WE ARE FAMILY:
PERSPECTIVES OF MALE BRITISH PAKISTANIS ON THE
PERSISTENCE OF FIRST COUSIN MARRIAGE PRACTICE

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Abstract

The practice of first cousin marriage is a complex social issue within the Pakistani community of Britain with roots in centuries old traditions handed over from one generation to another. There are existing dynamics influencing this practice in the context of being Pakistani and British at the same time and on the whole, the custom is strongly observed and appreciated by its practitioners despite the risks of producing offspring with genetic defects which do accompany it.

The study which was carried out in the English city of Bradford, West Yorkshire, was of an exploratory type with elements of the descriptive, the methodology consisting of interviewing of informants, focus group meetings and discussions, and participating in and observance of activities that pertain to a British Pakistani marriage. All activities of data collection were on the basis of informed consent. In order to understand the decision-making processes of marriage arrangers and spouses, social anthropological theories of the different forms of preferential marriage as they apply in the community of Bradford Pakistanis were analysed. Also the question of whether the term “first cousin marriage” is used in the strict sense was studied.

In this study, I have tried to investigate a whole range of views of the informants about cousin marriage practice in general and first cousin marriage practice in particular, its historical background, the popularity of it and also the concept and process of Rishta leading up to the marriage proper. I have also tried to describe how the whole practice is perceived, negotiated and experienced by those Pakistanis of Bradford who have partaken of it and those who are about to. Attitudes to premarital medical counselling and genetic testing before marriage were also investigated.

There are limitations that are inherently present in this kind of studies due to a number of factors such as the limited number of informants interviewed, a short period of research and the singularity of fieldwork location. However, the study on the chosen number of respondents within the three-week period it lasted was intensive and informative.
Preface

I became interested in the topic of first cousin marriage practice among British Pakistanis when on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) Newsnight programme of November 16, 2005 it was revealed how widespread and entrenched the practice is within this community and it was all the more striking to learn that despite the risks of genetic disorders associated with it, fifty-five percent of all British Pakistanis, majority of which are British born, were married this way. It was made all the more poignant to see Myra Ali - a young lady who is a product of a Pakistani first cousin marriage – in pain and agony as a result of her debilitating illness called Epidermolysis bulosa, a recessive dystrophic disorder characterised by the blistering of skin and the membranous coverings of organs from even the mildest of traumas.

Having had a series of discussions and interviews with a few acquaintances of Pakistani descent in the Bijlmer area of Amsterdam Zuid-Oost, the Netherlands, who also were my neighbours, I started to consider the possibility of conducting a research fieldwork in a British city with a large Pakistani population for my Amsterdam Master’s in Medical Anthropology (AMMA) thesis about which I informed my teacher and supervisor, Professor Sjaak van der Geest in the summer of 2006. Preparations began in earnest with literature searches and reviews of studies done in the area of consanguineous marriages in general, different anthropological theories of preferential marriage, Muslim teachings and attitudes toward marriage, and cousin or first cousin marriage practice in Pakistan and among British Pakistanis.

In doing this research I resolved to investigate and document the positive aspects of the practice as perceived by the practitioners even though as a physician, trained to see the health risks involved in producing offspring from consanguineous affinities, it was initially difficult. I had also hoped to study their reasons and emic viewpoints, hence to understand the strength of the custom itself. Furthermore I explored the implications for health and holistic wellbeing of the informants in making their decisions and choices in marrying first cousins.

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of my supervisor, Professor Sjaak van der Geest, to the success of my research and the writing of this
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I am greatly indebted to my colleagues at the Philadelphia Clinic Hospital in Lagos, Nigeria, for releasing me to experience what medical anthropology is and for financially rallying behind me, enabling me to complete this course. Also, my thanks and regards to my AMMA course mates with whom I was able to interact in a very academically fulfilling way.

I dedicate this thesis to the very friendly Pakistani community of Bradford, England and especially to my informants for their benevolence, hospitality and cooperation and for cheerfully responding to all my questions even when some bothered on the infringement of their privacies in an area they rightly consider very sacred such as the theme of first cousin marriage.

Stephen Oludare Alaiyemola
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CHAPTER 1
RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction
This chapter deals with the research background and objectives of the research. In it the research problem, namely the persistence of the practice of first cousin marriage in the Pakistani population of Britain is described and explained. The statement question which defines the research objectives is afterwards presented.

1.1. Research Background
Pakistanis and the practice of cousin marriage
Throughout much of the broad expanse from North Africa through West Asia and into Pakistan and India, arranged marriages between first cousins especially between the children of brothers - that is parallel cousins – are considered the ideal (Sailer 2003: 20). In Pakistan, first cousin marriage is widespread in both the rural and urban societies where it serves to keep money and property within families and various forms of the practice are preferred across all ethnic and religious groups where parents are the prime decision-makers for both sons and daughters (Hussain 1999).

As a whole, 60 percent of marriages are consanguineous, that is between close blood relatives including between first cousins, double first cousins, first cousins once removed and second cousins (Bittles et al. 1993). Out of these, over 80 percent are between first cousins (Hussain & Bittles 1998). Among the Mirpuris of Pakistan for example, over 60 percent of marriages are contracted between first cousins and at least half of the marriages currently being contracted by young British-based Mirpuris is arranged with their cousins back home.¹

First cousin marriage among British Pakistanis and its effects

The population size of Pakistanis living in Britain is 747,285 which is 1.3 percent of the total British population. While the majority of the UK population is white (92.1 percent) Pakistanis are second to Indians who constitute the largest minority ethnic group.2

According to a report by the Birmingham City Council (1991) large scale immigration of Pakistanis to Britain began in the 1950s when Britain encouraged migration from the former colonies to satisfy its manpower needs following the Second World War.

The largest concentration of Pakistanis is in London but there are large populations in the West Midlands, Yorkshire, the Humber and the North West as well. This reflects the distribution of the first wave of migrants who settled in major industrial centres where they were most likely to find employment.3 In 2001 40 percent of the Pakistani population in the UK was born in Pakistan and 55 percent were born in the UK indicating much of the growth in this ethnic group has been the result of births rather than immigration.4

Many British Pakistanis celebrate cousin marriage because it is thought to generate more stable relationships. In fact, available statistical data do show that within certain groups of British Pakistanis, the rate of first cousin marriage has increased rather than declined (Shaw 2001). A survey of 100 randomly chosen Pakistani British mothers found that 55 percent were married to a first cousin and that 33 percent of their mothers had married a first cousin (Dyer 2005). These randomly chosen mothers are 13 times more likely to have children with recessive genetic disorders than the general population and even though Pakistanis account for 3.4 percent of all births they have 30 percent of all British children with such illnesses (Darr & Modell 2002).

Other recessive genetic disorders predominant in Pakistani children include autism, severe learning disorders, profound hearing loss (congenital deafness) and severe visual problems (Morton et al 2002:87).

First Cousin marriage among the Pakistanis of Bradford and its effects

It is estimated that three out of four marriages within the Bradford Pakistani community are between first cousins, well above the national average. The practice remains very popular because the community thinks there are real benefits to marrying in the family.

The city of Bradford, West Yorkshire, England therefore was selected as the place of my research fieldwork because of the large Pakistani population there as well as the high incidence of recessive genetic disorders presenting at the hospitals, traceable to the unions of first cousins. Bradford is also home to one of UK’s largest ever birth cohort studies, known as Born in Bradford, which will track the lives of all the babies born in the city from 2006 to 2008 with an aim to finding solutions to some of Bradford public health problems, such as obesity and a higher than average infant mortality rate. My study therefore would come as a contribution to the effort of locating causes and holistic solutions to health issues affecting a community.

Due to the high incidence of recessive genetic illnesses seen by doctors at the Bradford Royal Infirmary, the hospital was declared a centre of excellence for their treatment. On the BBC Newsnight programme of November 16, 2005, Peter Corry, Consultant Paediatrician at this hospital said that he and his colleagues have identified about 140 different autosomal recessive disorders among local children who are mainly of Pakistani extraction. In the journal Community Genetics (2002:201-204), Corry reported a study in which data on neurodegenerative disorders, microcephaly (small head), cerebral palsy and neuromuscular disorders were collated and analysed based on community of origin and mode of inheritance. The results concluded that in all cases, the Pakistani community of Bradford was over-represented, suggesting a high prevalence of these inherited disorders in their midst.

Out of the 44 children seen with microcephaly in the study, 35 were congenital - that is inborn, due to genetic reasons - while 9 were postnatal. Of the 35 children, 27 were Pakistani, 7 were Caucasian and 1 was Bangladeshi. In the case of cerebral palsy, 29 Asian children with the disorder were studied between 1985 and 1987 out of which 26

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were of Pakistani extraction. Of the 29 cases, 6 had siblings with the same type of cerebral palsy, 1 had a cousin, and 1 had an aunt.

It was in view of these facts, that the Labour MP Ann Cryer, whose Keighley constituency is in the Bradford area in West Yorkshire, called for British Pakistanis to stop marrying their first cousins due to this disproportionately high rate of recessive genetic illnesses in their midst. According to a report in The Guardian of November 16, 2005, Ms Cryer said:

I'm not calling for a ban or a change in the law because that would mean changing the law for everyone. I'm simply calling for an enlightened debate. We've avoided discussions on this subject. People are being politically correct.

There were mixed reactions to Ms Cryer’s comment. In a British Medical Journal interview of December 3, 2005, a spokesman for the parliamentarian said that they had expected “a storm of protest”, but her comments were quite well received in her constituency of West Yorkshire by the Pakistani community.

Yet a leading researcher in the area of consanguineous marriage Aamra Darr was of the opinion that British Pakistanis were been unduly focused by the media and were being stigmatised. In her article in The Guardian of December 2, 2005, she wrote:

British Pakistanis should not be stigmatised – they just need a responsive health service.

She maintained that the MP’s comment and the BBC programme that first aired her views were against the practice of cousin marriage and represented this valued social practice as being problematic, rather than discussing the genetic advances that would have allowed families to make informed choices. She also maintained that it was a reflection of how Britain’s dominant culture continued to deal with minority ethnic

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8 [http://politics.guardian.co.uk/homeaffairs/story/0,11026,1643683,00.html](http://politics.guardian.co.uk/homeaffairs/story/0,11026,1643683,00.html) accessed July 21, 2007.

9 [http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/331/7528/1292?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&his=10&R](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/331/7528/1292?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&his=10&R) accessed July 21, 2007

10 [http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,1655722,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,1655722,00.html) accessed July 21, 2007
health, an approach, she claimed, could only serve to shift responsibility from policymakers and service providers to individuals and communities, alienate minorities and hamper the process of devising responsive health services.

1.2. Research Objectives

It is obvious that the practice of first cousin marriage among Pakistanis both in the homeland of Pakistan and in Britain thrives. In my research, I aimed to understand the reasons responsible for this strong tradition. From the onset, I clearly intended to elicit and document the rationales for this practice by focusing on the Pakistanis' emic perspectives. I therefore proceeded with my research fieldwork with a view to finding answers to the following main question:

**What makes the practice of first cousin marriage so popular among the Pakistani community in the UK, despite the adverse health risks involved for children born in these unions?**

For practical medical anthropological purposes, the main research question was further subdivided into the following specific ones:

**I. Historically and culturally relevant questions:**

1. What is the historical background of this tradition? What is the cultural and social nature of the practice of first cousin marriage?
2. What diversities of first cousin marriage practice exist? Are they all first cousin marriages?
3. What are the general rules governing the acquisition of a spouse in this community?
4. What are the perceived benefits derived from this practice?

**II. Family relevant questions:**

1. Who are the main parties involved in arranging marriages?
2. What are the roles of various family members of the spouses (grandparents, parents, and siblings)?
3. What role does the educational level of would-be spouses and their parents play in the decision-making processes?
4. When and how is this practice discussed within the family setting?
5. What are the politics involved in negotiating such a marriage between families?

III. Concept of Rishta:
1. What is meant by the concept of Rishta, relationship based on a good match and emotional compatibility present in marrying a first cousin (Shaw & Charsley 2006)?
2. When does courtship begin?

IV. Question pertaining to religion:
1. What role does religion and teaching of Islam play in choosing a spouse?

V. Questions pertaining to health:
1. How do people perceive the adverse health risks of this practice?
2. Is there a level of denial of the adverse side effects of first cousin marriage? In what ways does this further the perpetuation of this custom?
3. Does one get persuaded to marry a cousin with a view of leaving health destinies to Allah?
4. How accessible are people to information about possible genetic disorders in cousin marriages?
5. What are people’s attitudes to available medical information and advices? Are they heeded?
6. What are the attitudes to genetic testing before marriage?
7. How do people view genetic testing during pregnancy – amniocentesis - and what are their attitudes to aborting a foetus with a genetic disorder?
8. Do people prefer to marry someone from a family they know in order to prevent incurring an unknown illness in an unknown family?

VI. Are there love marriages?
How are they perceived in this community?
In the next chapter I will be explaining the methodology of the research which includes how I collected the data from my informants and what barriers I had to overcome in having to research such a sensitive topic as that of a Muslim first cousin marriage.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction
In this chapter I will be describing and explaining the methodology of the research, which includes the study type and data collection techniques. I will explain what made me to choose an emic approach for this study and the initial challenges I had in getting my informants to cooperate and be interviewed. Also, the limitations of this research study and the structure of the thesis will be discussed.

