

# South Asian Mobilisation in Two Northern Cities: A Comparison of Manchester and Bradford Asian Youth Movements

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## **Abstract**

Anti-racist movements develop and maintain their energy through the establishment of local, grass root networks. To date, research on the anti-racist movement in Britain has focussed on the creation of national narratives that highlight the power and influence of the movement. This article compares two of the Asian Youth movements that operated in the late 1970s and early 1980s to explore the importance of investigating localised settings when researching the history and impact of the anti-racist movement as a whole. Oral histories and documents produced by the Asian Youth Movements are used to reflect and understand how the organisations operated and developed differently, highlighting the influence of specific urban environments which affected local migratory experiences and therefore the makeup and operations of the movements themselves.

Anti-racist movements develop and maintain their energy through the establishment of local, grass root networks. To date research on the anti-racist movement in Britain has focused on political events and mobilisations which unfolded on the national level.<sup>1</sup> This article compares two groups which formed part of the Asian Youth Movement in Britain, which were active in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Asian youth Movements of the 1970s and 1980s in Britain sought to struggle against State and institutional racism and for basic civil rights for South Asian migrants who had come to Britain during the post-war period. In pursuit of these objectives they were part of a wider anti-racist movement. These included both independent and State sponsored organisations including the Institute of Race Relations; The Campaign against Racism and Fascism; The Race Today Collective; Black People's Alliance; The Anti Nazi League; and many more which operated as national bodies. At the same time, however, the Asian Youth Movement (AYM) was also embedded in specific localities and gained their influence through their involvement in grassroots campaigns and activities. This essay will explore the local differences between the Asian Youth Movements in two northern cities: Bradford and Manchester, in order to consider how the cities themselves - and the characteristics of the organisations in each town - affected the development and actions of these local anti-racist organisations and the way they are remembered.

Acknowledging the local histories of these movements is not to undermine the national narrative of the anti-racist movement which developed in Britain during the late 1970s and early 1980s, but to understand the complexity of this movement that incorporated a wide range of groups and individuals who believed in, and struggled for, equal rights for those living in Britain.

## **Anti-racist movement history in Britain**

The anti-racist movement as a whole developed to take up issues of discrimination that Commonwealth migrants increasingly faced after the economic depression of the 1970s led to the scape-goating of Black communities as the root cause of the problem. Racism impacted on all areas of life: Black school children were forced into immigrant classes and into schools out of their communities after the policy of bussing Black children to school was introduced in the '60s to prevent too many Black children being in one class; racism was experienced by Black families trying to find decent housing, as well as on the street as the phenomenon of 'paki-bashing' took hold and racist policing led to the harassment of young men of African and Asian origin in particular. The State entrenched the concept of Black people as the problem by instituting ever more stringent immigration laws through the 1970s that eventually, in 1981, took away the right to any child born in Britain from living here.

Anti-racists began to organise both local grass roots campaigns through the 70s to take up issues for local communities as well as national campaigns against the immigration laws.

A. Sivanandan's *From Resistance to Rebellion* emphasises this quality of anti-racist organisations in the 1970s and early 1980s to form and function as a result of specific circumstances, such as a fascist attack or police harassment. He highlights this phenomenon noting a wide variety of organisations that sprang up across the country such as the Southall Youth Movement, People's Unite, Bradford Blacks and the Asian Youth Movement in Bradford.<sup>2</sup> Sivanandan's article explores the development of these local organisations as a national phenomenon and also cites their place within the longer history of Black resistance in Britain from the mid twentieth century making links between anti-colonial struggles of the mid-twentieth century and anti-racist struggles of the late twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> The organisations that Sivanandan refers to however, were often extremely different in the size, age, and the social and cultural background of their members and this gave rise to different ways of organising. This is not to suggest that they did not act nationally in the sense of organising national protests and liaising across cities and communities, which they did, but the specific migratory and industrial histories of the cities and districts in which these organisations emerged was also influential on the ways in which they operated.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, in the US, an increasing amount of research on the Civil Rights Movement has been directed towards looking at local organisation in order to present a more in-depth account of the Civil Rights Movement - recognising its contradictory currents, for example violent and non-violent struggles, legal and illegal action, and their influences in specific regions.<sup>5</sup>

Through my research on the Asian Youth Movements it is clear that when individuals speak about their involvement in the anti-racist movement, they do so primarily in terms of their localized experience, even down to describing the geographies of streets where events occurred. The two booklets entitled *Campaign for Racism and Fascism's* are documentation of the local struggles in Southall and Newham that provide an understanding of a local community and its specific history.<sup>6</sup> The particular experience of Asian youth in the north of England however has not been explored and there has been little consideration of the impact of specific city environments on the development of these youth movements.<sup>7</sup> The existence of documentation on London based organisations rather than those in the north has meant that these London based organisations have stood for Asian Youth Movements in Britain as a whole.<sup>8</sup> It should also be noted that throughout this essay I talk of the Asian Youth Movements rather than a 'movement'. I have discussed them in the plural in order to recognise that each city group was in fact a separate organisation. While they were part of a wider anti-racist movement and their actions were part of a wider series of actions and impulses towards struggling against racism in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s, they chose to use the term 'movement' in the name of their organisations and it is organisationally that I refer to them in the plural.

### **The City, the Grassroots and the 'structure of feeling'**

Castells' influential text, *The City and the Grassroots*, argues for the importance of investigating space and place in a social movement organisation. He also asserts the crucial role that social movements play in the development and identity of the city: 'the process of production of the cities by societies is most evident in the case of social revolt and spatial innovation.'<sup>9</sup> Castells' definition of an urban social movement as campaigning for improved collective consumption; struggling for a community culture as well as for political self-determination reflects the role that the Asian Youth Movements in Britain of the 1970s and 1980s were involved with. Investigating localised experiences enables us to understand why some movements were more successful, lasted longer and had a more lasting impact on the communities and cities in which they operated. The focus on the local also enables us to understand these cities as complex geographic and social spaces that impinge on what Williams described as the 'structure of feeling' of a society.

