

# Asians in BRITAIN

## RECORDING AND USING ASIAN NAMES

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Hen

Produced for the DHSS and the King Edward's Hospital Fund for London by the National Extension College

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ISBN 0 86082 231 1

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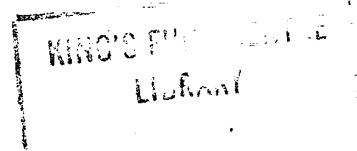
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Class Mark	Extensions
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Date of Receipt	Price
6 Mar 1992	donation

This booklet is a guide to the HINDU, SIKH and MUSLIM naming systems.

# Asians in BRITAIN



**Asians** refers to people from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and to people of Indian and Pakistani origin from East Africa.

There are three Asian naming systems, one for each of the three major religious groups: Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. The three systems are outlined separately.

## ASIAN NAMES IN BRITISH RECORDS

In Britain, record cards and filing systems are based on the British system of using names.

The British system is only one of many naming systems in the world. The Hindu, Sikh and Muslim systems, for example, are different, and this booklet describes them in detail. It shows how Hindu, Sikh and Muslim names can best be recorded on the cards and records we use in Britain.

The details given here will not solve all the difficulties that arise with the names of Asian people in British records. Many of these are the result of misunderstandings and lack of knowledge on both sides.

This guide should, however, give a basic understanding to work from in sorting out what has gone wrong, and in getting things right in the future.

Most problems are likely to arise with people who speak little or no English or who have recently arrived in Britain. Among Asians who have been in Britain for some time, many will have their names correctly recorded. There will, however, be many other people whose names have been incorrectly entered in records and who may wish, for their own peace of mind and for administrative convenience, to have their records amended. Sorting out existing confusion will require sensitivity and patience.

British names follow a basic three-part pattern, in which the last name, the surname, is the most important part for official purposes. Records

are filed in alphabetical order of surname. Other names distinguish people with the same surname.

Hindu, Sikh and Muslim names are used and recorded differently in the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). However, most Asian names can be fitted quite easily into British records once it is understood how they work.

### THE HINDU NAMING SYSTEM

Gujarati and Punjabi Hindu names only. Hindu names from other parts of India may follow a different pattern.

**BASIC PATTERN:** three parts, like the British pattern. (May be some variation as with British names).

Examples:	First Name (personal)	Middle Name	Surname (family)
	Lalita	devi	Sharma (F)
	Raj	kumar	Vasani (M)
	Vijay	lal	Patel (M)

**First name:** Personal name, used by family and friends, much like the British Christian name. First name used with middle name to show respect or formality, eg. Lalitadevi, Rajkumar. This is the traditional polite or official form of address.

**Middle name:** Used only with the first name. There are only a few Hindu middle names. Here are all the common ones:

**Male:** Bhai, Chand, Das, Dev, Kant, Kumar, Lal, Nath, Pal.  
**Female:** Behn, Devi, Gowri, Kumari, Lakshmi, Rani.

*Dev, Lal and Lakshmi can be either first or middle names. Kumar can occasionally be a family (subcaste) name.*

First and second names normally given together, especially by adults.  
First and middle names written as one word in Asian languages but may be separate in British records.

**Surname:** Family name. Also a subcaste name which indicates family's traditional status and occupation and so is shared by a large number of

families, eg. Patel. Wife and children have same surname as head of the family (as in British system).

In Britain, Hindu parents may give children only first name and surname (no middle name), eg. Neesha Patel, Pritam Desai.

### ENTERING HINDU NAMES IN RECORDS

1. Get the full name. Check that you have all the parts.
2. Enter the last name as the surname.
3. Check whether the last name is a shared family surname. If not, record the husband's or father's name for extra identification. Indicate the relationship with w/o (wife of), s/o (son of) or d/o (daughter of).

A few people have dropped their family name to indicate rejection of the caste system. (This is very rare with Gujarati Hindus, the majority in Britain). They will use their middle name, eg. Devi, Lal, as a surname. Each member of the family will usually have a different surname, ie. Mrs Devi may be the wife of Mr Lal. Sometimes they may all use the father's middle name as a surname.

#### Gujarati Hindu names

Many Gujarati Hindus use their father's (for men and single women) or husband's (for married women) name, after their own name, eg. Vijaylal Patel uses his father's name (Jayantilal) and is down in records as Vijaylal Jayantilal Patel. Vijaylal's wife, Lakshmidevi is down in records as Lakshmidevi Vijaylal Patel. This system helps to distinguish people with common family names.