2.1. Study type and data collection methods
The research was basically of an exploratory type since I sought to gain an insight into the topic by investigating my informants' viewpoints about the topic of first cousin marriage through exploratory questioning. This afforded me the opportunity of getting acquainted with the informants at personal levels and also enabled me to understand the way their world view is shaped. The study was also a qualitative one since it was based on qualitative values such as words used in explaining the practice and observable actions of informants. In view of the latter, the study took on an aspect of the descriptive in that I was able to witness a process of Rishta in part and an actual first cousin wedding during my stay in the city of Bradford.

Since the topic of my research deals with a phenomenon of inbreeding, I used the snowball sampling method which enabled me to circumscribe the number of my key informants to be within only two main families and relations that sprung from them. Thus I was able to choose my respondents from a close-knit community of inter-related and information-rich personalities who could check and confirm each other's contributions.

I had set out to interview both male and female Pakistani informants in the city of Bradford but on arrival I quickly learned that it would not be practical or possible to interview female respondents since the community in which I would be doing my study is intensely and strictly Islamic in which it is not permitted for a man to interact with people of the opposite gender who he is not related to, my reports are therefore mainly of male
perspectives. I suppose I would have been able to do a more complete study if I had worked with a female researcher.

There were of course some episodes of general informal interviewing at Pakistani eateries, telephone call centres, a barber's shop, the city's bus terminus (Bradford Interchange) and once with three young Pakistani students from the University of Bradford, the bulk of the fieldwork study was conducted around my key informants who were members of the two extended families. Formally I have talked to fourteen informants including two women who were wives of two of my male key informants present at a focus group discussion (FGD); informally I heard the views of about thirteen men of Pakistani descent, the number of which included the relatives of the grooms and brides at a Pakistani wedding.

Concerning ethical considerations, participation was wholly voluntary and all activities of data collection were on the basis of my informants' informed consents. Also, consents were obtained prior to the use of cameras and tape recorder while copies of photographs taken were made available to participants as well. I assured the privacy of participants by letting them know that pseudonyms would be used in the writing of the final report even though many did not object to my using their real names. Since the fieldwork was in a predominantly Muslim community, care was taken to observe and respect the cultural values, traditions and taboos of my host and in this respect my beard was left to grow to a length that was noticed and appreciated by them.

I travelled to Bradford with various research tools such as a portable Olympus tape recorder, a photographic camera, a laptop computer, notebooks, diaries and pens of different colours. Most interviews were not recorded on tape due to objection from my informants but I was able to freely transcribe all of their responses in notebooks and diaries. Photographs were permitted to be taken of informants during the sessions of structured interviews and focus group discussions but only of the men that were present. For the duration of the fieldwork, my data collection techniques are comprised of the following main ones:
1. Reviews of written sources and literature on earlier studies done in the area of first cousin marriages
2. Structured and semi-structured (conversational) interviews
3. Participant observation at the places of work of informants, shops, eateries and at the mosque during the preparations for the wedding of the two brothers and at the wedding itself
4. Informal and formal focus group discussions with informants

My data collection began generally with introducing myself and my mission in informal and unstructured interviews. This went on for three days at a halal meat shop and at a fast food eatery, both of which were close to the guesthouse where I stayed in the central area of Bradford.

The first of these three days afforded me the opportunity to carry out a pretest of my methodology and alterations were made to my prepared set of questions according to suggestions offered at these two places. The butchery was manned by a Pakistani man from the Pathan tribe, his brother, his sons and an African help while the eatery was owned by a Pakistani man who had various men of the same descent at different shifts working for him. After forming a rapport with Rashid Khan, the owner of the butchery, I was able to gradually shift to conducting structured in-depth interviews with him and his family members which later moved to the level of FGD. I was only able to conduct one informal interview of customers at the eatery since that was the extent the owner would allow me. This eatery should not be confused with another restaurant belonging to Khalid, a Khan’s relative, where in the course of my fieldwork I interviewed some key informants.

Rashid Khan of the halal meat shop was the one who made me to know the second family which constituted my second pool of key informants. This second family and those related to it were in turn distant relatives of Khan’s family, having both come from the same town in Pakistan. It was in these extended families that I was able to witness in part the process of Rishta and a wedding of two brothers on the same occasion. I was able to conduct interviews of several stakeholders involved during the two-day period of this particular marriage and a focus group meeting was also organised.
2.2. The importance of *emic* perspectives

Within the South Asian community of the UK, several studies have been done addressing the issue of consanguineous marriage and the health effects associated. Most of these studies however have concentrated on presenting the practice as problematic vis-à-vis the health of offspring (Darr & Modell 1988; Bullock & Khalid 1995), rather than researching the values which do inform the practitioners in making their choices.

In my research therefore, I set it as my goal to try and understand the reasons responsible for the persistence of the practice of first cousin marriage, the rationales for it and the appeals inherent. In other words, I wanted to investigate and report the positive aspects of this tradition as seen by the people. It was important therefore to approach my informants who were the objects of my study with the utmost respect and care for their culture, taking into cognizance their various taboos.

Furthermore, having come from a medical background, I endeavoured to not approach the people in a medico-centric way but rather focused on the Pakistanis' *emic* points of view. In other words, the study was not from a standpoint of what the people got wrong, or did not know (Green & Thorogood 2006:20), but rather to identify what they did know and what the underlying rationality of their behaviour and actions was. In this respect, I probed to see if the Pakistani young people, as independent agencies, are pressurised to comply with the desires of their parents in marrying cousins or marriages are entered into on their own free volition.

2.3. Overcoming challenges of cultural issues

In the course of doing my research fieldwork, certain challenges were anticipated namely not knowing how I would be received in the community of Pakistanis of Bradford and the possibility of the people not wanting to be interviewed, the topic of first cousin marriage practice being a very sensitive one. In the second place was the issue of religion: I am a Christian doing my fieldwork in a predominantly Muslim community. At my first meetings with potential informants, I was always asked if I was a Muslim. The fact of not being a Muslim did not in any way affect the people's attitudes to me though and this allayed my initial apprehension, giving me the early encouragement that I needed to carry on with my study.
As far as cultural issues are concerned, some of the people needed persuasion to cooperate and answer my questions but once we started, the interview sessions generally went smoothly. As a rule, there were no female informants present at the meetings and I was told that had to do with the fact that the families in which I conducted my research were of the Pathan tribe and their wives are mostly homely, kept away from men with whom they are not closely related. On occasions I saw women whom I assumed to be the wives of informants coming by to their husbands at the butchery in their niqab - black fabrics worn around the head which leaves the eyes and upper part of the nose visible. The Pathans are renowned for their very strict interpretation of Islam and they require their women to completely adhere to the demands of hijab.

I was able to talk to only two female informants who were wives of two of my key informants. Both occasions were at an FGD that held at a Pakistani restaurant belonging to the key informant, Taofiq Khalid, who by the second week had got used to me and felt freer to ask his wife along. That was also the case with the second woman whom I interviewed: she is the wife of the eatery owner's brother. I must state here that the two women were quite educated, modern and British-born and this might have accounted for the seeming relaxation of the rules.

All said and done, there was never a situation when my questions were not answered. In fact, Rashid Khan and Taofiq Khalid who are the heads of the two main families that constituted my key informants, took my telephone number and on many occasions called me to come over to their shops in order to interview family members who were not present at certain times when I was around and who they felt knew more about issues of which they were not sure and could give me more information. On one occasion, Khan even called Pakistan directly on his cell phone to ask about Rishta and I told him how impressed I was.

At the halal meat shop, Mohamed, Rashid Kahn’s brother was fond of serving me and the informants that were seated Chapatti - a sort of pancake from wheat flour - and strong tea. I was told that the type of Chapatti served originated in their tribal area and was called Paratha. It was laden with ghee in which it was fried and contained no sugar. The tea on the other hand was heavily sweetened with much milk added.
The English language was the medium of communication throughout the research period. The informants were all able to speak it though the British-born younger ones were more fluent and I had no problem in getting the informants to understand me.

2.4. Collation of data and writing of report

In the last two days of my field research, I started rounding up my work with visits to the various locations where my informants were in order to thank them and bid them goodbye. I carried along my notebooks and diaries in order to read to them all their responses that I had written so that they could correct or add to the gathered information. Their photographs that were taken and developed were also shown to them as promised and none of the informants objected to them being used in the publication of the thesis.

During this time, I sorted my collated data into the very important and relevant ones and into the not important and irrelevant ones as prescribed in the research textbooks and manuals (Green & Thorogood 2006; Ardon et al 2001) and as taught during the AMMA course. In this respect, I consider members of the two extended Pakistani Pathan families headed by Rashid Khan and Taofiq Khalid as my key informants and they also constituted my focus groups. Since members of these families constituted my selected research samples, the most important data reported in this study issued from them as well as the conclusions reached.

The key informants were given similar questions at the three locations of interviews and FGDs, namely, Khan’s halal meat shop, Khalid’s restaurant and the mosque. This enabled me to check and crosscheck their responses bearing in mind that they were of the same tribal group. The pieces of information gathered were compared during the writing of the thesis. It is of note to notice that the answers were generally similar as pertaining to the fact that majority of Pakistani Pathans did prefer first cousin marriage to any other form of marriage. However the younger and more educated informants did not object to making premarital medical counselling and genetic testing routine for potential spouses, as a result of the knowledge that first cousin marriages might lead to different genetic disorders of offspring. In this respect the more elderly ones would rather leave destinies of marriages and offspring’s health to Allah.
There were other interviews conducted outside the boundary of the two families mentioned above. These interviews were mainly of the informal type but they will only be taken into consideration in this report as they support or contrast with information gathered from my key informants.

2.5. Strengths and limitations of the study

The present study has certain limitations that need to be considered and balanced against the strengths produced in the approach. In this respect, the results of this study may not be generalised for the British Pakistanis as a whole.

Inasmuch as available quantitative data do point to a general trend in the practice of first cousin marriage, this study is qualitative in its essence and involves mainly a set of two extended families in a singular city of Bradford with their familial tradition and customs. However herein lies the strength, that is, I was able to intensively study the emic perspectives of a closely knit group of informants who had partaken of first cousin marriages and were rich in information which they were willing to share with me.

Furthermore, most of my informants were male and only two female were able to share their views with me during the whole research period, a situation which did not enable me to investigate the view of the other female members of the families. I did not insist on interviewing more women neither did I think this was necessary since the near absence of female informants around a researcher who was a stranger to them is a natural product of the culture which I came to study. Here also I see another aspect of the strength of the approach.

I did not set out to study the marriage customs of Bradford Pakistanis with a view to discouraging them from arranging their marriages neither was the issue of the dangers of medical risks accompanying the practice of first cousin marriage emphasised.

2.6. Structure of the paper

In chapter 1 the research background and objectives of the research are presented. In it, I also present the research problem which is the persistence of first cousin marriage practice among British Pakistanis. The health effects of the practice are also described
and explained. Furthermore the statement question which defines my research objectives is offered.

Chapter 2 describes and explains the methodology of the research, the study type and my data collection techniques. The challenges I faced in getting my informants to cooperate and be interviewed during the fieldwork are also discussed. What made me to choose to approach the study from the angle of *emic* perspectives of the informants is explained.

First cousin marriage is a form of preferential marriage. In chapter 3, social anthropological theories of the different forms of preferential marriage are discussed. In addition, biomedical theories which explain the state of health of children from consanguineous and affinal unions are presented.

In chapter 4, I describe the Pakistani community of Bradford and I present their views on the importance and relevance of the practice of first cousin marriage. I explain also the dynamics that are responsible for the persistence of this tradition. Furthermore I describe how my informants perceive what constitute a good marriage match, the process of *Rishta* and the issues of health and medical intervention. Love marriage and the influence of Islam on marriage choices are also discussed.

Having witnessed a Pakistani wedding firsthand in the city of Bradford, in chapter 5, the description of the wedding and preparations leading up to it is given. Also the series of interviews conducted at a mosque is presented.

Lastly, the thesis concludes in chapter 6. Here I present personal views based on the information I have obtained on the field explaining that the issue of a people’s tradition need not be a hindrance in reaching out to them. Moreover I attempt to proffer suggestions aimed at enhancing a wholesome healthcare delivery to the community of Pakistanis in Britain.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Introduction
The practice of first cousin marriage is a form of preferential marriage, a cultural issue which carries with it medical and genetic repercussions for the offspring produced from such unions. In this chapter, social anthropological theories of the different forms of preferential marriage will be discussed. The socio-economic basis of this tradition is explored while the biomedical theories of health and physical state of children from consanguineous and affinal couples are explained.

3.1 Theories of kinship and preferential marriage
In all societies, relatives are classified according to rules of kinship that are part of culture (Nanda & Warms 2007:211). These classifications of kin in turn provide important basis for choosing marriage partners. In addition to rules guiding the choices of marriage partners and the group in which one must marry, most societies have rules about the preferred categories of relatives from which marriage partners are chosen.

Kinship comprises relationships established through blood (consanguineous relations) and through marriage (affinal relations). It is a system that links people in a web of rights and obligations. Kinship provides continuity between generations and is the basis for the orderly transmission of property and social position between generations. Moreover, it is also within kinship that a person locates whom to depend on for aid (Nanda & Warms 2007:236).

