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Muslims in Bristol and Britain:

FAQ's ●

Myths ●

... and the Facts ●

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Muslims in Bristol and Britain

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Introduction

This booklet was commissioned as part of the council's commitment to mythbusting and is the third booklet of its type (see previous mythbusting booklets about asylum seekers and refugees and gypsies and travellers).

The booklet is supported by a short summary leaflet and a longer web resource, both of which can be found at www.bristol.gov.uk/equality



Islam is one of the main faiths practised in Britain today. Since 9/11 and the London bombings in July 2005 there has been a rise in Islamophobia. Myths about Islam and Muslims are common. It is important that the wider community has access to information about Islam and diverse Muslim communities in Bristol and Britain, in order to promote better understanding and community cohesion.

1 Why are Muslims always in the news?

This booklet aims to dispel some of the most common myths and stereotypes about Islam and Muslims using direct quotes from the media as examples and challenging them with facts derived from the Qur'an and other sources. This chapter deals with issues such as terrorism which are often in the news.

Although core Islamic beliefs will be discussed later (Chapter 4), before proceeding any further, it is helpful to understand some basic concepts. Essentially, "Islam" means "surrender" or "submission" to the will of God. A "Muslim" is a follower of Islam and someone who is willingly submissive to God's will, believes in the **five pillars of Islam** and the **six articles of faith** (see web resource). For Muslims, Islam is more than "just a religion", it is often described as a complete "way of life", or "**Deen**" which encompasses personal, social, economic and political aspects with spiritual and religious observance. The Muslim holy book is called the "**Qur'an**" and was revealed over a period of 23 years (from

610 to 632 in the 7th century) to the **Prophet Muhammad** who Muslims believe to be the last and final Prophet and Messenger of God. According to the Qur'an it corrects any misinterpretations of original scriptures given to previous prophets. It has remained unchanged since its revelation over 1400 years ago¹.

● What does Islam say about terrorism?

There is no such thing as "Islamic terrorism".

Some politicians, individuals and sections of the media wrongly create the impression that terrorism, suicide bombings and violent jihad are part of Islam's teachings and that "all terrorists are Muslims". None of these are true. For instance, data from the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report of 2007 for Europol (European Law Enforcement Organisation), shows that of the 498 reported terrorist attacks across Europe in 2006, only one was carried out by a Muslim.

There is no room for terrorism within Islamic teachings. The Qur'an (the Muslim holy book), is categorical that the killing of innocents is completely unjustified. Muslim scholars and organisations in the UK and across the world have repeatedly stated that Islam does not condone terrorism. In fact, the Qur'an says that the killing of one innocent person is the equivalent to the killing of the whole of mankind. For example:

"If anyone kills a person – unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land – it is as if he kills all mankind."

(The Qur'an, 5:32, trans. MAS Haleem, 2005)

The key message of the Qur'an is one of peace, faith, hope and justice among fellow human beings. Islam is essentially, a religion of the "Middle way" and not one of extremes. The Qur'an warns believers not to become "oppressors" and continually urges **forgiveness and restraint**.

Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the Madrid bombings in 2004, the London bombings of July 7 2005, and

recent attempted car bomb attacks in London and Glasgow in June 2007, Muslim organisations and scholars across the world have repeatedly issued statements condemning the attacks. They have been clear that the actions of the bombers are against the teachings and spirit of Islam and represent the views of only a tiny number of extremists who many have regarded as outside the folds of Islam. A campaign titled "Not in our name" was launched across the UK with large, full-page adverts in newspapers, billboards, buses and the underground. It highlights Muslims' rejection of attempts to link violence and suicide bombing with the teachings of Islam. It has been organised by a large coalition of Muslim organisations across the UK, including Muslim doctors.

- To see the campaign advert go to: <http://www.islamispeace.org.uk/>

Some critics of Islam point to verses in the Qur'an that they claim promote violence, war and intolerance. Similarly, some extremists use "snipped" quotes to back-up their own causes and actions. For

example, "*kill them wherever you encounter them*" (Qur'an, 2:191). However, if we look at the verses that come before and after these quotes, we can see the verse is talking about **self-defence**. This is the **only** context in which the Qur'an speaks about war or fighting. This is very clear throughout the Qur'an.

This is why it is wrong to talk of "Islamic terrorism" because there is nothing "Islamic" about terrorism.

● What is "jihad"?

"Jihad" does not mean "holy war". "Jihad" is an Arabic word which means "to struggle" or "strive" in the way of God for good against evil. However, it is frequently misinterpreted as "holy war" by the media.

The primary meaning of jihad is the moral, inner struggle a Muslim faces in their daily efforts to practice Islam. This is sometimes known as the "greater jihad". This includes actions such as being on time with the five daily prayers or not back-biting, for example. The "lesser jihad" includes

Myths:

"Almost all terrorists are Muslims"

The Sun, 9 July 2007

"Muslims have a very long tradition of jihadist slaughter"

The Guardian, 22 July 2005

"...more than half of our Muslims feel sympathy for suicide bombers in Israel and a fairly hefty minority (one in eight, at the last count) for similar action against the cockroach imperialist infidel scum (ie you and me) over here."

The Spectator, 7 July 2007.

¹ The translation used to cite all quotations from the Qur'an is MAS Abdel Haleem's (2005) *The Qur'an, A New Translation*, Oxford University Press.

armed struggle but can only apply when declared by an appropriate authority and even then there are strict conditions such as self-defence or when protecting and freeing the oppressed and weak, or when establishing freedom of worship.

Contrary to stereotypes, **Islam does not promote the spread of Islam by the sword or force.** The Qur'an is very clear on this when it says: *"Let there be no compulsion in religion"* (Q.2:256). This applies even in times of war.

● What does Islam say about Suicide Bombings?

In Islam suicide is **expressly forbidden.** The Qur'an states:

"You who believe, do not kill each other [yourselves], for God is merciful to you. If any of you does those things, out of hostility and injustice, We shall make him suffer Fire..."

(Qur'an, 4:29–30, trans. MAS Haleem, 2005)
[Abdalhaqq and Aisha Bewley, 1999]

The Qur'an is equally clear that even though the right to **self-defence** is given, it

is forbidden to lash out against an entire population of people as this oversteps the limits of self-defence. **Forgiveness and peace**, one of the predominant themes in the Qur'an, is by far the preferred response.

"You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially: do not let hatred of others lead you away from justice, for that is closer to awareness of God."

(Qur'an, Surah al-Maidah, 5:8, trans. MAS Haleem, 2005)

- See weblink to:
**Are Muslims a "threat from within"?
 Is Islam compatible with British values?**

● What is Shari'ah Law? Do Muslims want Britain to be ruled by Shariah law?

Shari'ah represents the **ethical and moral code of Islam** based on the Qur'an and the **Sunnah** (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). It includes all the religious, ethical and legal systems, which guide the lives of practising Muslims. Shari'ah is not an ancient fixed code – it is flexible, evolving and adaptable to different historical and cultural contexts.

For instance, a legal ruling that might have been suitable in Arabia 1400 years ago may not (and probably will not) be helpful or suitable for Muslims living in Britain today. There are specialist judges in Islamic law called **Qadis**, who are qualified in Islamic jurisprudence – a very detailed discipline – to offer Islamic judgements on a case by case basis and help guide Muslims in applying Islamic law in their lives if they so wish.

