

# Asians in Britain INTRODUCTION

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

**The authors of this pack**

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The development and production of these materials has been paid for by the Department of Health and the King Edward's Hospital Fund for London. They are part of a series of training materials to be produced by Alix Henley for health workers and others working with Asian patients and clients. If you wish to comment or find out any more about these materials, please contact Alix Henley, c/o NEC, 18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge CB2 2HN.

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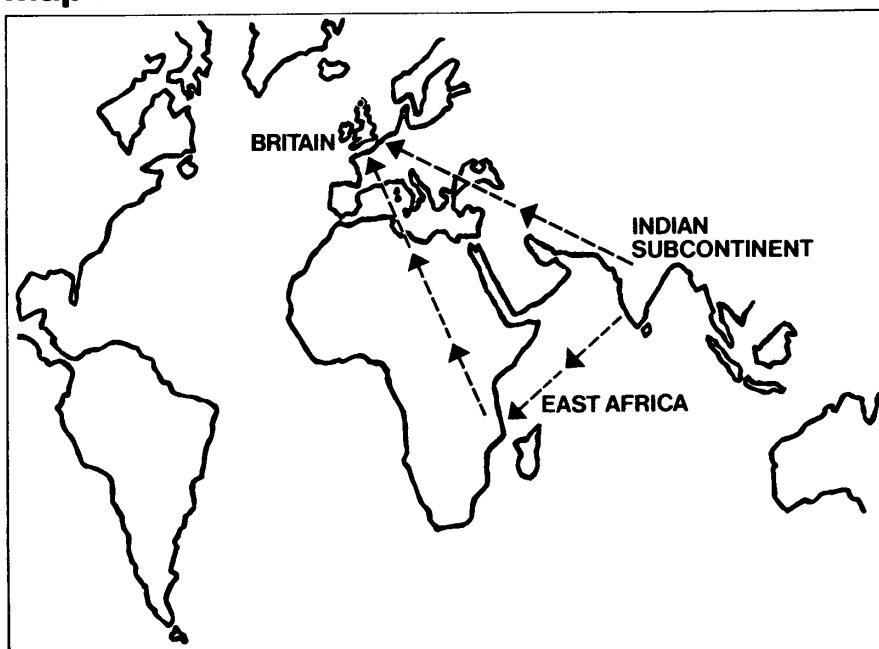
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This booklet describes the main areas from which Asians have come to Britain, what languages they speak and what religions they follow.

# Asians in Britain

**ASIANS** refers to people from the subcontinent of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and to people from East Africa whose families originated in the subcontinent. (See Map 1.)

**Map 1**



## HOW MANY ASIANS ARE THERE IN BRITAIN?

In 1976 it was estimated that there were about 796,000 Asian immigrants in Britain. (OPCS, PEP Report 1976).

390,000 came from India 226,000 came from Pakistan 20,000 came from Bangladesh 160,000 came from East Africa	} The Indian subcontinent
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*These figures do not include children born in Britain to immigrant parents.*

## THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

### WHERE IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT HAVE PEOPLE COME FROM?

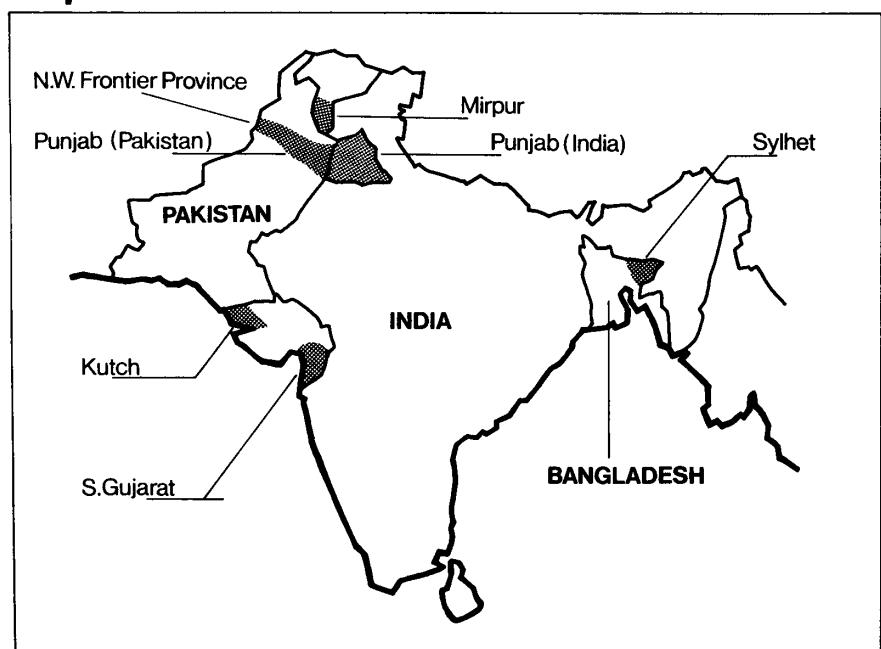
The Indian subcontinent is vast, about as big as Europe. About 636,000 Asians have come to Britain from only six small areas. These areas shown on Map 2 are

**India:** Punjab State  
Gujarat State (some people come from the northern part of Gujarat State known as Kutch)

**Pakistan:** Mirpur District (in Azad Kashmir)  
Punjab  
North West Frontier Province

**Bangladesh:** Sylhet District

### Map 2



## **WHAT ARE PEOPLE FROM THE DIFFERENT AREAS KNOWN AS?**

**India:** People from Punjab State are known as Punjabis or Indian Punjabis.

People from Gujarat State are known as Gujaratis.  
(People from Northern Gujarat are also known as Kutchis).

