

BRITISH CIVILIZATION

SECOND YEAR /2022

LECTURE 4: Race and Ethnic Minorities in Britain.

The British Nationality Act of the 1948 allowed citizens to settle in Britain and facilitated a new era in which most of the migrants were “coloured” people. However, numerous groups have settled in Britain before that date such as (Irish, Jewish, Polish, and Chinese). The end of the World War II brought about new flows of immigrants coming from the New Commonwealth (India and Pakistan, a few African countries, the West Indies).

The **mass migration** of the 1950s and 1960s produced close networks of related migrants from particular regions of origin. New Commonwealth immigrants formed numerous ethnic groups based on common language, religion and race. Distinctions are made between the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities, but far greater diversity exists than is implied by this two-fold categorisation.

From the very beginning, just after the war, ethnic minorities first came from the Caribbean and then from the Indian sub-continent, until about 1960. But, from 1962 onwards public attitudes towards ethnic minorities have gradually deteriorated. Legislation was introduced to cut down immigration and to promote equal opportunities for ethnic minority communities.

3.3 million Britons are now from an ethnic minority which accounts for 5.5% of the population, but there are numerous differences between the groups in their standards of living, access to opportunities such as jobs, education or housing, as well as in their belief systems, likes and dislikes.

Ethnic minorities have contributed to British culture and politics and they have their own newspapers and political organisations. Weekly newspapers include the *Caribbean Times*, *Asian Times*, and *Amar Deep Hindi*. *The Standing Conference of Afro-Caribbean and Asian Councillors*, the *Black Against State Harassment and Repression Groups* and the *Muslim Parliament* are the main ethnic organisations.

Ethnic minorities are worse off than the British community, especially Pakistanis and Bangladeshis families. In 1997, 82% of Pakistani households and 84% of Bangladeshi households had an income

below half the national average, owing to high rates of male unemployment, low rates of women's economic activity, low wages and large households.

In spite of the improving living conditions in Britain, ethnic minorities are over-represented among the homeless and overcrowded housing with a lack of services such as central heating. But while 25% of Chinese live in rented housing, 80% of the Indian population and 75% of Pakistani are owner occupiers.

Anti-discriminatory Policies

Since the arrival of the first Afro-Caribbeans in 1948, British race relations have had some bleak moments. There were the Notting Hill riots of 1958, Enoch Powell's Birmingham speech in 1968 calling for a halt to black immigration, and the Brixton riots of 1981. Discrimination in housing and employment is now illegal, but racial prejudice and violence still exist. It is important to mention that ethnic minorities have managed to integrate and some of them have succeeded in business, politics, music and entertainment.

Even though ethnic minorities have added to the British economy through enterprise and job creation, they were not always welcome and sometimes faced discrimination and violence. Policy makers thus passed race relations laws in 1965, 1968 and 1976. The **1965 Race Relations Act** enunciated the principle of ending discrimination against black immigrants on the grounds of race and outlawed discrimination in places of public resort. The **1968 Race Relations Act** extended the 1965 Act to include employment and housing and set up the Community Relations Commission to promote harmonious community relations.

Yet, the **1976 Race Relations Act** was the most important step in tackling racial discrimination and promoting equal opportunities. It introduced the notion of indirect discrimination and outlawed racial discrimination in employment and education and in the provision of goods and services. It set up the **Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)** with its wide powers to carry out formal investigations and to issue notices against unlawful discrimination.

During the 1997 election campaign, the labour manifesto claimed to seek the end of unjustifiable discrimination wherever it exists in society or at work. The Blair government was committed to work towards equality in employment and promoting equal opportunities. The department for education and employment has adopted a Race Equality Strategy in its employment policy and

develops action plans to meet the needs of ethnic minorities. The civil service had decided to increase its minority ethnic staff. The foreign and Commonwealth Office has encouraged recruitment of ethnic minorities in junior and senior posts and the government aims to recruit 8,000 black and Asian police officers over the next ten years. Furthermore, the Army launched an equal opportunities plan in 1997 and the plan means to increase the number of black and Asian soldiers to 5.2%.

Nevertheless, following the 9/11 attacks the Asian (Muslim) community of Britain had become the target of the national media, government and the wide community who held islamophobic sentiments to Islam and presumed all Muslims as potential terrorists . The situation of British Asian minority living in Britain worsened when four British-born citizens of Pakistani origin plotted a series of bombings at the London underground station on 7 July 2005. The blast killed 52 persons, in addition to the four bombers. As the plotters were British of Pakistani origins, the country faced the danger of racial tensions and prospect for greater national insecurity.

It was clear that Britain put its security at high risk by participating in the **US-led war on terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq**, and identifying so closely with American foreign policy aims.

Britain's foreign policy principles began to change when it initiated cooperation with President George Bush following the **09/11 bombings**. In that respect, Britain allied swiftly with the United States to punish the **Taliban government** for refusing to hand over the **Al Qaeda Organisation leader Osama Bin Laden**. The latter was wanted in the United States for directing the plane attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon. Britain sent its forces to Afghanistan in **October 2001** and became the second largest contributor to the war effort. By July 2010, the conflict cost Britain 300 royal troops and billions of pounds, but there was no end to the war in sight.

Britain's last war was in **Iraq** beginning in **March 2003**. That year, the United States decided to invade Iraq in total disregard for the United Nations disapproval. Here too, Britain followed in the footsteps of the United States almost blindly. In going to war, Britain relied on the disputed justification that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in breach of the United States sanctions that prohibited the Saddam government from acquiring such sophisticated technology. Soon, it was proved that Saddam Hussein did not possess these weapons, but the war went on unscrupulously. British forces were not withdrawn from Iraq until 2010.