In most systems of preferential marriage, preferred marriage partners are cousins, children of siblings at the parental generation. A cousin marriage may be between cross-cousins – children of one’s parents’ siblings of the opposite sex and parallel-cousins – children of the parents’ same-sex siblings.

Radcliffe-Brown (1952) had noted a tendency for men in patrilineal societies to marry their matrilateral cross-cousins, that is, their mother’s brother’s daughters. He attributed this tendency to a warm, emotionally close relationship in many patrilineal societies between a man and his sister’s son, suggesting that a boy’s sentimental
attachment to his maternal uncle is then transferred to the uncle’s daughter. Since patrilineal societies are far more common than their matrilineal counterparts, it stands to reason that matrilateral cross-cousin marriage should be more common than the patrilateral variant.

In his work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949[1969]) however, Lévi-Strauss proffered a contrary explanation for the predominance of matrilateral over patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. In this work, he developed the *Alliance Theory* or the *General Theory of Exchanges*. Arguing that a cultural phenomenon such as unilateral cousin marriage cannot be explained in terms of individual sentiments, he proposed that a rule directing men to marry their matrilateral cross-cousins is, for structural reasons, more productive of social solidarity than the reverse and is beneficial to the society. Lévi-Strauss proposed that the initial motivation for the exchange of women was the incest taboo, which he deemed to be the beginning and essence of culture, as it was the first rule to check natural impulses.

Lévi-Strauss’s alliance theory takes into consideration rules of exogamy and the close links between consanguinity and affinity giving rise to the concept of *marriage alliance* and the necessary interdependence of various families and lineages. The theory attempts to answer the basic questions about inter-individual relations, or what constitutes *society* and presents two different models of marriage exchange: either the women of Ego’s group are offered to another group “explicitly defined” by social institutions – these are the *elementary structures* of kinship, or the group of possible spouses for the women in Ego’s group is “indetermined and always open”, to the exclusion, however, of certain kin people (nuclear family, aunts, uncles etc) – these are called *complex structures* of kinship.

Homans and Schneider (1955) objected to the position taken by Lévi-Strauss describing his explanation as a *final* cause – that is, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage exists because it is good for society. In their work *Marriage, Authority and Final Causes*, they argued that marriage is contracted by people, individuals and not societies. There must be an *efficient* cause, and for that, one must return to individual sentiments, as promulgated by Radcliffe-Brown.
The Hormans/Schneider causal hypothesis simply stated that a man marries his matrilateral cross-cousin because he is fond of her (Spiro 1964). When it is assumed that Ego wishes to marry somebody, his fondness for his matrilateral cross-cousin renders this form of marriage 'sentimentally appropriate' (Homans & Schneider 1955:24). This fondness, they argued, stems from the system of unilineal jural authority found in unilineal societies. In societies in which jural authority is patripotestal (paternal) the child develops warm and close ties with his nurturant mother and, by generalization, with those relatives with whom she is identified. This positive sentiment then provides a motivational basis for marriage with the matrilateral cross-cousin (Spiro 1964) while at the same time the negative sentiments toward father and his kin, evoked by patripotestal jural authority, render marriage with a patrilateral cross-cousin inappropriate.

The Homans/Schneider attempt to provide a motivational explanation for the practice of this form of marriage does not come from some universal characteristic of the human mind nor from some assumed characteristic of the members of the society, but rather from early learning experience in the context of a certain type of institutional structure, that is, patrilineal authority and matrilineal nurturance (Spiro 1964). They pointed out that though jural authority is a necessary condition for the practice of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, it is on its own not sufficient.

Needham's contribution to the discussion came in antagonism to the position of Homans and Schneider. In his work Structure and Sentiment (1962) he proceeded to declare of their work that "its conclusions are fallacious, its method unsound, and the argument literally preposterous (1962:viii)." Homans and Schneider failed to recognize, according to Needham, that Lévi-Strauss was really concerned with prescriptive rather than preferential systems of cross-cousin marriage. If a man has no choice as to whether or not he will marry his matrilateral cross-cousin, the issue of individual sentiments becomes irrelevant. Needham's first objection to the Homans/Schneider explanation is that it is:

_Fundamentally, not sociological at all, but psychological, and inapt to the solution of a sociological problem_ (1962:4).
He maintained that the sociological factor is too general to predetermine the course of social phenomena (1962:50). His second objection to the Homans/Schneider explanation is that it is causal, and causal explanations for him, are as inappropriate as non-contextual methods (119-123).

Needham's functional explanation for unilateral cross-cousin marriage is summed up in the following thesis: Although both types of unilateral cross-cousin marriage are found in unilineal societies, the matrilateral type is to be found most frequently in those societies in which residence and descent rules are parallel — “the harmonic regimes” (Spiro 1964). This is to be explained by the high degree of social solidarity, resulting from the generalized exchange inherent in this type of cross-cousin marriage, and by the “instability and confusion” inherent in the patrilateral type.

According to Leach (1961), three cross-cousin type marriage systems exist, namely: the Kariera type, the Trobriand type and the Kachin type.

In the Kariera type, cross-cousin marriage is symmetrical. It approves the simultaneous or nearly simultaneous exchange of women between two local descent groups. In the ideal type a man marries the mother’s brother’s daughter who is sister to his own sister’s husband.

In the Trobriand type, cross-cousin marriage is asymmetrical and patrilateral. This system precludes the reciprocal marriage of a man with the sister of his own sister’s husband, but it amounts nevertheless to a systematic exchange of women between two local descent groups. The exchange is completed only after a time lag of one generation. In the ideal type a man marries the father’s sister’s daughter but is forbidden to marry the mother’s brother’s daughter. This kind of marriage regulation occurs in patrilineal as well as matrilineal societies.

In the Kachin type, cross-cousin marriage is also asymmetrical but is matrilateral. It precludes altogether the exchange of women between two local descent groups. Giving of a woman in marriage is never reciprocated in kind, though it may be reciprocated in other ways, for example, by marriage payments, work service, political fealty. In the ideal type a man marries the mother’s brother’s daughter and is forbidden to marry the father’s sister’s daughter.
In the case of Kachin type marriage since wife-giving group B may not marry from wife-receiving group A, Leach identifies the possibility that a third group C, or more, could make mutual arrangements to 'marry in circle' – C giving wives to B, who give wives to A, who give wives to C again. In this case the wives that C gives to B are, in a sense, compensation for the wives that B gives to A (Leach 1961:60).

Granet had stated that an arranged marriage is not a one-sided transaction: it is part of an exchange (1939). In Kariera type systems it is a direct exchange of women; in Kachin type systems it is an exchange of women for gifts (prestations), the gifts in turn being exchanged with another group for further women. Leach elaborated further by offering the two most general principles that govern the Kachin marriage system: a man will try to avoid marrying into a class beneath him, while at the same time will seek to make the maximum profit – either in terms of bride-price or political advantage – out of the marriage of his daughters (1961:84).

In my study of British Pakistani community, I attempted to know which form of first cousin marriage is pre-eminent: matrilateral or patrilateral. I also wanted to disprove or confirm whether patripotestal jural authority is a cause or a determinant (per Homans and Schneider) in the decision making processes by marriage arrangers. In the case of the matrilateral marriage that I came across, was Needham's functional explanation of "harmonic regimes" applicable?

3.2. Biomedical theories of recessive and dominant genes
Each chromosome is an aggregate of linearly arranged particulate bodies called genes, which in turn are made of nucleic acids (Anderson 1957). Genes carry the codes that give individual biological characteristics or traits to a person such as the sex, height, colour of hair, eyes or skin. Since chromosomes occur in pairs, genes also occur in pairs.

Human genes are not permanently stable. They can undergo changes as a result of internal and external factors in a process known as mutation. The changed genes are also known as mutations. If all humans had identical genes, no action of theirs' would be seen as unusual. When genes consist of unlike forms (alleles) their actions become recognized. (Anderson 1957). The term recessive gene refers to an allele that causes a phenotype - a
visible or detectable characteristic that is only seen in homozygous genotype, an organism that has two copies of the same allele.

Normally every person has two copies of every gene on autosomal chromosomes, one from mother and one from father. If a genetic trait is recessive, a person needs to inherit two copies of the gene for the trait to be expressed. Thus, both parents have to be carriers of a recessive trait in order for a child to express that trait. If both parents are carriers, there is a 25 percent chance that each child will show the recessive trait. A recessive gene thus contrasts with a dominant one in that recessive genes must occur in a pair for their actions to be recognized while a dominant gene all on its own will express its characteristics.

There are hundreds of diseases caused by inherited mutations called recessive or variant genes, many associated with severe disability and sometimes early death. Possessing a single copy of the mutation is often harmless, but if a copy is inherited from each parent, the result can be death or chronic disease (Anderson 1957).

We all have two copies of every gene. If a person at conception inherited one recessive gene, he would not fall ill. If however, a child inherits a copy of the same variant gene from each of its parents it will develop one of the so-called recessive genetic disorders. Since first cousins share a pair of grand parents, in a first cousin marriage, the chance that their offspring will be a carrier is thus 50 percent, the chance of a wholly healthy offspring is 25 percent while the chance that the disease alleles falling on an offspring is 25 percent. This is shown in Diagram 1.
Diagram 1. Recessive Genetic Disorder: 2 carrier parents and probabilities of offspring being unaffected, carriers or affected

3.4 Power relation in first cousin marriage
Inherently, the practice of first cousin marriage is a power relation issue due to the preeminent and important role of parents who are the marriage arrangers. Pakistani marriage choices cannot be understood simply with reference to the cultural preference for marrying a kin. To understand why a preference is followed, all of the deliberations of these marriage arrangers, that is, the parents of the spouses, must also be considered (Donnan 1988). For Pakistani parents, it makes good sense to meet the obligation to consider their siblings’ children as spouses for their own children.

Furthermore, the anthropologist Alison Shaw argues that the high rate of consanguineous marriage, especially first cousin marriage in a sample of second-generation British Pakistanis is not a simple reflection of a cultural preference but rather
is as a result of factors relating to parents favouring arranged marriages for their children in relation to Pakistani migration to Britain (Shaw 2001), which, in cousin marriages, ultimately benefit members of the same extended family. He further demonstrated that the blanket category ‘Pakistani’ in relation to marriage patterns and choices is inadequate since region of origin, caste, socio-economic status, religion and upbringing all play their roles in generating the existing marriage pattern and will offer clues to its likely persistence.

Formally, men make marriage decisions, but the judgment and authority of senior women, especiallygrandmothers, and the power relationship between spouses can crucially influence the choices that are made (Shaw 2001).

3.5 Transactional nature of the practice
Though the popularity of consanguineous marriages has been attributed to social rather than religious or economic influences by the majority of Pakistanis that were studied in both Pakistan (Hussain 1999) and the UK (Bullock and Khalid, 1995), the transactional nature of the practice is ever paramount, presenting in the form of financial benefits, inheritances, opportunity to emigrate (Shaw 2001), and property remaining within the family (Hussain & Bittles 1998).

In this regard I set out to investigate the link this practice has with issues of wage-earning, inheritances in the forms of jewellery, landed property, family ownerships of shops, businesses in the context of British society as well as inheritance ties to Pakistan. The connection between marriage with a first cousin in the ancestral home of Pakistan and the issue of migration was also analysed.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, various forms of first cousin marriage practice are preferred across all ethnic and religious groups and parents are the prime decision-makers for marriages of both sons and daughters (Hussain 1999). In Karachi, Hussain’s studies were done in order to examine the relative importance of three commonly perceived reasons for such marriages, namely religious, economic and cultural. The major reasons for a preference for consanguineous marriages are socio-cultural rather than any perceived economic benefits, either in the form of consolidation of family property or smaller dowries.
After the initial wave of Pakistani migration to Britain in the 1950s, onwards from 1962 it was harder for adult male Pakistanis to enter Britain, but men settled in Britain were entitled to bring their dependants (Jeffery 1976; Shaw 1988). Analysis of Home Office referrals and census data for Bradford shows that 57.6 percent of Pakistani marriages during the early 1990s were to spouses from Pakistan (Simpson 1997:104). Of the 50 marriages to spouses from Pakistan that were studied by Shaw (2001), 37 were with first cousins.

Today for many Pakistanis, the marriage of a Pakistani man in the homeland of Pakistan to a woman raised in Britain is the only way that a potential wage-earner may enter Britain, other than by seeking political asylum. A man’s earnings are not only, or primarily, for his own use but for that of his close relatives. Remittances are used to build new houses, start a business, or facilitate the migration of another family member. Thus there are particular advantages of sending a groom to Britain namely as a strategy for continuing male labour, this must be viewed in the context of obligations to siblings and members of one’s own extended family, which in turn influenced the process of migration. Pakistani migration to Britain is of migrants as representatives of their biradaris (brotherhood) intent upon improving the position of their ghar (household) which include cousins (Shaw 2001).

3.6 Structure and Agency

In this context, agency refers to the capacity of individual humans to act independently and to make their own free choices. It is the capability of doing things on one’s own free volition, to actively change the course of events by causal intervention (Giddens 1984:9).

The generic features of social structures (Smelser 1989) refer to the relation, mostly through interaction, of two or more people. This is as expressed in Elias’ definition of social structures as social relations (1999). Within this relational characterization, defining social structures as shared knowledge (Garfinkel, 1996) is a more actor-centered variety of the constitutive relation, while defining them as functions (Parsons & Bales, 1953) covers a more society-centered variety. Another generic feature is that structures are repetitive, the focus of which gives rise to independently existing
patterns within society, social life (Levi-Strauss 1968) and social structures as generalizations (Fuchs 2001).

