

In the aftermath of the acquittal of the 'Bradford 12', Karan Thapar reports on the mood

Asians in Britain: no place like home

It was perplexing to hear the melodramatic Tariq Mahmood Ali the day after a Crown Court had acquitted him and 11 Asian colleagues from the "Bradford 12". Last July they were charged with making explosive devices with intent to cause damage to property and conspiring to make explosives for an unlawful purpose. The 12, ranging in age from 17 to 25, admitted responsibility for the 38 milk bottles filled with petrol found in a Bradford wasteground, but denied allegations that they were intended for use against the police or public.

In court, the Bradford 12 argued, the petrol devices were made in self-defence against skinhead gangs and for the security of the city's 45,000 Asian community which has experienced racial attacks. The jury believed them. Last Wednesday they were freed.

But Tariq and at least three others are apprehensive. Instead of celebrating, they were anxious for the obscurity they had lost. "The police were made to look stupid in court," Tariq explained, "and they don't like that. I'm

bloody scared of the police at the moment."

What conditions the Bradford 12 action, and now in triumph, their fear, is the fact that Asians cannot feel accepted in Britain. Although he did not say so, Tariq believes the police similarly cannot accept losing in court to 12 Asian boys, seven of whom have previous convictions.

For Asians, the most hateful manifestation of this absence of acceptance is racial attacks. A Home Office study last year showed that Asians were 50 times more likely to be victims of assault (blacks 36 times) than whites.

In most cases Asians say, these incidents are not reported. For many they have become "a way of life". Certainly, what records there are show they are becoming more numerous. In 1981 the number of such incidents reported to the police in the London area has nearly trebled from the previous year's 277. Yet, in Asian eyes, police response has failed altogether. "When you ring them they firstly come late, then they do nothing

about it and frequently don't even bring charges."

For Asians, the police are recruited from the same class of society as members of the National Front and the British Movement. At the very least they do look upon Asians as "foreign", "mysterious and, worst still, "successful".

Unwilling to accept any longer their helplessness, second generation Asians have taken to defending themselves. In Bradford, Manchester, Southall, Leicester and Birmingham, organizations such as The Asian Youth Movement run self-defence classes in judo and karate, coordinate vigilante groups and provide

their own "policing service".

"Our aim," explained Marsha Singh, a former Bradford AYM president, "is to encourage every Asian to be in a position to defend himself. We must not tolerate or be forced to bend to racial attacks. The soft, gentle, non-violent Asian image makes us easy victims".

The vigilantes, whom Marsha prefers to call "self-defence patrols", are groups of five or six Asians, usually in their late teens or early 20s. "These are people who know some karate or judo or have experience of street fighting," he said.

Mohammed Alam, who is a member, says: "We either

routinely check out an area and 'do' the skinheads before they 'do' us or when there are reports of tension, anticipated trouble, we patrol parts of the town."

In Bradford, the AYM has even published a telephone number to which those who have received or fear threats can ring for help. "If we don't defend ourselves," Marsh asks, "who on earth will?"

The Bradford 12 jury faced the same dilemma. In court the police repeatedly said they had not heard of racial attacks or killings in Britain.

As Sibghat Kadri, counsel, questioned: "If they won't even admit knowledge of

racial attacks, what defence will they provide against them? Our boys have no alternative." The jury concurred.

The defence against racial attack now seems legally permissible, no matter how controversial the method. But there remains the wider fear of general racism from which the Asian feels unprotected. This is the ubiquitous attitude of discrimination that he sees and senses around him.

Be it the Manningham pub owner who forbids any other language but English in his bar, or the white employer making Asians redundant first, or the Heathrow immigration officer unreasonably



"The soft, gentle, non-violent Asian image makes us easy victims"

of the community

Correlation between ethnic breakdowns of population and victims of violent crime in Greater London

Ethnic origin	Percentage share of the population	Victims of violent crime in 1981
White (European)	85.9	82.2%
Indian Pakistani		
Bangladesh	4.1	10.8
African West Indian	5	3.6%
Arabs Chinese others	5	3.4%

Source: 1. Percentage share of population from 1977 survey of housing, dept of employment. 2. Ethnic breakdown of victims of crime from metropolitan police, March, 1982.

suspecting his credentials, or the clerk of a respectable set of chambers politely but firmly turning down a young barrister's application, the Asian is conscious of racism underlying it. It makes him believe that he is not wanted, not accepted, not considered a part of British society.

For the first generation Asian immigrant, this was tolerable. He too did not feel a part of Britain; he remained, despite 20 years in Wembley or Wolverhampton, a Gujarati or Punjabi villager. But for his sons and daughters it is shattering. They are not immigrants. They are British-born Asians. England is their home, while India, Pakistan or Bangladesh have become slightly strange, exotic holiday spots. The Bradford 12 belong to this generation.

It was their feeling of rejection, of bitterness as well as their determination to fight, that convinced these young men that making petrol bombs in their own defence was necessary. "We wouldn't have used them unless we had to. We didn't want to use them and in fact we did not either," Tariq said. "But to have been caught defenceless would have left us wide open to attack."

Thousands of Asians — the

majority — were "appalled" by the Bradford 12, and even their parents have described them as "stupid and irresponsible". But the entire Asian second generation faces the same struggle as they do. This is why the Asian community was determined to save "these fools".

The Bradford 12 are an unrepresentative extreme minority. Yet they are a part of the second generation's fight to be both British and Asian. But, as Farook Hashmi, a consultant psychiatrist, elucidates: "Britain will only become a multi-racial and multi-cultural society the day the white Englishman accepts the concept of an Indian Englishman or a Pakistani Englishman, much as America cherishes its Polish and Irish Americans."

Tariq, Marsha and Alan will not leave. Britain is their home. And they are not likely to give into such pressure, nor will they flinch if it comes to defending their rights. This is why they believe that "race relations will get considerably worse before they get better. If they get better, that is."

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Karan Thapar's series Asians in Britain continues tomorrow with an examination of the role of women in the community.