young men and women, who were asked to reflect on their experiences as children going to the mosque.

It was the case in this community that at various times there was no female teacher in the mosque to teach the girls. This resulted in families making other arrangements for their daughters usually involving a teacher coming to the house or the daughters attending lessons in the house of a female teacher. It was certainly not evident during the course of the interviews that parents thought it any less important for their daughters to complete the usual course of Qur'anic instruction. The main issue was the appropriate facilities in the mosque. This was either a case of there not being a female teacher or, in some cases, a dissatisfaction with the behaviour of the other children and the inability of the teacher to control them. Below is an extract from a family interview where the main respondent is a young woman who had recently left full-time education. Her father's comments are non-italicised:

What age did you start learning the Qur'an?

I started at about 8 or 9.

Where?

We went to this lady. We never went to a mosque to learn because at home from our parents, we had a lady teacher, (Father: Neighbours, good neighbours)

Is that because they didn't have a girls' class at the mosque?

Yes, that's the reason.

Would that be the case for most of the girls?

Yeah.

They wouldn't go to the mosque but would have someone come to the house?

Yeah.

So did you learn as a group then?

Just our brothers and sisters, you know. (Father: Just at home like, you know)

So your brothers didn't go to the mosque either?

Coz they don't read it properly there. My parents didn't, you know...(Father: I don't like...)

All they do is mess about. But she was a good teacher and we learnt from her.

All the time?

Yeah, every day. From, like, 3 to 5, 2 hours.

For how many years did you learn like this?

Two or three years.

So less time than if you had gone to the mosque?

Yeah. They don't have enough time for each child in the mosque. And us, she used to really push us forward. Each child. (Fameeda and Jabbar)

A number of issues arise in this exchange. Firstly, we learn that in this family a decision was taken to instruct the children away from the mosque and this involved them starting a little later than the norm. The reasons given were that, for the girls, there was no suitable female teacher at the mosque, and for the boys, that there was dissatisfaction with behaviour. It is clear that the family valued these alternative arrangements for they allowed the children to complete their course of instruction in far less time than would be normally required in the mosque. The teacher-student ratio was so low in the mosque that the family felt their children would not be receiving the appropriate level of attention. Their alternative teacher allowed for the children to be pushed further and more quickly in their learning of the Qur'an.

However, it should be stressed that this arrangement did not imply that there was any break with the mosque in any other sense. The father and his sons regularly attended the mosque for prayers and the daughters eventually became teaching assistants in the mosque itself, providing classes for girls.

All children interviewed were asked about the way they were taught how to read the Qur'an. The same method was employed whether or not the child was taught in the mosque or in a private house:

(1) She used to say the word first. Tell us what it looked like and we used to repeat afterwards. And then she used to mix the words up and ask us which word was which. So not reciting things without knowing which word you're reading. (Rukhsana)

(2) You start with the puhtee - which is like equivalent to learning the alphabet. The aleph, bah...

Is this a book? Or a sheet?

It's like a sheet, yeah. You start there with the alphabet and then go onto the Qaidah¹⁸. Which helps you pronounce it, like as a full word. Putting it into words. It's a guide book towards reading the Qur'an. (Rashida)

(3) A new person, goes to the teacher and learns to pronounce them. The teacher says it and you then repeat it. Keep on saying till I get it right. Alphabet and then you go like, same but different, (short sounds with the letters)(Fiaz)

¹⁸ The Qaidah is the basic (and universal) primer used for learning Qur'anic Arabic in all mosques.

(4) We used to be in groups and then we usually had to come up to a bench where the imam's wife used to teach us. And one by one, we used to read a bit to her, and if we got it wrong she'd ask us to read it again...and correct it.

But how did you actually start?

I can't really remember. We learnt the phutee, like the alphabet, we learnt that first and then went higher...You had to learn 5 phutees to get to the Qur'an, by then you knew how to read it...(Shaheeda)

(5) The imam's wife read it and we had to repeat it and keep on saying it....(Noreen)

(6) We had the letters first. The teacher said them and we said them after her. (Farida)

The basic method for Qur'anic instruction was based on a look-listen-repeat model of learning. The children begin with the 26 letters of the Arabic alphabet, the puṭtee in Punjabi, and learn these firstly as *names*. For example, the first letter of the alphabet is called 'alif' and the child begins by learning the name 'alif'. The name has only an indirect connection to the sound the letter might represent. Children will then go on to learn the *sounds* of the letters so that 'alif' becomes [a], [i] or [u] depending on the vowel which accompanies it. Unlike the English alphabet, the Arabic alphabet is made up of consonants or semi-consonants and vowels are indicated by diacritic marks above or below the letters. A child will learn these consonants and then proceed to learn each letter with, initially, the three basic vowel sounds, [a], [i] and [u].

خ Xaa'	ح H'aa'	ج Jiim	ث Thlaa'	ت Taa'	ب Baa'	أ 'Alif
ص Saad	ش Shiin	س Siin	ز Zaap	ر Raa'	ذ Thaal	د Daal
ق Qaal	ف Faa'	غ Ghagn	ع 'Ayn	ظ Thcaa'	ط Iaa'	ض Daad
ي Yaa'	و Waaw	ه Haa'	ن Nuun	م Miim	ل Laam	ك Kaaf

Plate 2 – The Arabic Alphabet with Roman script transliteration

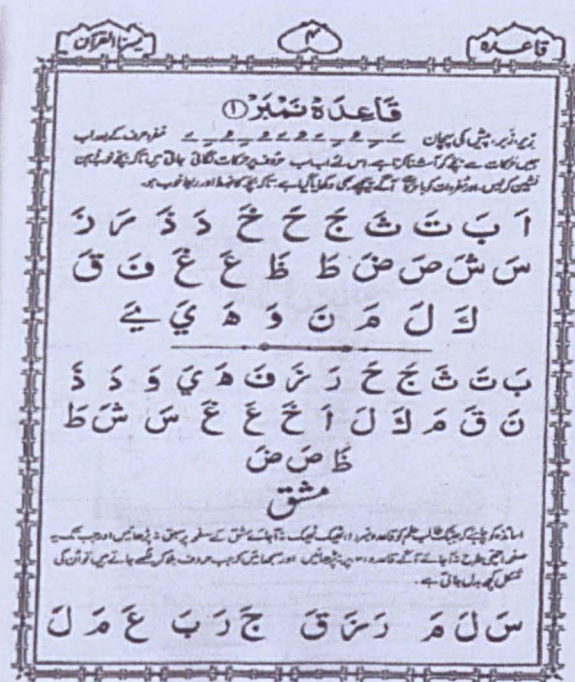


Plate 3 - Arabic letters with vowelling

Again, each child will repeat and memorise the letter-sound correspondences until the teacher considers them ready to move onto the next stage. This will be to combine these consonant+vowel units with others to form syllables. This stage is

then followed by words which can be real or nonsense words. This then leads to reading phrases which by now are all meaningful and recognisable from the Qur'an or other parts of the scripture, such as the *kalimahs*. The *kalimahs* are a series of utterances which encapsulate the fundamental beliefs of the Muslim and along with learning the words of prayer and recitation of the Qur'an constitute the main learning activity in the mosque. The central *kalimah* is '*ash-hadu a-laa ilaaha ill-Allah, ash-hadu ana Muhammada-r-asool Allah*' which means 'I testify that there is only one God and that Muhammed is the Messenger of God'. The final stage in this preparation for reading the Qur'an itself is the reading of complete verses which occupy the last few pages of the *Qaidah*.

The *Qaidah* is a short primer of the Arabic reading system. It usually contains between 10 to 40 pages and begins with the alphabet on the first page followed by subsequent pages that follow the sequence described above. Occasionally, children are given a single page containing the alphabet only, the *puhtee*, and this can be obtained in plastic so that the page remains intact after generous use by young hands.

These plastic pages are very reminiscent of the hornbooks which were used until the nineteenth century in both Britain and America. These were also a page long and always included the alphabet in upper and lower case letters along with the Lord's Prayer. They were called hornbooks because a layer of horn, which had been beaten until transparent, was placed over the page to preserve the life of the page (Manguel, 1996).



Plate 4 – 18th Century Scottish Hornbook



Plate 5 – Plastic Qai'dah or Puhtee

The teacher makes the decision as to when a child is ready to move onto the appropriate next stage. Children are aware and sensitive about where they might have

got to in their learning of how to read the Qur'an and are always ready to declare, or boast, where they might have reached. Similarly, the teacher will decide when a child has reached the end of their course of instruction and will either inform the parents that there is no longer a need for their son or daughter to attend or that he or she would benefit from amore advanced course in memorisation which always comes later. There is a very 'quantitative' dimension to the following responses:

(1)

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

I know it all but I don't know it off by heart. I can easily read it...

Do you know any of it by heart?

I do know the last ten (chapters) of the thirtieth siparah....(Ghazanfar)

(2)

Who decides when you have done or learnt enough?

It's the teacher, when she knows you can read all the Qur'an by yourself, you read it to her and she considers you can read it now and that's it. (Fameeda)

(3)

At what stage are you when you stop going to the mosque?

Well, I finished the Qur'an twice.

What does that actually mean?

Well, you just get to read it through from the first chapter until the end. And while you do that you get to memorise parts of the Qur'an, surahs, starting from the back, the last thirty. There are 114 in total and I managed to learn the last thirty. And you get to read the kalimats in Urdu. Basically, when you have got to a stage where you think it is quite acceptable at the mosque you read that...

Who decides, you or the teacher?

You decide personally, and go off to read at home...

Who monitors how much or where you have got to?

The ustaad at the mosque, which in my case, was Maulana Shabbir.

What about you? (to respondent's younger sister)

I read it three times. And now I am learning the thirtieth siparah. I have learnt 27 surahs. (Rashida and Robina)

As in the interviews with children in *Sample 1*, the number of times one has read through the Qur'an serves as a measure of progress. Children are also encouraged to memorise as much of the last *siparah* as possible. This exercise will also help identify those children who demonstrate an aptitude for memorisation for it is at this age that children either leave the mosque school or continue with '*hifz*' (memorisation) of the Qur'an.

Abdul Ghafoor and his brothers have all memorised the entire Qur'an and are therefore entitled to be called '*Hafiz*' of the Qur'an, a very prestigious title within Muslim society.

What age did you start learning the Qur'an?

About 13 or 14.

So when you said 14 or 13 you meant *hifz*...Who taught you?

My dad. At home.

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

Hafiz of the whole Qur'an...

How long did that take?

About two years...

And your brothers?

They are all hufaaz (Arabic plural of hafiz') of the Qur'an.

Is two years normal?

Sometimes it takes longer...

What is the best age for doing hifz?

Young. At about 8 years of age.

Once you have done this and learnt the Qur'an, how do you keep it?

You keep on reciting it...Every day you should read it regularly...

What do you do every day?

One siparah...

And do you do it in order?

Yes.

So every month you go back to the beginning...Do you have to keep going back to the text to check?

Yes. Or you read it to someone, a teacher...

Do you help each other, your brothers?

Yes. (Abdul Ghafoor)

This aspect of learning in the mosque or in the Muslim community is a common one. Although Abdul Ghafoor and his brothers are rare in that most children do not go on to memorise the complete Qur'an, nearly all children will memorise significant sections of the Qur'an beyond that needed for the performance of prayer, where all that is needed is the opening chapter of the Qur'an which is seven verses long and one of the shorter chapters from the last thirtieth which could amount to no more than 3 or 4 verses. Nafisa tells us that she has memorised the chapter called 'Yasin' and Tasleem and Sajidah tell us they have memorised most of the thirtieth siparah (approximately 25 pages).

What about learning the Qur'an by heart? Did she encourage you to do that?

No, because, you know...for that you have to go to a special school...

Yes, if you want to do the whole thing. I mean learning 'Yasin' or something like that. A siparah for example.

Yes, we did that at home, the first siparah... the second.

How much do you know by heart?

I only know the first page and enough to do my namaz. And 'Yasin' by heart.

(Father: Surat Yasin is the heart of the Qur'an. The most important. You have to read it every morning after the Fajr (the dawn prayer)) (*Tasleem , Sajidah and father, Jabbar*)

3.6 Liturgical literacy – an example of syncretism

As we will see in more detail in the chapter devoted to teachers (*The Teachers*) the curriculum of the mosque school is centred on learning how to read the Arabic of the Qur'an. What other learning takes place varies from mosque to mosque. Teaching about Islam and its fundamentals and the teaching of Urdu are the two other dimensions to the curriculum which are possible. The extent to which these dimensions feature will depend on a range of interrelated concerns such as the availability of teachers, the wishes of parents and the choice of language of instruction. Discussion regarding the presence or absence of these dimensions takes place in the chapters, *The Parents, The Organisers* and in *Section IV, Languages*.

In this chapter, it will suffice to mention how the children experience these additions to the curriculum. In one mosque there was a significant period of time

when there was no female teacher available for the girls. During this period two sisters were approached and asked to run the two hour sessions for the girls. These two girls, who were members of one of the families interviewed, had no experience of teaching except as recipients of teaching both in the mosque and in school. What they managed to achieve is noteworthy inasmuch as they were able to fuse some of the techniques they had experienced in school with the teaching objectives of the mosque school. This is an example of what Gregory (1998) refers to as syncretic literacy practices, or what has been described alternatively as a 'fusion' of different kinds of literacy (Millard, 2003). Here Nafisa describes how she and her sister went about teaching younger girls in the mosque:

No. Can I just say something. You know, me and Nahida, we taught in the mosque. You know, Jamia Mosque in University Road. We thought it was important to teach Urdu and Islam. I had the little group and she had the older group. We used to teach them Islam. And the girls we taught a lot and they were really interested in it. And we had lots of girls coming, like 50 or 60. Because they were really interested in Urdu. And Islam. They enjoyed it and we had comments from the parents, you know, the kids really liked what we did. And he (their father) brought some books from Dewsbury, some Islam books, and gave them out to the girls for free to learn something because they hardly knew anything. Most parents don't know anything. They are illiterate people, they don't understand Urdu or the English. And when she (their mother) goes to houses, they still remember us. Saying 'they were the best teachers in the mosque'.

What did the community think?

They thought it was really good. They didn't want us to leave and kept on calling us back. But we couldn't go back. There were too many girls to handle and only two teachers... What we did, like, we put all the little girls in little groups, and we taught them one word first, and moved onto the next one. We had lots of kids but we put them

in little groups and it was much easier for us. And we said we'd give them something if they learnt it.

Did they help each other?

Yeah, the older girls that my sister had, we put one of them in each group to help the little girls. The 5 or 6 year-olds. And then we all used to sit together and repeat what they had done. And ask them what they had been learning. And whilst they were in the groups we used to round from group to group helping them as well.

On Friday we used not to read the Qur'an. We just used to do Urdu for two hours. Because they used to get bored just with the qaida and reading. Keep on being fidgety. So on a Wednesday there was an Islam class, the girls who wanted to do an Islam class so we did that. And on Fridays Urdu. (Nafisa)

In this mosque, the girls were placed into groups by their two young teachers and older, more advanced, girls were used as guides for the younger ones. A reward system was introduced and the curriculum was varied, with the teaching of Islam on Wednesdays and Urdu on Fridays. The sheer number of children attending the mosque school clearly necessitates some imaginative use of group work. It was clear here that the two 'teachers' were using their experience from school in the context of the mosque.

There were other ways in which the girls were advantaged by having teachers who knew not only something about school-based teaching and learning styles but also who shared in their experiences, particularly in respect of language:

Was anything said to you when you introduced teaching Urdu into the mosque?

They really liked it.

Was that your choice? Did you have to ask anyone's permission?

No. We just did as we wanted. We were like the Heads there! We did whatever we wanted to.

Did you get paid?

Yeah. But we didn't really bother about that. We were only interested in getting the kids...

So how did you get involved then?

This lady had left, she was on holiday somewhere, and they needed new teachers. And I used to go to school then and went straight to the mosque and he asked if we would be interested and we thought it would be good fun. My dad said yeah it's a good job rather than going somewhere else. And that's the only job we've done since we left school.

Why did you stop? Is it because you got married?

My big sister got married and I couldn't carry on my own.

So what happens now?

There were two other ladies and it's a total disaster! Whenever I see the two ladies they say why don't you come down some time? But I haven't got any time now. It's because we were near their age and we knew English...

So these two ladies don't know English?

They just know their own language and tell the children to shut up and do this and do that! And they won't listen. We used to speak English, and Punjabi and Urdu, we used to speak mixed, and they could understand and sit down. We used to give them choices, if you want to read, read, if not go home. Things like that. I used to copy like what the teachers at school would do. (Nafisah)

There was obviously a conscious attempt by the girls to adopt teaching techniques from school and this, together with the ability to communicate to the girls in English

as well as Punjabi led to the success of the short-lived venture. The ability of children to imitate teaching methods encountered at school and use them in a different context appear, within this community at least, to serve very useful purposes. (cf. Gregory, 1998) Earlier we encountered Bashir who was reluctant to interfere with the teaching of the mosque. However, Bashir was also initiated into the ways of school and the English language by his elder sister who would teach him at home by imitating school learning:

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

English? I learnt it from my older sister. She started school as soon as she came to England. We all basically came at the same time. She started teaching me what she was learning straightaway at school. I was two years of age, two and a half, and she'd come home and tell me everything that she was taught. My older brother, he didn't tell me anything. My sister, she was very very good in teaching. She taught us a lot before we actually started school (Bashir)

It is clear that part of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, Luke, 1996) of this community is its ability to transmit language and culture through the imitation of institutional models of learning and their application in the contexts of home and mosque. It is also clear that that it is often females who are more comfortable in adopting this school-based model.

3.7 Liturgical literacy and reading for meaning

Learning to read the Arabic of the Qur'an, nevertheless, remains the principal learning activity of the mosque school. The method of teaching is a very traditional

one which differs very little from the manner in which all Muslim children are taught to read the Qur'an irrespective of their language or cultural backgrounds. There are Qaidahs for Arabic-speaking or Turkish-speaking children which are practically identical to those used in mosques where the congregation is Mirpuri-Punjabi-speaking. Often the main difference will be in the type of script employed, where communities originating from the Indian sub-continent will be more familiar with a more cursive script than those communities where Arabic is spoken which use a more angular and characteristically Arabic script. The principal reading skill taught is decoding and authentic recitation. One of the central characteristics of this form of teaching is its apparent lack of reference to the meaning of the words. Children, as we saw earlier, when asked what they might reflect on whilst reading can only manage, at best, a vague reference to religious values and concepts without making any linkage to the discrete meaning of words, phrases or whole texts.

The most commonly recited chapter of the Qur'an for a Muslim is the '*Fatihah*', or 'Opening' which is, in fact the opening chapter of the Qur'an and is seven short verses long. A Muslim, if praying regularly, will read the '*Fatihah*' at the very least seventeen times a day, and will, usually, recite it many more times than this. It is as ubiquitous in a Muslim's daily routine as the Lord's Prayer might be in a Christian's.

All children were asked if they could explain the meaning of these verses to a non-Arabic speaker and non-Muslim. Apart from a general sense that the words were an important part of their faith, the children struggled to communicate a meaning for the words.

(1)

The part of the Qur'an that a Muslim reads the most is the Fatihah. The most basic and well-known chapter and, if you prayed five times a day, something you'll be saying every day about twenty times. If, for example, your friend, an English, non-Muslim, asked you to explain it, could you tell them what it is?

Father: *Yeah, we can explain it a bit, yeah*

Daughter: *No, I'm not sure. I read it somewhere in English. But I've forgotten it now.*

Father: *God bless you, blessings (Nafisah and Jabbar)*

(2)

Could you translate the Fatihah for somebody, an English non-Muslim who didn't know and asked you what it meant?

I wouldn't be able to go through it either line for line or word for word, but I'd be able to give a basic representation...where 'al hamdu lillah' means...I mean I wouldn't be able to give that as in full, but if I read 'al hamdu lillah rabi alameen...' in complete I'd be able to tell the other person this surah which I have read to you actually means or has got equivalent understanding that...I'm asking God at all times for him to put me onto the Straight Path... '...er...it goes on to say the duas which are included in it... 'siraat ul mustaqeem' which is part, which it says 'to the straight path' ...I'd have to probably read it over and over again to get all the rest of the words out, but this is... (Bashir)

(3)

What about the Fatihah? You know the Fatihah? The beginning of the Qur'an...the very first chapter...the one you always say in namaz...we say that at least 15 times a day if you're praying regularly...So it's probably the most important part of the Qur'an for a Muslim...Would you be able to explain it to a non-Muslim friend...?

No, we don't know what it means... (Ghazanfar)

(4)

You know the Fatihah? Just seven verses. What do they mean?

I'd have to go and look it, and read it.

Where would you read it?

In a book or something. (Mumir)

(5)

Do you know the Fatihah? The first surah of the Qur'an?

Yes.

As you know, we recite it many times in regular namaz and we also say it on very many occasions outside of namaz. If you had to explain to a non-muslim, what it meant, after all it is the most important verses any muslim knows, would you be able to explain its meaning?

No. No. (Amjid)

Don't worry about that. I'm finding it's a general thing. If you were going to know one thing in English it would be that.

The intention behind the question was not to embarrass the young boys and girls but to seek the confirmation that the meaning of words and verse was not included as an

essential ingredient of the reading curriculum. If the meaning of any section, chapter or verse of the Qur'an was to be known, then it would have to be this collection of verses. The fact that such a regularly recited chapter is not comprehended by the majority of the respondents¹⁹ in this study underlines the importance and value exclusive decoding has as a cultural and religious practice within this and other Muslim communities.

3.8 Children's attitudes to liturgical literacy

The final set of questions for the children focused on their attitudes towards attending the mosque. This was an attempt to elicit responses which might reveal common values and understandings of this most intense of cultural experiences. There is no doubt that attending the mosque creates tension for the young believers and their parents. Sageer, whom we met at the start of this chapter, has to balance the demands of school, home and mosque as well as seek to have some sort of social life outside of these institutions. The community, however, is far from being able to alleviate these competing pressures. The two hours between school and home are acutely valued by the teachers who know this is the only time available to them to teach their young students. They know they cannot demand more time for fear of alienating both students and parents.

