

Paediatrics Among Ethnic Minorities

Asian families I: cultures

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This article considers the problems of children whose families have originated directly from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and indirectly from the Indian subcontinent via east Africa.

The extended family is of great importance in Asian culture. It consists of three generations: the husband (head of the family) and wife, their sons and wives, and their children. In Britain the traditional roles of husband and family cannot always be sustained; the husband may feel that his authority has diminished and may worry because his children do not look to the extended family in Asia. His wife may feel isolated at home, lacking the support of relatives, and may see her husband and children, with their contacts outside the home, adapting better to life in Britain. The children will attempt, with varying degrees of success, to cope with life in two cultures. Most Asian parents in Britain approve of arranged marriages and their children generally accept them as marriage is very much a family affair.

The three main religions

HINDUISM

Except for the Sikhs from the Punjab, a few Moslems from Gujarat, and a few Christians from Goa, Indian families are Hindus, as are most Indian families from east Africa. In Britain distinctions of caste have less importance than in India, though marriages usually occur within the same caste. Marriage is regarded as a sacrament; divorce, though rare, is becoming more common among Hindus in Britain. There is no religious prohibition against postmortem examinations, but the reasons for carrying out this investigation should be fully and tactfully explained to the family, as such a request may be completely unexpected. After death the family may want to wash the body and are often particular about who touches it. The body is cremated, but children may be buried.

Hindus do not eat beef and are usually vegetarian, though the strictness of observance varies greatly. Gujarati Hindus are usually very strict vegetarians.

Parents may put jewellery of religious importance on their children before they go into hospital; these articles of jewellery should not be removed without the parents' consent.

SIKHISM

All Sikhs come originally from the Punjab, though many have come to Britain from east Africa. Those who observe their religion strictly wear the five signs:

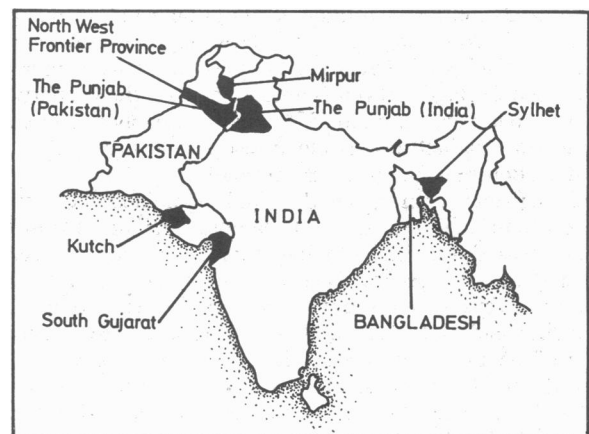
- uncut hair of the head and body (kes, pronounced kesh) for both men and women;
- a comb (khangā) to secure the hair on the head; men wear a

turban over this. The wearing of turbans has caused difficulties with legislation when crash helmets must be worn and also in some schools. Boys do not wear turbans until the age of 10-12 years, and before this they secure their hair in a knot on top of the head with a small cloth (rumal);

(c) a metal bracelet (kara) worn on the right wrist by both men and women; this must *never* be removed, even after death;

(d) a special undergarment (kacch, pronounced kaccha) for men only;

(e) a small symbolic dagger (kirpan or khanda) worn by both sexes, often as a brooch or pendant. It is occasionally and mistakenly



Main areas in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh from which immigrants have come. (Reproduced from *Asians in Britain: Introduction*, 1981, published by the National Extension College, Cambridge, for the DHSS and the King Edward's Hospital Fund and reproduced with their permission.)

regarded as an offensive weapon by some headteachers, who have attempted to prohibit its wearing in school; in hospital also, failure to understand the importance of the kirpan has resulted in its forcible removal, to the great distress of the patient and family.

As in Hinduism marriage is regarded as a sacrament, and divorce, though possible, is not approved but is becoming more common in Britain.

There is no prohibition against necropsies. After death the body is cremated.

Most Sikhs will eat pork but not beef; in general, however, they rarely eat meat. Their diet is nevertheless usually well balanced, and the children are well nourished.

