

South Asia Research

<http://sar.sagepub.com>

The Medical and Social Costs of Consanguineous Marriages among British Mirpuris

Khola Hasan

South Asia Research 2009; 29; 275

DOI: 10.1177/026272800902900305

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://sar.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/29/3/275>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *South Asia Research* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://sar.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://sar.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.in/about/permissions.asp>

Citations <http://sar.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/29/3/275>



THE MEDICAL AND SOCIAL COSTS OF CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES AMONG BRITISH MIRPURIS

Khola Hasan

LONDON, UK

ABSTRACT Consanguineous marriage has been widespread within the Pakistani Mirpuri community in Britain today. Such marriage arrangements are now increasingly perceived to create various problems and harms, including a high degree of insularity with barriers to integration and lack of contact with the wider community. Many instances of forced marriage give rise to human rights concerns. Since such marriages are often arranged with partners from Pakistan to aid the extended family financially, large-scale immigration from Pakistan into Britain continues. Many of these new spouses cannot speak English and are unfamiliar with English culture, which continues to slow down the pace of integration of Mirpuris. The article highlights particularly that the rates of consanguineous marriage are increasing within this particular community despite awareness of the medical risks involved, including an increase in congenital defects and infant mortality. Serious and culturally sensitive thought needs to be given on all sides, therefore, to addressing such issues rather than inflating controversies and damaging community relations.

KEYWORDS: *Asians in Britain, biraderi, consanguineous marriage, cousin marriage, forced marriage, genetic disorders, immigration, integration, marriage, Mirpuris, Pakistanis*

Displacing Villages and Reconstituting Relationships

The issue of consanguineous marriages among Britain's Pakistani-Mirpuri community, raised earlier by Ballard (1990), has gradually received increased media coverage and has now 'become a key symbol of cultural difference both within Britain and elsewhere in Europe' (Shaw, 2006: 210). Linked with discourses of cultural, social and biological harm, it has given rise to specialist academic writing (Charsley and Shaw, 2006; Gaffney-Rhys, 2006; Shaw, 1988; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2009) that often links migration and marriage practices with specialist medical literature concerned about

the health implications of the frequency of consanguineous marriages among British Pakistanis (on medical evidence see especially Bunday and Alam, 1993; Darr and Modell, 1988). The resulting debates reflect growing public policy concerns about South Asian migrants in Europe, individual rights related to marriage and procreation, the extent of state intervention, the difficult issue of arranged/forced marriages, Muslim identity construction and patterns of inclusion/exclusion of certain ethnic or religious minorities in Britain and elsewhere.

The Pakistani Mirpuri community originates mainly from several villages around the town of Mirpur in Azad Kashmir. The people concerned carry Pakistani passports, but as Kashmiris they share a distinct history and largely maintain a cultural identity of their own, though they find themselves commonly subsumed under and treated as British Pakistanis.¹ Pioneer settlers from this community probably arrived in Britain as a small group of stranded seamen during the 1930s.² After the end of the Second World War, these pioneers acted as a bridge for later mass immigration into Britain from what Ballard (1990: 226) describes as ‘stagnating Mirpur’.³ Shaw (2001) indicates that at least two thirds of British Pakistanis today originate from the tiny Mirpur region and are now living mainly in the industrial cities of Bradford and Birmingham. Migration from Pakistan is now mostly spousal migration (Shaw, 2006: 211). Werbner (2005) reports that Kashmiris comprise at least 60 per cent of the Pakistani population, concentrated in regions of Britain initially suffering acute labour shortages, especially the cities of Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow.

Twenty years ago, Ballard (1990: 227) highlighted ‘particularly strong communal networks’ among the Mirpuri community. In addition, it was observed that close kin marriages within the family are not only permitted among Muslims, but are encouraged, which differs radically from the rules followed by other South Asians (Ballard, 1990: 229–30). Hence, in Mirpur, ‘[b]rothers and sisters now *expect* to be given right of first refusal in offers of marriage for each other’s children, so much so that the rejection causes great offence: it is often regarded as a repudiation of the obligations of siblingship itself’ (Ballard, 1990: 231, italics in the original). While ‘[t]his does not mean that Mirpuri marriages are *always* arranged between close kin’ (Ballard, 1990: 231; italics in the original), well over half of all marriages in Mirpur appeared at the time to be contracted between first cousins.

When I moved to Bradford for a few years in the mid-1990s, two serious consequences arising from this long-standing practice of consanguineous marriages became soon apparent. As a volunteer with the Islamic Shariah Council, I was regularly approached by young and often distraught girls who were being forced into marriages with cousins from rural communities in Pakistan. I would advise them and their parents that forced marriage is forbidden under classical Islamic Law as well as under official Muslim state law today. The response I received from many parents was that they owed obligations to their extended family (*biradari*) in Pakistan, who were poor and needed to improve the family’s economic situation by sending young men to Britain to work. Given Britain’s increasingly tough immigration legislation, the only way of

sending wage-earners to Britain was as bridegrooms of British-based girls. Hence such transnational marriages had to be arranged.

While I was troubled by the scale of forced cousin marriages, my husband was exposed to a different consequence of generations of consanguineous marriage. Completing his medical training at Bradford Royal Infirmary and St. Luke's Hospital in Bradford, in the paediatric wards he saw the abnormally high levels of genetic diseases among Mirpuri children. There were many rare abnormalities, serious or fatal genetic recessive disorders, congenital heart malformations and terrible disabilities.

Our personal experiences led to intense questions whether such marriages should be banned or regulated by legislation or other forms of state intervention. The present article highlights three consequences of cousin marriages within the Mirpuri community. Firstly, the obsession with cousin marriages is leading to many forced marriages, increasingly perceived by the wider community, social workers and legal practitioners as totally unacceptable. Secondly, the Mirpuri community is seen as one of the least integrated ethnic communities in Britain today. Given that the terrorist attacks in London on 7 July 2005 were by young British Muslim men from West Yorkshire, lack of integration can be seen as moist ground for breeding radical thought. I believe this lack of integration can partly be blamed on the regular injections of rural Pakistani culture into the Mirpuri community through marriages with cousins. Thirdly, the hugely disproportionate number of Mirpuri children affected by rare and often tragic disorders constitutes a huge weight on the public purse as well as on the general well-being of the community itself. My research thus sought to explore specifically the possibilities of curtailing such marriages and avoiding the serious health consequences.

Cousin Marriages in History

Cousin marriages appear to have been a common feature of traditional societies. In pre-modern society, when most people lived in one local community, marriages often took place within a close family or tribal network. Marriages within the extended family were particularly favoured by agricultural and land-owning families, the aristocracy and royalty to keep wealth within the family. It was feared that should an individual marry outside the family, after his or her death the estate would be divided among strangers, leading to fragmentation of the wealth of the tribe or extended family.

Bittles (2003) shows that at least 20 per cent of the world's population favours cousin marriages and that at least 6.5 per cent of couples are actually in consanguineous marriages. Though Muslim communities widely favour the practice, it is also common among others. Ottenheimer (1996: 10) puts the figures much higher, arguing that 43 per cent of the world's societies permit cousin marriages. Consanguineous marriages occur in South Asia and are also favoured in the modern Middle East among Jews and Muslims. I asked Sheikh Suhaib Hasan, of the Islamic Shariah Council in London,⁴ for comments on the practice. He explained:

The reason for such marriages being favoured among Arab Muslims is historical, as cousin marriages were favoured among pagan Arabs long before the advent of Islam. Society was based on tribal lines and loyalty to one's tribe came above loyalty to anyone else. Marriages were arranged within the tribe to show allegiance and to strengthen ties with close family. The Prophet Muhammad...did not comment on the practice, but did marry his first cousin Zaynab. It is widely commented upon that he married his daughter Fatima to his own cousin Ali, but what is also pertinent is that his older three daughters were not married to cousins. Although the practice of cousin marriages was widespread in the Middle East before Islam, the Prophet's practice has also given it a religious sanction.