What the social world of the Pakistani community is made of in the context of being in Britain and being British was investigated. In this respect, part of my research was directed at studying the social structures that are present in the Pakistani society in order to establish if they always and predominantly determine an individual's behaviour. Those factors such as education, employment, economic state, social class, religion and gender which influence the opportunities that individuals have in a society were explored with a view to understanding how they affect the decisions of marrying or not marrying one's first cousin.

I also investigated how and to what extent free agency is at work in the twenty-first century British Pakistani society. In this respect it would be interesting to learn to what extent young British Pakistanis deviate from the popular and preferred practice of first cousin marriage in favour of love marriage (Shaw 2001) and the factors involved, such as the role of Pakistani dating sites on the worldwide web.11

CHAPTER 4
COMMUNITY OF BRADFORD PAKISTANIS, RISHTA AND THE RELEVANCE OF FIRST COUSIN MARRIAGE

Introduction
The chapter presents the general view of my informants. In it I describe who they are as British Pakistanis, their community and occupations. Also in this chapter, the information supplied by them concerning the social importance and cultural relevance of the practice of first cousin marriage is analysed and their explanation of what the dynamics are and how they function is presented. Lastly, how my informants perceive what constitute a good marriage match in the process of Rishta is explained with a description of its time structure, stakeholders and participants.

4.1. Introducing my fieldwork informants:
As stated earlier in Chapter 2, this research being of a qualitative type, I conducted my intensive studies within two extended families of key informants even though there were sessions of interviews of other informants at various locations in the city. On my arrival in Bradford my first move was to try and establish contacts with local Pakistani organisations such as the Muslim Association of Bradford and the local mosques in order to explain my good intentions of conducting an academic research in the midst of the people. I was directed to one mosque by the owner of the halal butchery, Rashid Khan, who later played a major role in my period of study in Bradford. The mosque to which I went also served as a wedding hall and several Pakistani weddings did take place there. The people at the association office replied me that it should not be a problem at all to learn about their custom of cousin marriage but they could direct me specifically to no one. I was told that I could always come to their office if and whenever I needed any help or should I need them to explain to the locals my mission.

I had also made up my mind to visit the shops belonging to Pakistanis that were to be found all around and introduce myself and my mission in Bradford. This was the way I met Rashid Khan and Mohamed his brother at the butchery. Through Khan I met Taofiq Khalid, his forty-eight year old relation who owned a restaurant where I conducted
further interviews and FGDs after the initial ones at Khan’s butchery. Apart from this, Khan also organised for me to meet another man, Dar, his cousin who was a driver for the city’s bus service. He was my main informant on Rishta and the processes which lead to a Pakistani marriage and also became my interpreter at the interview sessions at Khan’s meat shop.

All the three men are married and all have children, some of which are also married but Khan remained my anchor man throughout my research period. For my interviews, Khan permitted me to ask questions from his customers. Actually Khan was always proactive and would introduce me to the clients who after buying their meat sat down to drink tea. He and his brother served Paratha and tea at every occasion of interviewing and focus group meetings.

The core fieldwork study was organised around Khan’s and Khalid’s extended families. These two men were involved in getting the informants out from within their family groups, their acquaintances and from their customers for the sessions of interviewing and FGDs.

Khan, in his mid fifties and a grandfather, arrived in the United Kingdom in 1977 after his elementary school in Pakistan. He married a first cousin while in Pakistan. His wife and older children followed him in 1982 while one of his three daughters and two sons were born in Bradford. His brother, Mohamed, and cousin, Dar, both arrived in the mid eighties. Their family being Pathan originated in Nok Kundi area in Pakistan but they lived in Karachi before moving to Bradford.

The family spoke mostly Urdu and English but at home, Urdu is the vernacular among parents and the older generation. When talking with one another at the shop, the brothers mostly spoke Urdu but to their sons and grandsons they spoke in English with a Pakistani accent. The children whom I met talked with an accent like the rest of the English people I heard on the streets of Bradford.

4.2. Organising the interviews and discussion sessions
The first interviews and FGDs were conducted at the butchery. Khan the owner told me to be at his shop on interview days between twelve midday and one o’clock in the afternoon first because this was the period when they took their tea break and also most
customers began to come for meat as from about two p. m. In all, I interviewed him, his brother, his cousin and to a less extent his sons on three occasions but had FGDs twice with his extended family that included a visiting cricketer from Pakistan.

The second batch of interviews and FGDs were courtesy of Khalid at his restaurant. In this situation also, I started with interviewing him and his brother with whom he worked and later on had an FGD with him at which were present his brother, his father-in-law and his uncle whom he had told about me and who decided to come around for the FGD. As I mentioned earlier, he and his brother had asked their wives to come along for the FGD meeting and I was able to interview them as well. I also availed myself of the opportunity to conduct informal interviews of several customers who came to eat at his restaurant.

Other interviews were both informal and structured in nature and involved the Pakistani customers at Khan’s meat shop, Khalid’s restaurant, the fast food chicken eatery, the students from the Bradford University and a few people I was able to interview at the bus terminus – Bradford Interchange – while they waited for their buses.

In this chapter I will dwell on the interviews conducted during the first week of my stay in Bradford which lasted till the Wednesday of the second week. After this, I will report the sessions which took place at Khalid’s restaurant during the second half of the second week.

4.3. The social and cultural importance of the practice of first cousin marriage

First interview at the halal meat shop

The initial and general response of the people was one of amusement and intrigue that I had come from the Netherlands to study their marriage culture. My first pool of informants was at the halal butchery manned by Khan, his younger brother, sons and an African man from Mali, who was an employee there.

According to Kurtz (2007) one of the reasons Muslim cousin marriage helps cement such intense in-group solidarity as found within the Pakistani community is that it builds upon and magnifies the already immensely powerful emotional bonds of early family life.
At our first meeting, Khan was at first hesitant but by the third day I came to appreciate what a good man he was. He and his brother - always dressed in white overalls as butchers do - attended to me, always asking one of his sons to go to their home, which was just in the corner from the butchery, to bring Paratha and freshly prepared tea in an old fashioned kettle. He answered my questions, sitting down across me while his brother Mohamed contributed answers to the sessions, as he attended to customers who came for meat. Interested customers sat down to listen to us and sometimes Khan interpreted my questions in the Urdu for their benefit.

At the first interview the main issue discussed pertained to the benefits of the practice of first cousin marriage among the Pathan people of Pakistan to which my two key informants belong. The people are spread across the borders of Iran, Southern Pakistan and Afghanistan. Locally the tribal elders are in control of daily civil, religious and communal issues. In the homeland the culture is very popular and the Pathans of Britain naturally remain connected to the people there hence the popularity of the custom here in Bradford as well. I was told that many young men that were born in Bradford have had their wives arranged for them in Pakistan, having never set eyes on them till marriage.

The Pathans are land owners and to them land has much honour. A Pathan may be poor but he has his land as his pride. It is considered a dishonour to loose one’s land to a member of another family into which a person marries and a father or grandfather passing away rejoices to pass his land on to his children and children’s children who are married first cousins. Due to this tradition, land has remained in the same families for hundreds and thousands of years. In a village everyone is related and the result of this is harmony and unity among neighbours who came from same forebears.

K: Intruders were not able to come into our midst. We are a strong people and it is because we do not go out to marry. Marriage is among people that are familiar with each other.
S: That is nice.
K: Yes. Keep to your tribe, there is honour in that. Connection is not lost, you see.
S: So one remains connected to the land and to his family at the same time.
K: Exactly.

According to him, he himself is married to his first cousin, a daughter of his father’s brother while in Pakistan before immigrating to Britain, this is to say that he his married
to a parallel cousin. He told me that this has been the way his forefathers married in the past and it was only appropriate for him also to marry this way and hopefully this tradition will be continued by his sons.

K: This tradition has been in our tribe for generations, for thousands of years. Allah asked the old fathers to marry within their tribes but even before then the fathers married their first cousins and nieces. We all are products of cousin marriages doctor. Don't you think so?
S: I suppose you are right.
K: It is so. That is why there are different groups of people on this earth — people married others who looked like them.
S: You mean different human races?
K: Exactly. It is the arrangement of the Creator to marry cousins.

Moreover his three daughters are all married to their first cousins, the husbands who were at the time living in Pakistan, moved to Britain to be with their wives. Two married their father’s brothers’ sons, while the third married the son of one of Khan’s sisters, that is two of them married their parallel cousins while a third one married a cross cousin. He also made me to realise that they are three siblings in the family who are male and all of them are married to their first cousins including the one working with him at the meat shop and another brother in Leeds.

K: We marry within the family. We don’t go far away to look for wives. To us such a custom is strange.
S: So you consider cousin marriage a good thing?
K: (With a smile) Yes, o yes. It was good enough for my forefathers and it is good enough for us
S: What makes it a good thing to marry a cousin?
K: I know what you are thinking: that the children may have bad genes. No it is very rare for this to happen. Marrying a cousin, we know whom we are marrying. It is risky to marry from another family we do not know.
S: What makes it risky sir?
K: I will tell you. In marrying a cousin the parents know the woman’s family for a long time. The man’s parents and the woman’s parents grew up together. The man and the woman are brought up same way. Marrying from another family, the man does not know what they do there, what the girl likes and does not like, the food they eat there and so on and all this will bring problem for them in the future. The man has a plan that the woman agrees with quickly when they both are cousins.
S: I see. Like what plans?
K: Here in Britain you see many marriages fail because of conflicting plans of husband and wife. She does not want to understand the man’s plans and wants to go her own way. With a cousin this does not happen. They are moving in the same direction all the time. Time is not wasted explaining dos and don’ts.

Khan went ahead to describe to me how there exists a measure of control within a family that constantly guides a man and a woman who married as cousins or for that matter who married as near relatives inside the given family. According to him, this control works in
two ways: through obedience and respect. First a woman who obeyed her parents and married their choice for her, which is of course a first cousin, has learnt the process of obedience and will not find it hard to obey her husband at home. Secondly, she has also learnt to show respect to her parents, brothers and cousins and will not find it difficult to respect a cousin she is getting married to. It is unlikely for a first cousin wife to walk away from a marriage or become wayward.

S: So there is a form of control?
K: Yes, control that she is used to since she was a child, from her parents and older brothers and sisters.
S: She is not being forced to obey and respect her man?
K: No, not at all. A marriage whereby a girl is forced against her will is not recognised in Islam.
S: She agrees with her parents’ wish and desire and marries their choice?
K: In our family, yes. These days you can see a few cases when a boy and a girl meet outside maybe at the university and they want to get married. Love marriage they call it. But that is Hollywood, it does not last. After a few months they start to fight and have problems. A cousin is less inclined to quit a relationship.
S: This is a really interesting aspect.

At this juncture I told him that the topic of love marriage is part of my future interviews and would like us to speak more about that in the meetings ahead since I would prefer for us to talk more on the intra-family control issue and the role of Islam which he raised. He then continued to expatiate upon these areas pointing out that it is a matter of ethos in the Pathan tribe that obedience, respect, hospitality and the teachings of Koran be the moral core of a Muslim family.

It is not as if respect must only be from the woman to her man without him reciprocating because according to Islamic tenets and Pathan culture, the man is also bound to honour his wife and both find this easier when they are cousins since she is a sister to him and he is her brother. He is obliged to care for her and keep her safe always. The influence of their parents is always present since the parents are siblings and children of same parents as well. He then told me how he has been married for thirty-six years and his wife had never been rude to her in any way since there is mutual respect for each other.

From behind the meat counter, Mohamed, Khan’s younger brother also contributed to the discussion and said that he is also married to a first cousin. It was a good opportunity to engage him in the discussion because all this while he had been occupied with the task of packing meat for customers.
S: And you sir? Are you also married to a cousin?
M: Yes, my wife is a cousin too. Both of us (referring to his brother Khan)
S: Your first cousin?
M: Yes, my first cousin.
S: Did you marry her here in Bradford?
M: No, my uncles in Pakistan arranged her for me and I travelled there to marry her. Khan also went with me. That was nineteen years ago.
S: And where is your family now?
M: Here with me of course. We all are British.

There was obvious passion displayed by these two brothers as they discussed the issue of first cousin marriage with me. I was rather amazed at the manner they had received me and their hospitality. All these while Khan sat close to me and a few customers were there listening to us. Only his brother and the African man were busy selling meat for customers and one of Khan’s sons kept serving heavily sweetened tea and Paratha.

From Amsterdam, I had brought along my equipment for blood pressure measurement – the sphygmomanometer - as I had hoped it would become handy and help in my charm offensive at winning the cooperation of my informants. Khan’s blood pressure was done and it was 115/75 millimetre of mercury (mmHg). I told him what it read and how surprised I was to see that his blood pressure was that good despite the constant drinking of tea and eating of fat-soaked Paratha. He said that the doctor had told him that his blood cholesterol and sugar levels were within normal limits but at the highest permissible level and that he would have to limit his sugar and high-fat diets and I told him that I fully agree with his doctor.

The use of the term first cousin
I was very mindful of the fact that I needed to understand the extent to which my informants did marry their first cousins who are first cousins indeed and near relatives who they may as well refer to as cousins. I noticed that these people are generally educated enough to differentiate between the cousin terms and they themselves mostly spoke about marrying first cousins. The British media lately have been dealing with this issue so much as to make every Pakistani know the terms.