ISLAM

The Mosque is the centre of male religious and community life for Moslems and is in the charge of an Imam. Physical seclusion (purdah) for women was prescribed by Mohammed, but the degree

of observance of purdah and the wearing of a cover over the face vary considerably. Marriage is a civil contract, not a sacrament; in Britain it is rare for a Moslem man from the Indian subcontinent to have more than one wife; divorce is permitted but not approved. Moslem boys must be circumcised before puberty; as with Jewish circumcision this cannot be done under the National Health Service unless there is a medical indication for the operation.

According to Islamic law the body must be buried within 24 hours of death, but full observance of all the rules may be difficult in Britain. After death no part of the body may be removed or damaged in any way. Necropsies should therefore be performed only when there is a legal requirement, as ordered by the coroner; the need for these must be fully explained to the parents. After death the body is buried and must not be cremated.

Dietary observances are strictly prescribed by Islamic law. Meat must be "halal"—that is, the animal must have been killed in a specific way. No Moslem will eat pork, pork products, or anything that contains pork or pig derivatives; if there is any doubt about the origin or content of a food they will refuse it.

Names

Each of the three religions has a different naming system. The same name may be spelt in a number of different ways, often within

TABLE I—Hindu naming system

	First name (personal, usually different male and female names)	Middle or complementary name (different male and female names)	Subcaste name
Female	Arima	Devi	Patel
Male	Naresh	Lal	Chopra

TABLE II—Sikh naming system

	First name (personal name, male and female names usually the same)	Middle or complementary (religious) name	(Subcaste name)
Female	Jaswinder	(all women) Kaur	(Gill)
Male	Armarjit	(all men) Singh	(Bamra)

TABLE III—Moslem naming system and way of recording it

	Names	Record as:
Husband	Mohammed Habibur Rahman	(Mohammed) Habibur RAHMAN
Wife	Jameela Katoon	Jameela Katoon, wife of Mohammed Habibur RAHMAN
Son	Shafiur Mia	Shafiur Mia, son of Mohammed RAHMAN
Daughter	Shameema Bibi	Shameema Bibi, daughter of Mohammed Habibur RAHMAN

TABLE IV—Main groups from India, east Africa, and Pakistan

People from:	are called:	their religion is:	their first language is:	they may speak some:	they first settled in:
<i>India and east Africa</i>					
Gujarat:					
South and central regions	Gujaratis	Hinduism, a few Islam	Gujarati	Hindi	<i>Gujarati Hindus</i> Birmingham, Leicester, N London, Preston, SE England Wellingborough, W Bromwich, W Midlands
Northern region, Kutch	Kutchis or Gujaratis	Hinduism, a few Islam	Kutchi or Gujarati	Gujarati, Hindi	<i>Gujarati Moslems</i> Bolton, Leicester, Preston, Tameside, Wandsworth Birmingham, Chatham, Gravesend, Rochester, Leeds, Maidenhead, Southampton, Warwick, Leamington Spa, W London, W Midlands
The Punjab	Punjabis (Sikhs)	Sikhism	Punjabi	Hindi	London and other large cities
Other parts of India (Bombay, Delhi, etc)	Indians, or name of state	Hinduism	Hindi	English	
East Africa*, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia	East African Asians	Hinduism, Islam, or Sikhism, depending on family origins	Gujarati or Punjabi, according to origin	Hindi, English, Swahili	Birmingham, Croydon, Leicester, Loughborough, N and S London, SE England
<i>Pakistan</i>					
The Punjab	Punjabis	Islam	Punjabi	Urdu	Bedford, Glasgow, High Wycombe, Humberside, Lancashire
Mirpur District (in Azad Kashmir)	Mirpuris	Islam	Mirpuri (Punjabi dialect)	Punjabi, Urdu	Maidenhead, Sheffield, Slough, W Midlands, W Yorkshire
North West Frontier	Pathans (phonetically Pataans)	Islam	Pashto	Punjabi, Urdu	

* A few families who came originally from Goa are Roman Catholics and usually have names of Portuguese origin, such as da Silva.