The limited time is two hours – that's what the community gives for their children.

Five days a week. Two hours is little. Three hours – then you break the barrier of

¹⁹ I asked the same question of most parents, and although their number is too small to draw a secure conclusion, their responses lead me to conclude that the lack of understanding of this chapter is common to all generations.

children's relaxation time and their leisure time and everything. So the 5-7 time is just balanced in between. (Maulana Shabbir)

All children were asked about the importance of attending the mosque. As one might expect all gave very positive responses. However, the clarity of their responses demonstrates that they do have opinions about one of the most defining aspects of their identity. Any critical comments were based on perceptions of student behaviour in the mosque rather than on negative attitudes towards the act of attending mosque itself.

All agree that attending the mosque was essential for their lives and themselves as individuals:

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

(1) Very important. We finished school at 3.30 and went to the mosque at 4. Monday to Friday.

Did you find it hard to do all those things – school, mosque, homework?

Yeah. But once you start doing it you get used to it...It is hard at first, you know when we were at Barbhill (junior school), it was OK, because...but when we were at Fieldworth (secondary school) it used to be really really tiring, because you would get more homework and things and walk all the way home – ten minutes – get ready – go to the mosque – come back home – homework... (Akbar)

(2) Because it is our religion it is very important. (Rashida)

(3) It's our religion, innit? That's what we've got to do. We have to learn about our religion. It's very important. (Tasleem)

(4) As a young child, it is quite exciting, as you go a bit you learn how important religion is to you. And how you've got to bring it into everyday life. So it does become very important. And you get encouragement from there. It builds your confidence. (Nafisah)

(5) I think it is important, very important to learn about Islam and Arabic. That's if they are learning it there, but if they are not, what's the point of going if all they are doing is messing about. It's better if they just learn at home with their parents, if they can do it, or go to a better mosque school. (Ferzana)

When asked about the principal activity in the mosque, learning how to read the Qur'an, children remained equally positive, if a little imprecise:

Why do you learn the Qur'an?

Because we are Muslims and it is part of Islam... (Amjid)

Because it is something to do with the religion. (Rukshana)

However, once the discussion turns on meaning, the child is obliged to deal in generalities and can only refer to the overarching value of reading the Qur'an.

When people say 'learn the Qur'an' what do they actually mean?

Learning how to read it. And to understand what it all means.

That doesn't seem to happen so much, does it?

As you go through reading it, the ustaad²⁰ points out little things that are important and introduce them to your everyday life. It's not something you would probably remember for ever...You can't go back to it and say 'I know what that means'. You remember the general idea. And about how to incorporate it into your life. (Rozina)

Finally in this phase of the research, the children were asked if they perceived any differences or similarities in the manner by which they had been taught to read at school and at the mosque and were invited to suggest ways in which the manner of learning to read at the mosque could be improved.

Their answers are characterised by considerable candour and thoughtfulness revealing again the seriousness this aspect of their lives has for them.

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

(1) No, I think they were both the same. She used to teach in schools as well. She did it the same way. From the alphabet. (Samina)

(2) I think mosque was more stricter and, like school you have to go...no matter what like...because the government says so...but the mosque was just family thing...and that is why it was much stricter and didn't let anybody mess about...but in school teachers couldn't be too strict with you...so you used to mess about much more in school... (Fiaz)

What about the way you were taught to read, rather than the way you behaved?

Did you know how to read before you went to school?

²⁰ *ustaad* is an Urdu word derived from Arabic, 'master', and denotes a teacher.

The age you went to nursery was the age when you went to the mosque...I don't know about the difference because you always start with the basics and then you move on... (Munir)

(3) For the Qur'an we had to do everything in our heads, whereas in school we could also write things down on paper. In some mosques they still use the cane like in the old days.

What might you get the cane for?

For not learning. Instead of getting detention, you'll get the cane instead. (Sujad)

(4) Personally, I don't find any differences. If in English there's a word you don't understand, you can get a dictionary, but you don't have Arabic dictionaries, but in school you just get the dictionary. (Ameer)

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

(1) What we did, like, we put all the little girls in little groups, and we taught them one word first, and moved onto the next one. We had lots of kids but we put them in little groups and it was much easier for us. And we said we'd give them something if they learnt it. (Nafisah)

(2) If the Qur'an was written in English, like a word is in Arabic but written in English for the Arabic words (i.e. Roman script) it would be easier. (Munir)

(3) I'd like there to be more English books. About Islam. Let children read them. (They've got English books in the mosque, in the bookcases, haven't they?). Yes, but they don't open them. Maulana Shabbir used to do it every day. We used to get more cleverer, more about Islam. (Tasleem)

The last word in this chapter will go not to a child but to the teacher mentioned in the last quotation who, although no longer employed by the mosque which features in this study, left a lasting impression with many of the children he taught. He will feature more prominently in Chapter Three – *The Teachers*.

I asked him about the children's attitudes to learning in the mosque given the other demands upon their time and his response was the following:

Because of the difficulty that they are facing at the masjid(mosque) they tend to make excuses of not attending the masjid. In other words, try to cut corners, or stay at home. Then you have those who are willing to come and those who are willing to come but not learn anything at all just try to sit there. And you have those who just come and learn and learn...I think children's attitudes you can't really say something concrete...because they are just in a mood of their own. You might have a problem with a child for one whole week where he is not learning anything whatever and the same child next week might turn around and be top of the class. And you might have a child who's been coming first every time and then he just switches off...And I think it's always just, as it says in the hadeeth(sayings of the Prophet), the iman (faith) always goes... increases or decreases, I think it is the same thing with children...it increases or decreases... (Maulana Shabbir)

3.9 Summary

This chapter has allowed an insight into the practices, thoughts, feelings and attitudes of the young people involved in the acquisition and practice of liturgical literacy. It has sought to demonstrate the rich, but complex, nature of the latter and to stress the fundamental and central role it plays in the lives of these young people. An important theme in this study is the way the different generations of the community relate to and interact with liturgical literacy. The next chapter seeks to add to this study on liturgical literacy by describing the parents' practices, thoughts, feelings and attitudes.

Chapter 4: The Parents

Vignette

Munir is over sixty years old now and is retired. He was born in a small village in Mirpur, part of Azad Kashmir. He spent the first sixteen years of his life in the village where he went to primary and middle school. His father worked on ships and he saw him quite rarely. He arrived in this country with his two brothers in 1963, having followed their older brother who had arrived in 1957. They all lived together in one house with two other cousins. Apart from a few evening lessons to learn English held at the local college, there was no opportunity to continue studying. Anyway, this was not the reason for coming to the UK in the first place. Riverton, at this time, was a good place for those seeking employment. The steel works which surrounded the town centre at Templeborough or at Parkgate; the railway marshalling yards at Tinsley and the glass manufacturers, Beatson Clark, whose plant loomed large over the town centre; all were ready takers of the large numbers of young labourers coming from the small rural province of Mirpur. Munir first started work in a factory called Steel Products and stayed there for ten years. He finished there and moved to the British Rail marshalling yards at Tinsley, where he spent five years. He then moved to Beatson Clark, where he inspected mathematical bottles. Here he stayed for 26 years. He took early retirement when he was 57, on the grounds of ill health. He married in 1971 in Mirpur and returned with his wife shortly after. He has had six children and now has three grandchildren. In the sixties, he and his brothers used to return to Pakistan in order to visit their parents. They could afford to spend long periods of time out of work back home because they knew there were always going to be jobs waiting for them when they returned. The economic downturn in the nineteen-seventies meant that an extended stay back home might result in losing employment. This economic reality together with the

fact that their parents passed away, as well as the steady arrival of children, has meant that the need to return has diminished. He also knows that his children would find it very difficult living in Mirpur, so the dream of returning, which was there with him and his brothers when they first came has now disappeared. In the early days, they were young and concerned principally with earning enough money live on and send home. There was little time for thinking about their culture and its maintenance. In a sense, at the beginning, the men thought their sojourn in the UK would be a limited one and they would return home. As they began to put down roots, most markedly by having families, the need to preserve something of their culture and religion asserted itself. Throughout the late fifties and sixties, if Munir wanted to pray, as he did on a Friday or at Eid twice a year, he would take the bus to Darnall in Sheffield and pray at the nearest local mosque. As the community became more conscious of its religious and cultural needs, a mosque opened near the town centre in 1971. This would be a place that served the needs of the community in terms of prayer, but would also allow the children to be taught a basic understanding of their religion and how to read the Qur'an.

Akhtar came to this country when he was ten. His father had come earlier in the early nineteen fifties and Akhtar came with his mother and younger brother in 1970. He attended the local school for four years and left with a number of CSEs. Although very bright, as his later life proved, because of his limited English he was put in a stream at school which did the lower status CSEs. He left school and went straight into an apprentice scheme at British Steel. Here he worked for five years before he was able to purchase a shop and since that time has been a successful small businessman. He, along with many of his generation, still suffer the frustration of having arrived in the UK at an age which missed UK primary education and, because of the lack at that time of additional support within schools for non-English speakers, struggled their way through secondary education leaving with few qualifications and, therefore, could only take up low paid jobs. His father worked sixteen hours a day, six days a week, and Akhtar is determined that his own children will enter the professional class. His eldest daughter has just been accepted to study law at Leeds University. He has strong opinions about

the education provided by the mosque but cannot be too vociferous in the community because his uncle is the mosque's chairman.

4.1 Introduction

There are three generations of parents at present in the community. The older generation is made up of those men who first came to the UK in the nineteen-fifties and early nineteen-sixties. They were either already married before they came, or they went home to marry and their wives would remain in Mirpur. Any children that were born were the result of visits home which, in the early days, could last for up to one year. Eventually, with the economic realities of the nineteen seventies upon them, these men took the decision to bring their wives and any children they had to the UK. They moved out of homes shared with other men and began buying houses for their families. This is Qurban reflecting on his visits home in the nineteen-sixties:

I have been to Pakistan many times. First time was in 1966, then I come back again. I went in 1966 for one and a half years. Because our parents were alive, you know. We used to go there for the sake of our parents. And now our parents are passed away, there is nobody, no close relative, so we don't go there now. Because children have grown up here. And also when children have grown up they don't want to go there, don't want to live there. It's difficult for them, you know, to live there. (Qurban)

The second generation of parents interviewed for this study are those who were born in Mirpur but who were brought here by their father in the late nineteen sixties and early seventies as the first generation began to realise families had to be reunited and

that visits home were becoming less likely and less desirable. These children had often spent much of their primary education in Mirpur and arrived in this country with little or no English. They either spent a year or so in primary schools or went straight into secondary schools depending on their age on arrival. By the start of the eighties these young people began to marry, often with relatives from Mirpur, and their children began to pass through the local schools from the mid eighties onwards. Their children, therefore, were born in the town and attended all phases of compulsory education. Here, Hanif describes his arrival and experiences of school:

Yes, I came in 1969 with my mum and dad. And my wife came in 1981 when we got married.

When did your father come?

Maybe early sixties.

Did he come alone?

*Yes, in them days you came on your own and you had to bring your family later
And, like I said, I was primary level. 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 (ROSLA). 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. I started as a motor mechanic, for a long long time. Then I
did taxi driving for a bit and then back into motor mechanics.*

Is it your business?

Yes, it is. It is my business from the beginning more or less. I started it from scratch.

(Hanif)

The third generation of parents in the community were, of course, the sons and daughters of the generation just described and, as such, were the parents of very young, pre-school, children. These were not specially targeted for interviews although some of the 'older' young people who gave perspectives in the previous chapter were just embarking on the journey of parenthood. Their own experiences and those of their children are crucial for an understanding of the future role of liturgical literacy in the community. However, their role as third generation parents is not fully examined in this chapter (see *Section 3, Languages, Chapter 11*).

4.2 Attitudes and Concerns

In respect of the education provided by the mosque, the parents interviewed had very interesting views. All the fathers attended the mosque either on a daily basis, more likely with the first generation who were now reaching retirement age, or on Fridays. All had sent their children to the mosque for some time. However, there were some families who elected to have their children learn how to read the Qur'an outside of the mosque. This was usually down to dissatisfaction with levels of behaviour in the mosque school or with the lack of individual attention available with such high teacher-student ratios.

My mum says if there's a good teacher then they will learn, otherwise they go there just to mess about. (Nafisah)

There's too many children. 60 or 70 children. The Moulvi (imam) just does the Qaidah and that's all. (Jabbar)

When asked a general question about the quality of education provided by the mosque most parents from both generations were candidly critical of certain aspects of either the organisation or curriculum. It is important to mention, however, that all were satisfied with the principal learning objective of learning how to read the Qur'an. There is no doubt that the methodology adopted for instructing the children in the accurate decoding of the Arabic text is an extremely effective and highly efficient one.

There were two main bones of contention in respect of the education provided by the mosque. Firstly, it was felt by many parents that not enough time was allowed for children to develop a better understanding of their religion beyond the learning of the basic of ritual and liturgy. In addition, to learning how to read the Qur'an in Arabic, children were always taught how to pray. This consisted of instruction in bodily movements as well as memorisation of the correct wording, also in Arabic. They would also be taught how to conduct the ritual ablution needed before prayer and handling the Qur'an or entering the mosque. These elements of the ritual comprised the 'basics' as some parents and imams termed them. Yet parents admitted that they felt this was inadequate as a religious education for their children and, as a consequence their children were growing up ignorant of much of the fundamentals of their religion.

(1) You should learn Islam as well as reading...They don't do that in many mosques.

They don't do it at all. (Akhtar)

(2) But in the mosque there, there is no good imam, you see. She says that in the bigger cities and places they can learn Islam, (Birmingham, Manchester) but in Riverton there's none. In Manchester and Birmingham there's Islam lessons and things like that. In Riverton not many, small community, twenty years they have none and the children have missed all their education. My mum says that we have lessons, stories things like that, she reads books and tells us things (Father: Urdu books from the library and all this) She tells us at home.

So a lot of your knowledge about Islam comes from home?

From books which tell of the prophets and all that. (Nafisah and Jabbar)

(3) 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 (Wajib)

(4) That's the problem. They've got books. Nowadays, it's very hard. Unless there's something in the community you can go to, like in big towns they'll have places, but apart from the mosques we have nothing here in Riverton. There's nowhere to go. There's a gap there. Where youngsters can go and learn about Islam. Nothing in Riverton. (Qurban)

4.3 Languages in the mosque

The second major concern for parents in their dissatisfaction with the education provided by the mosque was the lack of use of English in the mosque. Indeed, many of the worries about the lack of a general knowledge of Islam by the children could be dispelled if the complex language situation be resolved. For the elders, and those in the community who had learnt a reasonably proficient level of Urdu, much of the general teaching about Islam takes place in the Friday sermons and at the occasional religious gatherings held at various times of the year. The language for all these events, at present, is in Urdu. In the two local mosques serving the community, both imams have a very limited knowledge of English and, although very proficient in terms of religious knowledge and in the teaching of the reading of the Qur'an, always deliver their sermons in Urdu. With the increasing absence of Urdu knowledge among the young people, the value of this vehicle for transmitting religious knowledge is becoming more limited for the future of the community. In my visits to the mosque, and in particular, my attendance at the weekly congregational prayer on Friday, I could not help notice the number of boys and young men, some of whom I had taught, who formed the last two or so rows of people at the back of the prayer hall. I suspected a language problem:

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 Eastfield Mosque, they used to come to taraweeh (special prayers in Ramadan), 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.

So the speech is in Urdu not in Punjabi?

Well, our imam his speech is in Urdu, about Islam, you know, what Islam says, for people my age, they don't know about Islam, and people are without qualifications, without education. In the mosque. But the imam does not come from our area, that place is Kashmir, a big place, you know, his place name is Palandree. He come from there.

The only problem is about our children. For example, you said a lot of children go there, and sit at back... (Munir)

However, the parents also indicated that English should be used much more extensively in the mosque including during the teaching of the Qur'an.

(1)

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

(2)

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. (Wajib)

(3)

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. (Munir)

(4)

Mosque education is just all right for reading. They can just read. But a little bit more, what I am feeling, if they give an education by through meaning, what Arabic means, the language, everything. They give with English. Then I am more happy, because it is easy to understand for children as well. What means everything like. (Qurban)

(5) *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)*

This poignant last comment about Urdu reflects a general view towards the use of Urdu which is the subject of a later chapter (*Section IV, Languages, Chapter 9, Urdu*).

The teacher, Maulana Shabbir, mentioned in the last quotation was previously employed by one of the local mosques and, indeed, achieved considerable success with parents and students, by teaching and preaching in English. He was, however, dismissed by the mosque committee after a dispute and has now started his own mosque and teaching institution in another part of the town.

4.4 Parents and the institutions of liturgical literacy

The administration of the two mosques was another issue which evoked comment from the parents interviewed. It is interesting to note that at present the administration of the two local mosques and other mosques in the town to which they are linked, by and large, is the preserve of men from the first generation of settlers. The committee of Church Walk mosque belong to that group of men who came alone in the nineteen fifties and early nineteen sixties as does the chairman of the University Road mosque. The time and, in many cases, considerable money invested in the establishment of these places of worship have given these men the authority to maintain the status quo in term of the education provided by the mosque. It is, of course, not that long ago that there was no mosque in the town and their presence now and the education provided for the children must appear to these men as a significant and great achievement.

The parents, however, who vary from those being on the fringes of the administration of the mosque to others having little or nothing to do with their respective mosque trustees, have plenty to say on the way the mosques are run:

I think the mosques are letting our kids down...I think they are helping to diminish Islam. I think they are little empires...Run by little men who are little despots...And that goes for all of them...(Akhtar)

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.

Yes. He's (the chairman of the mosque) 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. (Wajib)

The apparent conflict between these two stakeholders is closely linked to the difference which can occur across generations. It is noteworthy that no representative of the second generation of parents described above is a trustee at either of the two local mosques.

(1) Yes. The old people, oh God, they are the biggest barrier...I've mentioned it a couple of times that we should have it in English, 'Oh, what about our own language?' They confuse Pakistani culture with Islam. They are two different things...Islam has nothing to do with...there are things we do in Pakistani culture people think is Islamic...it's not...(Hanif)

(2) Main thing, for example, in our mosque committee is my cousin, you know, he is the secretary. He has a language problem. He can speak English, but he speaks broken

English. He can't speak full English. He can't explain what is our problem. If anyone goes to the council meeting from the mosque, we should have a good representative, he can explain what is our problem. A person who speaks broken English, he can't...it's difficult. We want a qualified person. Who knows English, and can explain to people on the council committee. Then they can help. If they don't understand how can they help?
(Qurban)

(3) And this committee is absolutely rubbish. I think myself. Because they do not give a chance to other people who are interested who want to do something about this generation. (Munir)

(4) What about in the mosque? Do you have any role there?

No. The reason being my uncle is the chairman of the mosque. Qurban Hussain.

He's somebody I need to speak to...

Don't mention you've spoken to me! (laughter)

OK, why?

No, seriously. He's an unelected chairman. He's the Mugabe of our mosque..

Because he has been there since the beginning basically?

Yeah...well it helped. What it was...That's how it usually works...He's alright...he's doing voluntary work...he doesn't get paid for it...There's supposed to be a trust...supposed to be elections...He doesn't believe in things like that...I'm not saying anything because he's my uncle...(laughter) (Akhtar)

4.5 Parents' acquisition of liturgical literacy

An unexpected outcome from the series of interviews conducted with parents was the information that many parents learnt how to read the Qur'an themselves in the UK at one of the local mosques. It is interesting to note how

many parents used the education provided by the mosque to learn a skill they had either forgotten about, or neglected to learn, when they were young. There is a strong sense of many of these men equally engaged in activities which help forge cultural and religious identity. The education available to these men when younger, both secular and religious, was limited in the village of Mirpur with little in the way of facilities and often lack of knowledge or expertise on the part of the teacher or imam. The parents were, therefore, able to bring an interesting perspective to the different ways liturgical literacy was acquired here and back home:

No, here is different. There... I think teaching is different. They coming this way, here, the imam is more a graduate. And there is an imam who is in the village he is alright as a teacher but very different there to here. To teach. And these imams there have no qualifications. (Jabbar)

One man described a special class that was set up by the imam in the afternoons for those who wanted to improve or refresh their knowledge of reading the Qur'an. He remarked upon how the methods used by the imam were a significant improvement on those employed back home when he was a boy:

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. But only two months. Imam was busy. (Munir)

Another man described how he studies with his sons and how their practice is quite different to how he remembered learning back home in the village:

Sometimes we sit together, me and children, and Wasim, and tries to teach me as well, because he is learning from here, and he is good at reading the Qur'an. And Fasal he is very good too. And sometimes I get help from them. I learned to read 30 years before, and it was very different there to here. (Qurban)

4.6 Gender role models

Mothers were often able to provide more guidance for their children in the learning of the Qur'an than their fathers. As we will explore later in the chapter devoted to the different languages of the community, it was often the mother who served as the main role model both in terms of Islam and in terms of the literary language, Urdu. Many of the fathers, whose origins were the rural villages of Mirpur and Azad Kashmir, and as a result, had had a relatively low level of education exacerbated by moving from home to the UK at crucial times in their educational careers, were married to urbanised, educated women whose knowledge of Islam and Urdu far exceeded that of their husbands.

(1) I remember sitting down on the floor most of the time. It was a poor school. We used to, we could read and that. The missus didn't have that background, a strong educational influence up there, but there wasn't that many books and we used to write on the slate, with chalk and everything, and I remember we used to have assemblies. Teachers were good. They believed in corporal punishment and all that stuff. I learnt a lot from Pakistani education. Urdu wise. (my underlining) (Wajib)

(2) She was more in the town basis. And I was from the village side.

Is there a difference then?