The article will make use of archival materials produced by the youth movements as well as fourteen in depth interviews with key members of the Asian Youth Movements in Manchester and Bradford. They were not collected as a representative sample but were collected from individuals who through the establishment of trust were prepared to talk about a period of history that they wished to preserve but wanted to share with a researcher who they felt was sympathetic to their past and what they were trying to achieve. As an individual who was involved in anti-racist campaigns in Manchester during the late 1980s and early 1990s, I met many of the individuals as a fellow campaigner. It was these former members who shared their knowledge of the movement with me before I began the interviews and made suggestions as to who they thought would be good individuals to interview. There were some individuals who also for personal reasons excluded themselves from the sharing of their own histories. It is therefore not possible to see these interviews as a representative sample. For this reason the style of interview was qualitative and in-depth to explore the past and the movement in as reflective a way as possible. My approach has an affinity with Brian Alleyne's investigation of the New Beacon Books' circle in terms of his adoption of a reflective and critical humanist framework to investigate the circle and their participants.<sup>10</sup>

I will consider the migratory experiences of the cities, the geographies and industries that were embedded in them and explore how this impacted on the membership, size and organisational practises of the movements in both Manchester and Bradford. In exploring Manchester and Bradford, we are able to highlight the differences between two northern towns – a geographical area that is often lumped together as northern. In writing about the differences between the youth movements, the suggestion is not that one community was operating in a more successful way than the other, but simply to acknowledge that local geographies and the specificities of a community or communities change quite dramatically what can be done.

## **Bradford**

### **Migratory experience and the development of the Bradford Asian Community**

Northern towns and cities in Yorkshire and Lancashire such as Bradford saw the migration of a large number of migrants primarily from rural areas of Azad Kashmir and Northern Punjab.<sup>11</sup> Bradford had the highest concentrations of Asians in comparison to any other northern town. In 1964 there were approximately 12,000 Pakistanis in Bradford. By 1970 the approximate figure was 21,000. As Badr Dahya notes these migrants were mainly employed in the wool and engineering industries. Of the ten members of Bradford Asian Youth Movement whom I interviewed, all of their parents were employed in the mills and factories of Bradford although many of them indicated that their parents quickly moved on after saving enough money to establish their own businesses:

My father was a business man before he left Pakistan, and when he came here he started working in a foundry in the steel works. But he was there for a very short time, because he quickly got into his own business.<sup>12</sup>

My father began working in England in a lighting factory as his first job but he very quickly established his own tailoring business.<sup>13</sup>

These key activists shared the migratory experience of the majority of Pakistanis in Bradford, not only in terms of the kind of work that their parents were involved with but also in terms of the de-classing experience which many experienced. The parents of these young people were mainly factory workers, especially mill workers, but also included parents or relatives who were bus drivers and shopkeepers. Their parents however were not all labourers in the sub-continent, so a significant proportion of the group included aspiring families and individuals. Two of the key members were grammar school boys. This de-classing experience and the desire to better themselves was an experience that Bradford Asians shared with those in other towns and cities.

This experience can be seen as a contributory factor in why young people organised themselves and their need to establish a sense of self worth. As Dahya notes:

...the fact that the politically dominant group of the host society judges the immigrants as belonging at the bottom of the class structure in Britain, is not a valid reason for a sociologist to assume that the immigrants and the native proletariat share a single scale in values and preferences.<sup>14</sup>

As Anwar Qadir commented:

...it was almost a magnet pulling us all together, ...'cos we were all coming from our... own experiences, but we were all coming together because we cared, because we were, in a way, a generation who were expected to go in and do all the jobs where our parents had left off – but we were a generation that was saying we're not going to be doing that. Life has a lot more to offer to us than working in the foundries and the mills, and driving the buses and cleaning hospitals, so we were a generation that was saying 'no', we were not the generation that was thinking about, well we've got family back home and we need to look after them etc., etc. Because our parents had done that. We were a generation that was saying 'no we won't take it lying down, no we won't do these jobs, yes we will want to have white collar jobs, yes, yes we want to be in management, yes we want to be in your colleges and teach, yes, we want to be in your schools and teach, and your banks etc etc.<sup>15</sup>

Dahya has noted how, by 1970 with a population of 21,000, there were 260 immigrant owned and operated businesses in Bradford.<sup>16</sup> The majority of these shops and businesses were in Manningham. The development of a significant number of shops and businesses not only operated to enable the economic betterment of the community but also acted as a way of sharing culture and values, which could then be passed from one generation to the next. It is clear that this small but enterprising community stuck together to establish a space in Manningham that enabled the South Asian Migrants to support each other and survive, despite an environment where racism was endemic.

### **Social and Political influences**

The overriding reasons for the creation of the Asian Youth Movement in Bradford was both the general level of racism and the strength of the fascist presence in Bradford in the 1970s. Institutional racism had created the de-classing experience that I have described above, and street racism created situations of violence and aggression which made it impossible to ignore. Many of the young people who joined the movement experienced racism in all areas of their lives and commented on these experiences and their impact:

My first real political consciousness occurred probably before I was seven, when there was a huge demonstration in Bradford, organised by the Muslim community about a..so-called accidental shooting of a Pakistani boy that pulled out a toy gun and was shot.... I was a spectator on the side streets... But then growing up as an eight year old in Bradford, some interesting things happened to you ... the first thing that we faced was bussing, of course, and that was the education policy in the kind of late 60s and early 70s to actually disperse Muslim communities ... but it was really the Black or Asian community at the time. So I had a seven mile journey as a four and a half year old to school, which is unheard of today, and you could go up quite a famous road in Bradford, Lumb Lane and could find something like 15 buses that would bus literally hundreds of Asian children to all parts of Bradford...<sup>17</sup>

Norrazaman's elder brother Jani, recalls incidents of racism in school:

'I was about nine years old... there was one particular guy whose name was James – was the sort of school bully basically – who decided to call me a 'monkey'. So first of all he started calling me a 'monkey' and then he started calling me a 'Paki' and then a 'blackie'. And he, being a bully, he'd sort of managed to get other school children, you know, to call me names and that culminated in a fight eventually and it was in fact a student teacher that stopped the fight and you know he'd obviously had problems with this bully as well because his remark to me was ...'next time I should hit him harder'.