The Sheikh himself discouraged the practice of cousin marriage and had not arranged the marriages of any of his six children to cousins, despite great interest within the family. He commented that the Second Caliph, Umar, discouraged consanguineous marriages. Umar was once asked about the practice, and he suggested that the community marry outside the family to strengthen their children's health. The Caliph's comments are obviously pertinent in the light of modern understandings of genetics.

Cousin marriage is not only a practice among South Asian or Middle Eastern Muslims. Among Christians, some Protestant sects permitted consanguineous marriage, but the Roman Catholics forbade it. The Bible lists forbidden marriages in Leviticus 18: 6–18. Though the text does not explicitly mention cousins, the Catholic Church took one particular sentence, namely that '[n]one of you shall approach any that is near of kin', to apply to cousins. For centuries, thus, the Catholic Church forbade not just first cousin marriages, but also marriage among second cousins. Bittles (2003) adds a financial explanation to the Catholic ban when he indicates that dispensation to marry a relative within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity could be granted at Diocesan level and suggests that the fees charged were a useful source of income for the Latin Church. In interview, Father Francis Coveney explained the Catholic attitude to cousin marriages:⁵

The short (but not very academic) answer to your question is that first cousins are not allowed to marry in the Catholic Church. They may however be granted a dispensation from their local Bishop and be allowed to marry—provided that their blood lines are not too closely linked. To show to the Bishop that their blood lines are not too closely linked, they have to draw up a family tree for both families. The reason for the prohibition on marriages between first cousins would be based on Natural Law, namely science and genetics, as well as on Divine Law as revealed in the Holy Bible.

I also interviewed Father Robert Hampson of the Holy Trinity Vicarage in South Woodford, who explained the Anglican attitude to cousin marriage:⁶

The royal families of Europe often practised cousin marriages. Of interest in relation to Leviticus 18 is Henry VIII's marriage to Catharine of Aragon. Henry was given permission

by the Pope to marry her. She had previously been his elder brother Arthur's wife who had died. Henry then became convinced that he had been cursed in that marriage because it was forbidden. But that's not a cousin marriage.

Re-reading Leviticus 18, I cannot see that there is a prohibition to marrying a cousin. It does not seem to mention that in my text. I would imagine that in tight-knit communities this would always occur. In the stories of the sons of Isaac, Jacob marries his cousin Leah and then her sister Rachel, which according to Leviticus 18 is not allowed, but that of course is centuries ago. Isaac also marries his cousin. So certainly in Genesis it is an ordinary practice, and even perhaps the common thing to do.

In America, all states allow second cousin marriages, but first cousin marriages are a criminal offence in eight states and are illegal in 22 others (Ottenheimer, 1996). Currently, these American states as well as China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea forbid first cousin marriage through legislation. Worldwide, it is estimated that 80 per cent of all marriages historically were between cousins. Famous persons such as Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin and Queen Victoria married their first cousins.

Cousin marriages remain favoured among certain communities for the strong sense of family they help maintain. Dr. Aamra Darr conducted a study of British Pakistani families with thalassaemic children,⁷ concluding that support structures for women as well as men and children are inherent in the kinship pattern of societies that practise consanguineous marriage. These structures are in effect created and reinforced by that marriage pattern.

Although cousin marriages were the preferred type of marriage among many communities for many centuries, there now seems a sharp decline in the practice, especially in the industrialised world. Communities see the health benefits of exogamy and, as people generally travel a lot more than they did one hundred years ago, there is more interaction between people of different cultures and religions, leading to more cross-cultural and cross-religion marriages. Darr and Modell (1988: 188) explain that '[t]he frequency of consanguineous marriage is thought to be falling in most populations as a result of social change and increased mobility'. For example, in Japan it decreased from 13 to 2.9 per cent in urban areas and from 21 to 4.3 per cent in rural areas between 1947 and 1972. Mirpuri Pakistanis, however, clearly show a different trend.

Genetic Disorders

Though Charles Darwin married his first cousin, it seems that for a while he was convinced that such marriages were disadvantageous to the health of children. Bittles (2003: 137) reports that in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin wrote that '[w]hen the principles of breeding and inheritance are better understood, we shall not hear ignorant members of our legislature rejecting with scorn a plan for ascertaining by an easy method whether or not consanguineous marriages are injurious to man'. His son George Darwin conducted an asylum-based survey on the link between consanguineous marriage and mental illness but found 'no association between consanguinity and

insanity or idiocy' (Bittles, 2003: 137). Perhaps Charles Darwin revised his views based on the findings of his son.

The issue of cousin marriage and genetic disorders was picked up by the British media in the early 1990s when Dr. Elizabeth Bunday published the results of extensive medical surveys in which she and her colleagues interviewed almost 5,000 mothers who had given birth in Birmingham during 1986 and 1987 (Bunday and Alam, 1993). As also reported by Kingman (1993), Bunday's study found that 15 to 16 in every thousand infants of Pakistani origin suffered lethal malformations, more than double the expected rate. About half were due to a genetic recessive disorder, caused by the inheritance of two copies of an abnormal gene, one from each parent. In each of these cases, the parents were cousins.

In subsequent studies, also reported by Kingman (1993), Bunday found that among Pakistanis married to cousins, the risk of a child dying or developing a chronic disease in the first five years of life was more than 10 per cent, compared with 3 per cent for Pakistani couples who were not related. Research also found a much greater incidence of a genetic form of severe mental retardation among the offspring of cousin marriages. Bunday's overall findings were that 48 per cent of serious diseases in Pakistani children were due to recessive genetic diseases, which compared starkly with just 3.6 per cent for all other ethnic groups combined. She calculated that if British Pakistanis were to stop the practice of marrying first cousins, deaths and serious illnesses among their children would drop by 60 per cent within one generation. Bunday also offered advice about pre-marital genetic counselling for communities considered to be at risk. She was hopeful that some genetic counsellors would be employed to visit families in their homes. There was realisation that Pakistani families were reluctant to seek medical advice themselves, and that it was therefore the duty of the National Health Service to take the information out to affected communities.

Many years later, little seems to have changed. The Mirpuri communities of Birmingham and Bradford continue to persist in arranging consanguineous marriages for their children. In fact, the evidence suggests that the practice has increased within the community in Britain in only one generation and that the trend, first identified in Darr and Modell (1988), has continued. In 2005, Keighley MP Ann Cryer hit the headlines when she called for a stop to the tradition of cousin marriages within the Mirpuri community. As reported by Dyer (2005):

As we address problems of smoking, drinking, obesity, we say it's a public health issue, and therefore we all have to get involved with it in persuading people to adopt a different lifestyle. I think the same should be applied to this problem in the Asian community. They must adopt a different lifestyle. They must look outside the family for husbands and wives for their young people.

Children who were born when Dr. Bunday was conducting her research in Birmingham in the late 1980s will probably now be getting married, evidently in many cases still to first cousins. During the furore surrounding Ann Cryer's comments, BBC's *Newsnight*

(Rowlatt, 2005) reported that an estimated three out of four marriages in Bradford were between first cousins. It also reported that the Birmingham Primary Care Trust estimated that one in ten children born to first cousins among the Pakistani community either dies in infancy or suffers from serious disabilities. According to Rowlatt (2005), the latest reported figures reveal that British Pakistanis are thirteen times more likely to have children with genetic disorders than the general population. Though they comprise only three per cent of births nationally, they account for 30 per cent of all British children with such illnesses. Bradford's Royal Infirmary revealed that it had identified more than 140 different recessive disorders among local children, compared with the usual 20–30.