Yes, there's a difference. Probably more resources. My wife's school had more resources. They probably sat down on chairs and everything. The school was near to the house as well. In my case it was a mile two miles maybe. My wife goes to classes, like, she reads the Qur'anic verses, at Rosehill Community Centre.

Teaching?

Well, you can say teaching, she reads with the people, teaches them how to read. Poetry and everything. She does that every Friday. When she goes to this community meeting, a lot of ladies can't read Urdu, so she has to read it and tell them whatever (Hanif)

(3)

Daughter: My mum speaks Urdu, she doesn't speak Punjabi, she speaks in a more mannered way. More than my dad

So do you all speak to your mum in Urdu?

Father: I only speak Punjabi, you see, I like my language. I like it.

Daughter: My mum speaks good Urdu so we all speak Urdu with her. So they come up with better language and that...(laughs) (Nafisah)

4.7 Attitudes towards secular education

When asked to comment on their opinion about the education provided by the state school most parents were very positive and generally expressed a very benign view of the education their children have received. Sometimes this is positively compared with their own experience when arriving in this country back in the sixties and seventies. These men consider that their children's experience of state schooling contrast very favourably with their own experiences when they arrived with their mothers in the late seventies and early eighties.

(1) (consults wife here) I could have done more if the school had helped me...in my school I could have done more but in them days school wasn't... was ignorant of the Asian community. Them early days.

So there wasn't any extra help?

No, there wasn't. No extra help. You went to college to do anything academic. Right, that's my belief.

Because of the language problem?

Yeah, language problem. Probably, ignorance, more than likely in them early days. There wasn't as many Asian people in Riverton probably. Nowadays, I mean, my daughter has gone to university, Manchester University. My son is at college. So more has been done for the Asian community now, I suppose. (Hanif)

(2) 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)

Generally, the children of the community have achieved more educationally than their parents did. This, in a sense, disguises the real level of achievement of this group of pupils in the local schools. Parents, on witnessing the apparent academic success of this group of pupils, and unaware of the levels of educational achievement of other groups, will naturally look upon their schools in a favourable manner. However, that children from Pakistani heritage (Mirpuri) traditionally achieve statistically less than their mainstream peers (see *Appendix 4*) is little known within the community.

(1) 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)

(2) Nowadays, I mean, my daughter has gone to university, Manchester University. My son is at college. So more has been done for the Asian community now, I suppose.

On a general level, yeah. Education wise yes. A lot has been done for the community.

(Hanif)

(3) 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. (Bashir)

(4) I think they are good. No complaints. Education is good here. (Munir)

When asking parents about education it is hard to prevent them dwelling on aspects of pupil behaviour as point of reference. This chapter remains true to this tendency by ending with a quotation from Bashir, who, in a way, represents that third generation of parents in the community mentioned at the start of this chapter. He missed being born in this country by two years, but he did spend all his education here. He was married at 16 and has two children, Aftab, 5, and Ferzana, 9. He attends the University Road mosque and assists with handiwork and odd jobs. He is a fully-qualified electronics engineer. His words tell a story of learnt wisdom and frustrated ambition. It is telling, and poignant, that he lays the responsibility for his frustrated ambition not upon any failure of the system, but rather upon himself.

What is your opinion about schools in UK? As a pupil, as a father?

My opinion is – very nice atmosphere, although you do have your down side, which is always portrayed on the news with the bullying aspect, the actual differences that children come with into school, ie. colour differences, they will always be a part and parcel of children and as I know in adolescence as well, whether people accept others that are different will be there, children do acknowledge it, but I never felt hurt about anything, I got called names, but I've never acknowledged any of that. From teacher's point of view the only bad experience I ever received was at college. It wasn't at school.

So obviously as yourself are aware, it's not necessarily a type of person, or type of colour of a child. If a child is going to be destructive which ours wasn't – I saw destructive children walking around the school, we had mixed classes in the comprehensive school, so you were mixing with children beyond your own form and you saw other children as well, you saw them out on the playing fields, you saw them outside on the playground, that is what will never be taken away...whether it is a completely white school, whether it's a mixed school, or whether it's a predominantly Asian school, these issues are always there...you still have your...if it's a completely Asian school, then obviously they still abuse each other...they still call each other names...there's no getting away from that. A mixed school, it's still the same. And if it's a completely white school, which I've seen, I actually went to Midbrough Infants, at that time there was just me and my cousin were attending the school. But we saw the children and how they played...they didn't notice anything different between us and themselves.. so we always heard, 'your dad is this...', 'your mum is this..' So coming from our point of view, it was all straightforward. These are the things that children will always say... 'My dad's got a better car than yours'. So beyond that, no problems with teachers...no problems with studying.

What about the academic side of things? Are you satisfied with the level of education you came out with?

I am satisfied, but I would have been more satisfied, if I did more.

Do you then put it down to yourself?

To a certain extent, to myself. Why I say this is I was promised a result in Religious Education to be an A or an A+. I got an E or an F. Why I got an E or an F is because the rest of the subjects at school, they were all end of year exams. The maths it was taken in stages. And I could have done the higher paper. But I was asked to come in after school. I didn't want to go in after school on a Friday, didn't want to into school on a Thursday. Just to learn a little bit more in maths. Whereas my teacher, he said, I'm capable of a C if I go for the lower paper, but I would like you to go for A. You can get an A. And me thinking the way I was thinking, a child, 'Well, if I can get a C, and always all teachers tell you, that an A, B or C, basically are equivalent. In value. All

employers accept them. All people wherever you go accept them. The thing behind an A is that you're accepted even more...by, if you're going onto college, if you're going onto different forms of education. University and whatever. Me being a child, I didn't want to do homework, I didn't want to stay at school after school. That was it. Once the chance is gone, it's gone. You can't realise it as a child. If you had learnt these things slightly younger, then possibly I might have felt there is an advantage, but it was basically down to me. My lack of everything really.

Bashir touches on a number of issues here which, unfortunately, are not part of the central theme of this study. However, his experience, when put alongside the experiences of many of his contemporaries, paint a dismal picture of frustrated hopes, low expectations and, it would appear from his initial rationalisation of name-calling, rabid racism. Yet, the marginalisation of the literacy practice of liturgical literacy *is* a theme of this study. The community whose literacy practice it is, in the words of Bashir, is marginalised. It will be shown later (*Section III, Places, Chapter 8, School*) how marginal liturgical literacy is positioned in relation to the privileged mainstream school system, and, by extension, how the community's marginalisation is thus exacerbated.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter the parents of the community have been given the opportunity to present their experiences, opinions and concerns regarding the theme of this study. Their experiences and opinions about liturgical literacy are vibrant and strong. The strength of feeling expressed in their words reveal the centrality of liturgical literacy to their lives and those of their children. There is little doubt that the cultural capital

liturgical literacy represents for the community is a cherished and fundamental one regardless of its apparent lack of value outside in the wider society. Alongside this literacy practice, parents have also been keen to opine their thoughts and feelings regarding the other literacy practices which have a vital role within the community, and, in particular, have adopted a relatively non-critical attitude towards state schooling as experienced by their children. Their words demonstrate a serious engagement with issues of both pedagogy and language. They have plenty to contribute regarding the teaching and teachers of liturgical literacy and it is those individuals charged with the teaching of liturgical literacy who are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: The Teachers

Vignette

Mufti Siddiq has lived in Riverton for twenty years. He was born in the NorthWest Province of Pakistan, where the people speak Pushto, not Punjabi. He was taught the Qur'an at the age of 10 and had learnt it all by heart six months later. He spent twenty years at the Dar Al Uloom (Faculty of Sciences) at the University of Karachi, where he graduated in the nineteen seventies and quickly followed this with an MA and PhD in Islamic Studies from the same institution. He was also awarded the title of Mufti, allowing him to make judicial decisions in cases of civil and religious disagreement. He came to this country in 1980, where he became imam of the only mosque in the town, and began his work in the Muslim community. After approximately ten years, he had to relinquish most of his duties in the mosque as his other roles developed significantly. He is currently the holder of two important and prestigious posts within nationally recognised scholarly societies in the UK. He regularly travels the country, attending meetings and speaking at conferences. He most recently visited Denmark where he spoke at an international conference. New mosques, funded by the Saudi government were recently opened in Spain and Bosnia. Mufti Siddiq was one of the invited guests to the opening ceremonies. At present, he provides a weekly lesson for the elders in the mosque on a Wednesday afternoon and, when he can, delivers the Friday sermon in a mosque in a small neighbouring town. He is the father of seven children, six of whom attended the local schools. All his children have been very bright and demonstrated considerable ability at school. However, for three of them their arrival in the UK came too late for them to make the necessary progress in English which would enable them to succeed academically at 16. Mufti Siddiq himself demonstrates little knowledge of English though his understanding is suspected to be much greater than he lets on. As a

parent, he very rarely visited the school even when one of his sons was having behavioural difficulties. The schools have no awareness of the important role Mufti Siddiq plays locally, nationally and internationally. He lives in an end terrace house in Derham and his office is the front room of the house. The main wall opposite the fireplace is festooned with shelves laden with books. The books are mainly in Urdu and Arabic but include titles in Persian, Pushto and English. The desk opposite the bay window is covered in papers, letters, notes, pens, pencils, envelopes with in-trays and folders containing other papers. The remaining wall space, above the fireplace and above the desk, features a decorative Islamic calendar, two pieces of Islamic calligraphy and the ubiquitous photographs depicting Mecca and Medina. There is a coffee table in the centre of the room, which is also strewn with papers and books. This is undoubtedly the room of a man of letters. That the 'letters' are not in English mean that the work of this scholar is unknown to those around him. Few, if any, of his non-Muslim neighbours know of his scholarly reputation and his international status. When it is necessary to interact with the UK world outside of his community, he relies on his eldest son to act as intermediary both as translator or interpreter and as scribe.

5.1 Introduction

The history of the two mosques which feature in this study is described in a later chapter (*Section III, Chapter 6, The Mosques*). However, the role and function of the principal teacher in the mosque, the imam, shares a historical perspective. The appointment of a particular imam in the nineteen eighties eventually resulted in enough community disagreement to provoke the establishment of a second mosque. A very successful, English-speaking imam was dismissed from one of the mosques because of the power and authority of one of the elders who took a personal

dislike to him. The teacher in a mosque is never 'just' a teacher. In this chapter it will be shown how the role and function of the teacher, the imam, are intimately linked to questions of tradition, authority and language.

5.2 Duties and responsibilities of an imam

The duties and responsibilities of an imam in a UK mosque vary from one establishment to the other. In truth, these duties and responsibilities are determined by the committee, or group of trustees charged with the administration of the mosque. The imam is nearly always an employee of the trust which runs the mosque. In some cases where mosques have been set up by individuals, for example in a private house, the imam may well be responsible only to himself, but in most cases, where mosques have been established with the consent and support of the community, there is a trust that administers their affairs. Sometimes the imam is employed only to lead prayers, including preparing a sermon for Friday. This may be the case in larger cities where mosques are large and staffing is more extensive. In the two mosques that feature in this study, the imam is employed to lead prayers, but also has the responsibility for teaching the children of the community how to read the Qur'an as well as the basic requirements for conducting prayer and ritual ablution.

(1)

If you had to summarise to someone the main responsibilities and duties of an imam, what would they be?

The main duty of an imam is they should have a good character, that's most important, obviously a beard as well...his recitation of the Qur'an has to be perfect...and he is mature...

What are his duties, insofar as what he has to do?

Well, the imam...it varies in every single mosque...very much so...In some mosques, the imam, his job is just to lead the salat (the Arabic word for 'prayer') and that's it...In other masjids, the imam has more duties, like he has to do the salat, he has to teach the children, he has to get involved with the community with its problems...I think in every masjid, the committee it has a set contract, as far as I know, for the imam... (Maulana Shabbir)

(2)

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

Five times a day prayers, and also teaching the Qur'an to the children, and also Juma (Friday prayer). (Hafiz Shakeel, translated by Hanif)

5.3 Qualifications and training

The teacher must be suitably qualified to carry out his duty in regard to the teaching of children. He must have attended and qualified from an institution which has a recognised reputation and which has covered the basic curriculum allowing him to teach in a mosque setting. These institutions have traditionally been in Pakistan and imams have routinely been recruited from back home. However, it is not unheard of for the imam of a mosque with a predominantly Pakistani congregation to recruit an imam from India, as was the case for one of the mosques in Riverton until very recently. In addition, there are now institutions operating in the UK which prepare students for work as an imam. Mufti Siddiq acts as an external examiner for their

assessments. These latter, of course, have the advantage that they prepare imams to work in the UK context and their graduates are usually fluent English-speakers. On the other hand, they do not always carry the same academic reputation as their counterparts overseas. The four imams who feature in this study all attended prestigious institutions in Pakistan and in the UK. The present imams of the two mosques attended the Faculty of Religious Sciences (*Dar ul-Uloom*) in Faisalabad and Islamabad. They entered these at the age of 11 and graduated when they were 21. An Islamic College of this nature begins at school age and a student can continue to undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The final qualification is roughly equivalent to a BA in Islamic studies covering knowledge of the Qur'an, the *Hadeeth* (sayings of the Prophet, their provenance and authenticity), *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) and includes *imamat* (knowledge on how to be an imam). Both also carry the title *Qari* which means they have completed a course on how to recite the Qur'an correctly. One of them is also a *Hafiz* which implies he has memorised the entire Qur'an by heart.

Mufti Siddiq, as already mentioned, graduated from the Faculty of Religious Sciences of the University of Karachi and holds a PhD from the same institution.

Maulana Shabbir is the only imam to have received his qualifications from a British-based institution, the *Dar ul-Uloom* in Bury, near Manchester.

Table 3 – Educational profiles of imams

Name of Imam	Age	Arrival in the UK	Country of Origin	Place of Education	Titles/Qualifications held	Mother Tongue	English-Speaking
Hafiz Shakeel	25	1998	Pakistan, Mirpur	Pakistan, Faculty of Religious Sciences, Faisalabad	BA Hafiz Qari	Mirpuri-Punjabi	No
Mufti Siddiq	51	1983	Pakistan, North West Province	Pakistan, Faculty of Religious Sciences, University of Karachi	PhD MA Mufti Hafiz	Pushto	No
Maulana Shabbir	35	Born here	England, Leeds	College of Religious Sciences, Bury, near Manchester	BA	Mirpuri-Punjabi	Yes
Qari Mustafa	40	1999	Pakistan, Azad Kashmir	Pakistan, Faculty of Religious Sciences, Islamabad	BA Qari	Punjabi	No
Maulana Zubair	58	1983	India, Gujerat	India, Faculty of Religious Sciences, Delhi	BA Qari Hafiz	Gujerati	No

Being an imam is not only about having the correct qualifications. There is a traditional profile for an imam which is taught in the institutions which must be fulfilled if an imam is to be appointed. He must be of good character, look like an

imam (that is, dress following the example of the Prophet) and have an excellent recitation of the Qur'an.

(1) The main duty of an imam is they should have a good character, that's most important, obviously a beard as well...his recitation of the Qur'an has to be perfect...and he is mature... (Maulana Shabbir)

(1) He reads the Qur'an well, he has the appearance of an imam, his life is within the sunnah (the word used to describe the example of the Prophet)... (Hafiz Shakeel, translated by Hanif)

5.4 Training for teaching children

It is noteworthy that no mention is made of any particular quality for teaching children. The above qualities would serve no doubt the definition of an imam whose sole responsibility was to lead the prayers in the mosque. That most imams are also responsible for teaching children is a factor that the above definitions ignore.

However, there is built into the teaching and learning model employed by these traditional institutions such as the faculties of Religious Sciences, and the mosques themselves, an aspect of deployment which ultimately contributes to an element of teacher training. In the previous chapter, *The Children*, it was seen how allowing older children to work with or supervise younger children was a practice well used. This was not only a reflection of necessity caused by the large numbers of children and the lack of teachers. It was also an example of that very traditional form of

'mentoring' involving the use of older children to instruct younger ones which is not peculiar to Islamic settings, and is, perhaps, universal in one form or another.

Hafiz Shakeel of University Road mosque was able to 'practise' his teaching of the Qur'an by working with the younger students in his college:

Do they have any opportunity to practise?

They do it within the madrassah, because they have small children there as well, learning the Qur'an.

And the same thing happens here as well, with older children who have learned the Qur'an, as there are too many children here, so the imam tells them to go and sit with and teach some of the younger children. That's the way of learning. (Hafiz Shakeel, translated by Hanif)

Maulana Shabbir, who attended the UK based college, went a step further. This, no doubt, contributed to the success he had both at the Church Walk mosque and at present in his own establishment in another part of the town. Training for teaching, on his particular course, was an option which he chose to follow. It was not a compulsory element of the course which still allowed its graduates to serve as imams without it. However, Maulana Shabbir, through personal choice, and possibly with an eye to the future, elected to take the optional course in teacher training:

Did your training involve pedagogy?

There is actually because I myself had teaching training...whilst I was at the Islamic college...but that is an optional thing you see...I mean you get some people who, some

students who go for that option...and you have those who wouldn't...so yes I have had some training...

What did that training involve?

Well, basically it involves the method of how to teach the Qur'an itself...that's one thing...secondly, how to discipline children...that's another thing as well...that's most important...mainly it's these two things...

And do you get opportunity to practise whilst there?

Yes, you would do that with the younger students in the college. What would happen is for a period of two months under the supervision of a supervisor, you would have two months with a class of ten, and you would implement all that you had learnt there...

(Maulana Shabbir)

Mufti Siddiq, as well, was employed in the college he studied at to teach younger students. However, in his case it was more akin to graduate teaching to undergraduates.

I taught hadith and fiqh in certain Islamic schools, in Pakistan, in Dar ul Ifta (College of Law) (Mufti Siddiq, translated by his son, Abdul Ghafoor)

How these men were recruited to their positions will be dealt with in the next chapter (*Chapter 5, The Organisers*) but all these imams, by any account, are exceptionally well qualified for the jobs they do. They are all highly respected within the communities they serve, and any negative comments which are voiced are purely down to matters of doctrinal difference which are not the subject of this study. Their authority is never called into question by the community members. The only negative comment made came from the Mufti himself when discussing the imam who had been dismissed from Church Walk mosque and was now operating a very

successful teaching centre elsewhere. His comment, although terse, spoke a great deal about the differences in prestige between Islamic colleges back home in Pakistan and those in the UK:

Do you know anything about the school that has just been set up in Cliff Road?

There has to be a qualified teacher to teach the kids...

And he's not?

No he isn't.

He has got the advantage of English, but that's all?

Yes, the school itself...because wherever there is a religious school, the Pakistani parents send their kids there...

Wasn't he the imam of Church Walk for a time?

Yes, he was. (Mufti Siddiq)

5.5 The methodology of teaching liturgical literacy

The methodology of teaching the Qur'an does not differ across the mosques neither in observed teaching sessions nor in the words of the teachers themselves. Their method may be termed as 'tried and trusted' in the true sense of the words as this is a method evident across cultures, national boundaries and time itself. Its simplicity and its reliability are its greatest strengths.

Although never referred to as synthetic phonics²¹, this method is obviously one which lies squarely in that particular camp with its build up from smaller units to larger ones. The reliance on whole word recognition and the subsequent breaking down of words into smaller units, analytical phonics, does not feature in the early stages of learning to read the Arabic of the Qur'an.

As this aspect of teaching the Qur'an is so important in the context of this study an explanation of this method will be left almost verbatim from the interviews conducted. Firstly, Hafiz Shakeel outlines the basics of the method as he uses it:

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

First of all, there is the alphabet. Afterwards, it is the Qaidah. Most of the words are from the Qur'an. But separately, you can see it written, how to learn those words, so they finish the Qaidah off, then they learn the Qur'an. From the first siparah.

What is the overall aim in the teaching?

Completing the Qur'an.

How long does that take?

Two years, but longer if he's a bit slower..And it's not much time...just two hours a day...

At what age do they start then?

At about six years.

²¹ Among the competing 'schools of thought' regarding the most appropriate way to introduce children to the written code when teaching initial reading, synthetic phonics is a method which relies on introducing ever larger units of shape-sound correspondences (letter – name, letter – sound, letter + vowel sound, syllables, monosyllabic words and so on). This might be characterised as 'bottom-up' methodology. In contrast to this, analytic phonics relies on the teacher introducing meaningful units of sound (i.e. short words) to a child/learner and then breaking the word down into its constituent parts and, similarly, might be interpreted as a 'top-down' approach.

So if they are really clever, they could finish in two years?

If they are slower, it could be three years, clever ones less than two years.

But at the age of 8 or ten, what do they do next?

They can read hifz (memorisation)

Does everyone do the hifz?

Yeah, if they are interested, some don't bother, they leave as soon as they have read the Qur'an. They stay and read it at home. They don't come to the mosque. Some, like my children, I ask them to go to mosque, learn more, about salat, learn more about the Qur'an. Learn in translation.

What is the best way to learn hifz?

First they teach them from last siparah. And small surahs.

And how many children are expected to learn the whole Qur'an?

Not much over here. People are not that interested. If they are, they will send him to a madrassah to learn every day. Here it is not much. I don't think so anyway. We might do one or two siparahs. We have got one kid here who is doing...has done about 7 siparahs. As Hafiz. (Hafiz Shakeel, translated by Hanif)

5.6 The problematicisation of script

Hafiz Shakeel, along with the other imams involved in the teaching of the Qur'an, has to face the problem of children being less and less familiar with Urdu, and, by extension, the Urdu script. He is choosing to exploit the children's knowledge of English in order to facilitate certain procedures in learning in the mosque. This is a development occurring in UK mosques which has both advocates and opponents among the teaching cadre. The former see the use of English, or at least Roman script, as an efficient way to support the learning of the Arabic script. The latter interpret this development,

particularly the use of Roman script, as potentially damaging, and could lead to children finding it harder to learn the Arabic script. In University Road mosque, the imam, who speaks and understands only a little English, is a supporter of this method:

We have a book if you want it. Complete salat. You can read it in English. It is in Urdu, but written in English, words,

That's interesting...