Since Shari'ah is such a misunderstood concept, it is important to recognise that there are differences between simplistic

cultural interpretations of Islam claimed to be "Shari'ah", from the rigorous and detailed application and processes of Islamic jurisprudence with properly trained Qadis.

Contrary to the impression some newspapers and opinion polls give, Shari'ah law is not about cutting off people's hands, or stoning people to death. Nor do Muslims in Britain want to impose "Shari'ah law" on the rest of the country. Instead, when Muslims talk about Shari'ah law in Britain, they are talking about the right to live according to Islamic principles if they choose to.

In practical terms this means things like being able to buy and eat halal food, the right to pray, the right to get married in an Islamic way. These are practices that in no way contradict the law of the land. It is no different to Jewish people wanting to eat kosher food, or marry according to Jewish traditions.

Interestingly, the Bank of England, with the support of the Government and some Muslim experts on finance, has introduced schemes for some **Islamic financial services** in order to facilitate religious prohibitions on usury (earning interest). These do not mean interest-free loans, but are closer to a form of joint investment. Muslims have warmly welcomed these provisions by the Government and many high street banks are now offering Islamic banking services.

Further Reading

- Top Ten Myths About Islam
www.islam.about.com/od/commonmisconceptions/tp/myths
- EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report of 2007, Europol, The Hague, Netherlands.
www.europol.europa.eu/publications/tesat/tesat2007.pdf
- Islamic Bank of Britain
www.islamic-bank.com/islamicbanklive/GuestHome/1/Home/1/Home.jsp

Myths:

"...almost half of Britain's Muslims who want Sharia law in this country and do not remotely, therefore, share our norms and values."

The Spectator, 7 July 2007.

"Muslim radicals have established their own draconian court systems in Britain. Controversial Sharia courts have been set up in major towns and cities to impose Islamic law and enable Muslims to shun the legitimate British legal system."

Daily Express, 30 April 2007

2 Do Muslims expect “special treatment”?

All citizens want to have equal access to services when they need them. The development of social policy in Britain and Europe in recent years reflects the multi-racial and multi-faith societies we now live in and the ways we think about social differences across and within differing groups of people.

This means ensuring that services such as education, social welfare and health for example, develop policies that reflect the religious and cultural diversity of contemporary communities in Britain. Practical examples include making sure that religious needs are catered for, such as the provision of halal (for Muslims) and kosher (for Jews) food in schools and hospitals; that schools accommodate religious concerns about modesty in uniforms, sports and religious education; that social care provision respects religious, cultural and gender-related sensitivities; and that religious holidays are recognised, amongst others.

For employers, public authorities and service providers, it also means that they cannot discriminate against anyone on the basis of religion or belief. There have been cases in the past where Muslim men wearing beards or women wearing the hijab, have been told to remove their beard or hijab, or been dismissed from their job, or been discriminated against at the point of job recruitment because of their appearance. Muslims have also faced difficulties with some employers failing to appreciate the importance of the five daily prayers and the attendance of Friday congregational prayers for men, or the need to take a day off for religious celebrations like Eid. The 1976 Race Relations Act did not accommodate Muslims as they are a religious group although Sikhs and Jews were protected as racial groups rather than religious ones². Religious discrimination in employment was eventually made an offence in 2003 following European legislation.

Another key practical example has been the recognition of **faith identities** and the inclusion, for the first time, of a religion

question in the last Census in 2001. This has helped policy-makers to not only have more accurate data about the numbers and diversity of people in Britain, but crucially, it assists national and local government to plan for services that reflect the needs of differing communities across the country. It also highlights where significant social disparities in terms of employment, income, education, health and housing persist across differing faith groups. Many Muslims have welcomed these measures because some social policies only responded to people’s needs on the basis of their race or ethnicity leaving those who preferred to identify through their faith excluded or discriminated against with no protection in law.

There have been other calls for recognition by Muslim communities. The publication of the “Satanic Verses” and the controversial Danish cartoons that mocked and insulted the Prophet and Islam in 2005, have led to calls from Muslim organisations for the blasphemy laws to be extended to include and protect Islam from insults in the same

way that Christian communities are protected. These have led to controversial debates around the right to free speech. Violent demonstrations by a minority of Muslims against offensive publications such as the Danish cartoons in some parts of the world have contributed to stereotypes of Islam as restricting freedom of expression and delivering harsh penalties for those who commit blasphemy. In fact, the Qur’an commands Muslims to question all things, including the nature of creation and the Creator. It encourages debate among Muslims and non-Muslims on issues of faith and acknowledges the individual’s right not to accept Islam illustrated by the following quotes:

“Had your Lord willed, all the people on earth would have believed.”
(10:99)

Say “Now, the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so”.

(18:29)
(Qur’an, trans. MAS Haleem, 2005)

Since Muslims believe the Qur’an to be the true word of God and revere all Prophets, especially Muhammad (peace be upon him), insults directed against Islam are taken seriously but even here, the Qur’an recommends restraint in response and forgiveness:

“[...] you are sure to hear much that is hurtful from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with God. If you are steadfast and mindful of God, that is the best course.”
(3:186)

“When you come across people who speak with scorn about Our revelations, turn away from them until they move onto another topic.”
(6:68)
(Qur’an, trans. MAS Haleem, 2005)

Muslims have also lobbied for the introduction of legislation against incitement to religious hatred, and for the state funding of Muslim schools, in the same way that Church of England, Catholic and a small number of Jewish schools are funded.

Myths:

“Muslims are always demanding special favours for their culture, while assuming a victim mentality.”

It also seems that only Muslims have freedom of speech; all others are silenced by the police.”

*Daily Telegraph,
17 September 2006*

² Sikhs were given protection as a racial group under the Act in 1982 following the Mandela decision of the House of Lords judges.

● Do Muslims want to integrate into British society?

Many Muslim groups have argued that a faith-sensitive approach is one that can benefit all faith communities, not just Muslim, and lead to a culturally and religiously enriched society. This is not a view shared by those who argue that religion is a private matter and so should remain outside politics and public policy. They argue that the development of multicultural policies have led to a segregation of society along religious lines, a rise of religious “fundamentalism” and extremism, and a failure of Muslims in particular, to “integrate”.

● Does multiculturalism lead to Muslim separateness and extremism?

“Multiculturalism” has been blamed for creating “segregated societies” especially amongst Britain’s Muslim communities. Some commentators have described it as “dead” and have instead called for “integration”. But what does multiculturalism in Britain mean and how does it relate to Muslims?

Multiculturalism, and social policies derived from this concept, have traditionally been defined on the basis of ethnic origin. However, many Muslims have wanted to identify themselves through their faith and not through their ethnic origin because a faith-based identity is felt to be more relevant to Muslim needs and lifestyles.

September 11 and 7/7 have led some politicians and media commentators to question Muslims’ loyalty to Britain and whether Muslims are committed to what are understood as being “core British values” of freedom, tolerance, democracy, sexual equality and secularism. Instead of viewing religious identities as part of wider equality struggles, they are seen as a threat to multiculturalism.

However, experts on Muslim communities and multiculturalism have argued that Muslim campaigns for recognition and equality on religious grounds are in fact, a very **British phenomenon** and one that demonstrates how Muslim communities have integrated into non-Muslim British society through their various campaigns for recognition as British Muslims. They are not asking for “special treatment”, but are simply asking the State to respect, recognise and accommodate Muslim religious and cultural beliefs as Christians, Jews and Sikhs are.