Darr and Modell (1988: 186) found earlier that in 17 out of 18 British Pakistani families with thalassaemic children living in Bradford, the parents were clearly consanguineous. They commented that '[m]ost paediatricians are aware of an increased frequency of genetic disorders among British Pakistanis' (Darr and Modell, 1988: 189). Medical studies from other communities suggest that consanguineous marriages repeated over many generations have severe health consequences for children. It is not just the British Mirpuri community that is affected by this issue,⁸ similar problems have also been identified in other European countries. Doctors at Ullevål University Hospital in Oslo in Norway, which has a large Pakistani population, compared perinatal mortality and infant mortality in children with Pakistani and Norwegian backgrounds (Orstavik et al., 1994). They found that perinatal mortality among Pakistani children was 1.5 times higher, infant mortality was more than double, and deaths due to autosomal recessive disorders were 18 times more common among Pakistani children compared to Norwegian children. Also deaths due to multiple malformations, which could be due to unrecognised syndromes, were ten times more common in the Pakistani group. The researchers saw the reasons for the increase in infant death as linked to the high rate of consanguineous marriages among Pakistanis.

State Interference in Marriage Patterns

Given such strong medical evidence of harm, the question becomes whether it is feasible to ban or place restrictions on consanguineous marriages among certain communities on public policy grounds and through targeted state intervention. Alghrani and Harris (2006) specifically discuss the issue of regulating the foundation of families and the management of fertility. Their study, which makes compelling reading, argues that procreation and founding families are fundamental human rights which cannot be lightly controlled. The essay concerns couples who found families through alternative methods, such as assisted conception or adoption. There are many regulations in Britain, such as those laid down by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, that require such couples to be screened 'for what is essentially their potential to be good parents before being offered access to assisted conception services' (Alghrani and Harris, 2006: 191). Finding that such screening may not be operating fairly, this study

warn against unjustified violations of liberty and, in the context of an ethical discussion, quotes Ronald Dworkin and John Stuart Mill. In defending the right of individuals to choose their own way of life, Alghrani and Harris (2006: 193) argue:

We do not, to paraphrase Ronald Dworkin, allow the majority to determine what religion others are permitted to follow because we rightly regard such matters as issues of personal liberty and fundamental rights.

Thus, unless the state has a compelling reason for denying individuals the right to make choices about their way of life and to live according to one's most deeply held beliefs, which are also at the heart of procreative choices, individuals should be left to make their own decisions. Relying on Dworkin and a number of US decisions, the advice of Alghrani and Harris (2006) is that there should be as little state intervention as possible in intimate and personal decisions. However, this 'democratic presumption' (Alghrani and Harris, 2006: 197) has to be matched with the welfare principle, in efforts to protect children from inadequate parenting. This leads to the argument that, '[i]n short, there is only one reliable criterion for inadequate parenting; it is the palpable demonstration of that inadequacy, in terms of cruelty, neglect or abuse of children' (Alghrani and Harris, 2006: 202). The remainder of the article focuses on reproductive liberty and does not address the question of choice of marital partners, though Alghrani and Harris (2006: 203) touch on this matter when they argue:

For those founding a family using normal sexual reproduction, it is pot luck as to the child conceived; although there is of course a sense in which choice of procreational partner is sometimes an attempt to influence this outcome. Nonetheless sexual reproduction is a genetic lottery; the chromosomes from each parent combining randomly generate infinitely varied possibilities. However advances in artificial reproductive science have increased the ability to intervene in the reproductive process and now offers individuals the ability to choose children which possess or lack certain characteristics.

The focus in that particular article, however, shifts towards the issue of permitting the creation of a 'saviour sibling' and thus moves away from the concerns of the present analysis.

Given that courts—at least in the United States—do not wish to set a precedent for controlling marriage choices or for banning certain marriages, we have to explore viable alternatives for guiding couples at risk of producing seriously defective offspring as a result of consanguineous marriages. One such alternative is to offer extensive pre-marital counselling and DNA testing to couples who are closely related and wish to marry. This may seem like sensible advice, until we discover that 'in most recessive disorders in our Asian population a DNA diagnosis is still not possible' (Benson, 2005). Recessive disorders create a huge burden of illness and handicap, and their numbers remain high. Benson (2005) reports that '[i]n Blackburn the Asian population has

a 12-fold increased risk of recessive disorders compared with the white population, with 13 new recessive disorders per 1,000 births'. Given that DNA testing is often not able to identify the multiples of recessive disorders that exist, the advice is simply that 'families will need to consider non-consanguineous marriage as the only way to lower the risk' (Benson, 2005).

The World Health Organization (n.d.) admits in a web publication on 'Community Approaches to the Control of Hereditary Diseases' that consanguineous marriages are common among many world communities and that government interference would be ineffective. It recommends instead better screening during pregnancy, such as foetal diagnosis of disorders and congenital malformations. Similarly, Modell (1991) recommends that the numbers of children born with congenital disorders could be reduced by family counselling, screening before and during pregnancy, prenatal diagnosis and selective abortion of affected foetuses. It remains to be seen how viable such suggestions are for Mirpuri couples in Britain.

A quest to change marriage patterns among British Mirpuris was challenged forcefully at a conference at the leading international law firm Clifford Chance in London, held on 29 May 2008. In this conference, which I attended, and the proceedings of which are reported (Progress Educational Trust, 2008), Dr. Aamra Darr, a Senior Research Fellow at Bradford University, was highly critical of any government or National Health Service interference in the marriage patterns of Mirpuris. She described cousin marriage as a social reality, like increased maternal age. Women in Britain were increasingly choosing to have children later in life, she said, despite the increased risks of having children with Down Syndrome. The medical profession had responded to this new reality by providing better screening and targeted information for older mothers, not by banning late motherhood. The same treatment should therefore be afforded to consanguineous marriages.

The Human Genetics Commission (n.d.) seems to agree with Darr and confirms on its website that the National Health Service has responded to the risk of Down Syndrome in cases of increased maternal age by committing significant resources to a national screening programme, seeking to ensure that all pregnant women are routinely offered screening to identify those at increased risk of having a baby with this chromosomal abnormality. Overall, healthcare provision for women having children later in life has improved in order to reflect this cultural trend. Hence, it is stated:

In a similar way, it is appropriate to offer genetic counselling to couples whose relationship is consanguineous, preferably before they conceive, in order to establish the precise risk of genetic abnormality in their children, and to identify if any specific tests may be indicated (Human Genetics Commission, n.d.).

I disagree with such advice, because the community we are discussing in the British context is a Muslim community, for whom abortion is not generally considered acceptable, unless the life of the mother is at risk. Once the child has been conceived, tests

confirming that it will be a sick child will usually not lead to a request for abortion. Better antenatal screening seems to be a case of locking the stable door after the horse has bolted.

Once a marriage between cousins has been contracted, it would be foolhardy to expect that pre-conception genetic advice could be given to deter vulnerable couples from having children. Muslim couples highly favour the birth of children and would prefer to take the risk of having a sick child over the option of being voluntarily childless. I would therefore suggest that the issue of recessive disorders can best be tackled before a marriage has even been contracted. Once a marriage has taken place, the likelihood is that children will follow. As Benson (2005) also advises, changing marriage patterns may seem to be the best way forward.

Though the communities that are currently being castigated for consanguineous marriages are Muslim ones, whether from South Asia or elsewhere, it is interesting to note that medieval Muslim societies were acutely aware of the effects of close marriage on the health and physiology of their children. Ottenheimer (1996: 51) quotes a physician who compared the different marriage patterns of medieval Muslim Turkish and Christian Spaniard royal families. While the Turkish monarchs brought their wives from the mountains of Circassia and obtained healthy offspring, the Spanish monarchs selected wives, often near relatives, of royal Spanish blood, and suffered in the long run. It seems that the Muslim Turks had taken to heart the advice of Caliph Umar, cited above.