But there was nothing said about it in terms of school, nobody suggested that he shouldn't be saying these sort of things... of a racial nature.<sup>18</sup>

Anwar Qadir recalls how a skinhead's attack on his brother made him organise:

I was in the youth club, one night my brother got beaten up by a group of skin heads, now until that point we had nothing to do with skinheads... my brother described what they looked like and ...we recognised some of the people that he was talking about cos we had seen them on the streets,.. it wasn't "we're Asians and we're being exploited" and that, there was none of that, it was 'right well these skinheads are about to have a go at us Asians right, and we're going to teach them a lesson'... that was maybe the beginning of the journey...

For Tariq Mehmood, the playground in school was itself a violent place:

...in the playground... we were forced to form sort of elementary organisations...without a structure of anything like that... if we were on buses it wasn't that you could just walk freely and on our playground it was very violent.. and in our classrooms I still remember very clearly I learnt to speak English and I was still learning English... I said to the teacher, I could speak English now, I could read it... why do I still have to remain in the stream learning English? ... I had to get my uncle to go into school and say look he speaks English why does he have to learn English again?

It is clear from the memories cited above that racism galvanised and forced the youth to organise, often without conscious political understanding, but the importance of organising themselves was made clear to them in their daily lives. These experiences were not unique to Bradford but were part of the Bradford experience and there was a significant group within the local population that was unhappy about the presence of a growing South Asian community. In local political circles, as Dave Stark, a local trade unionist and trade union campaigner, mentions, 'Race was always on the agenda in Bradford from the early 1960s onwards. And there were disputes between Councillors, between political parties about immigration and about race.' The town saw the establishment of the Yorkshire Campaign against Immigration in 1969 which eventually became the National Campaign against Immigration and then the National Front (NF). This indicates the centrality to Bradford in the debate and fostering of racist immigration policies and attitudes.

### **The 1976 fascist march**

The difference between the theoretical debates and the practical realities of life were brought home for Tariq and others when the fascists decided to March through the area of Manningham in 1976. The strategy of marching through Black areas by the NF was a deliberate attempt by fascists to declare the streets as theirs, to mark Black people as not belonging to Britain and target them as the cause of the 1970s economic crisis. The NF believed that street marches and street action would enable them to 'march and grow' through the media profile that they would initiate.<sup>19</sup> A number of former members comment on fascist activity as a clear impetus to the development of an Asian Youth Movement:

I think there was a feeling that there was a need for an organisation to come together to fight against the injustices that young Asians, the young Asian community were facing at the time. We'd picked up on the activity of the National Front and how they were mobilising and wanting to essentially repatriate the Asian community,... all this talk about, the Asian community stealing our jobs, stealing our homes, stealing our women, that kind of stuff... and in fact, you know, in 1976 the National Front decided to hold a meeting in a school in the heart of where we lived and... that was my first recollection of a riot in Bradford basically, ... where police cars were turned over, paint was thrown at them, and being chased by police on horseback, And that was basically because they'd allowed the National Front, I think it was Martin Webster at the time, to come to Bradford and hold a meeting in a school in Manningham. So that was, I suppose, the first real campaign that I can recollect of any kind which was about defending our homes and our community basically, because that where

most of us lived. I lived on Lumb Lane.<sup>20</sup>

In reflecting on the formation of the AYM Bradford, a number of key members talked about the 1976 fascist march and meeting that the NF attempted to stage in Manningham. Manningham was a predominantly working class community with relatively cheap terraced housing, surrounded by mills and factories and by the mid 1970s saw the settlement of a sizeable Asian community. Most of the members from Bradford had attended school in the area and had defended each other at school from racism. This meant that many had close bonds with each other from a young age. A large proportion of the activists whom I interviewed were from Manningham. Out of 14 key activists in Bradford, ten lived in Bradford 8, the Manningham area, where they had defended their community against the fascists.<sup>21</sup> Two were from Bradford 3 where the Indian Workers Association (IWA) were influential and two were from Bradford 7. The concentration of individuals from one specific community made a significant impact on the way in which the AYM were able to organise, the impact they had on their community and the way in which the community identified with them. The Asian Youth Movement, (Bradford)'s first office was also on Lumb Lane, an important thoroughfare in Manningham and it was an office which they established independently of any other community organisation. The close cultural and community ties, the experience of going to school together and defending each other all affected the strength and nature of Bradford AYM and its impact.

The key concern to defend their community can be seen by the differing positions taken by the Trades Council and the youth during the anti-fascist march and protests on 24 April 1976. As *Race Today* commented:

For the organisers, Bradford Trades Council, the issue was mobilisation of massive opposition to the Front. The Black community, on the other hand, incensed at the fascist invasion, were concerned with defending their home territory. As the counter demo moved out of the immigrant area, many Black demonstrators stayed put. Those Blacks who continued with the march into the city centre soon returned when they heard that violence had broken out at home.<sup>22</sup>

Tariq Mehmood's recollections emphasise the feelings that the young people had at the time:

We saw them [the fascists] as coming to wipe us out, kick us out of our streets... or start the process and we weren't going to have it and there was a very big march against the fascists... and the march, the big anti-fascist march led by sort of the leaders of that time ended in the city centre. Now we lived in Manningham, or lots of us lived in Manningham, we marched to Manningham... broke through police lines, ran sneaked, because Manningham was ours and we had to protect it .... it was there that we really started thinking that we got to get our own house in order, we can't have this, we can't leave our future in the hands of people like... what we hated were the community leaders or the Labour Party types who would take control of our future.... We can fight and we can win...I think that there would have been the seeds of where the Asian Youth Movements began to be formed.