**Pakistan:** People from Mirpur are known as Mirpuris.  
People from Punjab are known as Punjabis or Pakistani Punjabis.  
People from North West Frontier Province are known as Pathans.

**Bangladesh:** People from Sylhet District are known as Bengalis or Bangladeshis or Sylhetis.

*A guide to the pronunciation of words and names is provided at the end of this booklet.*

Most of the Indians in Britain are Punjabis. Most of the Pakistanis in Britain are Mirpuris. Almost all of the Bangladeshis in Britain come from Sylhet District.

Most of the Indians in Britain originally settled in the South, especially in London and the South East. Most of the Pakistanis settled in the North, especially in West Yorkshire and Lancashire. The biggest Bangladeshi community is in East London.

## **WHAT DID THEY DO BEFORE THEY CAME TO BRITAIN?**

Almost all the people in Britain from the six areas listed have come from farms. Their families are generally small landowners who live off their own land. There are also a few people who have come from the towns and cities in these areas.

Doctors, lawyers and other professionals who have come to Britain have come from all parts of the subcontinent and not from these six areas only. Most of them have come from urban rather than rural backgrounds. They do not generally speak the same languages as the majority of Asians in Britain.

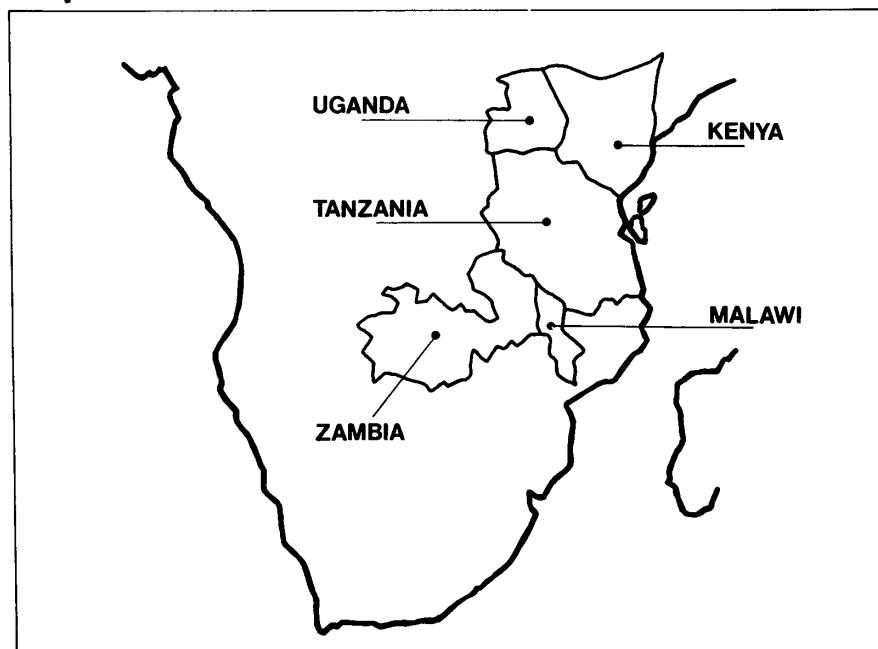
## EAST AFRICA

### WHERE IN EAST AFRICA HAVE PEOPLE COME FROM?

About a quarter of all the Asians in Britain have come from East Africa.

Most East African Asians have come from Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Some have also come from Malawi and Zambia. (See Map 3). The Asians have left Africa as a result of political changes and upheavals there.

**Map 3**



### **WHEN DID THE ASIANS GO TO EAST AFRICA AND WHERE FROM?**

Most Asian families originally emigrated from India and Pakistan to East Africa between 1890 and 1935, and, in a second period, between 1945 and 1960. Many families have been in East Africa for three or four generations and many East African Asians have never seen India or Pakistan.

Most people emigrated to East Africa from two areas of the Indian subcontinent:

Gujarat (India), mainly Hindus but also some Muslims.

Punjab (India and Pakistan), Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims.

Asians in East Africa continued to speak the languages of the areas from which their families had emigrated, Gujarati or Punjabi.