Marriage Patterns among Pakistanis

This section seeks to analyse why the rates of consanguineous marriage have increased among the Pakistani community. As indicated, in his comparison of Sikh Jullundur and Muslim Mirpuris, Ballard (1990) explained that various factors such as the socio-economic conditions of the areas of migrant origins, the timing of family reunion, work qualifications and religious preferences all combined to make Jullundur more upwardly mobile and prosperous than Mirpuris. Since in comparison Azad Kashmir was economically backward and so many early migrants lacked skills, they were forced to take unskilled jobs in heavy engineering and textiles. Ballard (1990: 229; emphasis in the original) cautiously suggests that 'there *are* some very significant issues at stake here, which are indeed broadly associated with religion'. He then considers specifically marriage rules, gender rules and mortuary rites to demonstrate the significant differences between migrant groups from South Asia.

I lived for three years in Bradford's Manningham area, which is heavily populated by Mirpuris. The community felt comfortable as it had created a home away from home, *desh pardesh* in the language of Ballard (1994 [2007]). The vast majority of the women did not take paid employment, often because they did not have the necessary academic or language skills, and also because Islam was used as an excuse to keep women in their homes. At Friday prayers the local Imam regularly denounced the

immorality to be seen on the streets and in the soap operas of England. He advised the community to keep their daughters safe from such satanic lifestyles. English food, culture, dress, lifestyle and values were all viewed as alien and unIslamic. To preserve Mirpuri culture in England was thus not just a duty to tradition, but to Islam as well. There was a strong sense of outside attack from secularism, godlessness and 'white' values, which made the community even more committed to keeping its culture and religion intact and insular. Given the process of 'white flight' from these residential areas, it was relatively easy for Mirpuri families to gradually buy up all properties in the area, either as homes for newly-married children or to rent out to students.

Such ghettos made it relatively easy to re-create the atmosphere of Mirpur among the moors of West Yorkshire. Ballard (1994 [2007]: 1–34) explains in detail that contrary to the expectations of Britain's white natives, Asian migrants and their children found inspiration from their own religion, language and culture and did not totally assimilate, but restructured their lives '*on their own terms*' (Ballard, 1994 [2007]: 8; emphasis in the original) and formed their own ethnic colonies. There are many effects of these mini-ghettos or colonies. Ballard (1990: 228) identified the lack of fluency in English among Mirpuri children as an important factor:

If, as is very often the case, they live in a neighbourhood which is exclusively Asian, if their parents speak little or no English, and if the schools which they attend are again dominated by Punjabi speakers like themselves, they will have very few opportunities to acquire fluent English from face-to-face contact with fluent English speakers.

A second and consequential effect is lack of integration. Mirpuris have remained among the least integrated ethnic minority communities in Britain, especially because they often live in communities in which there are no white people with whom they can integrate. Kurtz (2007a) specifically complains that '[t]he practice of cousin marriages among Pakistani immigrants has significantly slowed Muslim assimilation in Britain'. Kurtz (2007b) however, goes much further, claiming that Muslims in Western countries throughout the world are deliberately obsessed with endogamy to keep themselves isolated from the West. He argues that cousin marriage serves 'as the lynch-pin of a broader pattern of resistance to assimilation and modernization. In effect, parallel-cousin marriage in Europe acts as a social "sealing mechanism" to block cultural interchange'. Kurtz (2007b) then links cousin marriage and Islamic rules on apostasy to argue that '[i]nstead of serving as a religious creed that individuals are free to accept or reject, Islam itself functions more like a gigantic in-marrying lineage, whose solidarity is threatened by any individual member's dishonorable exit'.

Kurtz (2007b) thus highlights another dimension, beyond social norms and economic concerns, namely that cousin marriages and Islamic rules on apostasy combine to create a lifestyle of insularity and distrust of other communities. He argues therefore that the current war on terror needs to be fought not just on ideological grounds, but on the nature of Islam itself. He explains that Islam is obsessed with maintaining the honour and separate identity of the community. This is why women

are not allowed to marry partners of their choice, and this is why their first cousins are given the right of first refusal to marriage with them. Kurtz (2007b) concludes:

If we want to change any of this, it will be impossible to restrict ourselves to the study of religious Islam. The ‘self-sealing’ character of Islam is part and parcel of a broader and more deeply rooted social pattern. And parallel-cousin marriage is more than just an interesting but minor illustration of that broader theme. If there’s a ‘self-sealing’ tendency in Muslim social life, cousin marriage is the velcro.

As a committed participant in such debates, I am seriously concerned with the implications of such chains of arguments. What started as an issue of cousin marriages and its detrimental effect on the health of children in a particular Muslim community has escalated into a full-blown attack on the foundations of Islam. The global war on terror, no less, can only be won if the custom of cousin marriage and the Islamic laws on apostasy are challenged. I find this paradigm shift quite difficult to digest and unhelpful for the discussion of cousin marriages.

Links between consanguineous marriages and lack of integration were also made by a renowned anthropologist in relation to the United States. Ottenheimer (1996) questions the widely-held belief, or ‘myth’ as he prefers to call it, that some US states banned cousin marriages because of the biological risk to offspring. Instead he shows that most states passed laws restricting such marriages between 1840 and 1920, when the USA was experiencing large-scale immigration. It was felt at the time that it would threaten the Anglo-Saxon culture of the USA if these new immigrants were permitted to keep their cultures intact and their communities closely related. There was thus a strong movement to encourage assimilation and Americanisation: ‘These Anglo-Saxonists called for the dissolution of the immigrants’ cultures and an acceptance of the Anglo-Saxon language and customs to achieve cultural homogeneity in American life’ (Ottenheimer, 1996: 152). He thus argues that intermarriage was seen as the key to Americanisation, and laws prohibiting marriage with cousins were introduced.

Oslo’s Human Rights Service also makes the link between consanguineous marriage and lack of integration. Bawer (2003) comments with reference to Norway’s large Moroccan community that cousin marriages have two chief motivations:

One is to provide the foreign spouse with Norwegian residency rights under the ‘family reunification’ provision of immigration law. The other is to resist integration by injecting into the European branch of the family a fresh dose of ‘traditional values’—among them a hostility to pluralism, tolerance, democracy and sexual equality.

My research confirms that cousin marriage within the Mirpuri community has a negative impact on integration principally because a large majority of these marriages are with cousins from Pakistan, who are then imported into Britain. Shaw (2001: 327) found that 71 per cent of Pakistani marriages were with spouses from

Pakistan and explains that 'today the most significant immigration is of the spouses of men and women raised in Britain'. Given the economic stagnation of Mirpur and lack of educational opportunities there, these new arrivals, whether men or women, lack language, social and employment skills. The women are forced to stay at home and the men are fed into unskilled labour within the community, neither of which is conducive to integration. The community therefore seems to re-create again and again the experience of the early Pakistani migrants who brought to Britain sons and wives who were not British and who found it terribly hard to integrate or even interact with the native white community. This lack of integration prompted the government's Community Cohesion Panel (Migration Watch UK, 2004) to report other concerns about the speed at which newcomers can be accommodated. Notably, it is during the deliberations of this report that MP Ann Cryer claimed that 60 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi marriages in Bradford were to spouses from the country of origin (Dyer, 2005).

Shaw (2001: 327; 2006: 211) confirms that the percentage of cousin marriages within the Pakistani community has grown rather than decreased over time. Given the decline of the practice in Europe, America and Japan, it was expected that the same would happen within the Mirpuri community. But in a vicious circle, this community has not prospered economically and academically because of its particular migration and settlement history. Forced into a ghetto scenario, it has taken refuge in preserving its culture, especially cousin marriage. According to Shaw (2001: 319), this leads to a continuous influx of poor and uneducated relatives, which further exasperates economic and academic progress.