Further information

The following booklets, published for the DHSS and the King Edward's Hospital Fund for London by the National Extension College, are available from the college, 16 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge CB2 2HH (0223-63465/316644).

Asians in Britain: Recording and Using Asian names.

Asians in Britain: Foods and Diets.

Other related literature is also available, including guides to the pronunciation of the commoner Hindu, Sikh, and Moslem names with flow charts for records clerks.

the same family or by the same person on different occasions. Record clerks and receptionists should be taught to record Asian names in a standardised manner.

HINDU NAMING SYSTEM

Hindus have a first or personal name, a middle or complementary name, and a subcaste or family name, which in Britain is used as a surname. The husband's subcaste name is adopted by the wife on marriage and is used by the children (table I). Both first and middle or complementary names should be used together; sometimes they are written as one word—for example, Arimadevi. In Gujarati families the middle name is usually the father's first name, to

TABLE V—Women's dress

	Hindus	Moslems from Pakistan or Gujarat, Sikhs from the Punjab	Moslems from Bangladesh (Bengalis)
Women	Blouse, sari, and long petticoat	Kameez (tunic), shalwar (trousers), and dupatta or chuni (scarf)	Blouse, sari, and long petticoat (end of sari serves as veil)
Girls	Knee length dress or trousers	Kameez (tunic), shalwar (trousers), and dupatta or chuni (scarf)	Knee length dress or trousers

TABLE VI—Regional diets of main Asian groups in Britain

	From the Indian Punjab		From Gujarat		From Pakistan	From Bangladesh
	Sikhs	Hindus	Hindus	Moslems	Moslems	Moslems
Staple source of cereal	Chapatis	Chapatis	Chapatis, rice	Chapatis, rice	Chapatis	Rice
Cooking oil	Ghee*	Ghee	Groundnut oil, some ghee	Groundnut oil, some ghee	Ghee or groundnut oil	Groundnut oil, some ghee
Meat	No beef, rarely pork. Some are vegetarians. Most eat chicken or mutton	No beef. Mostly vegetarians	No beef. Mostly vegetarians	No pork or pork products, halal meat only (usually chicken or mutton)	No pork or pork products, halal meat only (usually chicken or mutton)	No pork or pork products, halal meat only (usually chicken or mutton)
Fish	Occasionally	No	No	Occasionally	Occasionally	Fresh or dried fish often
Eggs	Not a major part of diet	Not eaten by strict vegetarians	Not eaten by strict vegetarians	Usually hard boiled or fried	Usually hard boiled or fried	Usually hard boiled or fried
Dairy products	Very important. Yoghurt buttermilk, homemade cream cheese, milk (boiled and sweetened)	Very important. Yoghurt buttermilk, homemade cream cheese, milk (boiled and sweetened)	Important especially yoghurt and milk (boiled and sweetened)	Fairly important	Fairly important. Yoghurt and milk (boiled and sweetened)	Little or none
Pulses and dahl†	Major source of protein	May be only source of protein	May be almost only source of protein	Fairly important	A few pulses, some dahl	A few pulses, some dahl
Vegetables	Vegetable curries, occasional salad, fresh fruit	Vegetable curries, occasional salad, fresh fruit	Vegetable curries, occasional salad, fresh fruit	Vegetable curries, occasional salad, fresh fruit	Vegetable curries, occasional salad, fresh fruit	Vegetable curries, occasional salad, fresh fruit

* Ghee is clarified butter. † Dahl is the split seed of leguminous vegetables, various sorts of pea, or gram

distinguish between different families all called Patel/Shah, or other common subcaste names.

SIKH NAMING SYSTEM

The Sikh system is based on the Hindu system. In rural India the subcaste names have been abandoned, but in Britain they may be readopted and used as a surname. If the subcaste name is not used Singh may be used as a surname. All Sikh men have the complementary (or middle) name of Singh (meaning lion) and all Sikh women the complementary name of Kaur (meaning princess) (table II). The Sikh first name is used by family and friends, whereas for polite use, as in the outpatient department or surgery, the first and complementary names are used, followed by the subcaste name if used. The subcaste name is adopted by the wife on marriage and is used by the children. Some families simply use Singh as the surname for all male members and Kaur as the surname for all female members of the family. As this is confusing a reasonable attempt should be made to discover the subcaste name, to simplify the filing of records.