That we use to teach young children and older ones...

Why are you using English letters then to transcribe the Urdu?

Especially for these young children, they can't easily understand Urdu, some children born here, hard to speak and read Urdu.

So would the child understand it if they read the transliterated Urdu?

Yeah...

Like, when you read the first salat, like with the jamaat,

So the children know enough Urdu, to follow this?

That's right, yeah...

If they don't, they can read the English...

Do you think this is a good idea? Or would you prefer them to be able to read the actual Urdu script? If you had the choice....

Both. English is their mother language. It is their mother language now. Even when they come home they speak English. They don't speak much our own language. That is the only way to remind them, read something they can understand it...And you are recording my English on this tape, if other people listen to it, 'Oh, who's speaking this language?' Broken English! (Hafiz Shakeel, translated by Hanif)

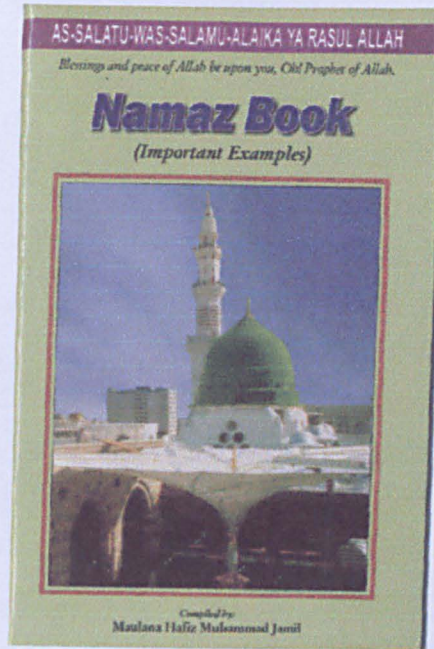


Plate 6 - Hafiz Shakeel's book of transliterations

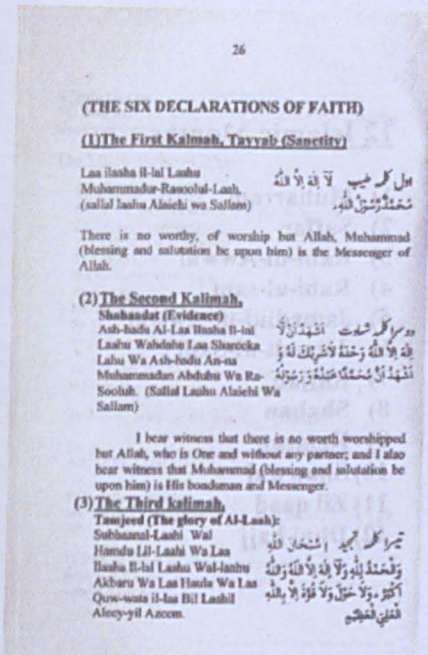


Plate 7 - Arabic, English and transliteration

NEYAT FOR NAMAZ FOR MALES

All Sunnat neyat

Main neyat kiti is namaz ki partha hoo khaas vaaste allah tallah day (2,4) rakat namaz sunat sunat mustahabay musallalah waikat namaz (fajar) (zohar) (asar) (magrib) (isha) moo mera tharaf khana ka'ba shrif.

Nafal neyat

Main neyat kiti is namaz ki partha hoo khaas vaaste allah tallah day (2,4) rakat namaz nafal bandge allah tallah day moo mera tharaf ka'ba shrif.

All farz neyat

Main neyat kiti is namaz ki partha hoo khaas vaaste allah tallah day (2 fajar) (4 zohar,asar) (3 magrib) (4 isha) rakat namaz farz farz namah tallah day waikat namaz (fajar, zohar, asar, magrib, isha) peechay is imam saab day moo mera tharaf khana ka'ba shrif.

Witar neyat

Main neyat kiti is namaz ki partha hoo khaas vaaste allah tallah day 3 rakat namaz witar wajib is rat kay moo mera tharaf khana ka'ba shrif.

Plate 8 - Transliterated Urdu

On the other side of town, the teacher who resigned his position as imam and teacher at Church road mosque, Maulana Shabbir, outlines the method of teaching children how to read the Qur'an in the following way:

Well, basically, it all starts with aleph bah tah²²...you start the child with aleph bah tah...

What do you mean 'start the child'? What do they have to in order to learn it?

What do you do in order to make them learn it?

I would say it is a bit similar to school, when a child goes into nursery...and the only difference would be that there when you have something like a for apple, b for banana, and so on you wouldn't have that here...the child has got a book, and we're talking about our place here, not talking about any other mosque, but the way we do it here...you have a child who comes to you totally new at 6 or 7 years old...a beginner and you have to teach him the Arabic alphabet...the way we would do it is that the child would come and, obviously, start with Bismillahi arahmanirahim²³...that's the first thing we would like him to learn.

They would just learn to say that, not read it?

Yes, just verbally. Bismillahi Arahmani Arahim. Because in the hadeeth, it says, the Prophet said (saw) that as soon as the child, when he begins reading the Qur'an, and aleph bah tah is the Qur'an, so the sins of the parents are forgiven straightaway...so that's why it is a principle to teach the child Bismala, so at least the parents, they have all their sins forgiven...so that's verbally bismillahi rahmani rahim. That will be repeated every single day until it sinks into the child's mind. Then you start with aleph, bah tah...and you repeat that with the child with the book in front of them... 'this is aleph, bah, tah...' Usually, what we tend to do is have a group, rather than just an individual...If you have a group then they can all sit and learn together...so they would go and the teacher would repeat that maybe two or three or four times, then go back in a group and learn aleph bah tah...when they've learnt that, then the next stage and the next stage and so on. So with the beginners, obviously it is not always concrete that they would learn it properly, you would finish the 26 letters of the Arabic alphabet,

²² 'aleph, bah, tah' are the first three letters of the Arabic alphabet.

²³ This Arabic phrase means in English 'In the name of God, the most Merciful, most Compassionate' and is the saying by which most Muslims begin significant actions, both religious and secular.

and from the 26 they might know about 20 or 18 or 21 and the others they might forget or something...so basically that's how it is done...so just get them used to...

So are they learning the names of the letters initially, not the sound?

They are doing two things. Firstly, what they are doing is they learn the name of the letter, how it is pronounced and where it should be pronounced as well...because the method of teaching is the child follows the lips of the teacher...so when the teacher says 'zha', the child will look at the teacher and say 'zha'. He doesn't have his head down and just say 'zha', because if he says 'zha', there is 'za', 'qaf' and 'kef'. So the teacher needs to explain that when you say 'qak' the mouth has to be full, but when you say 'kef' the mouth has to be empty...so just to get them used to pronouncing the letters correctly...and that's the beginning stages and that would be implemented for everything...for his prayer...that's a basic rule...for everything...So the teaching method in the Qur'an is very very different to English in schools...

If I understand it correctly, they go from a knowledge of being able to read and understand the alphabet to being able to read the sound with different tashkeel²⁴, so they know the vowelling and tashkeel, to syllables?

Yes.

Short sounds? Mixing up the consonants with the vowelling. Until you get to a stage where you combine it to make a word. Are the words always real words or is there sometimes use of what we call in English nonsense words – a made-up word just to allow the child to practise sound and consonant combinations?

Actually you have both. The reason for that is, firstly it's just to get the child used to spelling...it's like children always learn better when they can learn to spell. So it's the same sort of concept in Arabic as well...that once they have done the alphabet, then they go on to small letters, then when they start mixing up the letters together, they have to learn the harakat²⁵, of how to spell the harakat, the madda⁵, the shadda⁵, how

²⁴ 'tashkeel' is the system of diacritic marks which represent vowels and other features of pronunciation and which a reader must know in order to pronounce correctly words in the Qur'an.

²⁵ These are different examples of 'tashkeel'

to spell all of that, the tanweens⁵, so it's like in English, a child he would say, a-p-p-l-e. 'apple'. Similarly here in the Qur'an in the beginning stages, it's the same thing...and this exercise is implemented through all of the beginning stages, even through to the Qur'an because it makes it very easy for the child... (Maulana Shabbir)

However, unlike Hafiz Shakeel, who is attempting to use English, or transliterated Arabic and Urdu, to short-cut the decoding process, Maulana Shabbir has strong views against this practice:

Do you use any shortcuts? I have noticed in discussion with others the use of Latin script, Roman or English script to help teach the Qur'an, or prayers or whatever. Now what is your opinion about that?

We are totally against it because we feel that we are missing the essence of Arabic...

So you are aware of this going on. Why do you think it is happening?

I think it is done because a lot of teachers think that because children can relate to English much better, that's why if we have this type of scheme or system to help them but we are totally against it, we don't approve of it as well...because we want our children to be fluent in Arabic reading and don't want them to....because script is as essential a part of the Qur'an as the actual language of the Qur'an. And I think the other reason is maybe because children are not being explained the spelling purposes...you see you have two things...

Do you do any writing then? You talk about spelling, so do you get the kids to write at all?

We do make the kids do Arabic writing, but it starts at a later stage, at a very later stage...but spelling, as I was saying, if a child has the ability to spell at the beginning stages in Arabic or any Arabic book with harakat (letters) would not be a problem for him, he could spell it out.

And I see, there's also a danger, that in the community itself, if the children are weaned off proper Arabic script for reading the Qur'an, it is also going to be a handicap if they want to start to learn Urdu...because I know Arabic and Urdu are not exactly the same script, there is so much similarity that if you learn one, it is going to be a lot easier to learn the other... (Maulana Shabbir)

The use of Roman script to facilitate learning Arabic in the mosque is, therefore, a current issue for the mosques and their teachers. Bashir, one of the parents featured in the previous chapter, confesses that he actually learnt initially the Arabic of his prayers and the Qur'an from transliterated materials:

Can I just ask a question...If the children are using this (a transliterated sheet)...In a sense they are also going to learn this, aren't they? If you took away the English part, the English transliteration, they could learn the shape of the letter, aleph, bah, tah and so on, and listen to the sound of somebody...the English transliteration is just somehow a bit of an aid...

Yes, it is a very good aid...because most children even like myself...I didn't start mosque when I was two or three...I started the mosque when I was five...so I had already started school...

So you had some basics of English (reading)?

Yeah, basics of English...what I read as my first acknowledgement of salah that was at mosque...although I used to copy what my parents did when they were reading salah...what I actually acknowledged as what was read in between for the first time was in the mosque...and even at the age of 5 I could read very very fluently in English...this was down as I said earlier on to good teachers...I used to help my cousin in the school...while I was studying as well...the thing is I read my first salah in English form...it had no Arabic written there...so I knew my salah (prayer), al hamdu lillah rabbi-alameen, I knew my salah (Did you learn that from something written

down?) I learned that off by heart from a transliterated form...there was no Arabic in the book at all...no Arabic...everything was in English form...My Qaidah was in Arabic, it did have the transliteration of all the letters below so I knew what I read individually, but the place and time when it became slightly difficult was trying to understand the joining of letters. This was explained, but obviously my local masjid at that time didn't have anybody to speak in English and tell me. So whatever they said, basically, went. Because there were no transliterations of that form, where the letters and words are joined with the...we know them as the zebbahs²⁶, the zairs⁶, the pashas⁶, the maads⁶, I didn't understand that point, because I had read in English format...and I read in a transliterated Qaidah. (Bashir)

Whatever the advantages or disadvantages of using transliterated script to aid the learning of the Qur'an, there is no doubt that the community's recourse to Roman script operates in other important contexts as well. In chapters nine and ten, *Urdu* and *Mirpuri-Punjabi*, of the fourth section of this study, I will examine how Roman script is now being used, particularly by the younger generation, to transliterate Punjabi religious poetry and Urdu songs.

5.7 Use of English in the mosque


The different attitude towards English use in the mosque expressed by the two imams is an interesting one. Whereas Maulana Shabbir is a fluent and confident speaker of English and advocates the use of English in the mosque when teaching

²⁶ More examples of 'tashkeel'

about Islam or giving explanations about particular aspects of reading Arabic, he is clearly opposed by the apparent encroachment of English script as a short cut to reading Arabic. Ironically, Hafiz Shakeel has little command of English, and struggles to communicate with many of his younger students. Yet he expresses no wariness about the introduction of the Roman script for his students believing they possess a linguistic resource which can only assist them in their endeavours to read and learn Arabic.

As-Sabeel

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The Path

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Shawal / Zul-Qada

WHAT AFTER RAMADHAAN?

My dear brothers, my Muslim sisters, with the passing of Ramadhan we have highlighted a number of points. May Allah benefit us through them.

We bid farewell to the blessed month, its beautiful days and its fragrant nights. We leave the month of the Qur'aan, Taqwa, patience, mercy, forgiveness and freedom from hellfire? So what have we harvested of its ripe fruits and extensive shade? Have we attained Taqwa and graduated from Ramadhan with the diploma of the God-fearing?

What have I gained from Ramadhan?

My dear brothers & sisters, if you are from those who profited from Ramadhan, achieved the attributes of Taqwa and truly fasted only for Allah, then praise Allah and thank him, ask Him for steadfastness upon Deen.

Because of unravelling the yarn after it has been spun - what would you say if a woman was to spin a thread and then sew a shirt or a thoubi with it. Then, when she looked at it and it pleased her, she started cutting the threads and tearing them apart strand by strand for no reason.

What would people say about her?

This then is the condition of one who returns to sinning, immorality and shamelessness, and abandons obedience and righteous actions after Ramadhan. After being favoured with the radiated blessing of Allah within Ramadhan, how can such a person return to sins and evil actions. How evil can it be that Allah is only known in Ramadhan?

The situation after Ramadhan

People discarding Salah as soon as the announcement is made for Eid. The Masaqid used to be filled with worshippers for Taraweeh Salah which is a Sunnah, we see the number of visitors to the Masjid decline for the five daily prayers which are Fard (compulsory)

Many other non-Islamic and Haram activities and things are practiced that it puts one to shame to see a Muslim fulfil them. So if a servant is truly thankful to his Lord, you will see him advance in good deeds and obedience and you will see him distanced from disobedience. Thankfulness (Shukr) is the abandoning of sins.

May Allah safeguard us from all types of sin. Ameen.

I asked ... Allah gave me...

I asked for strength...
And Allah gave me difficulties to make me strong.

I asked for Wisdom...
And Allah gave me Problems to solve.

I asked for Prosperity...
And Allah gave me Brain and Brawn to work.

I asked for Courage...
And Allah gave me Danger to overcome.

I asked for Love...
And Allah gave me Troubled people to help.

I asked for Favours...
And Allah gave me Opportunities.

I received nothing I wanted...
But I received everything I needed!

"So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators" (23:14)

Plate 7 - English-language newsletter produced by Maulana Shabbir

We learnt of parents' concerns about their children's understanding of Islam in the previous chapter. On the whole, they were satisfied that the children learnt how to read the Qur'an well, but were concerned that children were not learning enough about their religion. They put this down, mainly, to language. Mufti Siddiq is well

aware of the language problems that beset the mosque in its efforts to teach the children their religion:

What is your opinion about education provided by the mosque?

It is good, but it is not enough in the mosque...

What else is needed?

They learn to read the Qur'an properly, but they don't learn the main things about Islam...

What is preventing that happening?

The first thing is language...most teachers speak Urdu....and the children do not understand it...

For example, after namaz (prayers, Urdu) just now in the mosque, you gave a short lesson, dars, you did it in Urdu. Do you mean that not all the community would be able to understand?

No, the elders do understand...every time I give a dars I look for someone who can translate it into English, but there isn't anyone... (Mufti Siddiq, translated by his son, Abdul Ghafoor)

5.8 Differentiation in the mosque

In this chapter we also examine the progress children make during their learning from the perspective of their teachers. Although most children begin attending the mosque at the age of 5 or 6, it is quickly apparent that some children make faster progress than others. The teacher, who is sensitive to this matter, therefore, has to have strategies ready to manage the different rates of progress among his students. Maulana Shabbir, who has very clearly articulated views on pedagogy, has a generally very sound opinion on differentiation:

What about the precocious child, the one who begins at 5 or 6 and makes very quick progress? Do they just go more quickly or do they get extra things to do?

With them we tend to make them do the basics first before doing any additional stuff...That's more important...if a child is capable, get his basics out of the way. He's on that, he's ok, he's well established on the basics, might be moving onto different levels of education...maybe additional things

Memorisation, where does that come in?

Hifz Qur'an again, is on the child's ability and aptitude....if a child is capable of being hafiz Qur'an, he's very clever, quick, intelligent, then we always get in touch with the parents, 'this is a gifted child, capable of memorising the Qur'an' and if the parents say 'right, ok' then he is set to work in a Hifz Qur'an class...

That's a separate group?

That is a totally separate group. There is no age limit. We have children of the age of 7 and children of the age of 14. There is no set age at all. Once a child is capable, his recitation is very good, he's able and willing, he has ability...

What about at the other end, with kids who find things hard?

With them there is a lot of leniency...we tend to have a lot of leniency with them...and most of all there's more support for them as well...there's no pressure on them at all...children always deliver if there is a bit of pressure on them...we noticed in the mosques, children always deliver and parents want their children to deliver, so do the ustads, the teachers, and the ones who have this kind of problem there will be a lot of leniency for them. Whereas other children are doing something in two days, this child will be left alone at his own pace to do the same thing in one week until he catches up and does understand what he has done. So there is a lot of leniency I would say...

Do they get extra help?

They do. That's why they are having the leniency...

Is that extra help coming from you as the teacher? Or do you have assistants?

We have enough, I think it comes from both sides, the teacher, the assistant, from the children who sit next to him, as well as the parents...so with someone like him, a child like that, the assistance will come from all around. (Maulana Shabbir)

Hafeez Shakeel, though less expansive, employs similar strategies to those used by Shabbir:

What about catering for children of different abilities? Boys with learning problems?

They just have extra time. And also give them help from older children. They give them extra help.

OK. What about the opposite? Children who are very good?

They are given extra things like extra lines, chapters. He can quickly finish the Qur'an. (Hafiz Shakeel, translated by Hanif)

5.9 Liturgical Literacy and the wider Islamic curriculum

Apart from learning how to recite the Qur'an in Arabic the teachers were also asked about the rest of the curriculum and what it entailed. Given the comments from parents in the previous chapter, it is no surprise to learn how small a part in the teaching time is allotted to general teaching about Islam. However, the success of Maulana Shabbir's new school may be down to the increased and systematic time devoted to the Islamic religion in general. However, Shabbir is a realist and recognises the pressures on his young students. In order to incorporate a more extensive curriculum, that would include more general teaching of Islam, something would have to give. He is adamant that the mosque's primary duty is to facilitate the

acquisition of the community's liturgical literacy. What he terms the 'basics', how to read the Qur'an, how to perform ablution and how to pray, are essential for a Muslim for the rest of his or her life. He is concerned that time spent on more general matters would be time lost for this more fundamental aim. He recognises that the young person is already giving two hours of every day to the acquisition of liturgical literacy and is loath to encroach any further on his or her time:

Apart from learning the Qur'an what else is taught?

Well, firstly, the common thing which I think is taught in every single mosque or madrassah is the basics...iman (faith)...salah (prayer)...taharah (purification)...hajj (pilgrimage)...zakat(alms giving)...the basic things of Islam...

How are they taught these things? Is there a time set aside for this?

I think in every single mosque, they do have a mosque, they always start off with the Qur'an recitation first, that is always a must at the beginning and once they complete their Qur'an recitation and they have learnt everything the teacher has taught them in that lesson, then they go on to the next stage of whatever the timetable has set for them...so, for example, on Mondays they would learn about faith...the six or eight kalimahs that are known...the important beliefs of Islam...they would learn those and then the day after concerning salah...

Is that as rigorous part of the general teaching as the Qur'an in the mosques?

What do you mean?

In the sense that, one of the things I hear from parents is that they want more of that. They're not saying they want less Qur'an, but I don't see how you can do both to the same degree. More of one thing will result in less of the other...

You see, with children, what you have to understand is that they remember something today and they forget it tomorrow...it's just like a person becomes a perfect driver once they have their own car...and he keeps on driving...until they can do everything blind because they have had the practice day in day out – same thing with children, if

you were to do the extra things that parents are saying, then these essentials which are part of life for them in the future, like for example, the memorising of salah, the fatihah²⁷, the surahs, the tashahud, the durood sharif, the dua, the dua in qunut and all of these things...if you were to just teach the child he memorises it and then you move onto greater detail for example the tafseer²⁸ or the translation of the Qur'an and leave it to one side, the child is going to forget, because the child is a child, and until you have it so that the child repeats it every day, like a driver, if he doesn't repeat it every single day, every day he is going to come up with a new mistake, because he is a child, so the essentials have to be repeated every single day...Now the additional things which some parents suggest, can only be covered if there is time...now that is one thing that the mosques don't have...in hand. Time. To teach the additional things. Which are important as well. The limited time is two hours – that's what the community gives for their children. Five days a week. Two hours is little. Three hours – then you break the barrier of children's relaxation time and their leisure time and everything. So the 5-7 time is just balanced in between. The additional things can be done, are done up and down the country once a child has become fluent and capable of remembering his essentials...the basic thing of wudu²⁹...now once a child is explained practically as well verbally how to perform wudu' and he does that every single day at home because his parents make sure he does his wudu and because he is doing it every single day and mum and dad are with him or the teacher in the masjid...is implementing that with him...practically or verbally through books or taking them into the wudu room, making them wudu, so he knows that that this is what he has to do every day, wash my hands first, read the duas, wash my hands, gargle the mouth, nose, so he knows this practice five days a week because he is doing it...

(Maulana Shabbir)

²⁷ This and the Arabic words which follow in this sentence are all examples of different prayers a child has to know in order to perform the daily prayer.

²⁸ 'tafseer' is the science of understanding the meaning of the Qur'an.