Among my informants, there were only two occasions that I heard of not being of the first cousin marriage type: one of Khalid’s brother, who worked at a filling station, whose parents came from the same clan as Khan and Mohamed, spoke to me about
having to marry a near relative, a daughter of his paternal uncle's wife brother, saying it is accepted in his clan to marry from that lineage, making me to wonder if it is a sort of a wife-giving descent lineage as identified by Leach (1961:60) where people 'marry in circles' and could involve three or even more groups. He could not wait for the daughters of his younger uncles and aunts to reach the legal age of, according to him, 17 years. The marriage was arranged by his parents too. He was born here in Bradford while his bride came from Pakistan. The other one was the visiting cricket player based in Pakistan who was around at one of the focus group discussion meetings who said that he is also married to a near relative, but a non-first cousin. A dandy of a sportsman, he is quite educated and well travelled, having played cricket in places like India, Jamaica and South Africa, it seems to me to be rather influenced by cultures other than that of his Pathan roots.

Admitting that they married women who are near relatives but are neither first cousins nor cousins at all, these two men are in stark contrast to the majority of my informants who claimed that they were married to their first cousins.

Further analysis of the main dynamics of first cousin marriage practice
Considering that Khan had mentioned issues of land, tradition and honour as important factors in the persistence of first cousin marriage practice, I wanted him to speak more on these and any other ones especially as they pertain to Pakistanis in the context of British life. He suggested that he would wish to invite a cousin of his, who according to him, is more educated and could explain things better to me in English. He made a phone call to his cousin and asked me to return the next day to which I agreed.

As I said earlier, Khan’s cousin, Hakim Dar, works as a driver in the city’s bus service company, FIRST. He came to join us at the butchery straight in his driver’s uniform and talking with him I was able to discern immediately that he had a better command of the English language and he was able to explain things very clearly indeed.

After the initial introduction by Khan, he told me he arrived in Britain in the 1970s and I asked him if he was married to a first cousin to which he answered in the affirmative. He is married to a cross cousin, a daughter of his mother’s brother. Everything was arranged in Pakistan and he left the UK for Pakistan in order to marry her
there. Now they live in Bradford and have three children. Dar’s son, born and bred in
Britain, is married to a first cousin too – his aunt’s daughter.

Khan spoke a Pakistani language to him and intermittently I heard phrases in
English such as “cousin marriage”, “inheritance” and “Rishta”. I assumed he was trying
to intimate him with the questions I had asked and immediately after Khan’s speech he
began to talk to me.

He told me that a system known as owner-occupation is the predominant form of
home ownership for British Pakistanis. Most first and second generations British
Pakistanis are into one form of trade or another because economic disadvantage, social
and racial exclusion have all contributed to making them look inwards for financial uplift.
In other words, Pakistanis find it more difficult to obtain necessary mortgage in time to
finance own property, they therefore engage in self-help projects and businesses such as
opening of shops, butcheries, restaurants, importation and sale of items of Pakistani
origin that would bring in enough money to pay for council housing for a time and
eventually move ahead the property ladder so as to buy one’s personal property.
According to this man, marriage to a cousin enhances a smooth fulfilment of such
delicate arrangements and plans since a cousin understands the needs that are present
within a family for she is not an outsider and will be willing to save the available
resources with her man. Most Pakistanis will not patronise banks due to religious reasons
and would prefer to borrow the deposits for properties from relatives or save it from self
employment schemes such as mentioned above.

Pakistanis live together in large households where three generations of extended
family members could be present. Ownership of such homes could be passed on from
grandparents to younger members of families who could be married cousins. These days
however the younger, more educated and affluent ones with good jobs such as doctors,
lawyers, engineers and IT specialists tend to move away from the overcrowding into
rented accommodation or buy their own property with help from mortgage companies.

Moreover most Pakistanis in Britain still maintain ownership of land in Pakistan
and it is only by way of inbreeding that the land could remain within the family. In this
regard saving is also used to help family dependants in Pakistan and the development of
property on the land there as well. Marrying a first cousin who are offspring of uncles
and aunts who remain in Pakistan is an effective way of maintaining this very important link with the land and family members.

D: My son, born and bred here, is married to his first cousin, his aunt's daughter. I and his uncles including Khan arranged everything for him in Pakistan and the two have a happy home. For his wedding our family elders in Pakistan gave him a piece of land and told him not to forget his roots. It is a good thing. The Prophet (peace be upon him) even said believers should marry from same community. Food type is the same, religion and culture — same. No hardship in integration and interaction. Say you were to marry a Chinese as an African, think of it, readjustments would be difficult for you both.

S: Extended family is very important in your culture then, even while here in Britain?
D: Yes. It is our culture to be together as much as possible. That is why once here, you miss your brothers, sisters and cousins and even uncles and aunts back in Pakistan. You miss the land too and if marriage is a way to get us united again, why not? Some people may have problem with that, we don't.

He went ahead to give an example of a certain Ja Maimahand who married a Jewish lady. According to him, there are two children born to this two very good people but the marriage is now dissolved since it was based only on love.

I was curious to learn more about love in a setting of arranged marriages so I decided to ask Dar and Khan. I was told that love is ever present in a truly Muslim family anyway and only love could have been responsible for a man and a woman to agree to marry in the first place and at that, a cousin. Not only that, love and respect are the factors that make children obey and agree with their parents choices for them in the first instance since the opposite of love is hate.

S: So an arranged first cousin marriage should then be better than a love marriage per se?
D: Experience has shown that it is. First, the parents of both the boy and the girl are family and have known one another for years. Secondly, the parents do always want the best for their children. This the boy and the girl know. I think in every way, there is a stronger base for a successful home with an arranged first cousin marriage. This is a fact. Marriage, when arranged, is a plus.

S: Has love then anything to do with marrying a cousin in an arranged setting?
D: It depends on how one understands love. Love is there from the start. A cousin is like a sister and the love is more natural here. Of course there is love and more love develops with time.

S: Do the couple have a choice in an arranged marriage?
D: The choices are made by the parents in an arranged marriage. If the children do not agree, they are not forced. The parents tell their son that they see a girl fit for you. The final choice is the children's and they usually agree with their parents' choices. When children marry according to their choices they may make only themselves happy but when they marry their parents' choices they make themselves and their parents happy. They make the whole family happy and win the family's support.

S: But I have read of cases where arranged marriages failed, where the lady felt trapped or the man is in love with another woman.
D: You are right there are some cases like that but they are rare. These days the children have more say about whom they wish to marry yet I do know that more kids go for their first cousins as wives still.
I was thrilled with Dar’s explicitness and very clear flow of thoughts and used the occasion to delve into the issue of Rishta and Pakistani courtship since I did not know how long he had to stay or for that matter if I would be able to get another chance at interviewing him again.

4.4. Rishta and a good marriage match

The concept of Rishta

By the concept of Rishta (literally translated meaning a good relationship), relationships that are based on a pre-marriage period in which cousins are groomed knowing each other, result in a good match. Emotional aspects of marrying a first cousin is an extremely important determinant factor in the choosing of a spouse (Shaw & Charsley, 2006) hence parents and every member of both families are very involved in the activities preceding marriage such as upbringing, familiarisation, visitations between families, and counselling.

It was important to study the role of parents, older relatives and the spouses themselves as related to this factor. Dar began by saying that children are not forced to engage in Rishta but are rather helped by the elderly members of the families to make informed decisions about a good marriage match. Also, every parent wants to instil in his or her children certain believes and customs which are valuable to them and which were instilled in them by their parents. They in turn would like to see those believes and customs passed on to their children’s children since this is what tradition is all about, they therefore play very active roles in seeing that their children marry a good match, not only for themselves but for the parents as well – a daughter-in-law or a son-in-law who will carry out and carry on the family’s tradition, one that is acceptable to everyone. Grandparents and parents, due to life experiences, are better at concluding if a girl is nice or not or if with time she will change and show her true character.

According to him most girls in Rishta are between the ages of fifteen and twenty-three years but for men, between seventeen and twenty-three years. A lot of the planning in Rishta depends on the time when a person is ending a vocational or university education and would be getting ready to finally marry, though many grooms and brides do have their weddings even while at school.
D: At such an early age, a child’s life-view is immature and imperfect. Children are prone to make mistakes but with the parents participation the chances are removed.

S: Who participates in the process of Rishta?

D: The whole family of the girl and that of the man. Yes, the two extended families do, starting with the grandparents to the siblings of the woman and man.

S: What specific roles do family members play?

D: The arrangements are made by the fathers on both sides but mothers give advice to the fathers and to the children but the negotiations are carried out mainly by the male members of the two households. Grandparents act as overseers. The other uncles and aunts also persuade and advise the engaging couple.

S: There is much orderliness really.

D: Yes much orderliness.

Khan came into the discussion and explained that Rishta could be started at any age by the parents and even in extreme cases before a daughter is born. As far as Khan is concerned parents are preoccupied with thinking about their children’s marriage as soon as they are born. In a situation when a bride is to come from Pakistan, the uncles and aunts over there who do the searching within the extended families, select and advise the bride. They also prepare her for the wedding and onward journey to where her man is though eventually the man would have to come and marry the bride.

I did not want to disturb the work of Khan and Dar and I could see that customers were trooping into the shop to but meat. Also, Dar needed to go back to work so we made an appointment for the next week and Dar promised to be around.

*Rishta and negotiating a Pakistani marriage*

The issues of *Rishta* and marriage topped our next meeting and we continued where we left off at the last meeting. At this meeting were Khan and his brother Mohamed and also the relative of Khan from Pakistan who is a cricket player. Some customers to the meat shop as usual sat around to listen to the discussions.

S: Who are the main parties involved in arranging a marriage Mister Dar?

D: The parents of the boy are, but his uncles and aunts are also very involved. Actually it is a family affair because every uncle and every aunt knows it will be their children’s turns also to marry.

S: When is marriage discussed with the boy and the girl?

K: There is no definite time but generally as soon as the children are matured enough to understand the issues. In Pakistan, children may even be aware as early as their primary school days. For the girl this is good because she keeps her mind focused and she studies her books.

S: So it does not come as a surprise to any of them who the parents’ choice is when the time comes?

K: A child already has an idea who his or her fiancé would be years before the marriage itself.

D: But that does not always translate to that child marrying the first person. Another cousin may ultimately become the spouse.

S: I see. But does that not lead to confusion and problems?
D: It is not supposed to. The parents handle everything with care and wisdom. A girl may have three or four Rishtas going for her but at the end she settles for only one man.
S: So Rishta is just like a period of courtship in which parents are involved?
D: Yes rather. How a Rishta ends depends on the girl, the boy and their parents. Of course it depends on Allah as well because if God does not want a boy for a girl, there is nothing anyone can do.

As it happened at our last meeting the information at this session was mainly provided by Dar and according to him, when a boy’s parents have made up their minds about a girl they want for their son, they inform the parents of the girl as well as the uncles and aunts. The girl’s parents tell their daughter and her view is asked. Generally speaking she does not object because a Pakistani girl sees it as a pride that she is desired in a process of Rishta. She has the right to be apprehensive but she takes courage in the fact that marriage itself is still a faraway event and there is time for her to make up her mind. Moreover she could be involved in Rishta with more than one man at a time. A Rishta with a boy and his family does not necessarily or always lead to a marriage with the particular boy.

After a period of time if there develops a good feeling from the girl and her parents toward the proposals of the boy’s family, an appointment is made to pay the girl’s family home a visit, the first in many. This marks the beginning of the engagement or magni. During magni, the visit of the boy and his parents to the girl’s house is to see her in her natural home setting, to see how she serves her parents, to assess how homely she is and to study her reactions to the boy and his parents. The girl will come into the sitting room where the boy and the parents of the two are. She will usually serve tea and Paratha and make a few more appearances. After the boy and his parents have left for their own home, the girl’s parents would ask her what her opinions are again and again. At this juncture she has the right to agree or disagree with the boy’s proposal but as a rule, she usually accepts the boy. If she is in doubt more visits are arranged to provide her with the opportunity of seeing the boy a few more times.

The same happens with the boy – at home he is asked by his parents to say how he feels about the girl. If either the girl or the boy has any questions or worries, the parents try to answer them and assure him that all will be well because his parents have known the family of the girl for many years and the qualities they possess. In a situation
when the girl is in Pakistan, the boy’s uncles and near relatives perform the visit but parents do travel from Britain for this purpose as well.

S: It is interesting to learn that marriage is not imposed on any of the two.
D: Not at all! Did you think before that the boy and the girl have no choice?
S: Well, the media make it seem so.
D: That is the Western media for you there. A marriage where a spouse is forced on someone is not recognised in Islam. God made each of us to be able to decide.
S: So the parents or uncles who are the marriage arrangers are just being guardians?
D: Yes, in a way, but a little more than guardians. They as parents have their vested interests also. They ensure that tradition continues. Our society is a very traditional one.
S: And the children too see to it that tradition is kept by agreeing with their parents designs?
D: Exactly. They may have doubts in their minds but ultimately they see the benefits.