MOSLEM NAMING SYSTEM

Moslems from different parts of the world have different naming systems. In those from the Indian subcontinent or of Asian origin from east Africa there are traditionally no names shared by the whole family; and wives and children do not adopt the husband's name. Moslem men have two or more names, one being a personal name and the other often with a religious connection, such as Mohammed (sometimes abbreviated to Moh'd) or Ali. In polite or formal use the man is addressed by his full name—for example, Mohammed Habibur Rahman. In Britain families usually use a clan name such as Chaudry or Khan as the surname. Women have a personal name followed either by a title that is more or less equivalent to Ms (Begum, Bibi) or by a second name: formally the woman is addressed by her names followed by the title. The record clerk should always ask for the husband's or father's family name (table III).

Separate identities of Asian groups in Britain originating from India

With the exception of those from east Africa the reason for emigration of most Asians has been economic—that is, a desire to improve the economic conditions of the family—especially when the economic conditions in the home country are poor, bad, or deteriorating. Asians in east Africa were expelled, or life was made so uncomfortable that they left. Table IV shows the main groups of Asians in Britain from India, east Africa, and Pakistan.

Gujarat—Apart from a few Moslems the Gujaratis are Hindus. In Britain the men and boys usually wear Western style street clothes. Older women and some girls tend to dress traditionally in blouse, sari, and long petticoat (table V). Hindus from other parts of India dress similarly.

Punjab (Sikhs)—The Sikhs come from the state of Punjab in India (not to be confused with the Moslem province of Punjab in Pakistan); a few come from east Africa. The adult men are distinguished by their turban and beard; boys wear their hair in a knot on top of their heads. Traditional dress for women is a tunic, trousers, and scarf (table V).

Pakistan—Most families from Pakistan come from the Province of Punjab, Mirpur (Azad Kashmir), and the North West Frontier Province (table IV). They are all Moslems. The men may wear a high collared coat and some type of brimless, often fur, hat; women dress similarly to Sikhs (table V). They emigrated from Pakistan for economic reasons. Difficulties have arisen in physical education classes and games at some schools because the girls are not allowed to expose their legs and arms and cannot wear gym tunics or swimming costumes. Most schools have reached a compromise by allowing the girls to retain their trousers for games and by arranging single sex swimming lessons. Their diet is nutritionally satisfactory, and dietary deficiencies are rare in their children (table VI).

Bangladesh—Most families come from the district of Sylhet; though sometimes known as Bangladeshis, they usually call themselves Bengalis and speak Bengali as their first language but may speak a little Urdu. They are Moslems. The men dress similarly to the Moslems from Pakistan, but women dress more like Hindu women, with saris (table V). These families originally settled in Bolton, Bradford, Dundee, east and north east London, Keighley, Luton, Oldham, Scunthorpe, Sheffield, and Tameside; the largest settlement is in Tower Hamlets (east London). The children's diet is often inadequate in iron (due to the late introduction of solids or cereals), vitamin D, and total calories. Children who arrived recently from Bangladesh are often severely undernourished and should be carefully screened for anaemia, worms, and tuberculosis. Their staple cereal is rice, and they eat chicken or mutton (halal) and fresh and dried fish but few dairy products (table VI).

I thank Alix Henley for her help with the preparation of this article; material from her book *Asian Patients in Hospital and at Home*, published by Pitman Medical for the King Edward's Hospital Fund for London, 1979, has been incorporated, with permission, in the text and in tables, which have been adapted from hers; this book should be consulted for further information.

Further reading

Henley A. *Asian patients in hospital and at home*. London: Pitman Medical, 1979.
Wright C. Pakistani family life in Newcastle. *Maternal and Child Health* 1981;6:427-30.

This is the third in a series of articles