There are now many studies that highlight how Muslims are discriminated against in schools, employment, health

and social welfare, the media and arts. Muslims are therefore asking for **equality** and protection from such discrimination and in doing so, are seeking **integration**, not “assimilation” or segregation.

- To read more see: Tariq Modood, “Muslims and European multiculturalism” openDemocracy, (15 May 2003). www.opendemocracy.net/people-migrationeurope/article_1214.jsp

Islamophobia – does it really exist?

Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim discrimination, refers to the “dread or hatred of Islam and therefore, to the fear and dislike of all Muslims” (Runnymede Trust, 1997). It can include institutional discrimination against a person because she or he is Muslim, physical assault, verbal abuse, or speech or writing that is intended to cause harassment, public disturbances or lead to racial or religious tensions. Islamophobic attitudes and practices can be both latent (hidden) as well as overt.

In 1997, the Runnymede Trust, a race relations think-tank, published a report

entitled, “*Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*”, highlighting the extent and nature of Islamophobia in Britain. The report noted **discrimination** in employment in recruitment and promotion into management positions, in social service provision, in education, health and housing. It also noted **exclusion** from politics and government, and **violence** perpetrated via physical assaults, vandalism of property and verbal abuse. Finally, it noted **prejudice** in both the media and everyday interactions. A follow-up report in 2004 highlighted how the media have contributed to stereotypes and prejudice against Muslims. The recent Danish cartoon controversy and articles that portray Islam and Muslims as violent or evil, and the quotes highlighted in this booklet, are typical examples.

There is now a considerable amount of research documenting Islamophobia. Following the attacks of 9/11, the European Union’s Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) published a wide-ranging study into Islamophobia across 15 EU member states in 2002. It included examples of serious attacks such

Myths:

Second-generation Muslims have not only failed to integrate; a small, dangerous minority are so filled with hatred for our country that they turn into suicide bombers.

Daily Telegraph, 23 August 2007

as death threats, attacks on mosques and private homes, physical assaults using beer bottles and pig parts, attacks on women wearing the hijab, and the bullying of Muslim school children. It also included “lower-level” hostility such as verbal abuse.

Following the 7/7 London attacks, a number of local mosques were attacked. There were also incidents of Sikh Gurdwaras (temples) being attacked which were mistakenly assumed to be mosques. The Bristol Evening Post reported a particularly horrifying incident in June 2007 where a 7 months pregnant Somali woman and her child were physically and verbally attacked and racially abused.

- See weblink: Bristol Evening Post, “Police Urged To Protect Somali Community”, 19 July 2007

www.thisisbristol.co.uk

Muslim schools in Britain – do they lead to segregated societies?

“If a Muslim child is educated in a school where the vast majority of other children are also Muslim, how can we expect him to work, live and interact with people from other cultures when he leaves school? ...This is a ticking time-bomb waiting to explode.”

BBC News Online, Thursday, 26 April 2007.

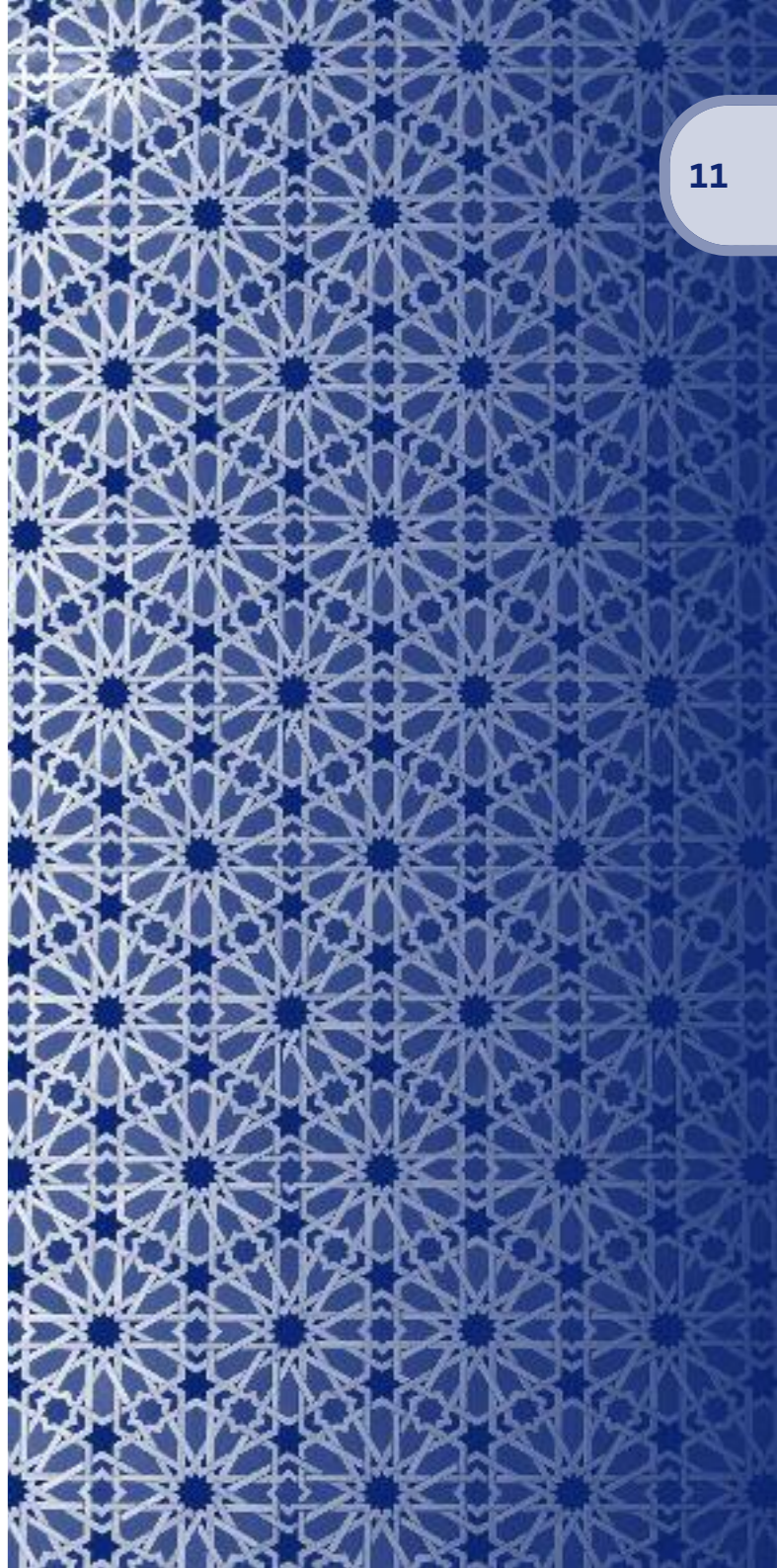
Muslim faith schools were first granted state funding, after several years campaigning, in 1998. Despite there being **only 7 Muslim schools** in Britain, the presence of Muslim schools has been a source of repeated controversy in Britain, particularly in the media. The following shows the numbers of other faith schools receiving government funding³.