²⁹ Ritual ablution

Hafeez Shakeel, on the other hand, has less to say on this subject. His problem is possibly a language-related one. There is no doubt that he is a gifted individual and older members of the community testify to his eloquence and erudition when speaking on religion. He has at his disposal a veritable treasure-house of engaging and moving teaching stories and verse. Sadly, for many of the younger members of the community, these riches are denied them by their lack of or imprecise knowledge of Urdu (see *Chapter 9*).

Traditionally, the Muslim community in all parts of the Islamic world, would receive significant instruction on their religion by means of the Friday sermon. The eloquence and erudition of this imam delivered through a delightful sequence of teaching stories and poetry in the Friday sermon would, in different circumstances, serve as an ideal teaching context for the whole community. Unfortunately, as the language of the sermon becomes more and more detached from the needs of the congregation so its teaching value diminishes and a viable meaningful alternative needs to be considered. The uncertain responses below reveal the sensitivities around this subject in the University Road mosque:

How do the children get taught about their religion? Apart from namaz and wudhu and how to do it...here in the mosque?

(long discussion in Punjabi)

What about teachings from the life of the Prophet?

Yes, we do teach them...

When does it happen?

Once a week, on a Friday...

So there's a different programme on a Friday?

It is about salat...

Does that mean you are talking to the children on Friday then?

Yeah. (Hafiz Shakeel, translated by Hanif)

5.10 Decoding and understanding

When it came to understanding what is being read in the Qur'an, the teachers were clearly united. There was no time to teach the understanding of the Qur'an in the very little time that was allowed. Only by going on to a college of further Islamic education would it be possible to begin understanding the language of the Qur'an. And even then, it might not be that straightforward. In Chapter Two, *The Children*, it was shown that the children interviewed had a rather rudimentary knowledge of the words they were reciting and none of them could explain the meaning of the most recited verses in the Muslim world, the *Fatihah*. Mufti Siddiq's five sons are all *hufaaz*³⁰ of the Qur'an (they know the entire 600-page Qur'an by heart). Yet were someone to ask even the oldest son to explain the meaning of a particular page or section, he would be unable to do so without the aid of an Urdu or English commentary. This ignorance of the meaning of the Arabic words of the Qur'an, unfortunately, sometimes extends to those in the community who claim authority on its behalf. Many imams would also be hard pressed to come up with an explanation for a selected Qur'anic passage without recourse to an Urdu translation and commentary.

³⁰ Plural of 'hafiz', someone who has memorised the entire Qur'an.

(1)

Where do you teach the understanding of the Qur'an?

We just read the Qur'an. In Arabic. They don't understand it. It takes time to understand it.

In Pakistan, does that understanding come later?

Yes, afterwards. When they have finished the Qur'an. (Hafiz Shakeel, translated by Hanif)

(2)

For example, if I were to pick any page from the Qur'an, and asked you to explain to me what it is saying, could you do that?

I won't be able to do that...

What do you have to do, to get to that stage?

You have to go to the Dar-u-Uloom...

If I were to ask a normal imam in a mosque in Riverton or in another large town the same thing, would he be able to explain it from the Arabic?

If the imam had good knowledge then he would be able to, but not many of them...

There's no guarantee that he would be able to then?

No.

Would he need an Urdu explanation?

Yes. (Abdul Ghafoor, son of Mufti Siddiq)

5.11 Summary

In this chapter I have attempted, whilst giving an account of the personnel and methodology involved in the teaching of liturgical literacy, to suggest some of the tension which exists at this particular temporal nexus created by changing patterns of language use. Despite the time-honoured and reliable teaching methods employed for the transmission of liturgical literacy, more contemporary issues keep intruding

to problematise the process. The use of English in the mosque, and the related Roman script issue, is a topic to which I shall return in Section IV of this study, *Languages*. The need to equip young people with a more informed knowledge of their religion, as they seek to accommodate their faith within the wider social and ever more secular environment, is exercising teachers' minds as well as those of the parents we heard from in the previous chapter. The teachers, however, do not always have the final say in what is taught in the mosques. In the next chapter, *The Organisers*, I will examine the role the administrators play within the mosque and the community.

Chapter 6: The Organisers

Vignette

Qurban Hussain arrived in the UK in 1955 when he was 17 years old. He worked as a steelworker for 35 years and retired on grounds of ill health in 1980. He always sits in the same place in the mosque, to the right by the wall, against which he rests when not engaged in his prayers. He is an acute observer of the life of the mosque, attending most prayers, although his ill health has recently obliged him to spend periods of time in the hospital. He is the chairman of the mosque though no one is quite sure how he came to this position. There were other trustees but most have died and have not been replaced. When he speaks about the mosque he speaks with a passion which illustrates his intimate involvement with its past, present and future. His life, the life of the community and the life of the mosque are all interwoven and in order to understand one of these elements it is necessary to understand them all. For the first ten years of his life in Riverton, he had little time for praying and going to mosques. Twice a year he took the bus and travelled through the industrial areas west of Riverton and east of Sheffield to the suburb of Attercliffe where Eid prayers were held in a converted house. Here he met up with friends and relatives who lived in Sheffield. And twice a year, he thought it would be a good thing to have a similar place in Riverton, but it would be ten years before practical steps were taken to achieve this desire. By 1968 it was clear that the community needed a mosque, as much for meeting together as for a place of worship. However, at this time, though not yet an issue, the future Islamic education of the community's children was to become a deciding factor in getting things moving. What to buy and where to buy it was more of a concern than how. The community prided itself on the principle of 'self help' and rarely if ever asked the Council for help. On those few occasions when they had, a rejection was the usual response. Qurban went from house

to house in the community, and on Fridays from town to town where mosques were already established, to ask for donations towards purchasing a place. A large non-denominational chapel had become available near to the town centre and the funds were available for its purchase. The building was purchased in 1968 and opened as a mosque the following year in 1969. Qurban and those closely involved with collecting the funds for the purchase and upkeep of the mosque were now the trustees and they quickly appointed someone from back home to come to Riverton to serve as its first imam. The next ten years were exciting times for Qurban as he tried to balance his work at the steelworks with his responsibilities as the chairman of the mosque. Much of his time in the initial years was spent organising, funding and doing the considerable refurbishment the old chapel needed in order for it to function as a mosque. The heavy wooden pews had to be removed as did the large heavy wooden pulpit with its accompanying large wooden plaques emblazoned with Biblical quotations which would not be appropriate in the new mosque. The building would be being used at least five times a day rather than once or twice a week and so the heating system had to be replaced to cope with the greater demand. The two other sources of great expense and worry were the carpet and the ablution facilities. Qurban was able to arrange for a small extension to be built on the side of the chapel to accommodate the toilets and washing facilities. The mosque also benefited in the early days by a benefactor who, although not Mirpuri like the rest of the community, was of Indian descent and was a successful local businessman. He paid for the carpet. Qurban made sure a quality vacuum cleaner was purchased at the same time. Towards the end of the nineteen eighties, the community was beginning to be affected by sectarian disputes. Qurban found himself in the middle of these disputes which at one time led to physical confrontation between members of the community and sadly a large part of the community felt the need to leave and buy their own mosque. In 1969 there was one mosque. By 2001 there were seven.

6.1 Introduction

Many mosques in the UK were established in a similar way. The men who were most closely involved with the collection of funds and the subsequent purchase of the building usually became the trustees. All mosques, if they are to benefit from charitable status, must set up a trust which acts as the body responsible for the mosque and its activities. The trust itself can vary in its power and authority. Sometimes the trust functions as a collegiate body which discusses and makes decisions jointly. This is certainly the case with one of the mosques in the community. Indeed, the trustees of this mosque went so far as to appoint a larger committee made up of other members of the community in order to incorporate a larger cross-section of views. The secretary of Church Walk mosque wanted to widen participation in decision-making, partly as a means of warding off criticism:

Well, it used to be the trustees responsible. Later on we realised, it is hard to satisfy everybody. Because of public involvement... They will always be making criticisms... Sometimes have chairman, secretary, trustee, but at other times wider community involvement. So we always set up a small committee. Between twenty to thirty people. They keep the community happy... (Mahmood)

The other mosque in this study, in theory, has a trust. However, in practice, one man makes decisions although he is assisted by a secretary and a treasurer. Here is one the more charitable views about the mosque chairman:

Our mosque committee... there's only one person who's the committee and everything...Mr Hussain . He's a trustee...and he's the committee...He's the chairman, he's everything. At the moment. (Wajib)

6.2 The role of the trustees of the mosque

It may appear, to those outside of the community and even to some within it, that these men have accrued to themselves a considerable amount of authority within the community. After all, they have the power to recruit, hire and fire the imam of the mosque and also decide how all the not inconsiderable collected funds are spent. Yet for all their critics, these men spend a great deal of their own time working on behalf of the community. They are in the positions they are as a result of the work they did when their respective mosques were being established. Furthermore, the work they did in the collection of funds almost *ipso facto* resulted in their privileged position at the end of the process. Another vital factor contributing to their positions is that many of these men also invested considerable amounts of their own money, as well as time, in the purchase of the mosque

(1) Oh yes. They put their own money. They put in 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. (Wajib)

(2) In the beginning there were five trustees. And then some people, for some reason, wanted to be involved in the mosque. Outside people. And they always raised questions

about the mosque, different things, so we decided, me and Pasha and some people, best way let these people involve some more in real terms, don't let them speak away from the mosque, better inside, so we added a few trustees, those active people, who speak all the time, sometimes in favour sometimes against. And then we were nine. At the moment, most of them, four or five have died. So we are three left. Because we are closest to buying the opposite land, now because we are all in our sixties, so we are thinking even in the process of appointing new trustees. Young men. More educated. (Mahmood)

As the last few comments above suggest, there is a realisation among the trustees that the younger generation need some involvement in the running of their mosque.

6.3 Responsibilities of the trustees

The main responsibilities of the trustees are to appoint the imam and to maintain and develop the mosque as a building and as a centre for worship and learning. The way in which they appoint, and the terms and conditions of employment for an imam vary. In one mosque the latest imam was recruited from Pakistan through 'word of mouth'. The previous imam had accepted a post in another northern town and needed replacing.

Who appoints the imam?

Yes, the trustees.

How did you recruit him?

It is done by word of mouth. We have contacts. (Maybe, someone in another mosque will say we have a very good imam and tell us)

Our imam is from Pakistan, not finding in this country.

The imam before the present one was an Indian wasn't he?

*Yes. He was Indian. He had been here all fifteen years. He has now moved to Preston.
(Ghulam, translated by Hanif)*

In the other mosque, the present imam was appointed after the dismissal of the previous incumbent, the English-speaking Maulana Shabbir.

(1)

Maulana Shabbir he left, he had an argument with my brother, you know. He used to go the mosque, not giving him education about Islam. He just go there, and he was doing something there against Islam, in the mosque, and Maulana Shabbir, is giving like a punishment, not giving an education, so Hameed went there and he said to him, why are you not giving him an education, he's coming to the mosque. So he had an argument with him, and actually, they all blamed Hameed, he expelled him from the mosque, and this is what happened. Everybody, says that Hameed he done that. And everybody was happy with Shabbir. But also Shabbir made up his mind that he wanted to move from here, he wanted to start his own place, a private, giving education. (Munir)

(2)

How did you recruit the imam?

But we are lucky, you know, most of the time somebody always approached us wanting a job. I am not sure what the legal terms are, but I think most of our imams have been self-employed rather than employed by the mosque. Even if given set wage, but because responsibility legal was so high, we are all volunteers. We are not getting penny out of this position. Purely voluntary work. So we decided, tax affairs, insurance affairs, other legal things, they know what they are getting, but they are responsible for their own selves. (Mahmood)

The terms and conditions of employment of the imam are a sensitive issue with some members of the community. The trustees who employ the imam would argue that they are paying the imam a fair wage, particularly if compared to wages that would be received for the same job back home in Pakistan. If accommodation is also included in the package, as it is with one of the imams, their argument is a little sounder. However, in terms of the national UK minimum wage structure, these imams are being paid very little and it could be argued that these men and their families are living below the poverty line. For men with such impressive qualifications, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the mosques are getting a bargain. However, as happened with Maulana Shabbir, as it becomes more acceptable to recruit imams from UK based seminaries such as the *Dar ul-Uloom* in Bury or the *Dar ul-Uloom* in Dewsbury, the trustees will have to re-examine the rates of pay they currently operate for their imams.

(1)

...but we can't get people. It's difficult to pay. Paying one year it's 50 pounds. This is the problem. People cannot afford, because the majority of the people they are without work, they can't pay this money. And the committee they are only getting from those people who have been paying for a long time. Only they who are paying every year, they only pay. And a lot of people are coming without money, and children also, they are getting education but they can't afford it, this is the main thing.

They are paying £150 a week to the imam. Other teacher is getting £50. Those two are getting £200 a week. And they also have another mosque in Wordsworth Road, Eastfield. There are three teachers there. They are getting the same money. And it is a big burden for the community. The big problem is money otherwise it's ok. They can get a qualified person. (Mahmood)

(2)

There again, it boils down to the committee...what they set for the imam...that is all I can really say on that...it varies...it depends on what type of duties they are doing and how they set the duties...

Could I ask, for example, over the past twenty years, could I safely assume that those sort of things have improved?

No, they haven't improved...I mean the imams, to be honest, like I said, this is a question for the committee, who can really answer it, to actually find out what the salaries are...as far as I understand it imams are low paid...

What do you mean by 'low paid'?

I mean they aren't paid the minimum wage, that's what we would say...I don't know for what reason but that's the type of salary...

Is it tradition for the mosque to provide accommodation?

Yes, it is.

Would that be free?

That again, I couldn't comment on that...

But that sometimes happens? You get a house?

That does happen. (Maulana Shabbir)

(3)

When you have an imam from Pakistan, do you have to find him somewhere to live?

Yes, for time being.

Is there accommodation in the mosque?

Yes. We have bought a house in Charles Street. (Ghulam, translated by Hanif)

Once an imam is appointed his contract is decided by the trustees. There appears to be rather a 'grey area' surrounding the status of the imam in respect of the mosque. In one mosque, the imam is 'employed' by the mosque only on a 'self-employed' basis. Whether this is to create greater flexibility for the imam or to avoid additional expenses on the part of the mosque remains to be seen, but suffice it to say that the current imam has little in the way of employee rights, were he to seek them.

I think most of our imams have been self-employed rather than employed by the mosque. Even if given set wage, but because responsibility legal was so high, we are all volunteers. We are not getting penny out of this position. Purely voluntary work. So we decided, tax affairs, insurance affairs, other legal things, they know what they are getting, but they are responsible for their own selves. (Mahmood)

6.4 Running the mosque: self-sufficiency

This apparent avoidance of making the imam an employee of the mosque and all the legalities that that entails seems to be linked to a more general tendency within the community to rely on itself and avoid as much as possible legal agreements with official outside agencies. Ballard (2001) describes how peasant farmers back home in Mirpur operate very much a similar practice to that demonstrated by the mosque trustees in Riverton:

Over and above a taken for granted awareness of the benefits that can accrue from collective activity – as, for example, in the extended family – peasant farmers are invariably strongly committed to self-sufficiency. Bitter experience has long since taught them that outsiders are not to be trusted, especially when they are the tax-gathering

agents of rapacious landlords and rulers: peasants therefore invariably place an extremely high premium on independence and autonomy. In the context of a working assumption that outsiders will never have anything but their own exploitative interests to heart, peasants routinely mistrust everyone but their own immediate kin. (R. Ballard, 2001)

This is exemplified by the attitude of one of the trustees to seeking planning permission. A building has become available opposite the mosque and would be an ideal site for developing the mosque's facilities. One of their urgent needs is for a place to educate the girls of the community separately from the boys. However, at present, the site is a vehicle mechanics and would need planning permission, if bought, for it to be converted into a place of worship or a place of learning. The Chairman of the mosque trust feels they should purchase the place first and then seek permission:

Because he is selling it (a yard across from the mosque), we decided that if we did not buy it we would lose the chance for progress. So we consulted our members and we decided that if we buy it, in the future, we might need some plans, we don't know, we can use it for many many things. We could extend the mosque. We could make the bottom part a car park and the top part for making wudhu. Or it could be a facility for girls. Muslim girls don't like to be taught with the boys...And if we can do it, there is already a small building there...

Have you bought it already?

Yeah (though I think there was some misunderstanding here)

Do you have to have permission from the council in order to do things with it?

We have not asked them because I we end up on the losing side of it, we won't be able to buy it. But if we buy it as a garage, then they will go away.

Some officials are personally good. But as a policy, I don't think there is a good policy.

And I don't want them involved too much, because sometimes it becomes too restrictive.

(Mahmood)

This reluctance to seek close contact with the council in respect of the mosque is also fuelled by the council's own apparent reluctance to look favourably upon requests in the past. Both Chairmen of their respective mosques are united in their disdain for the local council and their lack of enthusiasm to support the local Muslim community in the town and often compare them very unfavourably with the councils of other major towns and cities.

(1)

As far as I know, there is no special relationship, but when we were in the past, the politician or MP, or local council leader, or the Mayor, these people asked to speak to our congregation, we always give permission. Otherwise, I don't see not much in this town. And this is my biggest complaint. Because I am not too clever, don't know how to approach it, in different towns the council is a lot better than in Riverton. We have paid everything by the community, the land, the mosque, all the bills, even...

There is no council grant?

No there is nothing. They don't even know we exist here or something. Even we asked the car park there for many many years. We never had a positive response. (Mahmood)

(2)

Have you ever tried to get any help?

I have tried when I bought this one for a community centre. They offered me £145. And I rejected that. I said I don't want it.

£145?

£145. I remember because general hospital built it new, before that it was Oakwood Hospital. When they built a new property, I collected, I remember, £200 or something from my people and I gave it to council. For the hospital. And Keith Simpson, councillor in charge, he offered £145 to Ahmed.... Ahmed told me. I said no. I asked everybody.

That wouldn't even pay for a carpet...

Council gave me a headache. This extension. This extension has got a flat roof. It's leaking all the time. Three times the Council has rejected our claim. Planning permission to put pitched roof. We keep repairing, it keeps leaking, what can we do? Last time, when I applied again, John Holt, the architect, he keeps trying, to do half, pitched roof and half make extension. To change the toilet area.

So the council have been difficult about it?

I don't know why. I am not saying. But the Council has never done us any favours. When I bought this mosque, they didn't give me planning permission. I got a solicitor and went to court. Glister. And when it went to court, Glister says, 'why are you not giving it to him planning for this place?' It is a residential area, they said. And that's why people need a place to pray! Not make a mosque in the jungle! That's what he said. Then the council couldn't answer. Then he said, 'You give him part three of this paper...because he pays rates, he pays taxes, for many years he is working, he is asking me in quite friendly way...two people he ask the question, how long you been in this country, how long you been working here, do you pay tax, I told him, when I come in, working from the mill, seven days, six day week, then I pay tax, insurance, I pay rates, the solicitor said why you...these people...plan... (Ghulam, translated by Hanif)

(3)

Also we have a problem with a community centre. If you go to other towns, they have very good community centres, the local government has helped with this. But in this

town, there is no help from council. They have been struggling, when my big brother was alive, he had meetings with the council...but still we have a problem. Nobody is helping. Just this council in Riverton. They don't do anything. For our community. I mean if anything happens like someone dying, everybody is coming here, but there is no big room. And people in other towns, if anybody passes away, they go to that community centre. They have everything there, all arrangements, like if people come from other towns, for eating, you know, and they do everything in the community centre, for people don't go in their houses, because there is no big room. It is our culture, we do that things. Custom, you know like. So this is very important - a community centre. (Qurban)

6.5 The mosque and the town

These strong feelings towards the council reveal an aspect of the community which transcends any sectarian differences there might be within the community itself. Both mosques and their members, who have been involved with the running of their establishments since their inception, have met nothing but resistance from official agencies. The community, existing as it does within a context of economic deprivation and social marginalisation, finds itself, even after fifty years, on the periphery of mainstream affairs. An illustration of this marginalisation can be found in the local history society's website, *Riverton the Unofficial Website*, which in its survey of the industrial history of the town in the post-war years makes no mention of the Mirpuri community and the contribution it made to the steel industry and other important local industries such as Beatson Clark. Many of the older men interviewed for this study mentioned periods of employment in the enormous bottle-making factory just north of the town centre. Indeed, on a visit there to a pupil engaged in

work experience during the nineteen-nineties, I was shown a prayer room created for the Muslim employees of the factory.

At Beatson Clark. I went there in 1963. We had a prayer room upstairs, because everyone watching we decided we wanted a room. You know people were watching what we were doing and we said no. So that's why they gave us a room. In 1963, when I started there there was only one person who used to pray. And at that time the people, six people were working, on the machines there, sorting bottles, and when it was time coming for prayer, he finished and went upstairs, to read, to pray, then he come back because those 5 people keep working and he says it's my prayer time so he's left the job and gone upstairs... It's very very difficult because only 15 minute break tea time and half an hour you know snap so there was no time for prayer. I mean if anyone wanted to pray he can pray during the time. Snap time and break time. But there is only a few people there now. There is not any more Muslims there. (Munir)

6.6 Adapting to new times: language

We saw in the *The Parents* how there was pressure in the community for the mosques to adapt to the new situation of growing numbers of children attending the mosque with little or no knowledge of Mirpuri-Punjabi, making it difficult for the Punjabi-speaking imams to communicate with their young students. There was also considerable pressure for the mosques to incorporate more teaching about Islam rather than a limited course of instruction in learning to read the Qur'an. Wajib is a parent who has similar concerns. He is not alienated from the mosque and works with the trustees carrying out certain duties. One of his duties is to make the collection before the prayer on Fridays. His father was involved with the initial purchase of the first Riverton mosque in 1969:

My father was a trustee. But he's dead now. In 1997. He was a trustee and a founder of the mosque. (Wajib)

He has, however, approached the Chairman with some ideas about changing the mosque's curriculum and introducing the English language.