Record:	Surname	Other names	M/F
	PATEL	Vijaylal Jayantilal	M
	PATEL	Lakshmidevi Vijaylal	F

*(Note that in this system, women have a male second name which will change on marriage).*

### COMMON PROBLEMS WITH HINDU NAMES IN RECORDS

#### Middle name entered as surname

This may happen because many Indian people are accustomed to giving their first and middle name in official situations, not their surname.

Incorrect record:	Surname	Other names	M/F
	DEVI	Lalita	F
	LAL	Pritam	M
	JAYANTILAL	Vijaylal	M
	VIJAYLAL	Lakshmidevi	F

If you suspect that the name is wrong, ask for the family name. Change records accordingly after checking with the person concerned.

### Large number of people with common surname

This often happens in areas where a Hindu community has settled, because surnames are shared by many families. Use the established Hindu system: record the father's or husband's name for extra identification.

### HOW TO CALL OR ADDRESS A HINDU

**Formally by title + full name:** Mrs Lalitadevi Sharma

**or by title + surname:** Mrs Sharma

**Informally by first name:** Lalita. Ask if in doubt.

The most common polite Gujarati Hindu form of address is the equivalent of the British title + surname, first name + behn (sister) or + bhai (brother), eg. Lalitabehn, Rajbhai.

### THE SIKH NAMING SYSTEM

**BASIC PATTERN:** Three parts, like the British pattern, but for religious reasons most Sikhs in Punjab do not use the third part (the family name). In Britain many Sikhs begin to use the full three-part system. (May be some variation as with British names).

Examples: First Name (personal)	Middle Name (religious)	Surname (family)	
Baljit Ravinder	Kaur Singh	Gill Sahota	(F) (M)

**First name:** Personal name, used by family and friends, much like the British Christian name. Normally used together with the religious name, eg. Baljit Kaur, Ravinder Singh. This is the traditional polite form of address.

Most Sikh first names do not indicate sex and can be both male and female. First names often end in -jit, -inder, or -want. e.g. Baljit, Ravinder, Kulwant.

**Middle name:** Singh (M) Kaur (F)

Religious name or title showing that the person is a Sikh. Boys and men have the name Singh (lion) and girls and women the name Kaur (princess). First and religious name normally used together. Some Sikhs feel that when the first name is used alone without Singh or Kaur, the name is not complete.

Conservative Sikhs may wish to continue to use Singh or Kaur (with no family name) as the surname. In this case husband and sons have the surname Singh, and wife and daughters, Kaur.

**Family name:** Subcaste name indicating caste position. The Sikh religion is against caste, so Sikhs traditionally do not use the family name. In Britain many Sikhs have begun to use a family surname to fit in with the British system and avoid confusion.

Occasionally, as an adaptation to the British system, the whole family will use Singh as the family surname. (Sikh families from East Africa who have had previous contact with a British-style administration, often use this system).

### ENTERING SIKH NAMES IN RECORDS

1. Get the full name (usually two or three parts).
2. Enter the last name as the surname.
3. Check whether the last name is a shared family surname. If not, record the husband's or father's name for extra identification. Indicate the relationship with w/o, s/o or d/o.

### Mr Singh and Mrs Kaur

Some people do not use a family name. They use Singh or Kaur as the surname, with no family name. In some families the older members may use Singh or Kaur while younger members use a family surname, eg. Jaswinder Singh Gill's mother may be Mrs Avtar Kaur.

Sometimes a woman adopts Singh as a surname: put her full name, plus Singh, on records. eg. Mrs Swaran Kaur Singh.

### HOW TO CALL OR ADDRESS A SIKH

**Formally by title + full name:** Mrs Baljit Kaur Gill.

Title + surname alone, eg. Mrs Gill, may not be acceptable to devout Sikhs even if they now use a family name, since they still consider Singh or Kaur the most important part of their name. To be safe always use the full name.

**Informally by first name:** Baljit.

*(Note that calling out Mrs Kaur or Mr Singh without first names, for example in a waiting room, may cause confusion if there are several Sikhs there).*

### COMMON PROBLEMS WITH SIKH NAMES IN RECORDS

#### Duplicate or untraceable records

Most Sikhs were recorded under the surnames Singh and Kaur when they first came to Britain. Now they may use a family name, and may have two separate sets of records.

If you cannot trace the record of a Sikh under his or her family name, check whether he or she was previously recorded under Singh or Kaur. Change all records to family name, after checking with the person concerned.

#### Adopting family name as surname

People who wish to begin to use a family name to fit in with the British

system may need help and encouragement, particularly if they speak little English.