AYM (Bradford) was also inspired by the direct action taken by Asian Youth in Southall after the murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar in 1976 by fascists. Chaggar's death on a main thoroughfare in Southall was seen as a direct attack on the South Asian community. While the elders and the Indian Workers Association (Southall) responded by holding a public meeting and demanding an enquiry. The youth however were not prepared to wait and marched on the police station demanding justice. When two young men were arrested as a consequence, the need to organise themselves was immediately apparent and the following day the Southall Youth Movement (SYM) was formed.<sup>23</sup> Southall Youth Movement first acted primarily as a defence organisation, as Balraj Purwal recalls:

we went round kind of giving support.... trying to make these areas that were no-go open for all.. and to make Southall a no-go zone for racists and that was pretty effective, just so many people, you know.<sup>24</sup>

SYM was also quickly coopted into a funded organisation, running a youth centre. AYM (Bradford) in contrast, while coming out of the same experience of needing to defend their community against the fascists, was never simply a self-defence force, but a well organised group that campaigned and struggled for Black rights in terms of housing, education, immigration and wished to offer a thoughtful political understanding of national and global politics. They were only integrated into the State's youth and community structures in the early 1980s in contrast to SYM.

### **The left in Bradford**

Socialist and trade union organisations as well as the Indian Workers Association (Bradford) – an organisation that was not simply a migrant welfare organisation, but one that was deeply integrated with the trade union movement in the UK and with the Communist Party of India (ML) were also influential on the development of the youth movements. The nature of the IWA in Bradford contrasted with that of Southall. While IWA (Southall) was much more pro-establishment, and had a history of supporting the Labour Party as highlighted by DeWitt,<sup>23</sup> the IWA in Bradford was linked more closely with IWA (Birmingham) under Jagmohan Joshi, an organisation that had condemned the Labour Party's immigration strategies in the 1960s and had taken a much more militant position with regards to the use of strike action. IWA (Bradford) like IWA (Birmingham) was also clearly supportive of militant activity against fascists as Dave Stark:

when the National Front began to move into Bradford, they held meetings, they held marches, it would have been a mix of trade unionists including members of IWA, Asian, Black and White students,....it was always direct action, it was confronting them on the streets and occupying the meetings in Bradford..... the police came in as usual, arrested people, threw people out, that was the normal tactic, it was direct action... I suppose there was a tacit and direct agreement that you should confront the National Front and don't just talk about it. They should be confronted... any time they appeared.<sup>26</sup>

The IWA in Bradford clearly provided guidance for the youth as they began to organise. They first encouraged the formation of the Indian Progressive Youth Association and also provided an example of an organisation that was involved in both anti-racist politics as well as trade union and socialist politics. The secretary of the IWA, Jagtor Singh Sahota, was an active member of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), eventually becoming the regional secretary in 1979. Sahota, like the AYMs recognised the trade unions as an essential ally while also being aware of their racism.<sup>27</sup> The IWA's influence is also clear in Tariq Mehmood's novel *Hand on the Sun* where the young man Jalib clearly values the advice of the old comrade Dalair Singh: 'we must make our history into a weapon. We must learn from each defeat'.<sup>28</sup>

Asian Youth Movement (Bradford), unlike Southall also had three key members that were formerly members of White left, Trotskyite organisations before developing the AYM. One worked in Militant, another in the Workers Revolutionary Party and a third in International Socialists. This early influence of socialist organisation had a profound influence on the Bradford Asian Youth Movement and the way in which it developed and ran itself as an organisation. Tariq Mehmood recalls how he joined International Socialists (IS) - which he felt a lot of affinity towards as an organisation:

...because they seemed to have a lot more Asian people with them. They were coming from London. I think there was a group called Chingari or something, which Sunu Engineer and some of the others produced in Urdu and Hindi and different languages and it was at that time that I began to think that I could work with them. But I was really really angry with them as well because once they asked me to speak on racism because I must have been... one of the few non-Whites in Bradford at that time. I had no idea, I just had no idea how to articulate what racism was, I knew how to fight it because I didn't have a choice, I couldn't articulate the theoretical concept that it's a device used which is what the SWP wanted me to say you know... it's something used to divide Black workers and White workers... and I was also beginning to be unhappy with many other different concepts and some of these were theoretical things. I just couldn't get answers from the theoreticians within the Socialist

Workers. ... (IS) I wanted a Socialist world because I felt, 'that's our only future' and I understood by socialism things different to my White colleagues. And some of those things were that could we build socialism in one country? For me the ideas of socialism means that somebody didn't have to leave their mother and go thousands of miles away, to have electricity, to have water, to go to school near where you lived and for all of you to have work, but we had all that in England.. with struggles..and I was thinking back home in my village and I said no, my concept would be to get what we've got here and it didn't make sense to say no, it has to be global...

Two of the three organisers whom I interviewed that were members of left organisations before joining AYM related tales of being used as the token Asian and their frustration with their organisation's privileging of class politics above issues of race.<sup>29</sup> The experience of organising in a left organisation, was not only influential in terms of propelling these young men into action because of the frustration that they felt by working in an organisation which was not representing or meeting the needs of their own people but also in terms of learning the value of discipline. More than one member talked of how they operated almost like a party, and how individuals had to apply for full membership.

the AYMs recruited members I think it was a bit like a Communist organisation in the early days, they had to be nominated. You couldn't just turn up and say 'I want to join', someone had to propose you, you had to be on a probationary period, the Executive Committee had to discuss your membership, your membership would then have to be approved after your probationary period was over, if you misbehaved or didn't stand up to the aims and objectives, you were warned and brought in front of a disciplinary committee and you were disciplined and thrown out if need be. And you know we were building a cadre based body and probably at our height, we might have had a couple of hundred members.<sup>30</sup>

The movement also had very firm practises to avoid any activity that would bring the organisation into disrepute. For example, they were not allowed to drink before being involved in AYM activity and they were not allowed to date girls from families who the AYM were campaigning for, in immigration campaigns or any other. This was very different to Southall, which was almost entirely based around a street politics of self defence and where there does not appear to have been the formal discipline which you might find in a party, There was, however, extreme loyalty between members in Southall as was appropriate for an organisation that did sometimes worked outside of the law.