Khan contributed to the discussion by saying that the first thing done after a bride is chosen is the payment of the mehri – a dowry given the bride to keep and it is performed at the engagement ceremony also called magni. Mehri could be from the parents of the man or if the man is gainfully employed he pays his bride’s dowry himself and his parents can contribute. In addition to the mehri, jewellery is acquired for the bride as well as clothes and shoes. It is not unusual for a car to be bought for a bride by the rich parents of a groom. Other members of the extended families bring gifts in different forms for the bride too. This continues till the day of wedding, shadi, when the bride gets more gifts not only from family members but from all well-wishers and invitees. Gifts could be in various forms such as cash, household utensils, clothes, jewellries. The groom also collects many gifts from family members and friends.

Shadi could be sponsored by the families of either the groom or the bride with only mild variations between the different tribes but it is more common for the bride’s family to be responsible for it. It comes up usually between six to twelve months after the engagement and the payment of the dowry.

In Pakistan according to Dar, wedding could last as long as three days but in Britain a day is usually enough for the nikah - legal aspect of signing the marriage certificate and prayers in the presence of a maulah – and the shadi itself. The nikah usually takes place during the shadi as it happened at the wedding of the two brothers which I attended at the mosque.
Rishta and the world-wide web

According to Khan, the use of internet dating sites is getting more and more popular in finding a wife or a husband among younger British Pakistanis. Nevertheless among the older very conservative generation the practice is frowned upon and most parents do their utmost to discourage it. They feel it is un-Islam and too liberal to meet a life partner on the internet.

K: I heard a story of a Pakistani man who was residing in the UK. He met a girl during a chat on the internet. They became friends. The man finally decided to marry that girl. He came to Pakistan got married to the girl and returned back, promising to come back for the girl. Till date, he never came back. His wife is waiting for him. Allah gave them a son. She wrote many letters and emails to him but he has not returned. He was only flirting on the internet and snared her. The most devastating thing is that he is not divorcing her. Searches have been made for the man but apparently he is no longer living here in the UK but has moved to the States.

S: What a sad story.

K: Indeed, the elders consider it a taboo to look for a good march on the internet. They will have nothing to do with it. Maybe in the cities (of Pakistan) it could work but not in our tribal homes.

Dar on the other hand feels world-wide web dating is appropriate for anyone who desires it and that the story told by Khan could not always be the case. He saw nothing wrong with it once the two people dating are Muslims and have love for each other. He believed this trend will continue. He was aware of a situation in the UK where a couple had met on the internet and had got married. The parents of the boy and the girl were of course very worried at the beginning but during the process of Rishta everything was taken care of, the parents of both of them met, engagement went successfully and dowry was paid.


After browsing through these websites I am of the opinion myself that truly the conservative Pathan people would not appreciate the notion of getting a partner through the web. None seem to be from the tribal areas. I made up my mind to ascertain or disprove this at the wedding that will be coming up in the mosque. I also made a note to this effect on my diary so as not to forget. Many of the users are young, highly educated, upwardly mobile professionals but all seem to be Sunni Muslims of more liberal leanings and live in the big cities of Pakistan, USA, UK, Canada, Australia and Dubai.
4.5. Health and issues of medical intervention

Since there were quite a number of people present at the discussion session — ten people had gathered — I thought it a good chance to raise the issue of health and first cousin marriage. I started by asking how many people were there married to a first cousin. Several of the participants were old men and Dar thought they would benefit from interpretation so he told them my question in the Urdu language. I wondered if the men would understand the term *first cousin* but Dar told me that they did. Seeing he interpreted so well, I asked Dar to be my interpreter for this session and he consented.

Out of the ten, eight men were married to first cousins including Khan, Mohamed his brother and Dar. Of the two men left, one man was married to a second cousin and the visiting cricket player was married to a distant relative within his clan. I now asked how many people believe that marrying a cousin could be responsible for genetic defects in children. Here also I wondered how Dar would interpret what genetic defects are but he did convey the question to them and they all were slow to answer. Dar became the first person to answer and said it was quite possible and that a lot had been spoken about this.

S: So a lot has been spoken about this issue sir?
D: Yes. They harp on it always. The doctors and the nurses at the hospital do.
S: What about in the media, the radio for example?
D: The BBC had some programs on it and we also have local Muslim radio programmes in Urdu where they ask people to go for medical counselling.

He went on to say it is a very important issue in the community that parents should seek medical and genetic counselling before arranging a marriage for their children if the person they are getting married to are near relatives. In his case, Dar knew that he carries the gene for thalassaemia but told me that none of his children does.

There was a man present who said in English that he had something to say. He then continued in Urdu to speak saying that if a child would live it would live or if a child would come out of the mother’s womb with a defect, then that was the will of *Allah*. Several of the men agreed with him and said such things were best left in the hands of *Allah*, all this while Dar was interpreting to me their responses.

As I was wondering if the people were denying a connection between possible adverse health and cousin marriage I asked the men to voice their opinions. I found out that several did think that there is a connection. One Mr Ishiaq, about sixty years of age,
pointed to the fact that on the street of Bradford he has seen children with impaired sights being led around by their siblings and friends. He knew of families where there are members with illnesses that, according to him, were brought about by inbreeding.

I: Many of our people are becoming aware of this problem. When one sees a child in suffering it is not easy. It is better to try and prevent these things. The younger people also would prefer to have pre-marital genetic testing done.
S: How did they know it is cousin marriage to blame?
I: At the infirmaries. Doctors tell it like it is. It is a price we have to pay sometimes to continue to do what we like. When a doctor who is a Pakistani says it people just take it more seriously.
S: So the people have more faith in a doctor that is one of their own?
I: Yes, naturally: of same faith, of same extraction.
S: Why take the risk?
I: Things are changing now. The younger people ask questions and would prefer to have a doctor check to see if a girl he likes to marry is the right one. But once you are married there is little you can do. You just leave everything to God. But while single I suppose it is sensible to go to a doctor to confirm.

It is pertinent to know that the message is now getting around and people have started to understand it that genetic disorders in the families could be as a result of first cousin marriage.

Khan agreed with the last speaker by saying that in Bradford, attitudes are gradually changing in the face of mounting scientific evidence and media coverage of the medical problems that could come with the practice of cousin marriage but that most kids would still choose cousins as wives over any other women. He said that parents have started to put the issue of premarital medical counselling and genetic testing into consideration in arranging a cousin to marry during the process of Rishta since people would rather prefer to have their children marry from families whose medical history they know in order to prevent a genetic disorder. According to him, the children, being more educated and aware than most of their parents, also do insist to have potential spouses and themselves genetically checked before dowries are paid.

It was interesting to know that in Pakistan, attitudes too are changing and people are showing more interest in the medical aspects of the practice of first cousin marriage. According to the Pakistani cricketer Fazal Aziz, who was on visit and was present for the session, premarital counselling with genetic testing is now getting popular with the elites, city dwellers and even rural dwellers that are well to do and could afford the laboratory bills. As far as the general population is concerned, most marriages are still conducted the
old way through marriage arrangers - that is the parents and older relatives - and time of courtship passes without a conscious effort at making the children undergo any genetic testing whatever. I wanted him to tell me about his own situation and he agreed saying that only him had to undergo medical testing of various sorts as a cricketer. According to him he is not known to be a carrier of any inherited recessive gene so when the time came for him to wed, he did not insist on his fiancé being tested.

The next area of questioning concerned how the people viewed genetic testing during a pregnancy by way of amniocentesis and what their attitudes could be towards aborting a foetus with a genetic disorder. I took a poll and asked which of them would agree to have a foetus with genetic defect aborted and no one of them raised his hand. In fact most shook their heads immediately Dar interpreted to them my question and Dar spoke first saying that it is categorically against the tenets of Islam to abort a baby.

D: The Koran teaches that to kill one innocent person is like killing the whole of human race. There is no compromise about that. Once a child is conceived, we let him come to the earth to fulfil the mission Allah gave him. All the holy books teach that we must not kill you know.
S: Which means that amniocentesis is not popular with the people.
D: I have never heard of one being done to a Pakistani woman. No one really needs it. That procedure is going too far and I think it is very dangerous.

At this meeting I was glad that I was able to touch on different aspects of the practice of first cousin marriage including the issue of health and inherited disorders. As much as possible I tried to be sensitive to the feelings of my informants and did not want to be seen as condemning them for their customs which they without a doubt, derive many benefits from. From further questioning, I gathered that out of all the people that were present and who lived in Bradford, only Dar had once had a test done for a carrier status of the common recessive genetic disorders. He had also made all his children undergone the tests. It seems that people are getting informed but their response is slow. Since I was going to conduct further interviews at Khalid’s restaurant in the days ahead I decided to follow this same line of questioning with emphasis on people’s attitude to premarital medical counselling and genetic testing so as to compare with the data I have obtained so far at the meetings in Khan’s meat shop.
4.6. Further interviews and focus group meetings

Towards the end of my second week of fieldwork in the city of Bradford, I finally was able to get Taofiq Khalid - whom I introduced in an earlier chapter - to organise informants for an interview and a focus group discussion at his restaurant. Khalid’s restaurant was a place where not only Pakistani menus were served but also where one could eat Turkish kebab, hamburger, grilled chicken and Italian pizzas.

Khalid who is forty-eight years old, is a patrilateral relation of Khan and they both originally came from the same town in Pakistan being Pathans by descent.

The first time I met him was in the first week after my arrival, having come to visit with Khan at his meat shop. Khan had called and told him about me and he had been benevolent enough to agree not only to be interviewed but that his restaurant could be used for any FGDs that I might be interested in conducting.

He was a very busy person because of the peculiar needs of his business. His restaurant was quite spacious having within it eight tables with each table having four chairs. On the wall across as one entered, were displayed his certificates from the different culinary schools he attended. He, his brother Azaf and a few assistants including two white British girls who worked as waitresses, usually arrived at the restaurant very early in the day to take deliveries of the restaurant’s gastronomic supplies. He had another younger brother who manned a filling station in town and was the one married to a near relative from Pakistan.

He told me not to worry and that he would be attending to me for only the next day, Thursday and that I should come to the restaurant at eleven o’clock in the morning since he would by then be less busy and customers would just have started coming in. I asked him if it would be possible to interview his wife as well and he said to me that it should not be a problem at all since she was free on that Thursday. As I indicated, this was the second week of my fieldwork in Bradford. Things, so far, were looking very bright indeed.

On Thursday, Khalid’s wife, Aishat, came in the company of her father, Saheed Javez and Azaf’s wife, Fatima. She drove to the restaurant in a Mercedes 200 C class of silver colour. Azaf, Khalid’s brother and assistant in the kitchen, was also around as well as Khalid himself and an uncle, Imram Shuaib. I did not ask what the age of Aishat was
but I placed her around thirty years and Fatima a bit younger at about twenty-five. The two ladies wore the long flowing and embroidered *shalwar kameez* and both had their heads covered with scarves.

I joined the men to offload chicken boxes from a refrigerated truck while another truck was waiting in front of the restaurant with kebab rolls. We placed the boxes into the restaurant’s store where there was a large refrigerator against the wall.

I noticed that this family was very easy going, warm and friendly, just a typical British family. It was Aishat who brought tea for the men and came up to me asking me in a soundly British accent if I would like to have a tea as well or a coffee. I opted for a coffee and a chicken sandwich was offered which I did not reject.

Seeing that everyone was relaxed, I wasted no time in solemnities and unspoken protocols required in the presence of Khan and the rest of the older fellows of the week before but went straight to the points on my prepared structured questions. I began by introducing myself especially for the benefit of Khalid’s uncle and father-in-law, both of whom I had not met before. Khalid introduced the members of his extended family and I went to the next phase of the meeting which was to ask who amongst them was married to a cousin and what their opinions were about the practice. Both Khalid and his uncle Imram Shuaib are in first cousin relationships but Azaf’s case is different, his wife is a second cousin. Aishat herself is a product of a first cousin marriage, her father having married his aunt’s daughter. It was Khalid’s uncle, Imram Shuaib, who spoke first, extolling the practice of cousin marriage. Saheed Javez, Khalid’s father-in-law, also spoke in the same version.

I.S.: This tradition is an old and strong tradition among our people. It has been so for generations. To what can I compare it? It is our important way of life, it is our culture. Our parents married so because they knew it was good and we continue to carry on because it is nice.

S: What makes it important and nice sir?

I.S.: Look, without cousin marriage, there cannot be a people separate from others. We would have all been one race, one colour, maybe same height and so on. Don’t you know that this is the basis of a clan or tribe? Even the whites came about this way and the Chinese and the Arabs and the Jews. You as well, everybody.

S.J.: You see when a wife is married within your family, alliances are made and there is loyalty. The family becomes stronger and more prosperous from generation to generation. No one comes in to claim from you what belongs to your fathers. Your land is safe and your children are safe and your business too.

The answers to my questions from these informants were very similar to many of the responses I heard before at the earlier sessions of interviewing at the meat shop,
especially when they involved the benefits derived from the practice, how important it was to them and so on. However different opinions were expressed by participants when asked how widespread the practice was accepted in this modern period by British Pakistanis. While Shuaib and Javez thought that it was generally well accepted, Khalid, Azaf and Aishat felt that for many young people, ways of finding marriage partners were changing. Most young Pakistanis would prefer to not marry arranged partners in Pakistan but would rather get to meet their fiancés there in Britain. They viewed marriages with cousins whom they might not have met before as potentially problematic since initial romance was not involved. Furthermore, being British, they were of the view that connection with the Pakistani homeland would decline with subsequent generations.