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... (Wajib)

Wajib highlights here a significant gap between the generation of the trustees, all members of the first generation, described in chapter 3, *The Parents*, and the second generation all of whom have children passing through the mosque school at the moment. The prevailing view of the trustees, as articulated by the respective Chairmen, is that the present system is adequate and doing a good job.

Firstly, in respect of the language question, one Chairman interviewed had very few concerns and appeared not to appreciate that there may be a problem:

Do you think it is important for the children to speak English in the mosque?

Oh, yeah. Can speak any language in the mosque. Mosque has never been restricted to a language.

What about the teacher or the teaching?

If the teacher can speak English we are very happy, but if he can't because there's no requirement...if anyone wants to learn the Qur'an, English is not a requirement of it at all. You say, alhamdu lillah, not 'how are you?' Do you see, so the child, I want for Qur'an better Arabic teacher. With better pronunciation. Better ability. Who can convince the children this is the way to read. Can teach better. But for communication, English is our language today. (Mahmood)

His main concern is that the teacher is extremely well-versed in Arabic and that, all things being equal, this was the *sine qua non* for effective instruction in the mosque. In a sense, he is correct because without the necessary command of Arabic the main teaching objective, learning to read the Qur'an, will not be met. Yet he is not too bothered that English is not used in the mosque.

6.7 Adapting to new times: curriculum

In terms of the mosque's curriculum, both Chairmen are satisfied with the provision offered to students and parents:

(1)

What do you expect the imam to teach the children?

Because we are living in a non-Muslim society, my sole priority is to learn the very basics of Islam. That's my priority. That for a mosque we cannot expect more. It is not that institution where you can learn classical things. Very simple, everyone knows their Al-Fatiha, reading the Qur'an, recitation, what we teach in the funerals, you know, different things...basic..introduction of the Qur'an... (Mahmood)

(2)

How do you feel about the education for the children in the mosque? How important is that for you and the community?

Yes, we are quite happy. At least they learn the Qur'an. They know the salat. That's the main thing you know. (Ghulam, translated by Hanif)

We see here how the aims of the mosque education and the choice of language are determined by the trustees. Until there is change in the membership of these groups within the respective mosques there appears to be little likelihood of any substantial

change. The fact that Maulana Shabbir was dismissed when he was the only imam using English regularly in the mosque is symptomatic of this attitude.

We end this chapter not with the words of a trustee, but with the words of frustration of a parent who, like Wajib above, has found expecting trustees to change a bit like 'knocking my head against the wall'.

I think each kid pays about £1.50 per week. But I was saying to Mr Hussain 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 now, 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? (Wajib)

6.8 Summary

The tension suggested in chapter 4, *The Teachers*, is very much evident around the major stakeholders in this chapter. The vested interests of the ageing chairmen and trustees of the two mosques in this study are, at present, delaying any large scale changes taking place in the structures supporting the maintenance of the teaching of liturgical literacy. In a sense, this is inevitable, and not necessarily a bad thing. The community as a whole has a lot to be grateful to these men for having had the prescience some thirty years ago or more to fund and establish the means to promote and maintain its heritage of liturgical literacy. Indeed, some of the elders involved availed themselves of the opportunity to acquire liturgical literacy for the first time in Riverton (see *Chapter 3, the Parents*). The model adopted for the institutional transmission of liturgical literacy was a tried and trusted one. The mosques of Riverton employed imams from back home and they taught in the traditional way. For a time this was more than adequate, and, indeed, the chosen methodology of teaching liturgical literacy remains, and, I suggest, will remain the most effective one available. However, with the changing social and linguistic nature of the community, there is an evidently growing and more vociferous call for change in the mosque's structures. The call, on the one hand, for use of the English language, and on the other, for a more balanced teaching curriculum, is a difficult one for the Chairmen, trustees and other elders to withstand. Many of the issues around language choice

and use which fuel these tensions are dealt with in Section IV, *Languages*. Before, however, moving there, it is important to move from people to places. In the next section, I will examine the various loci where liturgical literacy takes place, beginning with the principal institution of transmission, the mosque.

Section III The Places of Liturgical Literacy

7

Chapter 7: The Mosques

Vignette

Standing facing the Jamia Mosque, Church Walk from the west a constant flow of traffic is at one's back. The two lanes bear commuter and shopper cars, business vans and lorries as they negotiate their way around the town centre. The noise is constant and loud. The fumes are in the air and the air pollution must be high. On the other side of the road, past two more lanes of busy traffic going in the opposite direction, is a grass rectangle separating the road from a large furniture warehouse located in the former Midbrough Independent Chapel and one of the area's most significant, but also neglected, historical monuments, the Walker Mausoleum. The independent chapel was built in 1777 as a breakaway from the main Wesleyan movement. Many of these were members of the Walker family whose name was closely associated with the iron and steel industry in the eighteenth century. To reach the mosque from that side of the road it is necessary to take the subway. Facing south from the mosque, the eye follows the bend of the dual carriageway until it reaches the large roundabout with its choice of right to Derham, left to the town centre, and straight on to Templebrough and the southern by-pass. Standing in front of the mosque facing east, one can see, on the opposite side of the narrow street on which the mosque is situated, the eyesore of a lorry repair yard which is just one of the small-scale local businesses which make up the trading estate which now takes the place of the former nineteenth century courts and back-to-backs. The site of the lorry repair yard has been offered for sale to the mosque committee, but after a big effort to raise the funds for purchase, the owner has reneged on their promise. The owners of the yard complain to the mosque about parking because it hinders their access. To the north the mosque faces, to the left, a long line of parked cars belonging to employees from the various small businesses on the estate. To the right a small rectangular piece of wasteland is used for parking also, and was also promised to the mosque, this time by the council. A deposit was paid to the council in the nineteen eighties, but the council changed its mind and returned

the deposit. The tyre suppliers on the opposite side of the parking area has now erected a steel fence to prevent cars accessing the parking area from their side of the road. The mosque suspects no permission has been granted for this fence from the council but are resigned to the feeling nothing will be done about it and, therefore, do not complain. Every lunchtime the loudspeaker declaims the call to prayer. This is in Arabic and is uttered by the mosque's unofficial caretaker who arrives early every day to vacuum the carpets of the prayer hall and check the central heating. The call to prayer is loud enough for all within one hundred metres to hear it, but the noise of the traffic and the small factories often reduce the sound to a muffle. It is unlikely that the nearest Muslim residents, on the opposite side of the dual carriageway, beyond the grass rectangle and behind the large furniture warehouse, can hear the call to prayer. It might be audible in the early morning for the dawn prayer, but council permission has not been forthcoming for the call to prayer at this time. It is unclear as to the feelings of the local workers and other employees when they hear this quintessentially eastern sound in their little part of South Yorkshire.



Plate 8 - 'Church' Walk Mosque and its location

7.1 Introduction

In accord with the paradigm of literacy study outlined by researchers within the 'New Literacy Studies' (Gee, 1990; Street, 1993; New London Group, 1996), it is

also important to examine the physical characteristics of the environment within which liturgical literacy takes place. In this section of the thesis, I will describe and discuss the homes and the two mosques involved as well as the geographical area in which they are situated.

7.2 Riverton and Midbrough

The square mile west of Riverton town centre which contains the districts of Midbrough and Derham is historically very rich. One hundred years ago the heavily built-up area of today still contained fields and open spaces with the river Don still providing the principal communication route into the town from the west. An extension of the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation Canal and the Midland Railway line had been constructed alongside its course. However, it was already clear where the future of the area lay as some of the major iron and steel works (Midland Steel Works, Holmes Rolling Mills) were already well-established and providing increasing opportunities for employment. The Midland Iron works, later to become the bus depot, loomed large in the centre of Midbrough, and the railways hemmed the area in with its court houses and two-roomed back-to-backs reaching from the works to the centre of the town.

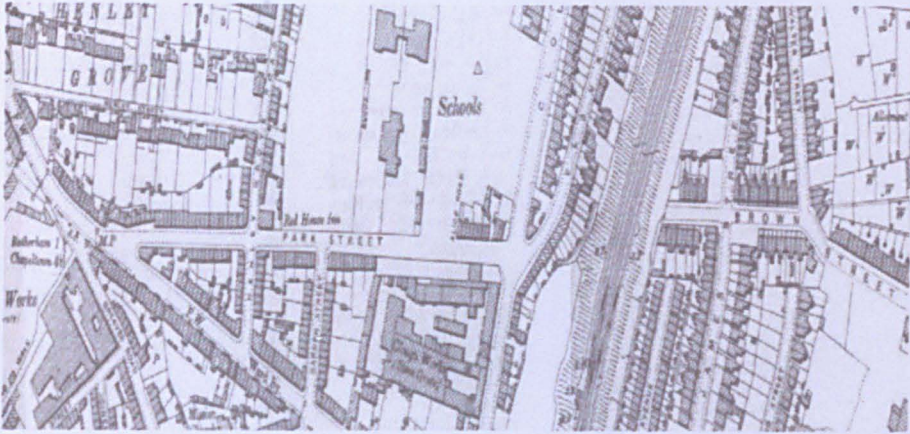


Figure 1 –Midbrough 1896

Riverton has six wards featuring in the 10% of most deprived wards in the UK. It has no wards featuring in the 10% of least deprived wards. Although 10% of white people in the town are unemployed, when it comes to those of Pakistani origin, the amount rises to 25%. Midbrough and Derham lie to the west of the town centre, with Midbrough clustered around the main railway line and station and Derham adjoining the large scrap metal works and football ground and just north of the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation Canal.

Until just after World War Two, the area's industries were manned by local workers and local shops were run and owned by locals as indicated by the typical names from street directories and electoral registers. Residents of the many courts were seldom listed in these sources.

Midbrough Street, Midbrough

79 Leech Herbert, pork butcher

81 Allen John, boot & shoe maker

83 Bray Henry & Co. grocers

85 Eaton John & Son, pawnbrokers

87 Adams Edwin Newton, grcr (Kelly's Directory, 1888)

The labour shortage after the war led to an increasing demand for unskilled labour to fill vacancies in local industries. The traditionally mobile Mirpuri community, who were well-represented in British merchant shipping at the time supplying crew members for ships plying their trade around the world at the twilight of the British Empire, saw opportunities for employment onshore and soon the first Mirpuri settlers began to arrive at the iron and steel, and related, industries in Riverton. Tenter Street, close to the railway, in 1950, could boast of two Italian residents, Antonio Maccio, at number 65, and Franco Annibaldi, at number 69, but its other residents all had local names. By 1970, Mohammad Azam was at number 39, Ali Sher at 43 and Arif Mohammad at 45. We also notice here the custom of buying houses adjacent to one another which characterised the early purchase of houses by the Mirpuri community in the nineteen sixties. In Josephine Road, in Derham, the first Mirpuri resident, Mohammad Sultan, appears in the street directory of 1970 suggesting a house purchase sometime in the nineteen sixties. The electoral register for the same year has Mirpuri residents in James Street from numbers 106 to 110. In Tenter Street, number 43, which is in the street directory under the name of Ali Sher, has five adult males living in the same house whilst next door at 45 three adult males reside.

162	...		830	Easthope, Iris Ida	104
724	Easthope, Sydney	104	831	Mohammed, Din	106
725	Easthope, Iris Ida	104	832	Zubeda, Begun Din	108
726	Smith, Frank	106	833	Abdul, Rashid	108
727	Smith, May	106	834	Ataf, Hussain—J	108
728	Griffiths, Frank Anthony	108	835	Ataf, Zubaida Begum	108
729	Griffiths, Sheila Ruth	108	836	Afsar, Mohammed	108
730	Couldwell, John	110	837	Barasas, Khan	108
731	Couldwell, Pamela J.	110	838	Mohammed, Riaz—J	110
732	Griffiths, Monica	112	839	Gulham, Akhter	110
		...	840	Griffiths, Monica	112
			841	Griffiths, Alfred	112

Plate 9 - 104-112 James Street 1960 & 1970

7.3 The origins of Church Walk Mosque

The Midbrough district, therefore, changed dramatically during a period of less than twenty years. The history of the purchase of the local mosques has been described elsewhere (*Chapter 6, The Organisers*). In this chapter I wish to briefly describe the relationship between the community and its institutions of liturgical literacy from a geographical point of view exploring the location of the buildings in relation to the homes of the community.



Figure 2 - Midbrough 2002 with the two mosques marked by ● and homes marked by ●

The mosque which was later to be named Jamia Mosque, or Church Walk Mosque, began its existence as the chapel of the Wesleyan Reform Union. Unsurprisingly, this was located on Church Walk though this street had got its name not from the place of worship in question, but from an earlier independent chapel built a little earlier situated at the other end of the street at its junction with University Road.

The Riverton and District Year Book mentions that the Chapel was built in 1872. At the turn of the nineteenth century services were held each Sunday at 2.30 and 6.00 p.m. Its 'pulpits are supplied with local preachers'.

WESLEYAN REFORM UNION.

This Methodist body has a Circuit called the Rotherham and Mexbro' Circuit which includes among its Churches, Societies at Masbro', Mexbro', Dalton, Parkgate, High Thorn, Swinton, and Bowbroom. The pulpits are supplied with local preachers. The local Chapel is situated in Chapel Walk, Masbro', and was built in 1872. The officers are—President, Mr. C. Adams; Secretary, Mr. A. Bailey, 28, Orchard Street; Stewards, Messrs. L. Brierley and J. Hall. Services are held each Sunday at 2.30 and 6 p.m.

Plate 10 - extract from 'Riverton and District Yearbook

NEW WESLEYAN REFORM CHAPEL AT MASBRO'.

—The members of the Masbro' Wesleyan Reform Church have determined upon the erection of a new chapel, and the corner stone of the edifice will be laid on Monday afternoon. We understand that much success has attended the endeavours of the Church in this direction, but still there is great need of help from friends of the cause. The ceremony will be performed by S. H. Burrows, Esq., of Sheffield, to whom will be presented a handsomely engraved silver trowel, from the establishment of Mr. J. Mason, Jeweller, of High street. It will bear the following inscription:—"Presented to S. H. Burrows, Esq., of Sheffield, on the occasion of laying the corner stone of the new Wesleyan Reform Chapel, Chapel Walk, Masbro', January 22nd, 1872."

Plate 11 - 1872 Newspaper report on opening

The chapel was not exclusively a place of worship during its history for a Sunday School took place regularly at the beginning of the twentieth century. An early photograph shows the Sunday School class presenting their work in the form of a display with their teachers. The children appear to have been working on the attributes of God or Christ and have chosen to present these both graphically through large card shapes as well as text. The boy to the extreme left of the picture (one of the few boys in the photograph) has chosen to use the shape of a castle to illustrate his slogan 'New Heart Castle'. The rest of the boys and girls are presenting a message to the camera finishing with the uplifting '...Night and Day, In Mercy, At Death, Through Christ, How God Keeps, In Perfect Peace...' with each child having a shape, either a heart or a cross, featuring their words. The children are standing outside the chapel next to the north facing wall in front of the exterior steps which lead to the side entrance of the chapel. Their teachers, one male and one female, look appropriately pleased and proud of their students as they contribute to both their children's religious knowledge as well as their literacy. In the top right hand corner it is just possible to see the rooftop of one of the terraced houses immediately behind the chapel.



Plate 12 - Wesleyan Reform Chapel (later Church Walk Mosque) circa 1900

The educating dimension of this photograph is clear and emphasises the reinforcing role that Sunday Schools played, and, to a much more limited extent, still play, in the acquisition of literacy where much of the learning of reading to read and write encountered in primary school was supported by activity in the church and chapel Sunday schools. No such obvious reinforcing role, as yet, exists for liturgical literacy in respect of learning how to read and write in English in contemporary primary and secondary schools. However, it has been reported elsewhere how the intensive experience of learning how to decode in Arabic in the mosque appears to have a beneficial effect on the ability to decode in general (Rosowsky, 2001).

The large slogan in the chapel itself situated behind the pulpit is a reminder to the congregation of the time of the purpose behind their worshipping and the hymns and tunes for the day are prominently displayed.



Plate 13 - Interior of Wesleyan Reform Chapel circa 1900

If we fast forward to 1969, we see the same building in its latest guise. The chapel was purchased by the Riverton Muslim community to be its first mosque. In the photograph below (*plate 14*) we see the Chapel soon after its conversion into a mosque. We can see clearly how the sign above the entrance announces the new role of the building. The houses which can be seen behind the mosque are in Vine Street. In front of the mosque is the beginning of wasteland created by the demolition of courts and back-to-backs in front of the building. The same fate awaited the houses behind the mosque ten years later when the local council decided to drive a dual carriageway between the mosque and the community to its west. To the east of the mosque lie the railway, the river Don and the town centre. The mosque still has the tall windows on two sides of the building but these would soon be bricked up as the high ceiling of the interior was reduced later by the construction of a false floor in order to reduce heating costs for a building more regularly used than hitherto.



Plate 14 - The Church Walk Mosque soon after purchase

In the second photograph of the mosque (*plate 15*), we can see how the demolition of the houses has been extended to the houses to the west. The mosque now appears to stand in the midst of a wasteland. This isolation was strengthened soon after by the construction of the dual carriageway separating the mosque from its community. The decision to construct the dual carriageway was not informed by the needs of the community in respect of its mosque. No consultation of the community took place and parents, in particular, were now faced with the prospect of their children negotiating a busy road in order to attend their daily mosque class. This problem was alleviated to some extent by the subway joining Church Walk to Midbrough. However, later development of the area around the mosque into a light industrial estate hardly left the building in a congenial environment.



Plate 15 - Church Walk Mosque 1975

It is not unreasonable to trace much of the anti-council feelings of those interviewed in the previous chapter, *The Organisers*, to the decisions made about the area around the mosque in the nineteen seventies. Nowadays, with feelings often running high about parking, matters are no better. Indeed, in 2003, the lengthy evening prayers of

Ramadan (tarawih) clashed one evening with an important local football match at Millmoor, home of Riverton United. Many northern football clubs (e.g. Bradford³¹) now have their grounds within or in close proximity to local Muslim, generally Mirpuri, communities. Cars of football spectators, who now came from parts of the town relatively distant from the ground, were boxed in by the cars of worshippers attending the evening prayers. Only sensible and prompt action by some of the mosque elders averted a nasty confrontation at the end of the match when football fans returned to their cars. The mosque is a busy place on a Friday and many worshippers come in cars. The local traffic wardens are always present at the time of Friday prayers in order to catch out anybody parked inappropriately. It is not therefore too difficult for the community to feel beleaguered and picked upon.

7.4 An aside: Liturgical Literacy – a matter of life and death?

The location of the mosque and its accessibility to the community has been a bone of contention since the establishment of the mosque in 1969. The construction of the by-pass immediately on the west side of the building has already been described. In 1984 it was decided to construct an additional by-pass to the north-west of the mosque. At that time, the district of Midbrough was bordered on the north by Black Street, north of which was the district of Rosehill. John Street, home to many Mirpuris, linked the two districts and at its northern end was one of the community's principal primary schools. The proposed new by-pass would follow the route of Black Street and link with Morley Road to the west. This would, in theory, allow

³¹ In the 1985 Bradford fire which took 52 lives, many members of the local British Asian community living around the stadium assisted with the rescue effort.

traffic to avoid the residential streets of Midbrough and create a more effective conduit into the town centre. However, it would also split the community down the middle. The main teaching institution for the community's liturgical literacy found itself on one side of the new by-pass and many of its students on the other.



Plate 16 - Newspaper report of new road

Despite concerns expressed by many, including the local councillor, Bob Matthews, who drew attention to the lack of fencing separating the dual carriageway from a recreation ground where children played, the opening of the new road went ahead. Sadly, the councillor's worst fears came to pass as a small child was killed as he attempted to cross the new road returning, not from playing in the recreation ground but, from his daily lesson in the mosque, now situated on the 'wrong' side of the dual carriageway. This happened six days after the official opening of the new road.

Many people are now separated from the nearby school, playing fields, and shops. A large number of Muslim families are now cut off from their community centre where children attend for religious education. (Rotherham Advertiser, 20th March 1984)

The event caused such an outcry in the community that the council had to agree to the erection of a footbridge a year later, but not before one more young girl, again on her way back from the mosque, was run over by a car. Thankfully, she survived.

POLICE last night lodged an inquiry on the scale of a murder hunt to find a hit-and-run driver who killed an eight-year-old boy on a new £2m dual carriageway.

Thousands of motorists are being questioned and their cars checked on the strength of what are believed to be a handful of vital clues provided by a taxi driver who chased the mystery driver along the newly-opened A629 by-pass in Rotherham after an accident in which schoolboy Askez Mohammed Ashraf died as he crossed a pelican crossing.

The taxi driver lost the other car, believed to be a gold or brown Mark III Ford Cortina.

Every car in South Yorkshire fitting that description — and there are believed to be about 3,000 of them — is to be checked and road blocks were set up last night to question drivers who could have been in the area at the time.

Chief Inspector Bob Lax said the measures reflected the seriousness with which police were treating the inquiry.

"If this had been a murder we would have had an incident room full of officers set up to deal with it, and it is almost like a murder," he said.

The boy died on his way home from a local mosque as he crossed the first phase of the new £4m A629 diversion road, which was officially opened last Friday.

Almost immediately, the road was at the centre of controversy when Rotherham councillor Bob Andrews criticised safety precautions in the area and forecast danger for children living close to it.

Yesterday Coun Andrews said he would be calling for better safety measures on the dual carriageway which effectively split in two the heavily Asian-populated areas of Masbrough and Thornhill.

"I still feel that a footbridge has got to go in there. If you look at the road, it is a fast dual carriageway, and drivers cannot be expected to see a pelican crossing suddenly coming up at them.

"There is a conflict between drivers and pedestrians because this road is splitting the community. Unless it is made safe, there might be a repeat.

"The people of the area are setting up a petition asking for a footbridge. It is too late for this little boy, but if we can prevent it happening again, then we must."

Relatives at Askez's home on James Street, Rotherham, yesterday joined Coun Andrews in criticising lack of safety precautions on the road.