The need for a left organisation which was 'Black' led could not be fulfilled by the IWA in Bradford because the community was mainly Pakistani and Kashmiri. As Jani Rashid commented: ' we were going around knocking on people's doors and asking them to join the Indian Progressive Youth Association... the feedback we were getting..was...

Well, you know, we're not Indian, we're Pakistanis', and of course we used the word Indian because it was the Indian sub-continent... but the people that we were trying to recruit felt alienated because we used the word Indian. So we very quickly, within a year I think.... changed it from Indian Progressive Youth Association to the Asian Youth Movement.<sup>31</sup>

The predominantly Azad Kashmiri and Pakistani population did not have workers' organisation that could support the development of a youth organisation.

It is clear that both fascist activity, the experience of trade union and socialist activism in Bradford, the presence of the IWA as well as what young people saw as the lack of effective direct action by large sections of trade unionists and left organisations, along with the lack of a migrant workers organisations which truly represented the population, made these young Asians believe that they had to organise themselves.

## **A Second Generation Organisation**

The sense of home being in Britain, on the streets in which they lived rather than in the villages



of Kashmir or Indo-Pak Punjab, which were becoming distant memories was also important for the development of the youth movement in Bradford. Rather than being aware of the differences between them in terms of the divides between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, they searched out their commonalities. Having said this the migratory patterns pertaining to Bradford meant that the organisation was heavily Punjabi in its cultural and linguistic identity because of the number of members from both India and Pakistan that spoke, (what were regarded at the time) as various forms of Punjabi. The organisation however, was open minded and not chauvinistic in its cultural or religious outlook and included Gujerati members as well as individuals from Malaysia. The movement had members from all the major faiths in South Asia.

A number of members commented on this feeling of being here to stay,  
As Tariq Mehmood mentions:

I/we were becoming conscious of the fact that you know whatever that was going on has become our life, I wasn't going back that easily... you know mother had become a bit of a faded memory...I wasn't able to write much to her anyway... I knew she couldn't read English so it was becoming difficult for me to write in the little bit of Urdu that I wrote... we were meeting lots of people and women were coming in as well... so it was a bit more of a family life developing at the time...<sup>32</sup>

The arrival of women into the migrant community was an important shift in the way the community thought about itself. During the early 1960s men outnumbered women 40 to 1<sup>33</sup>. Many of the key members of the youth movements came to Bradford in the 1960s when the number of families began to increase but the Asian population was still predominantly male. Many of the fathers of these young people had come to work first, as Shanaaz Ali recalls:

My father came out in 1963, just after I was born... [he] came and then, I think he couldn't live here. I think he felt that because he was ill and various other things... He just missed his family. So he then decided to call us over, despite his friends and people, other men from our area saying, 'you're mad. We're all going to work for a few years and go back.

Those who did bring children when they first came, brought their sons so that they would eventually be able to contribute to the family income through work and send money back home as soon as they came of age.

The make up of AYM (Bradford) reflects the influence of the early phase of migrant workers who brought their sons or nephews to Britain to work as well as the development of an emerging family life with the establishment of women and young children in the community. Many of the members who I interviewed came to Britain in the mid 1960s when the number of families would have been extremely small. The predominance of young men in the community and of course the difficulties of those women and girls who were present from these traditionally rural communities to gain access to independence that would enable them to participate in political activity, meant that Bradford AYM began its development as entirely male although later on there were women involved, but always only in small numbers. As Jani Rashid commented:

We didn't have many Asian Women in the organisation, my sister was a member, she didn't always come to meetings cos we were a largely male group and we did increase our membership to more than just my sister later on,... but I have to say in terms of membership it was very very limited in terms of women... there were accusations from ... all sorts of groups that we were a sexist organisation... but I didn't feel it was... most young Asian women were still sort of... kept at home by their parents, and you know to be exposed to the likes of young men from the Asian Youth Movement wasn't the right thing to do...

In character it is therefore not surprising that there were elements of machoism present in the behaviour of the young men and in their organisation. This was not simply a form of masculinity

which had been imported but also a form of masculinity present in their new home - the northern mill town of Bradford.<sup>34</sup> The angry young man image that was often seen in leaflets and posters of that time characterises Asian Youth Movement (Bradford), was not only influenced by traditional forms of masculinity present within the migrant community but also by traditional forms of northern British masculinity that were present in northern mill towns, where young men had historically gained their place and purpose in society through hard physical labour.<sup>35</sup>

### **Geographies and spaces**

Another key influence on AYM (Bradford) was the library. The central library in Bradford had a cafe and it became a focus for ad hoc meetings and educational discussions. It was accessible for young people all over the city and walking distance from Manningham. It was a public space that enabled the youth quite profoundly. Tariq Mehmood, who was estranged from his family, practically lived in the library and he associates this with his growing political awareness.

... I had the library to stay in, so I had the advantage over them in that sense. They were grounded in school and stuff... But I'd be in the library as soon as it opened. I'd be there until it closed. ... I just read a lot, I had nothing else to do during the day... didn't have family, didn't have a home, I just read as much as I could. I began to understand that the world I lived in was really fundamentally unfair. I began to understand that this country was rich because we were poor and I also began to understand that we were here because they were there and I really believed that.

Another member, Gurnam Singh talks about the meetings and discussions that took place there:

We used to kind of go in the library cafe when it opened in the morning, ... We didn't have much money so we'd all buy a cup of tea ... just to prove that we were bona fide. And we'd do crosswords; the *Guardian* crossword and things like that... we used to share what we were reading and then it would get into disputes about certain politics, and I would say, 'Go and get the book'. And so the library was like our kind of reference. It was there and we were talking and ... I can remember reading *Capital*, Marx's *Capital*, and discussing that. And talking about Gramsci and all these other people. And this was around the age of 16 to 17, and becoming politicised.