Medical researchers found similar evidence. When Darr and Modell (1988) conducted a study in West Yorkshire among two generations of Pakistani women, they found an increase in cousin marriages within only one generation. Among the young mothers in two hospitals, 55 per cent were married to first cousins, 28 per cent within the *biradari*, and 15 per cent to non-*biradari* members (Darr and Modell, 1988: 187). These figures contrasted starkly with figures for respondents' mothers who were married in Pakistan: 33 of them were married to first cousins, 24 within the *biradari*, and 30 to non-*biradari* members (Darr and Modell, 1988: 188).

The rise in cousin marriages is truly astonishing and the reasons for this phenomenon are worth analysing. One of them is clearly to circumvent increasing immigration restrictions in Britain and elsewhere by bringing in wage-earners in the guise of bridegrooms. Shaw (2001) analyses Home Office referrals and census data for Bradford, finding that 57.6 per cent of Pakistani marriages during 1992–94 were to spouses from Pakistan. If so many Mirpuri marriages are contracted with grooms from Pakistan to bring in men for employment, the question needs to be asked why women come to Britain as brides, too, as they are often incapable of being wage-earners. The answer lies within the complex system of obligation to kinsmen within Mirpuri culture. Ballard (1990) shows that the original migrants who came to Britain were often unable to afford the expensive passage. Each migrant's kinsmen came together to raise the funds

needed, with the implicit expectation that this individual would make it a priority to pave the way for other wage-earners from the family to enter Britain. Ballard (1994 [2007: 11] tellingly refers to this as ‘chain-migration’. Although immigration restrictions have grown over the years, expectations of the *biradari* that the passage of yet more members to Britain will be facilitated remain strong. The onus is no longer on the original migrants, but rests now on their grown-up children to call over relatives as spouses. Shaw (2006: 215) highlights in this context the phenomenon of re-connecting siblings within the family rather than just making connections (*rishta*) through marriage. Whether the new migrant is a man or a woman is immaterial, as long as they can legally make Britain their home, participate in the community’s relative progress and fulfil their duty to the *biradari* (Shaw, 2001). Cousin marriages are therefore preferred not just to help poorer relatives, but also as a means of reinforcing sibling ties in this transnational community.

Apart from questions of security in mate selection (Shaw and Charsley, 2006; Zaman, 2008), a third reason for the concern with cousin marriages and resultant growth is the concept of retaining the purity of the bloodline of one’s caste. Although Muslims claim not to have a tight caste system as exists in India, much importance is attached to one’s caste or lineage, often denoted by a common surname. Significantly, Shaw (2001: 322) explains marrying relatives also in terms of maintaining ‘the purity of the blood’ or the separateness of the family (*khandan*).

Forced Marriages

The studies by Ballard (1990; 1994 [2007]) and Shaw (2001) have generally been met with warmth in both the anthropological and legal fields in England. A similar study from Norway, cited by Bawer (2007),⁹ shows that the marriage patterns we see in the Mirpuri community in Britain are not confined to South Asian communities and to the UK; they are common also among other Muslim minorities in Europe. The Norwegian and European governments have praised this particular study immensely, but some Muslim groups have labelled it as racist and Islamophobic.

Bawer (2007) reports on Storhaug’s study and the argument that Muslims have established ‘parallel cities’ in many European countries, with families being put under incredible pressure to bring relatives to Europe through marriage. Legal responses have been significant. In 2002, Denmark passed a law to curtail forced marriage by establishing a number of tests for citizens desiring to bring spouses from abroad. Both parties had to be at least 24 years of age, they had to show that the marriage was clearly voluntary, they had to demonstrate a certain level of income, and they had to prove a strong connection to Denmark.¹⁰ Storhaug quotes a number of immigrants in her book who say that the new law has released them from family pressure to use their children as ‘human visas’ (Bawer, 2007). Not just Pakistanis feel compelled to arrange marriages of their offspring to men from their countries of origin, but also other Muslim communities. Statistics from Norway’s Human Rights Service show that from

1996 to 2001, the rate of Moroccan–Norwegian girls marrying men from Morocco was a staggering 82 per cent. The figure for Pakistani–Norwegian girls marrying men from Pakistan was 76 per cent (Bawer, 2007).

Storhaug apparently agrees with the Danish researcher Anders Hede, who concluded that cousin marriage largely involved force, that the rate of cousin marriage among immigrant communities was higher than in the home countries, that cousin marriage is tied to immigration, prevents integration and creates an underclass (Razack, 2004). In her discussion of Hede's and Storhaug's conclusions, Razack (2004) is clearly incensed that these researchers have linked cousin marriage with arranged marriage and forced marriage, as if they were one and the same. Though I agree with her on this issue, I did find in my research that Hede's other three conclusions were the same as my own. Firstly, the Kashmiri community in Britain clearly practises cousin marriages far more in Britain than it does in Pakistan. Secondly, most cousin marriages are to spouses in Pakistan and thus facilitate entry to Britain. Thirdly, the Pakistani enclaves in many large British cities, such as Birmingham, Bradford, Leicester and Glasgow, do not integrate with the wider British society, especially as many of the new spouses from Pakistan lack the language and social skills to integrate. As Razack (2004) reiterates, the lack of integration by Muslim communities is clearly not just a problem in Britain but throughout Europe. The issue is considered to be so pressing that in October 2003, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe tabled for discussion a motion signed by 26 member countries to tackle the problem of forced marriage.

There is plenty of legal and anthropological evidence to show that cousin marriages can lead to forced marriages. The Mirpuri community can sometimes be just as patriarchal as other Muslim communities, with the wishes of children in some families clearly subordinated to the agenda of their parents, especially fathers. In a migration scenario marked by repayment of debt, many Mirpuri families see it as mandatory that their children's British nationality should be used to further the economic interests of the *biradari*. Even when the spouses are not imported from abroad, there is still a tendency to arrange marriages in Britain within the community to further group solidarity. When a young son or daughter rebels, which is often the case, parents will use any ruse at their disposal to force the 'delinquent' into marriage. Kidnapping, holidays turning into marriages, funerals ending with a wedding, moral blackmail and even threats of bodily harm are used.

The scale of the problem of forced marriage in the UK is such that the government introduced the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Forced Marriage Unit claims on its website that it deals with around 400 cases a year,¹¹ but many observers believe these are only the tip of the iceberg. Bradford City Council has produced reports which detail the frequent disappearance of school girls from the local education system, clearly to be married off abroad (Vallence-Webb, 2008).

Taylor and Hughes (2008) mention a recent Home Office Paper which revealed that in Bradford alone in 2006, 250 girls were taken off its school rolls as they did not

return to school after holidays abroad. Not all these girls would have been forced into marriage while on holiday, but the Forced Marriage Unit says that a typical example concerns a young girl between the ages of 16–24, typically involving emotional abuse or pressure of some kind, and often involving physical abuse as well. There is often, though not always, an attempt to remove the girl overseas, often under the pretext of a family bereavement, sickness or wedding. If the marriage goes ahead, the new wife or husband returns to the UK and is then expected to sponsor the spouse to join them (Taylor and Hughes, 2008).

The Home Office funded a study (Khanum, 2008) on forced marriages in Luton, a commuter town north of London with a relatively large Pakistani community. Luton's largest minority community (9.7 per cent) is mainly from Kashmir and the research makes uncomfortable reading. Khanum (2008) found that it was difficult to establish the extent of the problem of forced marriage, as most victims preferred not to report their problems to anyone. The few who were brave enough to call for help often preferred to contact local community groups rather than the police or the Forced Marriage Unit. After speaking to many community groups, Khanum estimated that over 300 approaches were made to local community groups per year for advice on forced marriage. Given that these were only a minority of the victims, she estimated that over 1,000 young people per year were at risk of being forced into marriage. She also found that the vast majority of such cases came from the Kashmiri community. Khanum (2008) explains that according to Luton Training and Mentoring Limited, as many as 70 per cent of their female and a small proportion of their male learners either had direct experience and/or knowledge of their relations and friends facing pressure from parents and extended families to accept marriages arranged for them. This study also confirmed that not all such marriages were with spouses from abroad, but sometimes with spouses from the Kashmiri diaspora in Britain.