• Church of England	4,646
• Roman Catholic	2,051
• Jewish	37
• Muslim	7
• Sikh	2
• Hindu (expected 2008)	1
• Other (Greek Orthodox and Seventh Day Adventist)	2

Some of the criticisms directed towards Muslim faith-schools – both state funded and private – are based on mis-informed stereotypes. Critics suggest that Muslim schools encourage religious extremism, intolerance and segregation across varying ethnic and faith communities, fail to prepare children for citizenship in a multicultural society and discriminate in the educational quality against girls. Some have even tried to link the northern riots in the summer of 2001 and terrorist events such as the London bombings of 2005 with faith schools, though there is no evidence to support these claims.

However, research published in 2006 by Lancaster University with over 400 fifteen year olds and their attitudes towards race, religion and cultural integration, found that children in schools populated by mostly Asian and Muslim pupils showed a greater degree of racial tolerance than pupils attending mostly white populated schools (The Burnley Project, 2006).

³Figures for Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu and other groups from speech by Ed Balls, Secretary of State for the Department for Children, Schools and Families, 10 September 2007; Figures for Church of England schools from BBC Online, 31 October 2006; Figures for Roman Catholic schools from Hansard, 6 February 2007.



Another recent study by Bristol University showed that Muslim schools could be a positive addition to the education system and an effective way of integrating religious minorities into British citizenship (Meer, 2007).

In addition, the evidence emerging from Muslim faith schools is one of educational success on a par with non-Muslim schools.

This is certainly true of Bristol’s first Independent Islamic school, the **Andalusia Academy Bristol**, which opened its doors in 2005. It’s OFSTED Report for 2007 gave it an outstanding evaluation.

See: www.andalusiaacademy.org/

• **Further Reading: Multiculturalism and Islamophobia**

Tariq Modood (2005) *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain*, University of Minnesota Press.

Tariq Modood (2007) *Multiculturalism (Themes for the 21st Century)*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Mohammad Siddique Seddon (2004) *British Muslims Between Assimilation and Segregation: Historical, Legal and Social Realities*, Leicester, Islamic Foundation.

Runnymede Trust (1997) *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All*, The Runnymede Trust, London.

See weblink for more references.

3 Do Muslim women have any rights in Islam?

The status of Muslim women remains one of the most misunderstood issues about Islam, resulting in some of the most distorted stereotypes. Some common myths about Muslim women and Islam state that Muslim women have no rights, are oppressed and have an inferior status to men, that Muslim women are not allowed an education or career, have no say in their choice of marriage partner, and are forced to wear veils.

Ignorance of the Shari'ah leads to further stereotypes around the "stoning of adulterous women", Muslim men having multiple wives and women's lack of rights in marriage and divorce.

Unfortunately, some stereotypes are also the result of male-biased, **cultural misinterpretations** and a lack of understanding of Islam by some Muslims, which, over the years, have distorted the Qur'an's very clear message of **equality between men and women**. For instance, the appalling situation of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban's interpretation of Islam, and the tight restrictions on women's movements in Saudi Arabia, or issues such as "forced marriages" and "honour killings" are often wrongly portrayed by the media and some Muslims alike, as sanctioned by the Qur'an, when they are not.

Instead, the Qur'an emphasises how men and women are created "different but equal". This recognises physical and biological strengths and weaknesses between men and women. Recognition of this forms the basis of many Muslim women's movements for empowerment and enables Muslim women to argue for their rights by referring directly to the Qur'an. Many of the rights given to Muslim women over 1400 years and detailed in the Qur'an were, and still are,

revolutionary concepts (see below) and many of these rights were ones Western women had to fight for in the 20th century.

In order to avoid further stereotyping then, it is especially important that distinctions between what Islam actually teaches about the position of women, and cultural misinterpretations of the faith should be understood.

Recent years have seen a rapid growth in the numbers of people, especially women, converting (or reverting) to Islam because they find the egalitarian message of the Qur'an liberating. This in itself represents a direct challenge to stereotypes about Islam.

● Rights of Women under Islam⁴

Below is a selection of Muslim women's rights enshrined in Islam:

Economic Rights

The Right of Independent Ownership: This involves the right to manage her own money and property independently. She can buy, sell, mortgage, borrow, lend, sign contracts, set up businesses, etc. These rights are regardless of her marital position. She is therefore, economically independent.

The Right to Inheritance: Women's rights to inheritance are clearly guaranteed in the Qur'an. Unfortunately, cultural pressures can mean that women often feel obliged to renounce these rights to male members of the family.

We can compare the economic rights accorded to women in the Qur'an to the position of women in England who only attained similar property rights by the 19th century under "The Married Woman's Property Act of 1870". This

allowed women to keep earnings or property acquired after marriage; a further "Married Woman's Property Act in 1882" allowed women to retain what they owned at the time of marriage. In France, similar rights were not recognised in law until 1937.

● What does Islam say about forced marriage, domestic violence and honour killings?

The Right to Marry Whom She Likes.

Islam regards marriage and the family as a valuable institution and attaches great importance to its well-being. Islamic marriages are contracts made between the husband and the wife. In order for a marriage to be valid, it must be between two consenting adults. **There is no room for coercion** in marriage and Islam encourages women to choose their spouses.

Both husbands and wives have specified responsibilities within marriage. Men have financial responsibilities in providing

Myths:

"In Islam it is still the year 1427. They have had no reformation. The more Islamic a state is, the more its women are shrouded and confined..."

Mail on Sunday, 17 Sept 2006

"... 'honour killings' are largely a Muslim phenomenon... honour killings, the need to avenge the shame caused by a loss of honour, are rooted in values intrinsic to the way of life of many Muslims..."

The Times, 13 June 2007

"The Koran recommends the beating of women."

Daily Mail, 18 October 2007

⁴See Haiffa Jawad's book: *The Rights of Women in Islam, An Authentic Approach*, (1998), Macmillan Press.

for his wife and family, regardless of his wife's income or independent wealth. Women are not expected to be overburdened with domestic duties or restricted in their movements, or career. However, a woman's role as mother is highly valued and respected. There is a well known saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him): *"Paradise lies at the feet of your mother"*. Disobeying parents, especially mothers, is a great sin.

The Qur'an describes the relationship between husband and wife as follows: *"they, (your wives) are [close] as garments to you, as you are to them"* (Qur'an, 2.187). The **good treatment of wives is strongly emphasised** in various places in Islam's teachings. Indeed the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) own example of his actions and behaviour with his wives is exemplary.

Despite this, some interpretations of the Qur'an have wrongly led to stereotypes that suggest that the Qur'an condones "wife-beating". **This is not the case.** Here, it is important to understand the context of the verse most often cited in this

instance (Q.4.34) and that a proper translation is referred to. Asma Barlas, in her book *"Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an"*, (Chapter 6, 2002), discusses such issues in some detail. She notes that references understood by many to sanction wife-beating are poor translations. More accurate translations reveal the verse to actually prohibit and restrict violence against women.

The Right to end an Unsuccessful Marriage

Contrary to common stereotypes, women were also **given the right to initiate divorce** and have a say on issues concerning her marriage. She can either stipulate on her marriage contract **her right** to divorce instantly, or she can resort to an Islamic court to deal with the matter. Although divorce is permitted, it is regarded as one of the least favoured acts by God and therefore Islam places great importance on attempts at reconciliation in order to avoid divorce.

Again, contrary to stereotypes, divorce for a Muslim man is not easy. A husband planning on divorcing his wife has to ensure that a number of conditions are met for her well-being ranging from the time he may divorce his wife and how the process proceeds. Women who are divorced are permitted to marry again; there should be no social stigma attached to them.