Having not been able to interview female folks at my earlier sessions the presence of Aishat and Fatima at this gathering offered a window of opportunity to quickly do so.

S: Ladies what have you to say on this question of cousin marriage?
A: For me it’s nice. My parents did that and I feel what was good for them should also be good enough for me. Everybody has their ways though.
S: Any regrets?
A: Not at all! I am very happy with my cousin. Khalid’s parents and my parents all are siblings and they grew up together. It is so interesting because everyone knows each other. You have so many caring relatives to run to when you are in need. I find it nice.
F: Family members are nice to everyone. No one is angry at the other. Family meetings at Eid-al-Adha are so very warm and full of fun. You see all your cousins and nieces and nephews.
A: You read of couples breaking soon after they married. In my case it was easy to readjust to life after marriage because I already knew my cousin for years. For example I knew his favourite dishes and was there with my parents at his graduations.
F: Me too. Azaf is like a brother and a friend. It’s like I am home whenever I visited his parents’ house. We are just one people.
S: Are other young people of the same opinions as yours?
A: Things are changing now. A kid will want to marry a girl he met at school or the university because they fell in love. People meet on the net as well and after a time fall in love. Yet many girls get married to their first or second cousins. It’s both ways you know.
S: Do you have friends who have married from falling in love?
A & F: Yes.
F: But the parents too got involved before they could get married. The parents have to be involved.
A: Yes, the parents still got to meet and speak together and spend for the kids. They can’t do everything on their own. No, they can’t.
S: How long have you bee married now?
A: For fifteen years.
F: Seven years.

At this meeting issues of health and genetic testing were also discussed. Khalid spoke and said it was a very important issue and of the opinion that when cousins are getting married, it should be obligatory to have genetic testing done. Azaf and the women agreed
too saying it was so sad to see children with various defects in the city of Bradford. They told me that they had medical testing done before marriage and none of them is a carrier of defective genes.

S: Do you think that enough is being done to get people tested for faulty genes?
K: Probably not. I think more could be done. They should stop blaming those who marry their cousins because it's freedom of choice. We live in a free society and everyone has the right to marry whoever they wish to marry for God's sake.
S: What do you think could be done? How could people be encouraged to seek medical counselling before marriage?
K: First I think the whites should stop criticizing those who choose to marry their cousins. They should see that it's a culture of a people and start to get closer to learn why people do what they do. You don't expect to solve a problem without first attempting to know it. They should engage with the people and not cast them off.
A: Like you are doing, doctor. I wanted to come because Khan told us that you have not come to teach us or criticize us. You came to learn about our culture all the way from where, Africa? Amsterdam? You see what I mean? It's nice.
S: Thank you madam.
S.J.: Yes, she is right. I know most of the people will start to understand the need to have genetic tests done before marriage. They will not proceed with a marriage when it is proven scientifically that their offspring could be born with inherited disorders. I think the government and the health ministry should make a new approach and involve the people. To want to stop the practice of cousin marriage completely will be impractical.
S: Would any Muslim person you know abort a foetus that is defective after an amniocentesis (I explained to the older participants what it was)?
A: No. I don't think so. I've never heard of one. It's not the baby's fault, why should it be killed?
K: I have not heard of one either.
F: Maybe to save a mother's life then I heard that an abortion could be carried out but not because the child is bad or sick.

Meanwhile Azaf had left for the kitchen to make menus that were being ordered by customers. I expressed my gratitude to my informants and stopped the session because I would not like to hinder them in their work. It was a very fulfilling day indeed especially being able to interview for the first time female informants courtesy of Khalid. I wanted to take pictures of the women but was not permitted to do so and I could understand.

The following day Friday, being Jumat and the start of weekend, there was much business at the restaurant. Khalid said that I was free to speak with the customers as much as I liked but that he might not be participating in the discussion because of the presence of many customers.

My questioning was informal and unstructured since they were at food most of the time or relaxing with drinks of tea, coffee or fruit juice. Some customers showed interest while others were in a hurry to eat and leave. On the whole I got mixed responses from people that I interviewed and who of course were of Pakistani extraction. Some felt
that the practice of first cousin marriage is dying out, others spoke to the contrary that it is here to stay. They were also nearly equally divided into those who felt that the benefits outweighed the disadvantages and vice versa. Finally nearly all felt that it was better to have intending marriage couples undergo premarital genetic counselling.

4.7. Love marriage
Among British Pakistanis two types of arranged marriage have been identified (Shaw 2001). First, there are conventionally arranged marriages in which the major decisions are made by the couple’s parents or guardians. The bride and groom may be consulted but have no significant influence over the decisions. Secondly, there are marriages that appear to have been conventionally arranged but in which the couple together have influenced the decisions in important ways or have engineered the situation almost entirely themselves. Young Pakistanis describe these marriages as arranged love marriages. The latter type usually may start while the children met in their secondary schools, at the universities, through other acquaintances or on the internet.

While some men especially the older ones had a measure of misgivings about marrying solely on the basis of love, I gathered from my informants that ‘arranged love marriage’ is the trend in the future but there will still be the diehard adherents of arranged first cousin marriage. In fact the three students from Bradford University told me that they had patronised dating sites and tried to date girls they met in virtual space. Ultimately any girl they bring home would have to be Muslims and accepted by their parents because of the respect they have for them and the fact that a bride is a new member of the man’s family who should enhance the strong relationship she may meet and not divide that family.

4.8. Influence of Islam on marriage practices
All the men and two women I interviewed took Islam as an important aspect of their lives in every area – moral, social, economic and political. They were all of the opinion that a marriage partner should be of the Islamic faith. As far as marriage to a cousin is concerned, I could not know the official position of the faith. I was told by the maulah at the wedding in the mosque that the Prophet Mohamed, even though married to a first
cousin once, preached that people ought to marry from within their communities - which means racial types - but was of the knowledge that weak offspring would result from marrying a very close relative, therefore he did discourage inbreeding.

From all indications the practice of first cousin marriage is not strictly an Islamic affair since it cuts across all ethnic, social and religious groups. In fact among Muslims, following of religious tradition is the least commonly cited reason for the practice (Hussain 1999).
CHAPTER 5
A BRITISH PAKISTANI PATHAN MARRIAGE

Introduction
During the last week of my fieldwork, I was able to participate firsthand in a people’s tradition and observe the actions resulting from a people’s life view and cultural perspectives. In this section, I will be discussing informants’ responses from interviews conducted and be presenting my experience of a British Pakistani Pathan marriage.

Preparations towards the wedding
Khan, as I said earlier, was my point of contact throughout the period of my research fieldwork in Bradford. In the first week of our meeting he told me of a large Asian shop which specialises in the sale of marriage clothes and paraphernalia close to where there was a mosque with a large hall used for weddings in its premises. He thought that I could observe people coming into the shop to buy items in preparation for weddings and probably ask them a few questions. Moreover he said if I would still be around in Bradford in a fortnight then I could witness a wedding of the daughter of a relative. I said that I should still be in Bradford and would like to be at the wedding. He made phone calls to his relatives and to the mosque keeper, telling them about me and my mission thereby getting them ready to receive me.

The next day I located the mosque and introduced myself to the attendant who in turn told me that he had been informed about me. He was very forthcoming with cooperation and encouragement that I needed. He was personally a very light-hearted man. He asked me for a copy of my research fieldwork and thesis proposal which I handed over to him. He brought out his reading glasses and stared at the pages, trying to peruse the contents. After that he gave me back the copy and told me that there were weddings nearly every weekend and that he would be expecting me in the upper week to attend that of the daughter of Khan’s relative. He also asked me to come on the Thursday preceding the wedding since many relatives including the father and brothers of the bride and groom will be at the mosque setting chairs and decorating the hall.
Since I was free for the rest of the day I left the mosque and entered the big shop for Asian clothes in the neighbourhood, The Bombay Shop. An advert near the door claimed that it is the biggest shop for Asian articles in the whole of Europe. They seem to specialise in both Indian and Pakistani wedding items in that place. I saw beautifully embroidered bridal wears from different fabrics and *shalwar kameez* of different sizes and colours. They also had in stock different men’s wear and fanciful shoes of the type with upwardly curved front parts, made from shiny materials.

The place was large and people were trooping in for shopping. I noticed that elderly people, both male and female, were coming in with young women and men. I asked the security guard who these people were and he said that they were girls and boys soon to get married, coming with their parents. According to him they usually came to spend on gifts for their children, confirming what I already learned from my informants that parents and relatives are very financially involved in the process of *Rishta* and Pakistani weddings. Several of the girls wore the *niqab* but many also were having headscarves on. The women had on their hands *mehdi*, the intricately designed drawings in henna. There were people of non-Pakistani heritage in the shop as well.

*Interviewing at the mosque*

It was my third week and the final sessions of interview and FGD took place at the mosque. They were conducted around the topic of *Rishta* and preparations towards the wedding of the two brothers. For this a side-room was allocated and the relatives of the brides - including a father of one of the brides - with many relatives of the marrying men were present to supply me information on the procedures leading to a Pakistani Pathan wedding. The interviews were on the Thursday preceding the wedding which took place on the following Saturday.

I noticed here that the elders in the families of the grooms and of the brides all had long flowing beards and were always dressed in the flowing traditional dresses, the *shalwar kameez*. Many of these rather elderly men had grey hair but all looked very strong and healthy indeed. They all took part in decorating the hall and arranging the chairs and tables in preparation for the wedding. Also, they were all very friendly to me and sat through the sessions of interviews without objecting to their photographs being
taken. My tape recorder was not allowed to be switched on but I was permitted to transcribe. I must point out that they were all very relaxed and all their eyes were on me throughout. They were not distracted at all by anything.

The session itself was conducted in an atmosphere of a group discussion and was informal. Khan had advised me to be as relaxed and informal as possible and the men would cooperate with me. The bride’s father and mosque attendant summoned about ten to twelve men to the side-room where chairs had been arranged and where I was already seated. They briefly explained to the men who I was and my desire to interview them on the marriage culture of the Pathans. The attendant told me that I may start asking questions from the people being given only an hour since the men were to return to their business of decoration of the hall and arranging seats and tables.

Tea was ever present and I started with the usual salam malenku invocation. The expected chorus of lenku mansala came from the gathered gentlemen, both old and young but mostly old. A few of the men were busy passing their fingers and thumbs over their really large beards, over and over again as if to make them smoother. My own beard that had been left to grow a good two inches had good company that day. I would not know but I suppose it had really helped me to become accepted in the midst of my Muslim informants and now friends. The mosque keeper and a man, Yusef, who was an engineering student acted as interpreters for me.

My first question was to find out what did the people know about cousin marriage. The interpreter explained my question to the people and there was a moment when everyone seemed to talk to each other and finally Yusef gave me the interpretation as one man, Respondent One, continued to talk probably on behalf of the others. All his answers were given in English but interpretation of my questions continued.

According to him, cousin marriage was the way Allah spread men over the world. Thousands of years ago it had existed and as people move farther apart, they had to marry their cousins or nieces before people became many on the earth. He said that in the room, all of them came from mainly three clans in Pakistan and were all related. In their clans one either marries a cousin or a near relative but it is not usual to marry away from any other clan.
The issue of land ownership remaining in the family was emphasised as the reason why a Pathan should marry a cousin by respondents at the mosque meeting. As Pathans the culture to hold to one’s land is very powerful since the Pathan would prefer to die than to lose his land. Land must remain in the family at all cost.

S: But you are here now in Britain and the land of the Pathans is far away.
R1: No, it only seems so. The land of the Pathans is near, the land is here (placing a palm on the left part of his chest)
S: So it is widespread in your community here in Britain?
R1: Yes it is. The Pathan marries his first cousin or a close relative.

After many days in the field, my courage level had so improved as to make the asking of one of my early questions no more daunting but natural as I asked those men to tell me in a poll how many of them were married to cousins. Nine men indicated they were by a slight lifting of the hand and by nodding. I asked the other three who they were married to and they said that they were married to near cousins as well.

R1: All are cousins you see, whether first or second or third. What is important is that a wife must be from the family and not an outsider. Outsiders are welcome as guest to visit but not as wives.
S: This is powerful!
R1: (interpreting himself to the men what I had just said, the men all laughed) Yes, it is powerful.

I also asked one of the brides’ fathers – the one related distantly to Khan - about the negotiations that went over his daughter up to this wedding and to know if he was an uncle to his son-in-law. All he could tell me was that his daughter and her fiancé were cousins and were both born in Britain. I attempted to ascertain if they were first cousins but he answered me again saying they were cousins.

Bride’s father: The girls and the boys marrying are cousins. They all are our children. This, to us, is very important. They could be first cousins or second cousins but it matters that they be cousins or near relations. It matters that we the parents know who our children are getting married to.

I could see that this man was not the type of man who was going to speak much and probably felt that the information he gave was enough for me. Most of the time during the meeting, he only kept his eyes on me, not speaking much. Also I suspected he did not feel at ease to discuss details of his family life and that of his daughter’s with me after having met me only a few minutes before and in the hearing of the other men seated. He
was not being arrogant but I felt he was being cautious. I also thought that I should not press the question any further, being mindful of my informants’ sensitivities. Furthermore, he was always being called out to attend to one need or another in the main hall of the mosque where other men were busy with the decorations.