One of the extreme results of forced marriage is honour killings. Khanum (2008) concludes that 'in a small minority of cases, resistance to forced marriage—or the prevention of a marriage considered unsuitable—can lead to murder, misleadingly called "honour killing" since it is intended to preserve the family honour'.

English courts have recently had to deal with a growing number of cases involving petitions for annulment after one of the parties to the marriage claimed being forced into the marriage. Courts are also faced with a growing number of cases in which mentally ill or severely disabled young people are allegedly forced into marriage simply or mainly to bring a relative as a spouse into Britain.

In one such case,¹² the Family Division of the High Court exercised its jurisdiction to prevent what is now called a 'vulnerable young adult' (Gaffney-Rhys, 2006) from being forced into marriage, but that is probably not the whole story or the only dimension worth analysing. This particular case involved a 23-year old Pakistani woman with a severe learning disability. The local authority had been involved with the family for many years, as the seven children in the family were allegedly neglected and physically and sexually abused. The local authority initiated legal proceedings in 2003 because it

was convinced that the young woman was at risk of being taken to Pakistan and forced into marriage. Medical evidence was produced to prove lack of capacity to marry as she had little understandings of either sexual relationships or the concept of marriage. The local authority also explained that for the previous few years, the woman had mentioned to social workers that she was going to Pakistan to get married. A crucial and telling piece of evidence was that the parents had asked her doctor whether she would write a letter to the immigration authorities allowing their daughter to marry a man in Pakistan and allowing her future husband to enter the UK.

In another reported case,¹³ the local authority concerned applied to the court in order to protect the interests of a deaf girl who functioned at the level of a 13–14 year old and had a reading age of 7 or 8. The local authority had reason to believe that she may be taken to Pakistan for marriage, a change of residence that she did not desire. Although she had reached the age of majority, she was still considered to be vulnerable, and the application for protection was granted. Such interventions in family arrangements raise many questions about proportionality. Much clearer are the facts in *SK (Forced Marriage)*, (2005) Fam Law 460, where a young and competent adult woman had been taken to Bangladesh for a family holiday. She was not allowed to return to Britain but was forced into a marriage. She applied for declaratory relief through a litigation friend, which was granted by the Court.

Earlier, the large Kashmiri community in Scotland had come under the spotlight after many annulment cases due to coercion were brought before the courts. In 1990, Nasreen Akmal made legal history when her marriage was annulled on grounds of duress, despite the fact that she had three children during the marriage (Robertson and Staples, 2002). She had been taken to Pakistan in 1983 when she was just 14 years old and forced into marriage to a cousin. Two years later she returned to Glasgow with her husband and eldest son, but the marriage was never happy. The annulment set a precedent in the Scottish Courts and was the catalyst for a number of annulment cases brought by both men and women of Pakistani origin.

For example, in 1993 the marriage of Shahid Mahmud (1994 S.L.T. 599) was annulled on the grounds that he was emotionally blackmailed into it by his family, at a time when he had been living with a partner of his choice for five years, with whom he had a child. He was blamed for the stroke that killed his father and told that his mother, who was also unwell, would die from stress if he did not comply with the family's wishes and marry his cousin. As the youngest son of the family, he was told that it was his duty to bring a wife who would take care of his ill mother. If he refused the marriage, he would bring dishonour on the Pakistani community both in Scotland and Pakistan. He met his cousin for the first and last time during the 15 minute marriage ceremony, after which he went back to work.

More cases have been reported recently. In *NS v MI* (2006 EWHC 1646 Fam), the petitioner sought a decree of nullity on the basis of consent for marriage obtained through duress. She had been taken to Pakistan at the age of 16 where she found preparations for her marriage being made by her relatives. Her parents hid her passport

and threatened to kill themselves if she did not agree to the marriage. When she returned to the UK five months later, she served a petition for annulment on her husband. In *P v R* (2003 1 FLR 661), the petitioner had travelled to Pakistan for her sister's funeral, but after the mourning period found preparations being made for her marriage to a cousin. Despite her protestations and clear refusal, the marriage ceremony was forcibly performed. Her passport was hidden, she was forced to put on a wedding dress and her mother sat behind her during the ceremony, pushing her head forward in a nod each time she was asked for her consent to the marriage. Nullity was granted.

Based on such evidence from reported cases, family lawyer Georgina Vallance-Webb (2008) argues that the practice of forced marriage is thriving in the UK. She describes the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 as a blend of child law and domestic violence legislation. The Act will allow courts to make Marriage Protection Orders as well as award financial compensation to victims of forced marriage. What we are not told is that some of these cases are much more complex than appears at first sight.

My personal experience of the issue is that marriage patterns of Mirpuris (and also Bangladeshis), who insist on marrying within the extended family, are not always the norm for all other Muslim communities in Britain today. Many Pakistani Muslims from non-Mirpuri backgrounds are slowly realising the benefits of exogamy and are no longer obsessed with marrying within their lineage. Shaw (2006: 218) reports evidence that Pakistanis are becoming more aware of problems 'if you have the same blood'. Some will insist that the spouse has to be Pakistani, irrespective of caste or lineage. Others will insist that the spouse has to be Muslim. Loyalty to the religion is thus slowly replacing loyalty to the *biradari*. Given that Muslims in Britain today come from dozens of cultural backgrounds, this has led to an enrichment of Muslim culture in Britain. With such interaction between different cultures, including Arabs, Somalis and white converts to Islam, many Muslim communities are enjoying the fruits of this cultural exchange. In this atmosphere of interaction, integration with the wider British community is also becoming possible.

Conclusions and Recommendations

I chose to study the British Mirpuri community from Azad Kashmir in Pakistan for four main reasons. Firstly, the incidence of cousin marriage within this community is disproportionately higher than in other communities. Secondly, this community has figured in a number of medical studies regarding the unusually high incidence of genetic abnormalities in its children. Thirdly, this community remains one of the least prosperous and least integrated ethnic communities in Britain, with consanguineous marriage cited as one of the reasons for lack of progress. Finally, this community forms the bulk of the Pakistani community in Britain today and is very visible in England's inner cities.

After analysing the medical, moral and social evidence, I have come to the conclusion that although there is clearly a problem within the Mirpuri community, it cannot be

simplicistically seen as feasible for government to interfere in such an intensely private aspect of family life. Shaw (2006: 214) demonstrates successfully that such marriages 'represent not blind adherence to tradition, but a negotiated response to the social, cultural and emotional risks entailed in marriage'. I suggest that a possible and viable strategy to tackle the resulting problems is better educational programmes involving not just community health professionals but above all mosques and community leaders to bring the issue to greater prominence within the Mirpuri community. In light of the moral debates about regulating family life, including a right to found a family as one of the most basic human rights afforded to citizens of any civilised society, there is a need for internal reform and social change, which will of course take time.

Legal intervention might look more immediate, but will also take time to filter down to the social level and does not appear to be the right way forward. Members of Parliament such as Ann Cryer and Phil Woolas have raised the issue of consanguineous marriages because of the detrimental effects on the health of children in families in which such marriages have become the norm for many generations. There is plenty of medical evidence to prove that repeated consanguineous marriages can indeed result in terrible genetic deformities among the offspring. At the Clifford Chance conference, Dr. Aamra Darr spoke eloquently against any kind of interference in Mirpuri marriage patterns, advising better DNA screening. However, if many of these congenital disorders still cannot be identified through DNA screening, this strategy is not going to be effective.