Women's Right to Sexual Pleasure.

In Islam, "lawful sex", that is, within the context of marriage, has always been held in high esteem and regarded as an act of religious devotion for which the rewards in paradise are acknowledged. If a wife feels she is not sexually satisfied, or her husband is impotent, she has the right to seek divorce.

Men and women are **equally bound** to observe modesty and refrain from sexual relations outside marriage.

● Are Muslim women allowed an education and a career?

The Right to Education and a Career

Both men and women are equally encouraged to seek knowledge. The Qur'an commands all Muslims to exert effort in the pursuit of knowledge irrespective of their sex. However, today family circumstances, traditions and customs of specific Muslim countries may work to deprive women of education for reasons that have nothing to do with Islam.

Early Muslim societies recognised the need for educated and skilled women to serve their communities as doctors, teachers, mid-wives, and jurists for example, but also elevated women's status as homemakers. Even here, the social significance of mothers acting as educators of Islam to their children was highly valued for the overall well-being of Muslim societies. Provided external employment does not compromise a woman's dignity or her domestic obligations, **the right of women to work**

and earn an independent income is also enshrined in the Qur'an, again underlining the central importance of women's agency and right to contribute to society.

Women in early Muslim history, including the Prophet's (peace be upon him) wives, excelled in areas such as religious and legal studies, literature, medicine, military service, trade, politics and were skilled debaters in public arenas. Today, many women in Muslim countries are highly educated and have successful careers.

In Britain however, Muslim women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin currently have the lowest rates of economic participation. The reasons for Muslim women's unemployment in Britain are complex but are not sanctioned by Islam. In addition, the economic support and contributions that women make in family businesses, but which may not be categorised as "formal employment", are often ignored. However, recent research on South Asian Muslim women, higher education and employment shows growing participation in higher education and that their parents, **especially fathers,**

have been at the forefront in encouraging daughters to go to university and have professional careers (Ahmad, 2001; Ahmad, Modood and Lissenburgh, 2003; EOC, 2006; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006). This is a direct challenge to commonly held assumptions perpetuated in the media (and academia) about "over-bearing" Muslim fathers.

The Right to Election and Nomination to Political Offices and Participation in Public Affairs.

Islam encourages women to be active politically and be involved in decision-making. In early Islam, women were given opportunities to express themselves, to argue, and speak their mind in public. They led delegations, fought in war, gave judgements on political matters. Two of the Prophet's wives illustrated this right; one acted as political adviser and judge, another was active in grassroots politics. Both played a large part in compiling the Hadiths.

In recent times, the Muslim world has produced more female heads of state than the West. Women have been elected

as Presidents and Prime Ministers in countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey.

The Right to Keep Her Own Identity.

Women in Islam have always been entitled to keep her family name and not take her husband's name, thus indicating and acknowledging her own identity.

The Right to Respect.

Islam regards women as being equal to men as human beings, hence it emphasises mutual understanding and respect between the two sexes. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

“The more civil and kind a Muslim is to his woman, whether wife, daughter, or sister, the more perfect in faith he is.”

All the rights outlined above are enshrined within the Qur'an and Islam's teachings on the position of women. They directly contradict stereotypes commonly found in the media or from some politicians.

● Muslim women's clothing practices

Is the hijab a symbol of male oppression and women's subjugation in Islam?

The “**burqa**”, worn by Afghan women, is widely viewed in the West as symbolic of Muslim women's subjugation and oppression and Islam's “inability” to co-exist alongside Western concepts of modernity and democracy.

Myths:

“I find the hijab offensive; it is a symbol of female oppression and relegation of women to second-class status that offends universal principles of human rights.”

The Observer, 19 June 2005

What does Islam say about veiling?

There is a strong concept of modesty within Islam that applies equally to men as it does to women. This does not simply apply to dress but also includes modesty in one's personal behaviour at all times. In terms of clothing, for men this means he has to be covered from at least the naval to the knee, while women should cover all parts of their bodies except the face and hands.

The wearing of a veil is not an exclusively Muslim practice. Historically, it pre-dates Islam. In the Arabian context, it signified women who were from “elite” and wealthy backgrounds. Various veiling practices can also be found in Jewish and certain Christian traditions as well as Hindu and Sikh customs.

Hijab is an Arabic word that means “curtain”, but which also describes the many varied styles of head covering used by Muslim women all over the world. Some women also choose to wear the **jilbab** (an ankle-length coat, cloak or outer garment), and / or the **niqab**, a veil that

covers the whole face except the eyes and was the subject of Jack Straw's comments in 2006. The burqa refers to a head to toe shroud that leaves a space for the eyes. In some designs it also consists of gloves.

There is debate among Muslim theologians and Muslim women as to whether the hijab, jilbab, niqab and burqa constitute a religious requirement and are therefore compulsory. The disagreement centres on the interpretation of verses in the Qur'an that discuss modesty and relate to incidents in history where, in order to avoid molestation from non-Muslims, the Prophet's wives were asked to cover themselves:

“Prophet, Tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers, to make their outer garments hang low over them so as to be recognised and not insulted: God is most forgiving, most merciful.”

(Q.33:59–60, trans. MAS Haleem, 2005)

While some theologians argue that these verses suggest that all women should follow the practice of the Prophet's wives, others disagree, and argue that there is no explicit commandment in the Qur'an that

requires all Muslim women to dress in a particular way. They argue instead that the notion of modesty in dress and manner for both men and women is far more significant.

There is also a huge diversity of practice in Muslim women's attitudes to veiling. Many women who choose to wear the hijab for instance, say they find it personally liberating as it signifies that they should not be judged on their outward appearance, but rather judged for their strength of character and intelligence. Other women may choose to wear the hijab as a sign of their personal spirituality, faith and piety, while for others, it is a response to specific social and political climates. There are also huge variations in style of Muslim dress reflecting diverse cultural traditions. Some Muslim women prefer not to wear a hijab though remain committed to their faith as practising Muslims.

What all religious scholars do agree on is that there should be **no force** in matters of faith as the Qur'an says: “*Let there be no compulsion in religion*” (Q. 2:256, trans. MAS Haleem, 2005).

● Muslim women's empowerment and participation

For over 20 years, Muslim women's organisations across the country, like other women's organisations, work on a range of social welfare issues such as poverty, health, generational differences, access to education and employment, marital relations and divorce. In addition, Muslim women's groups have been at the forefront in tackling some of the most difficult and controversial issues affecting communities such as domestic violence, forced marriages, so-called “honour” related violence and in some instances, female genital mutilation.

Violence and abuse against women are not religious issues. They are instead reflections of personal relationships, tribal or cultural customs. Violence against women affects all communities. Figures from the British Crime Survey for instance, estimate that 1 in 4 women have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. On average, two women a week are killed by a current or former male

partner (Walby & Allen, 2004). An important point to note is the way stereotypes about Islam and Muslim women often result in media reporting that “blames” Islam so that Muslim families, cultures and religion are viewed as the “problem”, while cases of domestic violence in white, non-Muslim families are often reported as individual, relationship issues, or “crimes of passion”.