...  
Sometimes I'd go to the library in the evenings as well as after school. Or actually slam from school, miss classes and end up in the library. Which I mean, I think back to that, and I think that was something to do with developing a critical education.<sup>36</sup>

The library did not act as an educator independently. The activities of the left in Bradford and their interaction with South Asian youth was important to the direction that AYM (Bradford) took. Near the library, the Fourth Idea Bookshop also provided a space of inspiration:

The Fourth Idea Bookshop was a bookshop plus with some sort of printing facility in there, and an old comrade... he's departed now, called Rubin Goldberg who used to work there. I think he was part of the International Marxist group of which Tariq Ali was a member as well. And that's the place which had really provided us with a lot of support, ideological support, support with ideas and sometimes we would debate in the library and up at the fourth idea book shop, borrow books from there, read books...<sup>37</sup>

Geographies and social and political influences worked together to influence the development and nature of the Asian Youth Movement (Bradford). The forms of self education that took place in the public space of the library and the Fourth Idea Bookshop, the lessons of discipline and socialist perspectives learnt from the White left, meant that the macho culture of street battles and street patrols were tempered in the Asian Youth Movement (Bradford). They also saw the value in communicating their ideas to their public by producing a magazine that represented their thoughts and ideas, just as left groups did. Through *Kala Tara* in particular they gave their work and campaigning longevity and formalism. This magazine outlined their aims and objectives

here to stay, here to fight' and their ideological perspectives: to struggle against 'all forms of discrimination based on race, colour, sex, religion etc ... and to promote the cause of equal rights'; to support national liberation movements and encourage cooperation between different nationalities in the Indian subcontinent, and recognised that the only real force in British society capable of fighting racism was a united workers 'movement.'

The strength of Manningham as a community, through the specific migratory experience of Asians in Bradford, the influence of the political climate in general and the existence of the IWA in an area where Pakistanis and Kashmiris dominated; the experience of working in the White left and the discipline of communist organising that some of the young people had learnt before establishing the AYM; the spaces such as the Forth Idea Book Shop and Bradford Library and its cafe in a central location close to Manningham gave the Asian Youth Movement in Bradford the ability to organise effectively and a legitimacy because of their links with the main community of Manningham. All these factors influenced the longevity and power of AYM (Bradford) to organise. At its height AYM (Bradford) had about 200 paid up members working and organising, along with hundreds of supporters, running successful anti-deportation campaigns, campaigns against racism of the police, racism in education and struggling against street racism. Its size and influence was far larger than the Asian Youth Movement (Manchester) The size and influence of the AYM (Bradford) meant that they were able to sustain themselves as an organisation right until 1986/7, although the organisation changed in its nature as it grew older, establishing itself more in its later years as a community centre funding youth organisation than as an agitating and campaigning body.

### **Manchester**

In contrast to Bradford, larger cities such as London and Manchester encouraged a wider range of migrants including students, professionals and labouring classes. These cities also saw a wider diversity in the cultural and ethnic origin of migrants, although large numbers of migrants still tended to settle where they had familial or community contacts and support. The cities themselves, the institutions and businesses that migrants established, as well as the historic institutions such as libraries and universities that were already established also impacted on how individual AYMs operated and are remembered.

### **Migration to Manchester**

The history of Manchester is significantly different to the history of Bradford which is smaller and defined almost entirely by its textile industry. Manchester by contrast, while holding an enormously significant role in the history of the textile industry, also has a long history as a commercial and metropolitan centre. This has been recognised as a significant factor in its 'structure of feeling' and it is certainly the case that it has influenced the kind of migration that has taken place to the city. In 1971, the number of Manchester residents born in India was 2879 (0.5% of Manchester residents) and the number of those born in Pakistan was 3388 (0.6% of Manchester residents). By 1981 those born in India had actually decreased for Indians to 2742 (0.6% of Manchester population) and increased for Pakistanis to 4975 (1.1% of Manchester residents). The number of Bangladeshis appeared for the first time as 607 (0.1% of Manchester residents). The 1981 figures do not include those born in Britain so to some extent they are an underestimate of the actual population.<sup>38</sup> In spite of this, it is clear that the Asian community in Manchester was smaller both in proportion to the entire population as well as in actual size to that of Bradford. The mix of immigrants from South Asia to Manchester was also much wider. Manchester's metropolitan status and size attracted individuals from India and Pakistan's professional classes as well as those from rural backgrounds.<sup>39</sup> There were still specific areas such as Cheetham Hill, Longsight and Whalley Range to which South Asian migrants settled, but bearing in mind the size of Manchester and the scattering of South Asians across various localities, it is inevitable that migrant organisations would find it much harder to have a significant influence both within migrant communities as well as within the local politics of Manchester as a whole. It is also significant that Werbner's study of Pakistanis from the 1970s and 1980s was not drawn from families

employed within factories but from a group of families operating as entrepreneurs.<sup>40</sup> Manchester's identity as a commercial city may have impacted on individual choices when choosing a location to settle and the pattern of chain migration which was strong in Bradford as well as smaller towns in Greater Manchester such as Oldham<sup>41</sup> was less evident in Manchester and this made the community more fluid.

### **Social and Political influences on the formation of AYM (Manchester)**

Unlike Bradford or Southall, where a specific attack on the Asian community galvanised individuals together, the Asian Youth Movement in Manchester did not develop in such a spontaneous way. The impetus for political action was different. From the start they were far more implicated and involved in already established local community structures. This is how one Manchester member, Nilofer Shaikh described the influences on her just before she helped establish the AYM (Manchester).

There were different kinds of influences and there were other community workers, Asian community workers, older community workers who formed a group called the Asian Workers Association..., and I joined that ... you know it was more around how do we support each other as Asian workers in our work with the Asian community; and I remember even helping to organise conferences,... people were using different ways to combat or tackle racism, you know, one was from the level of cultural sort of things to a really political level.