Plate 17 – Newspaper report on child's death

In the previous chapter, *The Organisers*, it emerged from comments made by interviewees that the council was often unforthcoming in its support for community projects, and, in fact, sometimes appeared to obstruct rather than facilitate. These incidents with the dual carriageways are two very obvious ways where this has happened. The positioning of the Mirpuri community on the periphery of the town's life is a development which, though not strictly engineered, is an all familiar example of that institutional racism which appears to pervade the structures and systems of British society at the present time.

7.5 Educational purpose of the Church Walk Mosque

The history of the building now known as Church Walk Mosque is an important aspect of this study and fulfils the important requirement when explaining uses of literacy to also explore the institutions and locales of literacy, for without this understanding the picture of literacies and their role within the community is incomplete. The references earlier to the Wesleyan Reform era of the building have solid relevance in that the activities of the Chapel one hundred years ago foreshadow its later use in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. They also bear witness to the continuity of those literacy practices which at that time were closely tied in to religion and the Christian church. The literacies of the community in this study, although its children are well used to secular literacies in school and in the wider world, are still very much connected with religion and matters of faith.

Part of the motivation behind establishing the mosque in the first place was to provide a place of learning for the community's children. The older members of the community clearly recognised the importance to the community of the establishment of the mosque:

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.

(Mahmood)

A mosque, in fact, is often seen as a place of learning as well as of worship; though this is a view expressed about mosques in this country rather than a general observation of all mosques. Maulana Shabbir acknowledges the educational purpose of the mosque:

Well, first of all, it is necessary to understand that every masjid is an educational centre...when we look at the sirah or the life of the Prophet (saw), they used to do everything from the masjid...everything was done from the masjid...all the meetings, all the agendas...all the teaching...and everything was done from the masjid...so the masjid is the educational centre...So here in our place, like in every masjid, all the teaching is done in the masjid... (Maulana Shabbir)

This may be a fact of life in the UK Muslim communities as they seek to provide their children with an Islamic education that they cannot deliver at home. It is certainly not necessarily the case for mosques back home in rural Mirpur. This husband and wife had a different experience in Pakistan to that of their children in Midbrough:

Where did you learn to read the Qur'an?

(consulting wife) In Pakistan. In the house...like they are doing here

So it was separate to school?

Yes, separate. In somebody's house.

Same for you?

I learnt it a bit in Pakistan in somebody's house but when I came here, Church Walk.

So if you went to somebody's house, does that mean you didn't go to the mosque, like they do here?

Not really, no. The girls couldn't go to the mosque anyway.

The boys?

Errr, yes. In the towns maybe, but not in the villages. In the village you had to go to somebody's house I think. From what I can remember. I had to walk a few miles to go to somebody's house, to read.

In the UK the mosque has two jobs, a place of worship and a place to teach the children the Qur'an. That's not the case in Pakistan?

No, it's not the case. It's just for prayer. I think most mosques...It was at Church Walk mosque that I learnt it. (Hanif and Ferzana)

For these UK Muslim students, learning to read in the mosque is as significant a literacy experience as learning to read in school. The connection between reading and worship is so intimate for this community that it will talk about 'reading prayer' rather than 'saying prayers' as might be more common among Christians. This is, one needs to stress, a particularly Pakistani, or Urdu- or Punjabi-speaking, custom, for Arabs will talk about 'doing prayers' or 'praying' rather than 'reading'. The Muslim call to prayer, the Azan, which is now recited once a day from the Church Walk mosque through an external loudspeaker (a rare concession from the local council), is always referred to as 'reading the azan' rather than any other expression. Children will, likewise, talk about 'going to the mosque to read'. It is often unclear whether they mean 'pray' or simply 'read the Qur'an'. The distinction between the two is so blurred. This close tie between 'reading' and acts of worship underlines the primacy given to the act of reading in the mosque.

7.6 Church Walk Mosque in 2004



Plate 18 - 'Church' Walk Mosque - 2004

Nowadays, the building described above looks very different to how it appears in *plates 14 and 15*. It has now been whitewashed and extended to include a main entrance at the side of the building. The long wall-length windows have been bricked up at some stage and smaller windows inserted. All these modifications have been prompted by reasons of worship. The side extension contains the *wudhu* (ablution) facilities, the long windows were removed when the main auditorium of the building was divided into two with a new ceiling creating two prayer halls. This allowed for smaller heating bills as the mosque had to be warm most of the day to accommodate the five daily prayers. The new side entrance allowed worshippers to enter and leave the building without having to pass through the ablution area and the large rectangular bulge in the south-east facing wall contains the prayer niche, the *mihrab*, which indicates the direction of prayer. Coincidentally, one side of the building stands facing south east and allows for the congregation to face Mecca as they pray.

At the bottom of the steps leading up to the upper prayer hall there is a park bench, a collection of rose bushes and a conifer.

Inside, a time-travelling visitor from the Wesleyan Reform congregation would find enormous changes. There are now two prayer halls devoid of any furniture except for the three-stepped pulpit, the *minbar*. The floors are covered in good quality carpet with the carpet of the upper prayer hall boasting a design based on myriad prayer mats arranged in rows facing the *mihrab*. In the lower prayer hall, there are three large bookcases. One has books on Islam in English. One has books in Urdu. The other also has books on Islam in English. These books are the legacy of the former imam, Maulana Shabbir and the remnants of an efficient lending system (stamps, notebook) are evident in one of the bookcases. The books in the cases are, at the moment, rather untidily arranged and remain locked most of the time. Bookshelves around the hall all carry copies of the Qur'an, some in cloth covers, others not.

Our time travelling non-conformist would find much that is strange, but also much that was familiar. The three-stepped *minbar*, although not as grandiose as the large pulpit from one hundred years ago, serves the same purpose. It is from here that the imam delivers his weekly sermon sitting on the second step speaking in Urdu for approximately thirty minutes before the formal ritual of Friday prayer when he will stand on the bottom step and deliver a short ritualised sermon, or *khutbah*, in Arabic before the main prayer of the day.

The large wooden cupboard on the same wall as the *mihrab* is not a cupboard at all, but an elaborate and decorative wall-mounted prayer timetable. In every mosque in

the world, one of the most important features is the display of prayer times for that particular day, week or month. This particular version is made of wood and allows for the days and times to be displayed by means of small wooden blocks, akin to a small child's bricks, inserted into appropriate holes. The language of this display is in Arabic, including the numerals, with the designer allowing the wood to inspire a design suitably cursive and florid. Our time-traveller will also notice, however, an A3-sized poster just below the wooden timetable, which carries the same information in English for every month of the year; useful for those in the congregation who understand little Arabic and especially Arabic numerals.



Plate 19 - Wooden prayer time indicator

The sums of money which the community has expended on the purchase, modification and upkeep of the building are not inconsiderable. The principle of 'self help', retained from cultural and social practice back home, is naturally followed (see previous chapter, *The Organisers*, page 198 and Ballard, 2001). These are comments from the Chairmen of the two mosques:

We have spent nearly £40,000. Not asking anyone to give money – only money from collection. Ask this gentleman, he is writing it down in his book. (Ghulam, translated by Hanif)

So I was thinking myself and I told to committee if you are going to buy a place across the road, it's a lot of money, but they have collected it, the truck place, they are going to close it and the mosque wants to buy it, £120,000. And it's a lot of money. People have collected about £65,000.

Because he is selling it (a yard across from the mosque), we decided that if we did not buy it we would lose the chance for progress. So we consulted our members and we decided that if we buy it, in the future, we might need some plans, we don't know, we can use it for many many things. We could extend the mosque. We could make the bottom part a car park and the top part for making wudhu. Or it could be a facility for girls. Muslim girls don't like to be taught with the boys...And if we can do it, there is already a small building there... (Mahmood)

In Islam, there are two acceptable manners of giving charitable donations. The first, and the most praiseworthy, is to give in secret and thereby avoid any accusation of 'showing off' one's wealth or advertising one's generosity. The object in this case is to incur the pleasure of the Almighty which, by itself, should be its own reward. The second manner of giving charity, and the lesser valued, is to publicise one's donations, not to curry favour with one's peers, but to serve as an example to others. This latter custom is used extensively when collecting money for purposes connected to the mosque and its activities. In connection with the 'on-off' sale of the yard opposite Church Walk mosque a list of donors and the amount of their donations is prominently displayed, in English, on the back wall of the main prayer hall.

The Church Walk mosque until this time followed neither school of thought and operated a 'welcome to all-comers' policy. The discussions prompted by the arrival of this imam led to fierce arguments and eventual physical fighting. The community was split down the middle and it was decided that one faction would have to leave the mosque and another building was urgently sought. A stone's throw from Church Walk is University Road. In 1982 a trustee from the Church Walk mosque organised a collection of money and, with considerable investment of his own, purchased an Irish working men's club on University Road and the building next door, a bicycle repair shop. In this conversation, the Chairman recalls the purchase of University Road mosque. The bracketed comments are from the treasurer who was acting as interpreter.

This was three properties, you know. That was an Irish Club. This was for bikes selling and repairing. These two places and that is back garden. So I bought it and then after mosque.

When?

1984 or 1985.

Have you any photographs of how it was before?

(They were houses and a shop, one was a club, the other a cycle)

No, no. You know Foster's..? It belonged to his property. So I bought it separate. One and then the next one.

All at the same time?

Three times over two or three months. Because I not got enough money.

So you bought it? You personally?

Me bought myself. (whole community together, so they choose a person who ...)

I am a trustee, but not just myself who bought it...everybody paid. Collection. (Ghulam, translated by Hanif, treasurer of the mosque)



Plate 22 - 'University' Road Mosque - 2004

Over the last twenty years this building, the University Road Jamia Mosque, has become established as the second main mosque of the Midbrough community. Unlike Church Walk which was already a place of worship, developing the buildings has been a struggle for the Chairman and, although heavily reliant on 'self help' for funding, he has been obliged to deal with the local council on many occasions because of issues around planning permission. From this experience has come a deep distrust of the council and its affairs.

Council gave me a headache. This extension. This extension has got a flat roof. It's leaking all the time. Three times the Council has rejected our claim. Planning permission to put pitched roof. We keep repairing, it keeps leaking, what can we do? Last time, when I applied again, John Holt, the architect, he keeps trying, to do half, pitched roof and half make extension. To change the toilet area.

So the council have been difficult about it?

I don't know why. I am not saying. But the Council has never done us any favours. When I bought this mosque, they didn't give me planning permission. I got a solicitor

and went to court. Glister. And when it went to court, Glister says, 'why are you not giving it to him planning for this place?' It is a residential area, they said. And that's why people need a place to pray! Not make a mosque in the jungle! That's what he said. Then the council couldn't answer. Then he said, 'You give him part three of this paper...because he pays rates, he pays taxes, for many years he is working, he is asking me in quite friendly way...two people he ask the question, how long you been in this country, how long you been working here, do you pay tax, I told him, when I come in, working from the mill, seven days, six day week, then I pay tax, insurance, I pay rates, the solicitor said why you...these people...plan... (Ghulam, translated by Hanif)

From the outside the red-brick University Road mosque appears modern and tidy. It fronts University Road, once a busy thoroughfare into the town centre but now a minor road which ends in a cul-de-sac created by the building of the dual carriageway. There are double yellow lines in front of the building offering little in the way of ease of access for worshippers travelling by car. Interestingly, there are no yellow lines in front of the local church yards away on the same road. The building bears no traces of its former occupants. The extension built onto the front of the building contains the *wudhu* facilities and as you enter the main door you are faced with shoe racks to your left and to your right. Entering another door into the main prayer hall, you are surprised by the amount of space there is concealed behind the façade of the building. The prayer hall covers the space previously occupied by the working men's club, the cycle shop and their respective back yards.

In 1888 University Road provided a world of contrasts. To the south were terraced houses for skilled workers, engine drivers and miners, butchers and mechanics; while

at Alfred Street, were humble but lively courts and back-to-backs, for workers at the local factories.

By 1901 the large fields behind John Street to the north of University Road had been replaced by more terraced houses. The row of terraced houses on University Road which now form the Jamia Masjid University Road feature on the Street Directory as follows:

110 Post, Money Order & Telegraph Office; Benjamin Gregory, sub-postmaster

110 Gregory Benjamin, grocer

112 Wharin Joseph, butcher

112 Askin George, draper

114 Brown Henry, house furnisher (Kelly's Directory, 1900)

By 1960 number 114 was St Bede's Working Men's Club and 112 was a bicycle suppliers and repairers. The former post office is now closed and remains a derelict building at the end of the terrace.

7.8 The materiality of liturgical literacy

The walls of the interior of the mosque are awash with pictures and texts. Starting with the prayer niche, the *mihrab*, which is tiled, there is a rectangular LED display at the apex of the *mihrab*'s arch which alternates the two parts of the Islamic credo in Arabic, '*la illaha illa Allah; Muhammadu Rasul Allah*' (There is no god except God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God). This electronic display is complemented by a string of fairy lights draped around the edge of the arch. Both of these electrical devices have been installed by Bashir, a young man who is trained in microelectronics. A chandelier is suspended in the prayer niche to complete the light display which underlines the centrality of the prayer niche to the rest of the prayer hall. On either side of the arch are two dish-shaped plaques bearing the Arabic, '*Ya Allah*' and '*Ya Muhammed*'. The significance of the word '*Ya*', or '*O*', is immense. In the case of '*O, Muhammed*' this saying has the implication in some schools of thought that the personage of the Prophet can still be addressed and be an object of a worshipper's supplications. A critic, as represented by the Deobandi school of thought, would consider such a saying as heretical and tantamount to '*shirk*', or polytheism. A Deobandi mosque would allow plaques saying '*Allah*' and '*Muhammed*' but would consider the insertion of '*Ya*', or '*O*', to be an anathema.

Running anti-clockwise around the walls of the prayer hall, the following images are arranged: a large (100cm x 75cm) photograph of the Holy Mosque and Kaaba at Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Next to this is a smaller photograph (A4-size) of one of a series of relics of the Prophet Muhammed, the Holy Sandal, which is presently kept in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul. Indeed, such a photograph would not be found in

Church Walk mosque, for it is typical of that branch of Islamic teaching derived from the Barelvi school of thought mentioned above. Furthermore, it is also true that more images and displays are found in Barelvi mosques than in the more 'puritanical' Deobandi mosques.

A large (150cm x 100cm) mass-produced printed cloth depicts in a stylised fashion the three principal mosques of the Islamic world, the Holy Mosque in Mecca, the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Next to this are another two large photographs of the exterior and interior of the mosque at Medina. Another poster featuring relics of the Prophet comes next. This poster with captions in English includes the aforementioned sandal, an imprint of the Prophet's foot, his sword, his bow, his mantle and his flag.

After this is an interesting document in the form of a poster. As in many other religions, tradition is carefully preserved and called upon to support and verify matters of faith. In Islam, a common practice in religious teaching is to regularly establish lines of spiritual authority. This poster features the Kaaba at the top with the names of those Prophets acknowledged in Islam arranged in chronological order below. The names, written in Arabic, have Muhammed nearest the top just below the Kaaba and include names such as Jesus, Moses and Abraham before ending (or starting, depending on one's perspective) with Adam, who, in Islamic tradition, is considered the first Prophet as well as the first man. Helpfully, there is a text-only version of this poster in English alongside.

Another large poster then features the Arabic words for the Prophet Muhammed and his closest Companions. As we reach the back wall of the prayer hall, a very large credo (200cm x 150cm) is displayed in white letters on a green background. This poster is framed and has the English translation in large capital letters underneath. The translation opts for the more archaic 'There is no deity save Allah' rather than the more straightforward 'There is no god except God'. This is an example of a problem the English-speaking Muslim community often has to deal with. Many of the available translations of texts, be they translations of the Qur'an or other texts, belong to an era when mass readership in English was not an issue. One wonders what the children make of words such as 'lo', 'beneficent' and 'deity'. The quality of translated materials and their usefulness, especially to the children attending the mosque, will be referred to in section IV, *Languages*.

The Emergency Exit sign above the rear door is sandwiched between two more large tapestries of the Holy Mosque at Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque at Medina. Next to this is an English version of the Prophet and his Companions with Muhammed in the centre and in the four corners in anti-clockwise order, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali.

A wooden, handcrafted, prayer time board, similar to that in Church Walk mosque, hangs on the wall next to the prayer niche. As the times are displayed in Urdu only, it is likely that this timepiece was brought from Pakistan. A '*salawat*' prayer, a supplication asking God to bless Muhammed, one of the most common prayers in the Islamic liturgy, is displayed in Arabic above a door leading out of the prayer hall. An

Urdu Islamic calendar and prayer timetable is next followed by an English board with clockfaces depicting daily prayer times.



Plate 23 - Prayer Times Display

At the rear of the prayer hall are stacked the low benches used for teaching children every evening. The imam has arranged three of the benches to form a square so that he can sit with his back to the wall. A cushion is there for the imam's use. In the evenings the other benches are arranged in ever widening arcs from the inner square. Behind the imam is a wall-mounted whiteboard.

A large bookcase contains the copies of the Qur'an and *Qaidahs* (see *Chapters 3 and 4*) used by the young students.

On the back wall next to the entrance to the prayer hall is a small peg board with notices. Here there are advertisements in Urdu and in English from travel agents specialising in arranging pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina. There are also receipts pinned to the board displaying contributions to the mosque funds. There is also a

poster in English explaining the ingredients of certain foods which contain forbidden substances.

The prayer hall is, therefore, very rich in texts, in a variety of languages and varieties of language. With the human form being proscribed in many Islamic contexts, it is the written word which, historically, has been developed into a fine art form. The words appearing in texts in University Road and Church Walk mosques do not generally aspire to fine art. With their varieties of languages, scripts, fonts, sizes and colours it is hard to imagine how such an impression could be made. On the one hand, there is the discrepancy between the scripts used for Arabic derived from the Arabic-speaking world and the scripts derived from the Indian sub-continent. The former tends to feature on bilingual texts featuring English and has a more angular form. The latter tends to be more cursive and features regularly in bilingual texts with Urdu which itself is conveyed with a stylised Arabo-Persian script. The large posters featuring English seem to prefer capitalisation as a calligraphic technique making them rather hard on the eye at times.

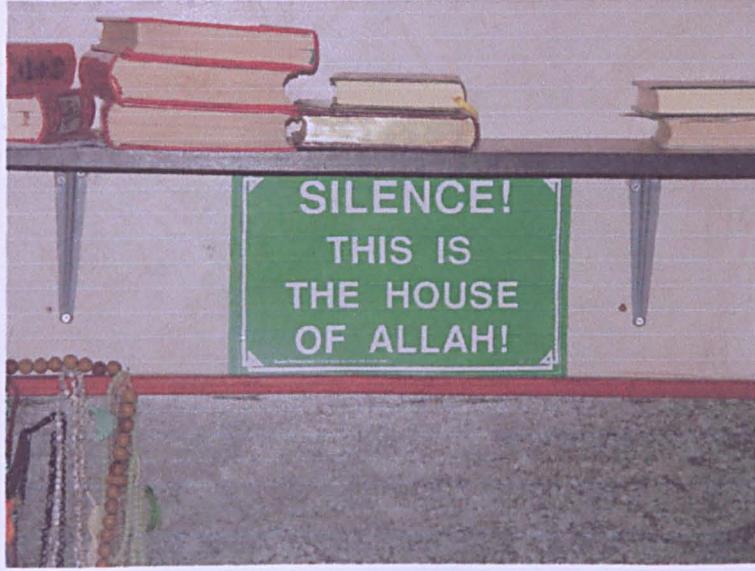


Plate 24 - A wall sign in English

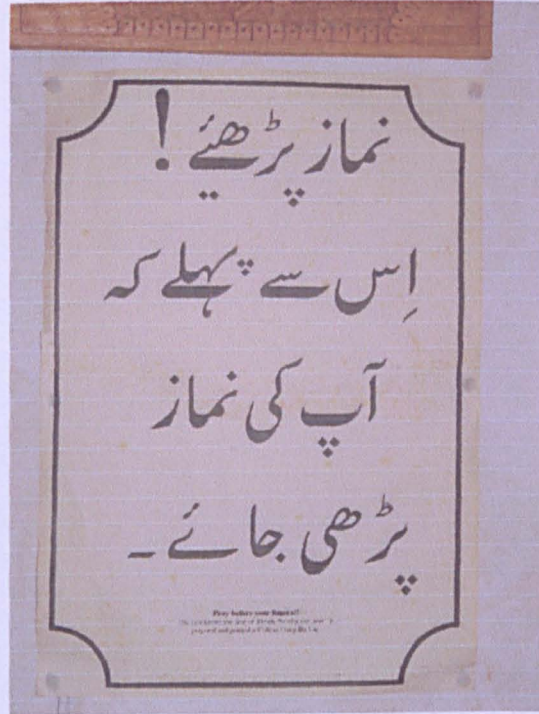


Plate 25 - Wall sign in Urdu



Plate 26 - Wall sign in Arabic and English

The prayer hall is not the only place in the mosque for displays of texts. In the *wudhu*, or ablution, area of each mosque there are toilets and washing facilities. There are many supplications to accompany preparation for prayer and these are often prominently displayed on the walls.