The remaining men went on to talk about other benefits of cousin marriage and *Rishta*, repeating basically all that I had learned from Khan and Dar the previous week. At this point I ventured to ask them their views on getting a wife or husband through internet dating and from their responses, I immediately could see that they considered internet dating untraditional and strange, which could eventually lead to instability of Pakistani homes and many divorces in the future.

Discussing the issues of health and genetic testing, they were not against young people who wish to have themselves tested from doing so before marriage. In their own case, since most were old men, they left the fate of their offspring to *Allah* and never bothered about testing. The mosque keeper came into the discussion pointing out that the type of medical intervention I was describing would be for the future and for the children, since none of them would need it anyway.

This was the most photograph-loving group I came across and we took many pictures together at the session. We shook hands and I was told to come for the wedding on Saturday. As for the bride’s father, he was very busy with other issues but came in towards the end to ask me how things went. I thanked him for his input in organising the meeting. He also reminded me of the wedding and I promised, *insh-Allah*, to be there.

The Pathans have left a very lasting impression on me from these experiences because I had read how nationalistic and warrior-like they could be. The media depicted these people as hard and rough and not open to the outside world but I came to Bradford to do a research fieldwork and fell into their midst. I saw a gentle people who welcomed and nurtured me with a most astounding hospitality I could never have imagined.

*Saturday, the wedding day*

On Saturday the wedding day proper, there was an impromptu session of a FGD in the hall where the wedding took place. It happened as men were arriving and saw me, the only person of African descent sitting at a wedding of Pathans. At the first FGD the
previous Thursday, a rather educated middle aged man who spoke very good English had been attached to me to be a kind of a guide. He led me into the hall and people who had gathered — about fifteen in number — all rose to their feet and welcomed me and I proceeded to shake their hands muttering to everyone, “Salam malenku!” He then proceeded to explain to them who I was and what I had come to do in their midst. This was around eleven thirty a. m. and as I started asking questions, more men came into the hall and since the hall was fast filling up I could not conduct any meaningful session of interviews here.

At a time a group came in led by someone who looked like a Muslim leader, the Imam, and everyone rose up to greet him. My guide told me that the Imam would be officiating and would pronounce the Islamic blessing on the wedding. He stopped in his path as he came near to me where I was standing with the rest of the people. I shook his hand and he sat next to me while his assistants and followers sat next to him as well. He was a rather young man — I think he should be in his late thirties — wearing a thick long beard and was of a friendly disposition with an atmosphere of authority and humility around him at the same time.

The imam and I started talking, he asking me what had brought me into their midst. I told me that I was a student of medical anthropology doing a research about cousin marriage among the Pakistanis of Bradford. He sat attentively, listening to me and then began to tell me about himself and to lecture me on the teachings of Islam on cousin marriage.

He told me that the person called an imam is called a maulah by Indo-Pakistanis in the part of the country where he came from. Furthermore, he would prefer to be addressed as such since, according to him, the Western media had come to stereotype who and what an imam represented.

M: The word imam has become associated by the Western media, with an Islamist who, having been brainwashed himself, indoctrinates others to carry out violent acts against innocent people. On the contrary the title of a maulah conveys the respect due the office which, by the grace of God, I occupy. I do not lay claim to any superlative wisdom, knowledge or superiority but in all humility I am supposed to be a holy wise man (smiling).

Moreover he said he was trained as a lawyer and attended three universities: Oxford, Manchester and Birmingham. From that statement he uttered in which his argument was
expressed and the subsequent pronouncements from his lips I was not really surprised. I felt that here was a very educated person wearing a long beard, a heavy turban and works as a maulah. Meeting him was an unforgettable moment of my research fieldwork period. I told him so and he told him that I was making him feel unnecessarily important. I said that he was important and he thanked me.

I asked him what his role that day was going to be and he began by explaining that he was there primarily for the nikah, the legal joining of the husband and wife, which normally must take place before him. Moreover he would be saying the prayer of blessing for the couples who were starting their new homes on that day.

M: Rishta needs to come to nikah for it to be legal in the Islamic culture. A man and a woman have basically become man and wife after the dowry has been paid but I bear witness as the couple's spiritual guide that they are married today, and of course the prayers of blessing are given at nikah.

I also took the opportunity to ask for his learned view on the thoughts of the Prophet on first cousin marriage practice and what the teaching of Islam is. He told me that the prophet for a long time remained monogamous till the death of his first wife who was older than him. Allah then allowed him to marry all the women in his life to serve as example to future believers that marriage in any form and to anyone – rich, poor, free, slave and from whatever tribe – is honoured by him God. He also said that since the Prophet married a first cousin it means that he did not disapprove of it. The normal thing however is for a man to marry the number of women he knows he could care for equally. This way the maulah was able to touch on some of the salient issues of my research topic and for this I greatly value his views as a leader and authority in Islamic matters.

Being so impressed with his knowledge of Islamic doctrines, I asked him to tell me the sources of them. He went on to say that there are four main sources from which the teachings in Islam come: the Koran, the Hadith, the Ijma and the Ijtiad or Logic. The Hadith is the collection of commentaries, nearly as old as the Koran itself, while the Ijma is the consensus of the scholars which is not as old as the Hadith. The Ijtiad on the other hand is the personal thoughts and understanding of the seeker or his capacity to come to logical conclusions. He encouraged me to buy the book, Sharia, by professor Doi, a South African, from Taha Publishers in order to grasp more of what he was saying. As he was speaking I was hurrying to write down, like a good student, as much as I could on the
back of my flight ticket in the glare of everyone that had gathered around us by now to partake of what literally became a lecture in Islamic exegesis. To the wedding, I had been advised not to bring copious writing materials such as a diary and notebook but a sheet of paper was at hand and a biro. After using up all of the writing space of the sheet of paper which I brought, I had to improvise by converting for use the little free space on my flight ticket which was in my jacket pocket.

Concerning the issue of health effects of cousin affinities we were unable to discuss because the maulah was summoned to the high table to which he was escorted by a large group of people where he would be making prayers for the grooms. We shook hands again before he left only to meet later during the reception.

The two grooms came into the hall with their friends and probably close relatives. Leading the way were some young boys in suits and ties who reminded me of the ring bearers at Christian weddings. One of the boys was Khan’s youngest son who recognised me and smiled. The grooms too were very young and both were dressed in sharp suits with ties to march. This was a sharp contrast to the rest of the people who were nearly all dressed in the traditional Pakistani robes and caps. We all rose up to greet them and they shook hands with as many people as they met on their way to the high table which was in the fore of the hall. After taking their seats, the solemn part of the marriage ceremony began with the maulah reciting prayers from the holy Koran with his hands in a raised position. Others joined him with their hands also raised and intermittently chorused the word “amin” as he continued to say the blessings.

It is of note that women were not present in the hall where the men sat throughout the wedding. I was told before that they were going to be gathering separately and be sitting with the brides. They had their own celebration of the wedding in a separate part of the mosque as this was in compliance with the injunctions of Islam which stipulates that men and women that are not from same family should not intermingle or be close to one another. This was in contrast to a Pakistani wedding which I attended in Amsterdam awhile ago where this sort of demarcation was absent, the bride was there for all to see in all her glory and she was made to sit with her man at the high table on the stage. I suppose what I experienced in Bradford was strictly an ethnic Pathan affair and was not the norm for all Pakistani weddings.
After the maulah had said the prayers for the grooms, some papers were signed and I suppose those were the marriage certificates of sort. Immediately the men, many of whom were at the interview session with me, started serving food to the guests and I went over to the grooms to introduce myself and congratulate them. I asked who they were and they said that they were brothers and the two of them were marrying on the same day and their two brides - one of which was the daughter of Khan’s distant relation - they would be going home with after the reception. Very nice kids, probably in their early twenties, I wished them God’s peace again and went to where I was assigned to seat. It turned out that across from me, slightly to the right, was the maulah. During the wedding reception I was permitted to take snapshots and even though the maulah had previously declined being photographed, he later consented as he was eating his meals, probably because the food was very good.

I joined the invitees, every one of which was eating with their bare hands as was the custom of the Pathans. It was not difficult at all. The bride’s father came over to me and asked how I was feeling to which I answered could not be better. I congratulated him and he said he was happy that I could cover the event of his daughter’s wedding as part of my research studies.

Bride’s father: The brides and the ladies are in the other room and we are here. The grooms will go to their brides, more prayers will be made and they will have food to eat then they will go home. We are simple, you see. God is simple.
S: I completely agree with you sir. Congratulations.

We had mitijava – sweet rice and bolao – rice mixed with green vegetables. We also had grilled chiken and Paratha, all with our bare hands. For drinks Cola, Fanta and bottled water were served.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

With this study I have tried to explore the experiences of British Pakistanis who have been involved in the practice of first cousin marriage using qualitative research methods of individual and group interviews. Khan, Mohamed, Dar, Khalid, Aishat, Fatima, Ishiaq, Aziz, Shuaib, Javez, the bride’s father, the maulah and all the rest of my informants have given me invaluable pieces of information for which I am really grateful.

As far as anthropological theories are concerned, the study shows that marriages in the British Pakistani community are mostly arranged by family members in strongly patrilineal homes, where most of the decision-making processes are done by the senior males. Intense power relation is exhibited between parents and older family members on the one hand and the children on the other in the discussions and processes that lead to a Pakistani shadi – wedding, yet agency of the children is actively at work as well since the decisions to marry certain choices of their parents ultimately rest on them. Inasmuch as parallel cousin marriages tend to be more in this community, cross cousin and near relative marriages are also being practiced. Of all the factors responsible for this practice, I found out that cultural and transactional reasons are the pre-eminent ones while religious factors, though existent, are of less significance.

Due to this study, I have also come to see the reasons why the people tenaciously adhere to the practice of first cousin marriage in the face of so much negative media attention around the topic and the health risks that accompany the practice. In this respect, I established that British Pakistanis of every generation still do possess an abiding connection with many customs and practices which did originate in the homeland of Pakistan in spite of being British, and perceive these as a highly valued heritage that must be passed on to the coming generations. I have learned that despite the presence of a larger segment of British Pakistanis who see that the practice of marrying a cousin is superior and desirable, there exists also a growing number of the population which believes that marriage could be based solely on love and on one’s own choice. As indicated by Shaw (2001) the upbringing of a child and the interests of parents are of significance in determining what choices are made in choosing a marriage partner in this
community. I have also seen that children are not forced into an arranged marriage but are persuaded and encouraged to choose it by their parents and older relatives. Moreover, I learned what the process of Rishta entails, who the participants are, how it is negotiated and that a good match necessarily means a compatible spouse for both one’s child and the parents themselves.

Furthermore the health issues as they relate to the risks of offspring from such unions being born with recessive genetic disorders are not being denied but are known by the practitioners, leading to a general desirability of premarital medical counselling and genetic testing before marriage. I found out that the people generally do have access to information about the possibility of genetic disorders resulting from consanguineous relationships due to health campaigns that are being mounted at the hospitals and by the Pakistanis themselves in the media.

A reasoning upon which any notion may be founded that the people are somewhat careless about the health of their offspring in continuing the practice of first cousin marriage is rather inadequate. Pakistanis located in Britain, living in a complex social environment as they do in which the forces of tradition are very vibrant, find that their life course is being charted by an aggregate of factors rather than the singular issue of genetic testing. Thus, the cultural practice of cousin marriage, being so deeply rooted, will warrant a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach in getting people to test.

On the part of policy makers and health givers therefore, it is paramount to establish a working relation with the community which transcends all forms of social, cultural, religious and racial divides. All actions need to be jointly coordinated by the local governments and Pakistani community organisations such as the Pakistani Welfare Association and the local mosques. Committing the care of one’s health to somebody else involves trust therefore the role of medical doctors and nurses and medical workers of Pakistani extraction cannot be overemphasised in this endeavour. Genuine desire should be made to understand and appreciate a people’s way of life such as the practice of first cousin marriage. Instead of being made to feel isolated and guilty, ways must be found to nurture their sense of belonging in the British society. In this regard, more efforts should be geared towards involving members of the Pakistani population themselves in organising befitting and tailor-made health outreaches that will take into consideration
the specific cultural concerns of the people under the supervision of the relevant health authorities. Actions need be directed at overcoming the distrust and disharmony that may exist between the white establishment and Pakistani community with a view to making the latter aware of available medical choices.

On the part of the British Pakistani community itself, more effort should be initiated and directed at conducting campaigns in which the people are well informed about the risks of inbreeding, not with the aim of stopping it but rather to enable them to carefully consider all their choices. Moreover, the emerging trend of younger generation Pakistanis initiating romantic relationships on their own should be encouraged and parents should not be unduly strict with issues of personal emotion and choice. After all the freedom to choose and freely associate is an aspect of the benevolence of Allah, given to man as a free moral agent and which ought to be appreciated. The stakes are just too great to maintain the status quo.

As a medical anthropologist I dare to submit that the Pakistani culture of first cousin marriage does offer an opportunity to strengthen a community and bring many benefits to the nation.
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Rashid Khan and Stephen, at Khan’s *halal* meat shop.

Mr Khan, Mr Ishiaq and Mohammed.
Mohammed, Stephen and Mr Khan at Khan's *halal* meat shop.

Taofiq Khalid, Khan's relative, the restaurateur
At the FGD in the mosque, the bride’s father is to my right.

We are eating mitjava, the sweet rice, at the wedding reception. The maulah is second from the left, enjoying the meal!
Let me not forget, this is Dar being interviewed on *Rishta*!