Make sure they agree and will use the full name every time in future.

#### **Mrs Singh and Mr Kaur**

Some women adopt Singh, their husband's last name, as their surname, eg. Amarjit Kaur may use Singh as her surname in Britain for official records. Remember to call her Amarjit Kaur Singh not Amarjit Singh, which is equivalent to Mr Amarjit.

Mr Kaur is always wrong. Ask for the real surname immediately (either Singh or a family name).

#### **Children lacking a middle name**

In Britain, Sikh parents may give their children first name and surname only, eg. Baljit Gill. In this case the name alone does not indicate whether the child is a boy or a girl.

### **THE MUSLIM NAMING SYSTEM**

Asian Muslims from the Indian subcontinent and East Africa only. These notes do not apply to Muslims from the Middle East or elsewhere, who have different naming systems.

**MUSLIM NAMES:** These are most different from the British three part system and are the most difficult to fit into the system. These notes attempt to offer a system which will be acceptable to all sides. They are not a set of firm rules which all Asian Muslim names will follow.

One of the most important differences is that in the Muslim system, the last name is not usually a shared family surname, so in most Muslim families each member has a completely different name.

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<b>Examples:</b>	Husband:	Mohammed Hafiz
	Wife:	Jameela Khatoon
	Sons:	Mohammed Sharif
	Daughters:	Liaquat Ali
		Shameema Bibi
		Fatma Jan

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In Britain, some families have begun to use a shared family name. Children born or at school in Britain are more likely to have been given their father's last name as a surname.

For British records, enter the last part of each person's name as the surname (for filing). Note the name of the husband or father for extra identification.

Always call or address Muslims formally by their whole full name (not

just title + last name). This is correct Muslim usage.

Male and female names work to a different system.

## MALE MUSLIM NAMES

**BASIC PATTERN:** usually two or three parts.

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**Examples:** Mohammed Hafiz    Habib Ullah  
                 Gulam Mohammed    Bahadur Khan  
                 Yusuf Ali            Mohammed Khalid Qureshi  
                 Suleiman Mia        Mohammed Abdul Rahman Choudrey

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**Personal name:** In the male Muslim naming system the personal name (equivalent to the British Christian name) usually comes first or second. The personal name is normally only used alone by family members and very close friends.

Since the first name is often not the personal name, it cannot normally be used alone to address a male Muslim.

**Calling name:** Every male Muslim has a calling name. This is the name which is normally used informally by friends and acquaintances. It is usually a two-part name consisting of a personal name and a religious name. The personal name may come first, eg. Gulam Mohammed, Yusuf Ali, or second, eg. Mohammed Hafiz, Allah Dittah.

The two parts of a calling name are sometimes grammatically linked, eg. Zia-ul-Hassan, Shehab-ud-Din (usually written in British records as Ziaul Hassan, Shehab Uddin). Note that in the first example the man's personal name is Zia (not Ziaul).

**Religious name:** The religious name is part of the calling name and is considered to be the most important part of the name. It should never be used alone.

Allah, Ullah (the form used when Allah follows another name) and Mohammed are always religious names. To address most devout Muslims by any of these names alone is as offensive as addressing a devout Christian as Christ or God. Ahmed, Ali and Hussein are sometimes religious names, used with a personal name. There are also other names that can have religious significance. Since it is very difficult for most non-Muslims to tell which names have a religious significance and when, always use the two-part calling name for informal usage to avoid giving offence. (Some Muslim men in Britain have become resigned to the fact that many British people use their religious names wrongly. To a devout Muslim, however, this is never acceptable).

**Other names:** Some men also have another name which follows their calling name. This is often a hereditary male name, eg. Qureshi, Choudrey, but is not usually used by the whole family.

In some cases Muslim men have only begun to use a surname for

records since they came to Britain. Instead of a hereditary male name, a man may use the last part of his father's name, or a male title (Miah). This surname will not usually appear on a passport or any other document issued in the Indian subcontinent.

*Note the importance of using a man's whole full name for all formal and official usage (not just title + last name).*

### ENTERING MALE MUSLIM NAMES IN RECORDS

1. **Get the full name.** Check that you have all the names.
2. **Enter the last part of the full name as the surname for filing purposes.** Check that the patient always uses this as his last name. Use full name on all formal or official occasions.

Where there is no shared family surname, record the father's name for extra identification.