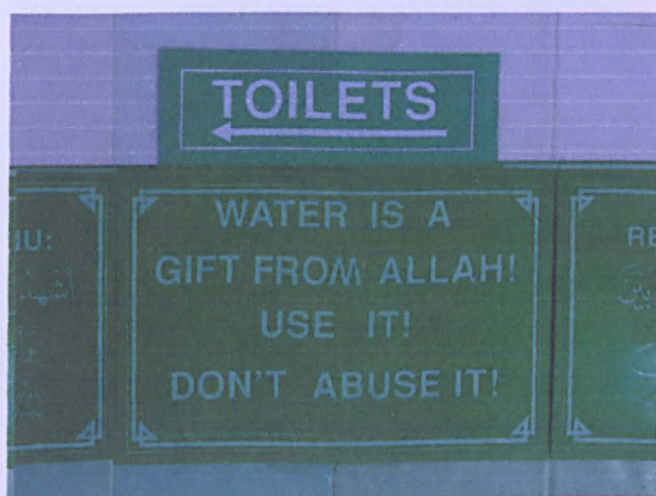


Plate 27 - Sign in ablution area

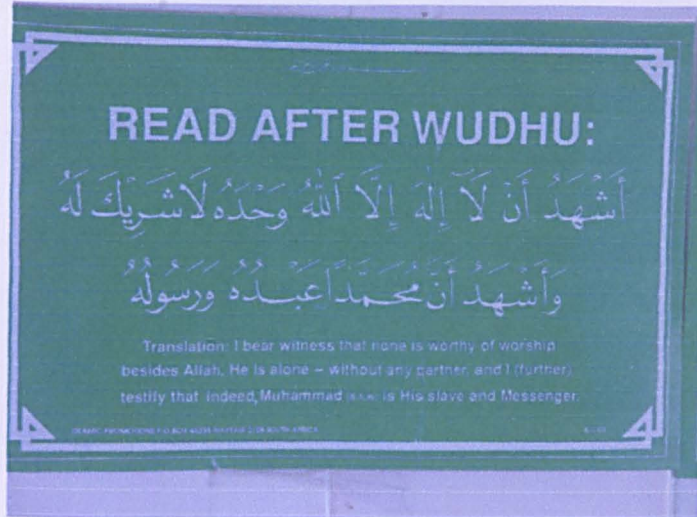


Plate 28 - Sign in ablution area

In every mosque which holds classes for children there is, inevitably, a high turnover of texts, copies of the Qur'an and the Qaidahs (primers). Despite the best of intentions, including the use of covers and careful use, books become tatty and pages become detached. Islamic custom insists that material containing verses from the Qur'an, and that includes practically all materials used in the mosque, cannot be thrown away. It is customary, therefore, for a space to be identified in the mosque where such materials can be deposited safely. In the University Road and Church Walk mosques there is a cupboard in the large bookcase which acts as a depository for old Qur'ans and other texts. It is fascinating to reflect on the link that can be made across the centuries between this practice of preserving fragments of sacred texts in UK mosques with the identical practice carried out by the original readers of what have come to be called the Dead Sea Scrolls, a large proportion of which are considered to have been collected and preserved for very similar reasons two thousand years ago in the Jordanian desert! A synagogue has a similar depository called a 'genizah'.



Plate 29 - Fragments cupboard: a South Yorkshire 'genizah'

7.9 Summary

The children who attend their respective mosques every evening for two hours have little awareness of the history of the buildings in which they gather to learn how to read the Qur'an. Their elders tell a story which involves determination, struggle and frustration. Yet the story they tell is one which is mirrored many of the towns and cities in the UK. The establishment of Muslim communities and their institutions, the mosques, has been a significant socio-cultural development over the past fifty years. In the most recent *UK Muslim Guide*, a 'yellow pages' for Muslim residents of the United Kingdom, there are listed over 800 mosques in nearly 200 towns and cities. The education which is on offer at the mosque for its young worshippers is, in many respects, a new phenomenon in UK society. In other respects, however, there is a great deal of continuity amidst this overriding impression of change. The children attending the Sunday School at the Wesleyan Reform Chapel in 1901, with their

teachers, and their combination of learning faith and literacy, have their counterparts in the early twenty first century with the young children of Mirpuri heritage and their imams and assistant imams now attending Jemia Mosque Church Walk and Jamia Masjid University Road.

We have seen in the Section II how the community structures and organises this cultural and religious activity. The buildings in which this activity takes place, and their history, bear witness to the sacrifice the community is always making in order to preserve and maintain it. As we shall see in Section IV when discussing the role of different languages within the community, no such similar sacrifice is made for Urdu or the mother tongue of Mirpuri-Punjabi.

The mosque, however, is not the only site for the practice and acquisition of liturgical literacy. The family home, too, reflects and helps shape the nature of liturgical literacy as it is practised within the community. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 8: Liturgical Literacy in the Home

8.1 Introduction

We have seen that the acquisition of liturgical literacy takes place mainly in the mosque. There are parents who assist their children with learning how to read the Arabic of the Qur'an, but most are content to support this acquisition by ensuring their sons and daughters attend the mosque regularly. In a sense, this is very similar to their attitudes towards formal education in the state school. However, there is no doubt that the home provides one of the main contexts for the practice of liturgical literacy. Once liturgical literacy has been acquired, the main practical use for this literacy practice is in the performance of prayer, the recitation of Qur'an and, occasionally, other religious ceremonies. All of these take place in the home as well as in the mosque.

8.2 The materiality of liturgical literacy in the home

The interviews with parents took place exclusively in the homes of the participants. In general, the interviews were held in the 'front room' of the families in question. This room is, as in many communities in South Yorkshire, kept as the room for receiving guests. The material literacy in these rooms reflected the variety of literacies of the community with texts in English, Urdu and Arabic. With the

exception of the Mufti's room, which, in fact, was more akin to an office or even a library, most of the rooms were similar in their contents. Texts were to be found on walls in the guise of pictures and posters, on tables in the form of books, newspapers and papers, or as books on shelves.

The ubiquitous large picture, often on cloth, of the Holy Mosque at Mecca was usually above the mantelpiece with occasionally a dish-like plaque on each side, one with the word 'Allah' in Arabic and the other with the word 'Mohammed'. Some homes had a framed picture of the 'Throne' verse from the Qur'an, a verse which is considered essential for protection from harm and evil.



Plate 30 - The 'Throne' verse in a family home

This verse is also sometimes found on amulets and jewellery worn on the body.

Another text usually found on the wall is the Islamic credo 'There is no god except God; Mohammed is the Messenger of God'. This is more often than not in Arabic.



Plate 31 - The Islamic credo

Not many books are in evidence. A copy of the Qur'an is kept in a cloth casing and placed on either the highest shelf in the room or on the top of a bookcase. This is to symbolise respect for the sacred text. It is interesting to compare this practice with the practice of Muslims from the Arabic-speaking world. In these communities, the Qur'an is no less valued as a sacred text with all the same strictures regarding the handling and placing of the Qur'an. However, the text in Arabic-speaking homes is very much more a text in use. It will be on a shelf, but can appear tatty and well-thumbed. It may appear on a coffee table or on top of a sideboard. It may well have a bookmark inserted into its pages or even a page corner turned over. Furthermore, it is very common in Arab countries to have a Qur'an on the dashboard of a car. Muslims may keep small copies of the Qur'an in their breast pockets of jackets or in handbags. It appears that the more meaningful the text is to the reader, the less likely it is that the book takes on a purely symbolic or reverential value. The Qur'an in the home of this community, which does not have direct access to its meaning, is very much an object of veneration rather than a text for regular consultation. The placing of the Qur'an in a high place, and its careful protection from damage and getting

dirty, in a sense, a meritorious act of devotion, at the same time, acts against an active engagement with the words of the text and their meaning.

Other books, if in evidence, will be in Urdu, and, as often acknowledged by the parents, are only read by the older members of the family.

(i)

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)

(ii)

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.

(Qurban)

Every home will have at least one, usually more, prayer mats. These are often imported from China and can be purchased in local Muslim grocers or milliners of which there are just one or two in Riverton but many just a few miles away in Sheffield. They are usually made from brushed cotton or velveteen and depict stylised images of one or more of the three holy mosques of Islam. Occasionally, another image will appear. The Blue Mosque in Istanbul is sometimes seen. Daily prayers are conducted on these mats and they are kept clean and folded away.



Plate 32 - Prayer mat featuring the Kaaba in Mecca

Another necessary accessory to prayer, and therefore liturgical literacy, is the rosary, or *tasbih* (or *subhah* in Arabic-speaking homes). These are kept in both mosque and home and often in pockets. The regular Muslim rosary (sometimes erroneously referred to as ‘worry beads’) consists of a string of ninety nine beads divided into three sections of thirty three with a single large elongated bead called the ‘*imam*’ at the head of the string representing the beginning and end of the rosary. The divisions into thirty three are designed to facilitate the counting of the phrases, ‘*subhan Allah*’ (glory to God), ‘*alhamdulillah*’ (thanks be to God) and ‘*Allahu akbar*’ (God is great) which, according to tradition, are best repeated thirty three times at the end of each prayer.



Plate 33 - Muslim rosary - *tasbih* or *sibhah*

However, the rosary has a more extended use than the above for some worshippers. Some Muslims will have a daily routine of *dhikr*, or remembrance, which they will carry out with the aid of a rosary in order to count the number of certain litanies and supplications. Again, this latter will take the form of Arabic words and phrases which have been learnt orally either by heart, or from texts. Not all worshippers will carry out this practice, and children very rarely, and some will only do it in the mosque whilst waiting for the beginning of the congregational prayer. However, it would be unusual for a home not to have a rosary.

8.3 Liturgical literacy events at home

Before leaving the home as a context for liturgical literacy, it is necessary to mention one particular liturgical literacy event which occurs in some homes on a reasonably regular basis. In *Chapter 10, Urdu*, a brief description is given of a *Mawlid*, a gathering of worshippers to celebrate the occasion of the birth of the Prophet. Many of the practices there described also, on occasion, take place in the home. It may be hoped that such a gathering is an auspicious event which may attract blessings for the house and those who live there or it may be to celebrate and give thanks for the birth of a new child. These are often family gatherings involving the extended family and close friends. An imam, or someone suitably qualified, will be invited to host the proceedings and a substantial meal will usually seal the event.

As in the mosque, this is an occasion for poetry and song as well as more the formal recitation of the Qur'an and other recitations. Unlike the mosque gathering, there is not so much, if any, formal speeches or addresses. It should also be mentioned here that not all the Mirpuri community will take part with equal gusto in such gatherings. The Bareilvi-Deobandi split, described elsewhere (*Chapter 7, The Mosque*), plays a role with the Deobandis often disapproving of such practices, particularly the *dhikr* and the singing.

Such events in the home are equally multilingual with recitations taking place in Arabic (Qur'an and supplications), Urdu (*naat*) and Punjabi (*naat*). Indeed, many of the younger members of the family may be more confident to declaim the poetry they have learnt, either by heart or from texts. A more detailed description of this literacy practice will be found in Section IV, – *The Languages of Liturgical Literacy*.

Finally, many Muslim homes will contain texts and textual artefacts which are considered to have properties of protection for those living there. We have mentioned earlier of how the liturgical texts of the Arabic language are sometimes used for esoteric purposes beyond that of their literal or figurative meaning (*Section 1, Chapter 2, pp 40-41*). The Mende imams in Sierra Leone would also employ religious texts as a means of warding off evil and misfortune. The 'Throne' verse mentioned above is an example of this particular usage and features not only on walls but on jewellery and on other personal objects such as credit-card sized insertions for wallets and purses. For more serious matters,

among some members of the community, a religious teacher (not usually the local imam) will provide amulets designed to perform particular spiritual or worldly functions. These range from seeking protection from evil spirits to seeking success in school or university examinations. The Arabic words that feature on these amulets are not generally known by those who wear them, but usually consist of verses from the Qur'an and other Arabic prayers and formulations. The amulet is usually a smallish square piece of paper which is folded into a small triangle and inserted into a silver or leather pouch and worn around the neck or placed in a wallet. The amulet may also be placed somewhere in the home.



Plate 34 - Example of amulet

It should be noted that not all Muslims agree with this particular practice and believe it to be a superstitious practice. Nevertheless, it is possible to witness usage of these amulets for various purposes in the community. *Plate 35* below shows an advertisement from a supplier of such amulets which was being distributed in University Road mosque this year (2004).

نوٹ:- جو بھائی بہن بے اولاد ہوں اور روزگار کے لئے پریشان ہوں، گھر اور دکان کی خیر و برکت کے خواہشمند ہوں۔ بیماری سے شفا اور اپری اثر سے چھٹکارا چاہتے ہوں تو آپ کا اور آپ کی ماں کا پورا نام لکھ کر مجھے ارسال کریں تاکہ آپ کو تھوڑے ہی عرصے میں شفا حاصل ہو۔

نوٹ:- دربار شریف کے کاروائی سے مجھے یاد دہانی۔

بذریعہ ٹیلیفون نمبر 0091-145-2421520, 2424460, 2429083

Note : If you are desirous of a child, any job, removal of any domestic worry, khair o barkat in your house or shop, to get ride of black magic, recovery of health from illness, please write me your & your mother full name. So that I may send you Taviz.

Please remember me for any service relating to Holy Astana of Khwaja Pak by my Telephone no. 0091-145- 2421520, 2424460, 2429083

نوٹ:- اگر آپ کو بچہ، روزگار، گھر اور دکان کی خیر و برکت، بیماری سے شفا اور اپری اثر سے چھٹکارا چاہتے ہوں تو آپ کا اور آپ کی ماں کا پورا نام لکھ کر مجھے ارسال کریں تاکہ آپ کو تھوڑے ہی عرصے میں شفا حاصل ہو۔

نوٹ:- دربار شریف کے کاروائی سے مجھے یاد دہانی۔

نوٹ:- جی ہاؤ، بھن بھولنا ہے، روزگار کے لئے پریشان ہو، اور شفا اور اپری اثر سے چھٹکارا چاہتے ہوں تو آپ کا اور آپ کی ماں کا پورا نام لکھ کر مجھے ارسال کریں تاکہ آپ کو تھوڑے ہی عرصے میں شفا حاصل ہو۔

نوٹ:- دربار شریف کے کاروائی سے مجھے یاد دہانی۔

Plate 35 - Offer of amulets (Taviz in Urdu)

Chapter 9: Liturgical Literacy and school

9.1 Introduction

This chapter is sadly short. The relationship between schooled literacy and its principal institution, the school, and liturgical literacy and its principal institution, the mosque is a simple one to describe for there is very little relationship that is evident or recognised. There appears to be, at best, little, or at worst, no awareness or precise knowledge of the literacy practice experienced by, in this particular secondary school, one in five of its pupils.

9.2 The local secondary school

The secondary school in question is an 11-16 secondary mixed comprehensive school located to the west of Midbrough in a different district of the town. Apart from its Muslim pupils, most pupils attending the school live on a large council estate with a small minority living in some private housing near to the school. The majority of its Muslim pupils come from two main feeder primaries, one in the district of Midbrough and the other in neighbouring Derham. Until 2001, standards were satisfactory and progress made by pupils measured against similar schools was considered good. The council's decision to close the school and merge its pupil population with that of a neighbouring school half a mile away resulted in a number of key staff leaving the school and standards dropped, despite a slight recovery in the

year before merger (2004). Of the three secondary schools closed during the past twenty years, all three served the local Mirpuri communities in Riverton, and, despite local campaigns to save the schools, the pupil populations of each were merged with traditionally 'all white' schools. Although no parent expressed any indignation about this apparent trend to close those schools with larger minority ethnic populations, apart from some voices concerned about the most recent closure, it would be interesting to hear the response of the council planners if asked for an explanation of this apparent coincidence.

9.3 Teacher perception of liturgical literacy

The fact that children from the school attended the mosque after school was generally known by teachers at the school, but beyond a non-specific awareness of pupils 'going to' mosque', little else was known. The majority of teachers in the school had no idea where the mosques were or how long the children spent there and would have had a hard job identifying the streets and houses of Midbrough where their pupils lived. At a school in-service training day in January 2003, where the theme of the day was cultural diversity, I projected an image of a map of Midbrough during a presentation to a group of teachers. At least two teachers claimed they had no idea of what they were looking at. Their daily routine involved driving to school from an outer suburb which avoided Riverton town centre and driving home at the end of the day. However, here I am conscious that I am not describing a unique situation and that many, if not most, teachers working in schools 'facing challenging circumstances' have little experience or knowledge of the areas surrounding the

schools in which they work. A teacher in such a school who lives in the catchment area is a rare individual.

The main way in which liturgical literacy overtly interacts with the life in the school is, sadly, as a nuisance factor. This manifests itself in two ways. Firstly, when Muslim children are placed in detention, they often use 'I've got to go t'mosque' as an excuse for leaving early. This, then, is often the only reference to this literacy practice and, as a result, teachers can have conscious or subconscious negativity about its importance. It is seen as an intrusion into the systems of school life.

Secondly, those few individual teachers who do have some awareness of the demands attendance at the mosque places on their pupils may express their concerns that little time is, therefore, available for doing homework or coursework. If coupled with the erroneous and uninformed opinion that allows them to think that Muslim girls do nothing in the home except housework, their view of life in the community can be a very negative one.

The school environment reflects linguistic diversity in some classroom and corridor signs, though closer inspection of the signs will show that most of them are merely English words transliterated into Urdu script, rather than Urdu words.

9.4 The effect of liturgical literacy on reading in school

By and large there is little interaction between schooled literacy and liturgical literacy. However, covertly, there is evidence that the intensive experience of liturgical literacy has a significant influence over the literacy behaviour of Muslim

children in school. It has been reported elsewhere (Rosowsky, 2001) that 11-year old Muslim children who have experienced a mosque education for five or six years arrive in the secondary school with a very accomplished skill at decoding English. This skill is generally well in advance of the accompanying skills of knowledge of syntax and reading for meaning.

Most teachers are aware of this situation, but are often unaware of the possible reasons. The emphasis on decoding Arabic in the mosque is no doubt responsible for the parallel development of this skill in reading English. This is clear evidence of the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) (Cummins, 1984, 1989) in action. This theory of bilingual development suggests that certain language skills transfer readily from one language to another. Furthermore, there is other evidence, apart from in this study, that suggests that this transfer takes place even where scripts are very different, such as in Vietnamese and Japanese (Cummins at al, 1984).

Reading tests (Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, 1989) undertaken by 11-year old Muslim pupils in the school which report both reading accuracy (decoding) and reading comprehension illustrate this discrepancy. Pupils on average had a two year gap between their decoding and comprehension ages. Their proficiency in decoding in Arabic seems to be a significant contributing factor to their proficiency in decoding in English. Of concern, however, are the corresponding depressed scores in reading comprehension. Again the CUP principle would suggest that the lack of attention to meaning in the pupils' intense acquisition of liturgical literacy might contribute to a similar lack of attention to meaning when reading in English at school. In *Chapter Three, The Children*, it was described how children, when asked,

would say that they thought of various matters when reading the Qur'an but could not, obviously, reflect on the meaning of individual words and phrases. It was interesting to notice that a similar response was given when asked about reading in English. The CUP does not include accompanying physical behaviours within its remit, but were one to observe these Muslim boys and girls reading their English books in the school library rocking gently to and fro, one would observe how a very physical aspect of liturgical literacy has been transferred to a different literacy context.

9.5 Liturgical literacy and literacy development in school

Discussion in previous chapters has touched on the issue of preferred language for instruction in the mosque and, although this issue is prompted by parental concern about their children's knowledge about their religion rather than a concern to complement literacy acquisition at school, if English were to become the main, or at least an equal, language of instruction on the mosque, one might predict a more mutually beneficial relationship between the two literacy practices. Indeed, it is possible to predict a relationship between school and mosque which is closer to that relationship shared, in another era, between school and Sunday school.

In the school, liturgical literacy is rarely acknowledged. All of the Muslim children attending the school have acquired an accomplished and secure knowledge of the decoding of Qur'anic Arabic. Many of them have also developed an interest and a skill in the declaiming of religious poetry. None of this is recognized by the school. Liturgical literacy remains a literacy practice which is developed apart from other

more approved or more legitimised literacy practices. Its 'capital' has little exchange value at present.

Yet the liturgical literacy of the children attending the secondary school is an identifying factor in their concept of self and self-worth. The acknowledgement of an important aspect of one's identity by validating institutions such as schools should enhance the general feelings of self-esteem expressed by these young people. Self-esteem is well documented as an essential element in the educational success of young people (Lawrence, 1996). To have a crucial dimension of one's identity denied or ignored by the institution which is responsible for formal learning, and, therefore, acts as the gatekeeper to future pathways and careers, can act as a debilitating factor in a child's educational progress.

9.6 Benefits of liturgical literacy

The practice of liturgical literacy can be criticised, and has been (see *Chapter 1*), if this literacy practice is pursued narrowly and without recourse to other more meaningful aspects of religious instruction. However, as educationalists, we should be aware of the enormous success the institutions of liturgical literacy have with teaching the initial acquisition of reading. The method of teaching initial reading in Arabic has already been described (*Chapter 4, The Teachers*) in detail. The proficiency which is developed in decoding is no mean achievement against the rather less effective mastery of decoding experienced by many children in decoding English. Without going into the ins and outs of the never-ending teaching of reading debate, it would appear obvious that the methods used in our mosque schools for the

teaching of reading need examining to account for their spectacular success. The quasi-synthetic phonics which is employed by the mosque teachers is a traditional form of teaching initial reading which has altered little since it was developed many generations ago. The current call for a greater emphasis on phonics in the teaching of reading within UK primary schools, and national programmes for tackling phonics even in the secondary school, suggests there is scope for a greater awareness of those teaching techniques which have proven their longevity and continuing success.

9.7 Summary

Liturgical literacy is acquired in the main in the mosque and is intimately linked with that institution. The home is a context for liturgical literacy and provides a literacy environment for its practice with its wall designs, photographs of the Holy Mosque in Mecca and copies of sacred texts and prayer mats. Daily prayers will occur in some of the homes on a regular basis, particular the female members of the household, and occasional religious gatherings will provide a vital context for the practice of liturgical literacy. Schools would benefit considerably from a greater awareness of this substantial and universal literacy practice.

As we will see in *Section IV*, it is liturgical literacy which is prioritised by the community. Without serious attention and significant structural change, the home and community languages of Punjabi and Urdu (though it could be argued that Urdu has never been a secure language within this community) will soon be supplanted by English in nearly all contexts, including religious ones. Only liturgical literacy is

actively supported and encouraged by and within the community. The formal institutions of schools need to recognise this linguistic fact of life.