Within Bristol, there are several Muslim women’s voluntary organisations and groups providing a range of support and counselling services, offering practical advice to women seeking help with accessing benefits, language difficulties, befriending services, support for elders and youth groups and assistance with housing problems. Additional services offered include skills training and educational courses such as assertiveness training and self-defence classes, leisure and sports activities. Many organisations offer talks on women’s rights and empowerment in Islam. Some also run projects and classes for Muslim boys and young men and offer support for elderly Muslim men. All these services contribute

to the well-being not just of Muslims but to Bristol as a whole through empowering communities and encouraging better communication and dialogue within and across differing groups in Bristol.

Important features of Muslim women’s organisations are that they seek **empowerment for Muslim women through Islamic frameworks** that place the role of the family as central and promote an active engagement with religious (often male) scholars.

• *Further Reading*

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Barlas, A (2002) **Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an**, University of Texas Press.

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See weblink for more references

4 What are the core beliefs of Islam?

● Islam and Muslims

Chapter 1 briefly introduced some of the key terms about Islam and Muslims. This chapter will go on to build on these themes and aims to provide an overview of Islamic beliefs. It is important to stress that Islam is not just about observing rituals and reading the Qur’an. Muslims are required to develop a strong spiritual bond with God and derive their personal sense of morality from Islamic principles which in turn govern their thoughts, everyday actions, choices, intentions and interactions with others. This sense of “God consciousness” is known as “*taqwa*”. This is why Muslims talk about Islam as a complete “way of life”, or “*Deen*”.

● Do Muslims worship a different God from Jews and Christians?

“Allah” means the One and Only universal God of all humanity. “Allah” is not just a translation from Arabic of the English word “God”, but is also His personal name. It cannot be made masculine or feminine or pluralized. It is also wrong to think of Allah as the “Muslim God” alone.

When Muslims refer to “Allah”, they are referring to the same God that Christians and Jews refer to in English. Christians and Jews of Arab background also refer to God as “Allah” simply because Allah is the Arabic term for God. In the same way, the French word for God is “Dieu”, though no-one thinks the French have a separate God!

People living in the Middle East before the advent of Islam would also refer to Allah. For example, if we look at the original language of Jesus (peace be upon him) – **Aramaic**, still in use today by a small minority of people across the Middle East, we find that they also referred to God as Allah.

While the Christian idea of God is based on a trinity, Muslims believe that God is Unique and has no “Son”, partners or associates. However, there are many more shared commonalities between Judaism, Christianity and Islam than there are differences.

• See for example the very interesting article by historian William Dalrymple (2002), “**Many intricate links bind Christianity, Judaism and Islam**”: www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,864994,00.html

Throughout the Qur’an, Muslims are reminded that they are not the only ones who worship God. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are collectively known as the “**Abrahamic faiths**” since they share many common monotheistic beliefs. The Qur’an refers to Islam as “**the religion of Abraham**”, and calls Jews and Christians “**Ahle Kitab**”, meaning “People of the Book”. This title reflects a shared heritage with Muslims and how Jews and Christians were honoured with Prophets who brought revelations from God.

Fifth Pillar

The fifth Pillar of Islam is The **“Hajj”**, or Pilgrimage to Mecca. There are two types of pilgrimage:

- **Umrah:** the lesser pilgrimage which can be performed at any time but is not equal to the main Hajj;
- **Hajj:** the mandatory pilgrimage. There is a specified period for the Hajj during the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar known as Dhul Hijjah.

The Hajj is a duty on every Muslim who is financially and physically able to carry it out and any dependents remaining at home should also be provided for. It should be done at least once in a person’s lifetime. The purpose of the Hajj is the glorification of God and commemorates a number of events in the life of the Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) and his family in Mecca.

One of the most amazing sights of devotion is the mass circumnavigations known as **“Tawaf”**, of thousands of pilgrims, all in the same direction, around the cubical structure known as the **Ka’ba**,

Fourth Pillar

The fourth Pillar of Islam is **“Sawm”** or Fasting during the holy month of “Ramadan”. During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food, drink, smoking and intimate relations while fasting from dawn to sunset. The aim of the fast is to learn physical and mental self-control while Muslims focus on seeking God’s forgiveness for their sins and mistakes and developing their spiritual connection with God. By experiencing hunger and thirst, Muslims learn to become more compassionate towards the needy and show solidarity with the poor.

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar and is the month in which the first passages of the Qur’an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) over 1400 years ago. The end of Ramadan is marked by the festival of **Eid ul Fitr**.

Other prayers that must be performed in congregation are funeral prayers for the deceased and the prayer on the occasion of the two major festivals of **Eid ul Fitr** and **Eid ul Adha**.

● *Women and mosques*

Contrary to some stereotypes, women are permitted to attend and pray together in mosques though some mosques lack provision for separate women’s spaces. Prayer is a deeply spiritual and physical activity and so it is not appropriate for men and women to pray side by side. Women are however, exempt from any requirement to pray in congregation, which men are obliged to do.

Third Pillar

The third Pillar of Islam is **“Zakah”** or Obligatory Alms giving. This refers to the payment of a certain percentage of one’s assets to the needy.

the very sick). The timings and names given to the prayers are:

- **Fajr** or dawn prayer;
- **Dhur** or noon prayer;
- **Asr** or afternoon prayer;
- **Maghrib** or evening prayer;
- **Isha** or night prayer.

In order to perform the prayer, Muslims have to first ensure that they are physically and spiritually cleansed through a ritual washing known as **“Wudu”** or ablutions. Muslims must pray towards the **“Ka’ba”** or holy house in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, which the Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) built for the worship of Allah.

● *Why do Muslims congregate at mosques on Fridays?*

Muslims are called to prayer through the **“Adhan”** – a human voice calling the faithful to prayer. The Muslim holy day is Friday or **“Jumm’a”**, which is marked by a congregational service and a sermon, attendance of which is obligatory for men.

First Pillar

The first Pillar is the **“Shahada”** or testimonial which states, “There is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God”. This first Pillar is the very cornerstone of Islamic belief and requires that one confesses with full conviction that God is the one and only deity and that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the servant and messenger of God. Any person who utters this testimony with sincerity is a Muslim.

Acknowledgement of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also means that Muslims acknowledge all prophets. The most well known and often cited are **Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad** (peace be upon them all).

Weblink: Six Articles of faith

Second Pillar

The second Pillar of Islam is **“Salat”** or Prayer. The prayers are performed at five set times over the course of a day and are obligatory upon all adult Muslims (though there are some specific exceptions, eg for

The Qur’an also commands Muslims to protect from harm not only mosques, but also monasteries, synagogues, and churches – because God is worshipped therein.’

● *What about Jesus?*

Muslims revere and respect Jesus (peace be upon him), known in the Qur’an as Isa, as one of God’s greatest Messengers. The Qur’an confirms his miraculous virgin birth through the same power that brought Adam (peace be upon him) into being. The Qur’an holds Mary (known in Arabic as “Mariam”), in great esteem – in fact a whole chapter (Chapter 19) of the Qur’an is named after her. Muslims also believe that Jesus (peace be upon him), with God’s permission, performed many miracles and also refer to him as “the Messiah”.

● *Pillars of Islam*

There are five Pillars of Islam. These represent the essential basis, or infrastructure of Islam’s teachings and are obligatory upon all Muslims.

a simple 50 foot high cubical building, which is the first house on earth built for the worshipping of the one God.

Equality before God is an important factor in Islam and this is dramatically demonstrated during Hajj when all men and women are required to put away their regular clothing and any signs of wealth and following a bath, make a firm intention to perform the pilgrimage. This spiritual and physical preparation is known as entering into a state of **“ihram”**. It means abstaining from all worldly pleasures and refraining from disruptive, or indecent acts.