What this reflection highlights is that members of an AYM (Manchester) were not necessarily completely disenfranchised. They were employed to work in their communities in areas such as community development, but they did also experience racism as Black workers and as students and wished to make links with others that experienced discrimination and speak up against it. Of the eight initial members of an AYM (Manchester) that I learned about, two were overseas students and three were students with families living in Britain. Being a student is primarily an activity which is associated with and enables self-betterment. The three remaining members were working people, one of whom was a surgeon. Only one of the eight initial key AYM (Manchester) members had been to school in Manchester after migrating to Britain at the age of 13. Apart from the three that were registered students, the others were all working by the time they set up the AYM - one in a women's refuge, another in the WEA and a third as an electronic engineer. In terms of the membership therefore, AYM (Manchester) had more formal education, included members that were substantially older and more mature and included a larger proportion of aspiring individuals. They were individuals who did not have the same roots in Manchester as the young people in Bradford, although they were extremely committed to struggling for social justice and in many senses they were not the second generation with parents working in Britain in quite the same way as Bradford. All these qualities impacted on how they mobilised and what they were able to achieve.

### **The Left in Manchester**

While the British left in Bradford had a significant impact on an AYM (Bradford), the Asian Youth Movement (Manchester) although still influenced by left politics was more significantly influenced by left organisations in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The links between this international influence was different to Bradford's influence from the IWAs, because the IWAs were migrant organisations set up by the first generation migrants with influence from the various Indian Communist Parties. The influence for Manchester was more direct since two of its members had been involved in communist organisations in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Mohsin Zulfiqar had been involved with the National Student Federation in Pakistan as well as with the National Awami Party during the late 1960s, before coming to Britain in 1971; Qumral Kabir, from Bangladesh had also been involved with a communist organisation in Bangladesh and with the movement for Bangladeshi independence before arriving in Britain as a student in the same year. Both individuals continued to organise within the left in Britain after their arrival here, but the influence of Trotskyism in the British left meant both were quick to move outside of the British left and begin to involve themselves in anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles, including the Imperial Typewriters Strike in Leicester and the Overseas Students' Strike.

The crippling rise in fees for overseas students in the 1970s impacted directly on these members and their friends and the Overseas students strike employed a number of direct actions such as sit ins to protest at the draconian increases that were imposed in universities across Britain including Manchester and Loughborough where these members were situated.

### **Geographies and spaces**

AYM (Manchester) also operated in South Central Manchester– the areas of Longsight, Rusholme, Ardwick and Old Trafford – as well as in the Cheetham Hill area of North Manchester. The areas of Longsight, Rusholme, Ardwick and Old Trafford in particular lie very close to the city centre and are dominated by the university with its large and transient student population and regionally significant hospitals such as the MRI, St Mary's and Christie's Hospital. These spaces are ones that attract a wide variety of people with very different life experiences. Despite these large institutions and public spaces there wasn't, however, a central space as in Bradford library for young people to congregate. Longsight Library, which was used for meetings did not have a cafe and the spaces such as youth centres that the AYM did use to mobilise young people were spaces that were essentially there to organise young people, not spaces where they organised themselves.

The mix of individuals and experiences and the less unitary sense of place made the AYM (Manchester) less focused on a specific community although they had some community links in Longsight and Cheetham Hill, which they used to mobilise for specific immigration campaigns, but they did not as individuals all belong to those communities in quite the same way as Bradford did. The lack of a unitary place like Mannigham and its environs meant for example that while the AYM (Bradford) organised self-defence patrols in their communities and as one member said 'we were willing to break the law' and 'we wanted a mass base outside of the State', (in this sense they had an affiliation to Southall and did in fact have contact with them, which Manchester did not), Manchester was less involved in such self defence activities and rather than organising their own self-defence groups joined a telephone tree organised by South Manchester Law Centre to support individuals suffering racist attacks.<sup>43</sup> AYM (Manchester) did however recognise the right to self-defence and organised meetings in support of a mosque that was being attacked and were very supportive of the kind of activities that Bradford and Southall were involved with.

In temperament, Manchester and Bradford organisations were different – Manchester, as one member from Bradford mentioned was 'more mature' and less angry. Some of the members were older, they were from a more middle class and intellectual background and they had Marxist Leninist training in their home countries. They understood how political organisations worked, which members from Bradford only learnt through the experience of being involved with the White left and liasing with them. The angry young man image that is often associated with the youth movements, which very much applies to Bradford, does not characterise Manchester.

### **Women and the AYM (Manchester)**

Apart from the middle class, intellectual and anti-imperialist experience of the Asian Youth Movement (Manchester), two key members of the movement were also women. Manchester as a much bigger, more affluent urban environment, attracting a more diverse group of people had women members from the subcontinent who came from educated middle class, urban families. This meant that as Manchester developed as an organisation, especially with the political experience that a couple of members brought with them, they were able to organise a women's wing to increase the involvement of women. They were the only AYM in the country that were able to do this, and although the women's wing was small, it did enable Manchester to not only mobilise women generally but also to offer women that were the focus of many immigration and anti-deportation cases, support from other women. Manchester became a centre for immigration campaigning over the years. The class and intellectual base of Manchester may be one of the reasons why their focus was largely on campaigning against the immigration laws rather than on issues of community self-defence.

Although more women were involved in Manchester, the treatment of women in both the Bradford and Manchester AYMs was commented on by one of the women members in Manchester, Kuldeep, in quite favourable terms. She came from Southall to Manchester as a student and she compares the three organisations:

...what I like about Manchester was it was quite formal, and I think this is something, that discipline ... I think Bradford AYM was an inspiration in the way they were structured and they were quite formal about things in a way I think Southall wouldn't have been, because Southall had a degree of familiarity and a bit of a macho culture. And I liked the formality of Bradford and Manchester; their structures, committees, Chairs, you know, appointments, all that kind of stuff... it was not just about people's egos and about people who were popular being appointed to positions and it was more democratic and fair, and encouraged women to get involved as well as stand for positions... People were much more committed to the cause and it was less about egos.<sup>44</sup>

Kuldeep's comments make it important to look at the similarities as well as the differences of the various youth movements and perhaps the recognition by some members in Bradford of the political maturity of some of the AYM (Manchester) members, could imply that the methods and involvement of women in Manchester impacted on Bradford. It was in fact after the AYM (Manchester) was established that more women were involved in Bradford.