### **WHAT DID THEY DO BEFORE THEY CAME TO BRITAIN?**

In East Africa about 70% of the Asians lived in towns and cities where they formed a commercial middle class. Asians also worked in the professions and in the civil service. Unlike most of the people who have come to Britain directly from the Indian subcontinent, Asians from East Africa were already accustomed to many of the features of urban life and to living within a bureaucratic system before they came to Britain.

## LANGUAGES

### WHAT LANGUAGES DO ASIANS IN BRITAIN SPEAK?

There are several hundred different languages (and several hundred more dialects) in the Indian subcontinent. Which language Asians in Britain speak depends on which part of the subcontinent they or their families originated from. Most of the Asians in Britain speak one of six languages (or a dialect of one of those languages).

- India:** People from Punjab State speak PUNJABI.  
People from Gujarat speak GUJARATI.  
People from Kutch (Northern Gujarat) speak a dialect of Gujarati called KUTCHI.
- Pakistan:** People from Mirpur speak a dialect of Punjabi called MIRPURI.  
People from Punjab speak PUNJABI.  
People from the N.W. Frontier Province speak PASHTO.
- Bangladesh:** People from Bangladesh speak BENGALI. Most Bangladeshis in Britain speak a dialect of Bengali called SYLHETI.
- East Africa:** People from East Africa speak the language of the area from which their families emigrated, i.e. usually GUJARATI or PUNJABI.

Just as a Geordie will probably say he speaks English if asked, most Kutchi speakers will say they speak Gujarati, Mirpuri speakers Punjabi, and Sylheti speakers Bengali. To check whether the person is likely to speak a dialect ask where he or she came from.

**HINDI** is the administrative language in northern India, so Indians from towns and cities or with several years' education may speak Hindi, as well as their own regional language.

**URDU** is the administrative language of Pakistan, so Pakistanis from towns or cities or with several years' education may speak Urdu, as

well as their own regional language. (Hindi and Urdu are almost the same language in their spoken forms).

**BENGALI** is the national language of Bangladesh, and is spoken by all Bangladeshis though there are some regional variations.

All these different languages are from northern India, and so most of them have something in common, rather like many of the languages of Western Europe, eg. Italian, Spanish, French. But although they have something in common, they are all (except Hindi and Urdu) different languages, not just dialects of the same language. Because of this, people who speak one northern Indian language do not necessarily understand the others. This is particularly important when choosing an interpreter.

**Written languages:** Three completely different alphabets are used in northern India. Which alphabet is used depends on the country and the language: Urdu, and Punjabi in Pakistan, are written in the arabic alphabet. Hindi, Gujarati and Bengali are written in the devnagri alphabet. Punjabi is written in India in the gurmukhi alphabet. Most people can only read and write one alphabet, even if they can speak several languages.

**ENGLISH** Many of the Asians who have come to Britain also speak English. In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, English was taught as a subject in schools and colleges. In East Africa, English was often used as the language of business.

People who have been in Britain for several years and who have had a lot of contact with English people will have learnt English here. How much English people speak will depend on their education and experience before they came to Britain, as well as their experience here.

On the whole, men (who are likely to have more contact with English people) speak better English than women, and, as a group, East African Asians speak better English than people from the Indian subcontinent.

## RELIGIONS



### WHAT RELIGIOUS GROUPS DO THE ASIANS IN BRITAIN BELONG TO?

Most Asian people in Britain from the Indian subcontinent and East Africa are Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims.

**Hinduism** is the major religion in India and about 80% of the total population of India is Hindu. Hindus believe in reincarnation, and in the sacredness of all life. Since the act of taking life is wrong, most devout Hindus are strict vegetarians.

Most people in Britain from Gujarat (India) and East Africa are Hindus. A few people from the Indian Punjab are Hindus.

**Sikhism** is a reformist movement of Hinduism which was founded in Punjab in the sixteenth century by Guru Nanak. Although Sikhs are a tiny minority in India, they make up the majority in Punjab, which is regarded as the Sikh homeland. Most Sikhs wear five religious symbols of their religion including a steel bangle and uncut hair and beard. Many Sikh men wear a turban to cover their long hair. Some devout Sikhs are vegetarians.

Most people from the Indian Punjab in Britain are Sikhs. A few people from East Africa are Sikhs.

**Islam** is a world religion which was founded by the Prophet Mohammed in Saudi Arabia in the sixth century A.D. Muslims believe in one God, Allah, and that Mohammed was the last and greatest messenger sent by Allah to teach man how to live. Muslims have a clear code of practical and spiritual guidance in the Koran, the Muslim holy book, which is regarded as the direct word of Allah. Muslims are forbidden in the Koran to eat pork (or anything made with pork products) and may only eat 'halal' meat, which is blessed and killed in a special way.

Almost all Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are Muslims. A few people from East Africa and from Gujarat in India are Muslims.

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

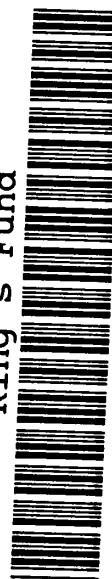
## GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

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>

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