Kurtz (2007a; 2007b) and Ottenheimer (1996) looked at this issue through the lens of integration into western lifestyles. Ottenheimer (1996) argues that the American dream of a melting-pot came true because of the policy of forbidding cousin marriages in many states. Anglo-Saxon values have reigned supreme in the USA precisely because many immigrant cultures have melted away. Kurtz (2007b) agrees, citing the example of the Jewish community that has intermarried and integrated well.

Studies from both England and Oslo show that cousin marriages are common among poor communities which wish to improve their family's financial status by bringing new immigrants to Europe. Strict immigration laws mean that the only way of bringing in new wage-earners is to secure grooms for their daughters. Storhaug's study of Moroccans in Norway and Khanum's research of the Mirpuri community in Luton led to similar conclusions: Usually arranged and often forced, cousin marriages are common in these two communities, with express intentions of improving the financial circumstances of the extended family. The problem we see presently is that if these marriages are often forced, some of the young men and women concerned may rebel and apply for divorces and even annulments. Many others do not, and will live their marital lives in misery. This is not good for the psychological health of any community. But what is the way forward?

I began my research with the perception that cousin marriages within the Mirpuri community need to be regulated through legislation. There is indeed enough medical and social evidence to show that there is a serious problem within this

particular community. However, Alghrani and Harris (2006) explain the importance of allowing individuals complete freedom to found families as a matter of universal human rights. In view of this discussion, I argue that despite the medical and social costs of consanguineous marriage to the Mirpuri community, there is no compelling justification for denying people complete liberty in issues of family life. While there are serious medical and social problems, the issue is too delicate and complex to warrant simple top-down state interference. Any external intervention in this arena might encourage even more ghettoisation, as the community would feel its identity was being threatened.

More education could be one way forward. With increased awareness of the genetic risks involved, closely-related couples who wish to marry can be encouraged to seek genetic counselling. On the issue of forced marriage, there clearly needs to be much wider media coverage. Imams and community leaders need to speak out against the practice much more forcefully than they have done in the past, instead of pretending that the problem does not exist or is of minor importance. Religion carries a lot of weight in the Mirpuri community, regardless of personal commitment to acts of individual worship. The Salman Rushdie saga during the 1990s showed the power that religious leaders and sentiments have over the community. For once, this power should be harnessed to the community's advantage.

I would also advise that immigration rules need to be tightened. Over the last decade I have met dozens of young women who were clearly forced into marriage, while their spouses were able to enter Britain quite freely. To circumvent nationality restrictions, the couple would often live apart, sometimes for many years, until the Pakistani groom's indefinite leave to remain in Britain was assured. Only then did the couple divorce, with the female British spouse having to carry the stigma and pain of a broken marriage. This is an intolerable situation. One girl I spoke to had lived apart from her husband from the age of 17 until she was 22. Only when her husband was assured of leave to remain in Britain was she allowed to file for divorce. Her ex-husband promptly married another Mirpuri woman, while his first wife is struggling to cope with her lost years. Britain has begun to learn from Danish legislation in which the minimum age for marriage to an overseas spouse is 24.

One characteristic I have noticed over the last decade is that the rise in satellite television has made it easier for communities to become more insular. In the past, new migrants who did not speak English would watch television with the rest of the family and be forced to learn rudimentary English. Today, in most Mirpuri households, I find families watching only Bollywood films, Pakistani dramas or Islam Channel. The headlines of the British media or concerns of the government simply pass them by. In communities that have integrated well, however, watching Asian television is not a problem because it does not dominate minds. In Ballard's (1994 [2007]: 31) language, these are 'skilled cultural navigators', comfortable in traditional cultural contexts

as well as English media. They switch from Punjabi to English with ease, dress in the latest Bollywood styles for traditional weddings, but slip easily into English clothes and language at work and play. In communities that have hardly integrated at all, such cultural navigation is clearly absent.

I have spent time in the inner cities of Bradford and Birmingham where a third generation of Mirpuri children is growing up without any interaction with white people. They attend Islamic schools (or local state schools in which ethnic minorities predominate), visit only Mirpuri friends and family, shop in local supermarkets, watch Asian television channels, and view the white English community as a different breed of people. There is no desire to mix or integrate. These areas have become breeding grounds for extremist leaders who preach that Muslims have a duty to isolate themselves from non-Muslims. When decades of cultural isolation receive religious sanction, there are new dangers and harms.

During a recent trip to Bradford, I spoke to a number of young women who were born and raised in West Yorkshire about the genetic consequences of consanguineous marriage as well as the unacceptability of forced marriage. These women were adamant that the problem did not exist within the Mirpuri community, describing my research as white propaganda to vilify Muslims. The sad thing was that at this particular wedding, I saw at least six mentally disabled children in the hall. The community seems to live in a world of its own, blissfully unaware of the discussions taking place around it. Given this insularity, more Mirpuris need to be involved in increasing awareness of these issues among their own community. Media outlets such as Islam Channel, newspapers and other Urdu-focused media must also get more involved.

Finally, I would advise that any education programmes undertaken must be conducted with sensitivity and respect for the culture being addressed. Ethnic minority communities do not wish to see their culture dying out, nor do they wish to see it being ridiculed. Hege Storhaug's study on *Human Visas* (Razack, 2004) may ostensibly be about forced marriages, but Razack explains how the study developed into a scathing critique of Muslim society and culture. The impression one gets from reading the summary of this particular study is that Muslim communities are '[u]nassimilable, duplicitous, tribal and prepared to sell their daughters into marriage and a life of criminal rape'. The book treats arranged marriage, cousin marriage and forced marriage as one issue, and encourages ethnic minority girls to resist their families and cultures. The importance attached to family and kinship in traditional Muslim societies is ridiculed as archaic and patriarchal.

Given the decline of the family institution, family values and respect for elders in many western communities today, ethnic minority communities are flying the flag for family values. This important contribution must not be belittled by any government for the sake of reducing immigration of Muslims into Europe. There clearly are problems, but they need to be tackled with inter-cultural sensitivity and should not be abused for cultural wars or scholarly politics.

Notes

1. It is far too little known, even among lawyers, that Azad Jammu and Kashmir has its own system of law, which is seeking to be more Islamic than the laws of Pakistan.
2. Visram (1986; 2002: 14–33) does not explicitly highlight the migration of Pakistanis and/or Mirpuris, but subsumes them under the category of ‘lascars’.
3. Ballard (1990: 226) also indicates that the construction of the Mangla Dam, completed in 1966, led to massive displacement of the local population. Apparently, many families used the meagre compensation paid to them for financing travel abroad to greener pastures. Further references to early Pakistani migration are found, for example, in Shaw (2006: 218, note 3).
4. Sheikh Suhaib Hasan was born in India, grew up in Pakistan and graduated from the Islamic University of Madina in Saudi Arabia in 1966. He worked in Kenya on behalf of the Saudi Ministry of Religious Affairs for ten years, and has been similarly involved in Islamic teaching in Britain since 1976. He is Chairman of Masjid Tawhid, Secretary of the Islamic Shariah Council, and founder of the Al Quran Society. He is a household figure in the Muslim community, especially since his regular appearances on Islam Channel.
5. Father Francis Coveney was at the time of the interview working at St Anne Line’s Church in South Woodford. Born in 1951, he took a degree in Physics and was a Science and Maths teacher before beginning his training for the Catholic priesthood at the English College in Rome in 1977. He then studied Philosophy and Theology at the Gregorian University in Rome and was awarded a degree in 1983. Ordained a Catholic Priest in 1982, from 1983 to 2008 he worked in various parishes in East London and Essex.
6. Father Robert Hampson is an Anglican Vicar in South Woodford in East London. Born in 1958, he studied Economics and Government at the London School of Economics, where he graduated in 1980. He then trained to be a priest in the Church of England at Ridley College, Cambridge and was ordained in 1997.
7. The findings of that study are cited in Modell (1991: 721).
8. Estimates of consanguineous marriage in Saudi Arabia are as high as 60 per cent. Ashbury (2005) writes that ‘[r]esearch shows that the Saudi rate for some diseases is 20 times higher than in populations where consanguinity is not practised’. Apparently, this has led recently to Wahhabi clerics gingerly counselling young men to choose a wife carefully with an eye to health.
9. This is a book titled *Human Visas: A Report from the Frontline of Europe’s Integration Crisis*, authored by the Norwegian activist Hege Storhaug.
10. See also Shaw (2006: 219, note 33).
11. See www.fco.co.uk and search under Forced Marriage Unit.
12. *M v B, A and S*, [2005] EWHC 1681 (Fam); [2006] 1 FLR 117. For details see Gaffney-Rhys (2006).
13. *A Local Authority v MA*, (2006) Fam Law 268.