It is clear that the two organisations influenced each other in their work. The AYM (Bradford) had in fact supported the development of the AYM (Manchester) sending speakers to initial meetings to talk about the need for an AYM and to support the development of a youth movement in Manchester. The AYMs in Manchester and Bradford worked closely with each other for about 2-3 years from 1979-1982 and members of both Asian youth movements believed in the need for a national movement. Although this was never actually established, the fact that they chose to call themselves the AYM (Bradford) and the AYM (Manchester) rather than the Manchester AYM or the Bradford AYM was because they wanted to establish names that would suggest that they were branches of the same organisation. If we look at the aims and objectives of the AYM (Manchester) and the AYM (Bradford) they are almost identical. The AYM (Manchester) in fact appears to have copied the aims and objectives from Bradford's magazine *Kala Tara* when they established and published their own magazine, *Liberation* a year later. The close ties were partly created because two of the student members in the AYM (Manchester) were from Bradford and had been involved in the AYM (Bradford) before coming to Manchester. One of their elder brothers remained involved in the AYM (Bradford) so familial and friendship connections obviously created a strong bond. The two organisations supported each other's activities and also worked together in organising one key campaign - the Anwar Ditta Defence Campaign.<sup>45</sup> Both AYMs in Manchester and Bradford were instrumental in enabling Anwar to successfully win the right to bring her young children to England in 1981, even when all legal processes of appeal were lost.

The close interrelationship should not however cloud a fundamental difference between the two organisations, which I think impacted on the legacy of influence in the towns in which they operated. Bradford, as a larger AYM with a range of younger members who had few family commitments, had members travel to various parts of the country, supporting activity in London, Sheffield, Southall, Leicester, Birmingham. As organisers from a left tradition, they realised the importance of building networks and their youthful energy enabled them to do this, while at the same time having a very strong local community base. Manchester did share some of these links but the more limited size of their organisation and the members' commitments in terms of jobs and families did not enable them to move for weeks or months to help organisers in other areas. Manchester, however, like all AYMs did support sister organisations in campaigns against police victimisation, deportation and in international solidarity campaigns including the anti-apartheid struggle, the Irish republican struggle and the Palestinian struggle. They attended meetings, demos and pickets. Bradford's strong base within a working class community also made them much more able and interested in supporting

workers and trade union struggles. Manchester did not organise trade union activity, although they supported such activity, since as students and community workers, they were much less involved with workers' struggles on a day to day level.

Bradford generally was more prolific in terms of its organisational activity. Its size and its rootedness within Bradford as well as the young men's ability and energy to travel and make links meant that they were involved with dozens of anti-deportation campaigns, anti-fascist actions, campaigns against police violence, international issues such as Palestine, Ireland and the revolution in Iran. But they never forgot the importance of local community activity, and, for example, were instrumental in the success of the Drummond School Parents Action Committee which eventually led to the sacking of the racist Headmaster Ray Honeyford.

There is one final comparison that should be highlighted between Manchester and Bradford which enables us to think about the organisations and their impact, and that is the memory of them in the two cities. In Manchester itself there is very little community memory of the AYM and its activities, partly because the movement was smaller, but also because as a city with aspiring individuals and as an organisation partly made up of students, the majority of the key AYM members do not live in Manchester anymore. Many have moved to London. In Bradford there are many individuals who are still active in the city, in different – often more official capacities - as youth workers, education officers and one as an MP, but they are still there, as are others that worked on the fringes of the organisation. The AYM (Bradford) also continued as an organisation until 1989, although by this stage it had been absorbed into council structures and operated as a youth Centre. The AYM (Manchester) started later and had dissipated long before the AYM (Bradford) collapsed. The town of Bradford too and the local paper, *The Telegraph* and *Argus* retain the memory of the AYM and recalled them when the riots took place in 2001. As Anwar mentioned when talking about the 2001 riots:

'the newspaper after the troubles, *The Telegraph* and *Argus* said 'we wish the Asian Youth Movement was round again, at least with the Asian Youth Movement we could speak.'<sup>46</sup>

Although the organisation in Bradford split into the AYM (Bradford) and the United Black Youth League (UBYL) in early 1981,<sup>47</sup> their prolific activity and also their uncompromising belief in their right to defend themselves also explains why the Bradford 12 case took place in Bradford as opposed to a city like Manchester and why it won such widespread support. As one of the defence solicitor's from the trial, Ruth Bundy commented, 'it was the sons of the community that were on trial'.<sup>48</sup> The Bradford 12 were charged with conspiracy to cause explosives and endanger lives after petrol bombs that had not been used were found in undergrowth after July 11th when it had been rumoured that fascists were coming to Bradford. The defence case rested on the right of the community to self-defence. The response to the campaign and their need for support which was given nationally was in many ways driven by their phenomenal ability in the previous years to make links, support other groups and individuals across the country in almost every town that had begun to organise. There were also other reasons which had national resonance such as the disturbances in towns and cities across the country in 1981 which meant that anti-racists nationally were looking to support a campaign against police victimisation and repression. It is undoubtedly the case however, that the AYM and UBYL, through local community organisation created a national campaign and legal history of the right of a community to self-defence.

It is clear from exploring the experiences of two Asian Youth Movements, that thinking about local experiences enables us to understand how and why community organisations develop in particular ways and with particular strengths. AYM (Bradford)'s integration with the local community enabled it to be large and influential. The experience of White left organisations by central members of the AYM enabled them to develop structures that would formalise the movement quite quickly. Physical landmarks such as the Central Library and the Fourth Idea Bookshop also enabled the youth. The

movement was also made of very young school aged males and this characterised the way they worked including the activities which led to the Bradford 12 trial. Manchester with its older, middle class and intellectual base was calmer and formal in its structures. They were able to see the importance of involving women within the organisation, but were also hampered in their activities by the lack of an effective community base in any particular area. The nature of the cities themselves and the histories of migrations within them also impacted on the nature of the organisations that developed.

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45. Anwar Ditta was a woman in Rochdale who fought to be reunited with her children who she had left in Pakistan while she re-established her home in Britain. She was born in Birmingham and had been sent by her father to Pakistan as a young girl.
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