### HOW TO CALL OR ADDRESS A MALE MUSLIM

**Formally by title + full name:** Mr Mohammed Khalid Qureshi, Mr Mohammed Hafiz.

**Informally by his calling name:** Mohammed Khalid, Mohammed Hafiz, unless specifically asked otherwise. (The personal name alone usually indicates a very close relationship.) Never use Allah, Ullah, or Mohammed alone.

### FEMALE MUSLIM NAMES

**BASIC PATTERN:** Muslim women from rural areas usually have two names, neither of which is a shared family surname, eg. Amina Begum, Salamat Bibi, Fatma Jan, Nasreen Akhtar. The two names are always used together except with family and close friends.

**First name:** Always a personal name, as in the British system.

**Second name:** Either a female title or a second personal name. The Asian Muslim female titles are:

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Bano, Begum, Bi, Bibi, Khanum, Khatoon, Sultana.

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**Some common second personal names** (which may be used instead of a female title) are: Akhtar, Jan, Nessa, Kausar. Akhtar and Jan can also be male personal or second names but are most common as female second names.

If a woman has a first and second name only, enter her second name as surname in records. Record her father's or husband's name for extra identification.

### **SHARED FAMILY NAME**

Some women, as they begin to have more contact with British society, choose to use their husband's last name as a shared family name, eg. Fatma Bibi married to Allah Dittah becomes Fatma Bibi Dittah in records. Many women, however, find it unacceptable to have their name changed as this is completely contrary to Muslim custom.

Even if a woman uses a shared family surname, continue to address her by her full name, eg. Mrs Fatma Bibi Dittah or by her own name, Fatma Bibi. Informally use her first name, Fatma. A few women who use a family surname have dropped the middle name. In this case use the name as you would a British first name + surname.

### **ENTERING FEMALE MUSLIM NAMES IN RECORDS**

- 1. Get the full name.** (Usually two parts, occasionally three.)
- 2. Enter the last part of the name as the surname.** Use the full name when you are calling or speaking to her.

If she does not use a family surname, indicate the husband's or father's name for extra identification, with w/o or d/o.

**Example:** Mrs Amina Begum's husband is Mr Mohammed Aslam

Record:	Surname	Other names	M/F
	BEGUM	Amina w/o Mohammed Aslam	F

Address her as Mrs Amina Begum not Mrs Aslam. Amina Begum is her name, and is what she will hear and respond to.

If a woman uses a shared family surname enter her name in the normal way. Always use her full name when calling or addressing her.

### **HOW TO CALL OR ADDRESS A MUSLIM WOMAN**

**Formally by title + full name:** Mrs Amina Begum, Mrs Fatma Jan Dittah.

**Informally by first name:** Amina or Fatma.

Do not address or call Amina Begum as Mrs Begum. These are female titles and do not identify anyone. If you have several Muslim women in the room all or none may respond. Always use the full name.

Begum, Bibi, etc. are female titles or names, not used as last names by men. Amina Begum's husband is never Mr Begum, nor Fatma Jan's husband, Mr Jan. They have completely different names.

### **IDENTIFYING ALL THE MEMBERS OF ONE MUSLIM FAMILY**

Where the family is using a shared family surname, record each member as normally.

Where there is no shared family surname, record and file each member

under his or her own name, but note the name and relationship to the head of the family.