In addition, men have to wear just two pieces of towelling wrapped, not sewn, around the waist and chest leaving the right shoulder exposed. They must wear sandals and leave the head exposed. Women can wear what they want as long as it is modest and hides their bodies and any signs of wealth. They must leave their hands and faces exposed.

Eid-ul-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice) is celebrated throughout the Muslim world as a commemoration of Prophet

Abraham's (peace be upon him) willingness to sacrifice his son for God. Eid-ul-Adha is celebrated on the tenth day of the month of Dhul-Hijjah.

(Source, Jamal Badawi, Islamic Teachings Course, Volume 1, 1982)

● Other sources of religious guidance

In addition to the Five Pillars, there are two other sources of religious guidance:

- **“Sunnah”** : This is the established body of what the Prophet said, did, agreed to, or condemned. These are transmitted and preserved through the recorded sayings of the Prophet known as “hadiths”.
- **“Shari’ah”, or Islamic Law:** This represents the eternal, ethical and moral code of Islam based on the Qu’ran and Sunnah. It includes all the religious, ethical and legal systems which guide the lives of practising Muslims. It represents more than just family and criminal codes that are often portrayed in the media. Contrary to stereotypes,

Shari’ah is organic and growing and dependent on local contexts (See Chapter 2). The Shari’ ah requires human understanding to interpret it and as a result, you will often see different opinions among Muslim scholars for a particular issue. A **“fatwa”** is another misunderstood word. It is a legal opinion given by a Muslim religious scholar or legal authority and can relate to any matter that comes under Shari’ah law.

The Qur’an also distinguishes between actions or things that are lawful, permitted and beneficial, known as **“halal”**, and that which is unlawful, forbidden and regarded as sinful, known as **“haram”**. The most common examples where these terms are frequently heard relate to food.



● Visiting a mosque

Mosques are always happy to greet visitors wishing to know more about Islam. However, it is a good idea to check if a mosque is able to receive guests as some smaller mosques in particular may lack the resources to host visitors or the timing of request may be inconvenient. Larger mosques are usually able to arrange tours for individuals and groups alike.

There are also a few notes of etiquette that Muslims would appreciate when visitors enter a mosque. One of these requires that men and women dress modestly in accordance with Islamic teachings when entering a mosque. For men this means ensuring he is covered from at least the naval to the knee, while women should cover all parts of their bodies except the face and hands. Everyone has to remove their shoes before entering the prayer area; there are usually shoe racks for this purpose. Visitors are also expected to respect the separate prayer areas for men and women. It is better to avoid taking photographs, especially when people are praying. If in doubt, seek advice.

● Further Reading

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● Islam and Beliefs

Jamal Badawi (1982) **“Islamic Teachings Course”**, Volume 1, Islamic Propagation Centre International, Birmingham.

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See weblink for more references.

5 Who are the Muslims of Britain?

The history between Britain and “the East” pre-dates Islam to the times of the Roman Empire. Some Arabs serving in the legions settled in Britain. Interestingly, one of these men eventually became known as the patron Saint of England – St George. Later, coins from the 8th century minted by King Offa of Mercia (an ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom), and bearing the Islamic declaration of faith, “There is no God but God and He is without association”, show that there were early, positive relationships between Muslims and Britain.

See: www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/cm/g/gold_imitation_dinar_of_offa.aspx

There are also references to Muslims in the work of European scholars such as Chaucer in his Canterbury Tales (1386), while Queen Elizabeth I was known to have sought the naval assistance of the

Ottoman Sultan Murad against the Spanish Armada in the mid-1580s. She maintained trade relations with the Ottoman Empire to supplement the English fondness for sweets and luxurious goods and gave a Royal Charter to “The East India Company” in 1600. By Queen Victoria’s time, it became so influential it was used as a tool to effect control in India.

Trade saw a steady exchange of merchants and sailors from across the Orient, Arabian peninsula, Africa, India and the Americas arriving regularly in Britain’s ports. “Coffee houses” became a familiar feature in London for about 400 years, frequented by artists and writers and are even mentioned in the novels of Dickens. The first large group of Muslims in Britain were sailors recruited by the East India Company, arriving about 300 years ago but also included ship’s cooks, which, as the British taste for curries developed, eventually gave rise to the first Indian restaurant opening in the 19th century.

The earliest settled communities were from Yemen, who made homes in the port towns such as Cardiff and Liverpool and later moved to places like Sheffield and Birmingham, establishing the first mosques. However, the first purpose-built mosque was the Shah Jehan Mosque in Woking (1894), and was followed in 1944 by the famous Islamic Cultural Centre near London’s Regent’s Park opened by King George VI and built with a donation of £100,000 from Churchill’s government in recognition of Muslim support for the Allies during World Wars 1 and 2.

From the 1950’s onward, large numbers of migrants from Britain’s former colonies were invited to Britain to help in post-war reconstruction. Many Muslims arrived from the Indian sub-continent but Muslims in Britain today reflect the vast diversity of Muslims across the globe influencing their cultural practices, the way they dress, food they eat, languages, and customs. This diversity contributes to Britain’s overall success as a multicultural nation.

● Who are the Muslims in Bristol?

According to the last Census in 2001, there are now an estimated 1.6–1.8 million Muslims in the UK – nearly 4% of the population.

Bristol’s Muslims represent the longer established communities such as the Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Nigerians, Somalis, Turkish and Arabs, and newer migrants such as Iraqis, Kurds, Albanians, Libyans, Bosnians, and Kosovans. There are about 43 Muslim organisations in the region including 10 mosques and two Muslim councillors of Kashmiri and Bangladeshi origin.

Muslims in Bristol, like the rest of Britain, contribute hugely in terms of the cultural scene – music, fashions, art, languages, cuisine – and also to the social and economic health of Bristol. Local Muslim organisations regularly encourage active participation in Bristol through projects aimed at encouraging further training, employment and education of local Muslims, but also through holding social

and cultural events. "Radio Ramadhan Bristol", launched in 2005, the BMCS Sports Team, participation in numerous multi-cultural and faith events are just a few examples indicating a thriving and active community. Upcoming is the “Hazrat Bilal Islamic Centre”, which is currently under development. This is particularly aimed at young people and encourages diversity and community cohesion with an open door policy.

According to the last Census in 2001, there were approximately 7664 Muslims in Bristol, representing 2% of the total population. However, since then, recent population movements suggest this number is closer to around 30,000 representing about 7% of the population. The numbers of Somali Muslims in Bristol have increased in recent years as a result of the on-going crisis in Somalia and the resulting migration of refugees. Many of these newer migrants are not reflected in the Census. Other refugees come from places such as Iraq, Iran and Eritrea.

For further information on Bristol’s ethnic minorities, see:

- National Statistics Online: www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/00hb.asp
- CRE Ethnicity profiles: South West England, Bristol <http://www.cre.gov.uk/diversity/map/southwest/bristol.html>



6 Have Muslims contributed anything to civilisation or Britain?

Education and learning are highly valued in Islam. Early Muslim civilisations sparked some of the most significant and enduring scientific and intellectual contributions as well as everyday luxuries that are now viewed as part and parcel of our lives. Muslims in Britain have also made significant contributions to the well-being of British society.