References

- Alghrani, Amel and John Harris (2006) ‘Reproductive Liberty: Should the Foundation of Families be Regulated?’, *Child and Family Law Quarterly* 18(2): 191–210.

- Ballard, Roger (1990) 'Migration and Kinship: The Differential Effect of Marriage Rules on the Processes of Punjabi Migration to Britain'. In Colin Clarke, Ceri Peach and Steven Vertovec (eds), *South Asians Overseas: Contexts and Communities* (pp. 219–49). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ballard, Roger (ed) (1994 [2007]) *Desh Pardesh. The South Asian Presence in Britain*. London: Hurst & Co.
- Bawer, Bruce (2003) 'Arranged Marriages Prevent Integration: A Trap for Muslim Women in Europe', *International Herald Tribune*, 27 June.
- Bawer, Bruce (2007) 'Hege Storhaug: Fighting for Human Rights in Norway', *The Norseman* (January).
- Benson, John (2005) 'Recessive Disorders and Consanguineous Marriage'. *British Medical Journal*, Letters page, 17 December.
- Bittles, Alan H. (2003) 'The Bases of Western Attitudes to Consanguineous Marriage', *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 45(2): 135–38.
- Bunday, S. and H. Alam (1993) 'A Five-Year Prospective Study of the Health of Children in Different Ethnic Groups, with Particular Reference to the Effect of Inbreeding', *European Journal of Human Genetics*, 1: 206–19.
- Charsley, Katharine and Alison Shaw (2006) 'South Asian Transnational Marriages in Comparative Perspective', *Global Networks*, 6(4): 331–44.
- Darr, Aamra and B. Modell (1988) 'The Frequency of Consanguineous Marriage Among British Pakistanis', *Journal of Medical Genetics*, 25(3): 181–90.
- Dyer, Owen (2005) 'MP is Criticised for Saying that Marriage of First Cousins is a Health Problem', *British Medical Journal* (News Item, 3 December).
- Gaffney-Rhys, Ruth (2006) 'M v B, A and S (by the Official Solicitor) Protecting Vulnerable Adults from Being Forced Into Marriage' (Case Commentary), *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 18(3): 445–54.
- Human Genetics Commission (n.d.) 'Cousin Marriages—Statement on Cousins Who Marry', URL (consulted 10 July, 2009) from www.hgc.gov.uk/client/Content.asp?ContentId=741
- Khanum, Nazia (2008) *Forced Marriage, Family Cohesion and Community Engagement: National Learning Through a Case Study of Luton*. Luton: Equality in Diversity.
- Kingman, Sharon (1993) 'Why Cousins Can be Just Too Close', *The Independent*, 6 July.
- Kurtz, Stanley (2007a) 'Assimilation Studies, Part II: On Cousin Marriage and Pakistani Muslims in Britain', *National Review Online*, 22 March (Last accessed 13 July 2009).
- Kurtz, Stanley (2007b) 'Marriage and the Terror War, Part II—Protecting the Honor of the Family; Protecting the Honor of Islam', *National Review Online*, 16 February (Last accessed 13 July 2007).
- Migration Watch UK (2004) 'Immigration and Marriage: The Problem of Continuous Migration', Briefing Paper 10.8—Cohesion and Other Papers. London: Migration Watch UK.
- Modell, B. (1991) 'Social and Genetic Implications of Customary Consanguineous Marriage Among British Pakistanis—Report of a Meeting Held at the Ciba Foundation on 15 January 1991', *Journal of Medical Genetics*, 28(10): 720–23.
- Orstavik, K.H., R. Lindemann and J. Steen (1994) 'Infant Death and Consanguineous Marriage', *British Medical Journal*, Letters page, 5 March.
- Ottenheimer, Martin (1996) *Forbidden Relatives: The American Myth of Cousin Marriage*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

- Progress Educational Trust (2008) 'Cousin Marriage: A Cause for Concern?' Report of a Conference held at Clifford Chance, London, 29 May 2008. London: Clifford Chance.
- Razack, Sherene (2004) 'Imperilled Muslim Women, Dangerous Muslim Men and Civilised Europeans: Legal and Social Responses to Forced Marriages', *Feminist Legal Studies*, 12(2): 129–74.
- Robertson J. and J. Staples (2002) 'Judge Annuls Arranged Marriage', *The Scotsman*, 24 April.
- Rowlatt, Justin (2005) 'The Risks of Cousin Marriage', *BBC Newsnight*, 16 November, URL (consulted 9 July 2009), from news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/4442010.stm
- Shaw, Alison (1988) *A Pakistani Community in Britain*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Shaw, Alison (2000a) 'Conflicting Models of Risk: Clinical Genetics and British Pakistanis'. In Pat Caplan (ed), *Risk Revisited* (pp. 85–107). London: Pluto Press.
- Shaw, Alison (2000b) *Kinship and Continuity: Pakistani Families in Britain*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Shaw, Alison (2001) 'Kinship, Cultural Preference and Immigration: Consanguineous Marriage among British Pakistanis', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)*, 7(2): 315–34.
- Shaw, Alison (2006) 'The Arranged Transnational Cousin Marriages of British Pakistanis: Critique, Dissent and Cultural Continuity', *Contemporary South Asia*, 15(2): 209–20.
- Shaw, Alison (2009) *Negotiating Risk: British Pakistani Experiences of Genetics*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Shaw, Alison and Katharine Charsley (2006) 'Rishtas: Adding Emotion to Strategy in Understanding British Pakistani Transnational Marriages', *Global Networks*, 6(4): 405–42.
- Taylor, J. and M. Hughes (2008) 'Mystery of Bradford's Missing Children: Were They Forced Into Marriages Abroad?', *The Independent*, 4 February.
- Vallance-Webb, Georgina (2008) 'Family: Forcing the Issue', *Legal Week*, 8 May, URL (consulted 9 July 2009) from www.legalweek.com
- Visram, Rozina (1986) *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes. Indians in Britain 1700–1947*. London: Pluto Press.
- Visram, Rozina (2002) *Asians in Britain. 400 Years of History*. London: Pluto Press.
- Werbner, Pnina (2005) 'Pakistani Migration and Diaspora Religious Politics in a Global Age'. In Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember and Ian Skoggard (eds), *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World* (pp. 476–86). New York: Kluwer Publishers.
- World Health Organization (n.d.) 'Community Approaches to the Control of Hereditary Diseases'. Geneva: WHO. URL (consulted 9 July 2009) from www.who.int/genomics/publications/WHOHGNGW85.10.pdf
- Zaman, Muhammad (2008) 'Socio-Cultural Security, Emotions and Exchange Marriages in an Agrarian Community', *South Asia Research*, 28(3): 285–98.

Khola Hasan is a writer and broadcaster presently living in London. She gained a BA in Law and Arabic and an MA in Comparative and International Law from SOAS, University of London. She has developed a special interest in Islamic theology regarding the status of women and the duty of jurisprudence to adapt the needs of the Muslim community to the modern world in this particular field, which she will explore in further studies.

Address: 80 High Road, Leyton, London E15 2BP, UK. [e-mail: khola_hasan@hotmail.co.uk]