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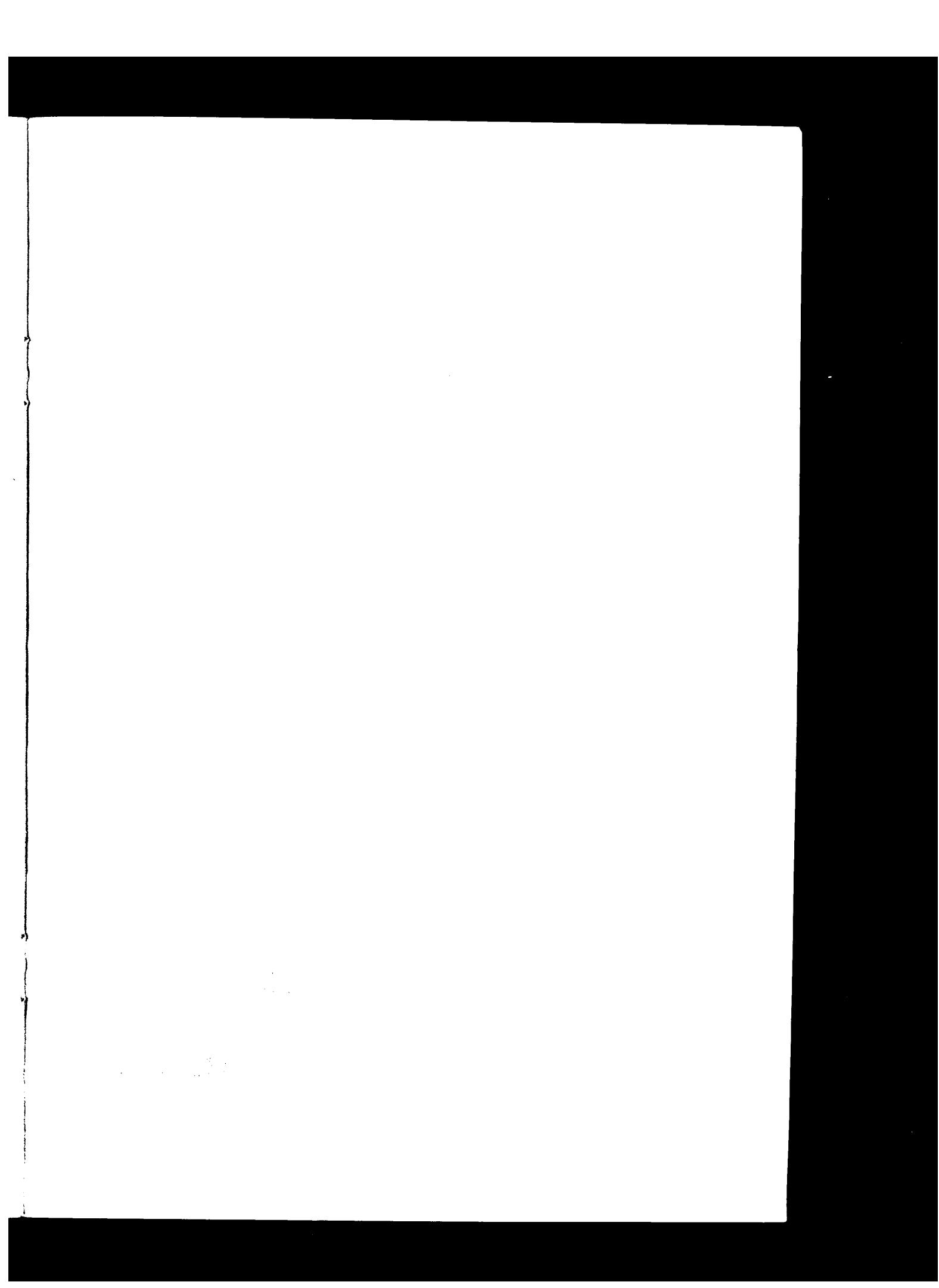
**Examples:** Husband: Mohammed Hafiz  
Wife: Jameela Khatoon  
Son: Mohammed Sharif  
Daughter: Shameema Bibi

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Record:	Surname	Other names	M/F
	HAFIZ	Mohammed	M
	KHATOON	Jameela w/o Mohammed Hafiz	F
	SHARIF	Mohammed s/o Mohammed Hafiz	M
	BIBI	Shameema d/o Mohammed Hafiz	F

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Address each person by their full name, unless specifically asked.





The table below summarises the three main religions and where Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in Britain have come from.

Name of Religion	Followers	Area from which followers have come to Britain
HINDUISM	Hindus	GUJARAT (INDIA) EAST AFRICA Punjab (India) — a few
SIKHISM	Sikhs	PUNJAB (INDIA) East Africa — a few
ISLAM	Muslims	PAKISTAN BANGLADESH East Africa — some Gujarat (India) — a few

#### GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

In the list below stressed syllables are italicised, eg. *England*, *Punjab*.  
 'a' is pronounced short — as in southern English 'but' or 'much'.  
 'aa' is pronounced long — as in 'farm' or 'barb'.  
 'oo' is pronounced long — as in 'fool' or 'lose'.

#### LIST OF NAMES

Punjab	pronounced <i>punjaab</i>
Gujarat	pronounced <i>goojaraat</i>
Kutch	pronounced <i>katch</i> (short 'a')
Mirpur	pronounced <i>meerpoor</i>
Pathan	pronounced <i>pataan</i>
Sylhet	pronounced <i>sillet</i>
Koran	pronounced <i>koraan</i>
Pashto	pronounced <i>pashtoo</i> (short 'a')
Hindi	pronounced <i>hindi</i>
Urdu	pronounced <i>oordoo</i>
Bengali	pronounced <i>bengaali</i>
Devnagri	pronounced <i>devnaagri</i>
Gurmukhi	pronounced <i>goormooki</i>