The Manchester Museum of Science and Industry hosted a three-month exhibition in 2006 called “1001 Inventions” on the contributions of Arabs and Muslims to modern life. The exhibition, now on tour across the country, was in partnership with the Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilisation.

See: www.1001inventions.com

The exhibition covers Muslim contributions ranging from the inception of the first universities and libraries, the spreading of knowledge in areas such as philosophy, science and mathematics,

medicine and health, the first banking systems, Muslim contributions to art, architecture and interior design, food, cosmetics, toiletries and luxury goods.

● Language

The exhibition also gives visitors a chance to explore the Arabic origins of several words in modern day English language, such as “algorithm”, “magazine”, “loofah”, “alchemy”, “guitar”, and gazelle.

*To see more go to Arabic words in English:
<http://www.1001inventions.com/words>*

Muslims were responsible for the first translations of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and thus made these texts, and Arab commentaries, available for the medieval Western world. Many Muslim philosophers were also scientists and made significant advancements in the fields of optics, chemistry, geology, geography, climatology, botany, biology and psychology.

- *How Islam Inspired Scientific Advance*
- *Innovations in Islamic Sciences*
www.muslimheritage.com

In science and mathematics, we learn that early Muslims developed the concepts of **trigonometry** used in mathematics and astronomy that were later used by European scientists such as Copernicus. Other advances were in the fields of **algebra**, with the word itself derived from the Arabic al-Jabr that appeared in the title of a book by Muslim scholar, Mohammed bin Musa Al-Khwarizmi. Muslim mathematicians also drew on the earlier scholarship of Greeks and Hindus and developed the use of “**zero**” (“zephirum” or “sifr”) in maths and the concepts of **addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and decimal numbers**.

The exhibition shows how many of today’s surgical instruments and techniques are based on early models developed by Muslim doctors such as Al-Zahrawi, known in the West as Abulcasis, in the 10th century. The Muslim philosopher and scientist, Ibn Sina (980-1037), also known as “Avicenna”, wrote a textbook, the

Canon of Medicine, that was used throughout Europe. The first free health systems were also founded in the early 9th century in Baghdad.

The beauty and breadth of Islamic art and architecture, with its characteristic geometric and floral patterns still influences and inspires art and design in interiors, exteriors and gardens today. These can be seen in the design of the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, which was strongly influenced by mosque design in its four large, bulbous domes and interior design. Similarly, the work of the designer William Morris is clearly influenced by the floral patterns found in Persian carpets that were popular in 19th century England.

See: The impact of Islamic arts on the West www.islamicart.com/main/architecture/impact.html

Cosmetics such as eye kohl (derived from the Arabic al-khol), lipstick, and perfume oils, and toiletries such as under-arm deodorants and hand lotions were important to early Muslims. Soap, for example, was developed in 7th century Middle East and was very popular

amongst Muslims from all social backgrounds at a time when Medieval Europe shunned the idea of regular bathing.

See: Muslim Contribution to Cosmetics
www.muslimheritage.com

● Contributions of Muslims in Britain

Today, Muslims in Britain contribute to its vibrant diversity in a wide range of fields from the sciences, medicine and health care, the legal profession, government, financial services, politics, the arts, the social sciences, community and voluntary services, sport, media and entertainment.

The Muslim News newspaper hosts The Muslim News Awards for Excellence, an annual event that seeks to raise the profile of Muslim role models – both the well-known and unknown, ordinary citizens who contribute to the betterment of society.

The website known as “Salaam” lists a “Who’s Who Men” and “Who’s Who Women” with brief profiles of professional

Myths:

“Arab countries are not exactly shining examples of civilisation, are they? Few of them make much contribution to the welfare of the rest of the world. [...] We have thousands of asylum seekers from Iran, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries living happily in this country on social security.”

The Express on Sunday, 4th Jan 2004

British Muslims and their contributions in education, medicine, law, media, charity work, politics and sport. The “Muslim Power 100” is another initiative aimed at highlighting Muslim contributions to British life.

Some of the best known individuals from the world of journalism include Rageh Omar (formerly BBC and now Al-Jazeera English), Asad Ahmad and Zenaib Badawi (BBC), Sameera Ahmed (Channel Four), and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown of the Independent newspaper. Other well-known writers include the commentator and academic Zia Sardar and Sarfraz Manzoor. The Muslim media is also thriving with a number of established publications such as Q-News, The Muslim News, The Muslim Weekly and the glossy lifestyle magazine, Emel.

There are now four elected members of Parliament two of whom are junior ministers, Sadiq Khan and Shahid Malik, and eight members of the House of Lords, four of whom are women. Among political campaigning groups, the head of Amnesty International is Irene Khan, a Muslim.

Sir Anwar Pervez is a Pakistan-born businessman who has been ranked as the 12th richest Asian in Great Britain with assets valued at £390 million.

In sport, familiar names are “Prince” Naseem Hamed, Amir Khan and Danny Williams – all boxers, while in cricket, there is the Lancashire fast-bowler Sajid Mahmood. In addition, a Muslim women-only team regularly represents Britain at the Islamic Women’s Games held in Iran.

In music, Yusuf Islam, formerly known as the singer Cat Stevens, is a regular presence on the public scene through his many humanitarian projects, and more recently again for his music. Some traditional forms of music, such as the Qawali, influenced by Sufi mysticism, have long held an appeal amongst many non-Muslims. The late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

was well-known for his collaborations with Western artists such as Peter Gabriel. The Muslim theatre company, Khayyal, regularly performs Arabic plays in English and have in the past collaborated with Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in organising a season of plays and talks on “Shakespeare and Islam”.

Muslim influences can also be seen in the intricate embroidery and distinctive style of many Western fashion and jewellery designs such as the popular kaftan tunics and embroidered shawls, while images of the Muslim word captured by the photographer Peter Sanders, can be found in international publications such as Time Magazine.

● Other famous Muslims

There are also many famous non-British Muslims who are household names. For instance, Mohamed Al Fayed, the colourful owner of the world famous British department store and tourist attraction, Harrods; the French footballer, Zinedine Zidane, has claimed every top honour that the game has to offer and led France to victory in the 1998 World Cup; the

Pakistani cricketer turned politician, Imran Khan, who led his team to win the World Cup in 1992; and the Iranian human rights activist Shirin Ebadi, who became the first female Muslim to receive the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in Norway 2003. But perhaps the most famous and iconic figure of modern times is the world famous boxer Muhammad Ali, three-time world heavyweight champion, and often described as the “most recognisable man on earth”.

This short summary of Muslim historical contributions to civilisation and Muslim contributions to Britain gives a small flavour of the ways Islamic influences have helped shape society as a whole, and shows how vibrant and diverse Muslims in Britain are.

• Further Reading

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Hattstein, M and Delius, P (2001) (Eds) **Islam Art and Architecture**, Konemann.

Contact list

Muslim Community Ahle-Sunni

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• Bristol Jamia Mosque

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t: 0117 971 1310 Nisar Ahmed

• Easton Islami Darasagah

2 Roman Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6DL
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• Easton Masjid

St Marks Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6DH
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• Islami Darasagah Bristol (Brailvi)

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Ismaili Community

• Bristol Community

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• Bristol Muslim Cultural Society

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• Daru-Al-Moameneen

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• Islamic Information Centre

460 Stapleton Road, Eastville, Bristol BS5 6PA
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• My Town Foundation

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