

Community Cohesion and Integration of Bangladeshi into Scottish culture: A practical need

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Introduction

It is a fact that every society is running into problems. Discrimination in the name of races, caste, class, religion or gender is one of the problems modern societies are experiencing. Therefore, the demand for equal opportunities is very strong in civic democratic societies today. But the replacement of discrimination with equal opportunities is not an easy task. Truly, if equal opportunities are to be promoted the different aspects of community integration and assimilation are to be considered in the first place. People will not be truly equal and treated equally unless and until they are truly integrated. The reverse is true. If people do not feel that they will be treated equally, integration and cohesion will not be easy to achieve. What it means is that there can be no true equality without true integration or there can be no true integration without true equality. Whatever way you explain the main line of argument is that the concepts of equal opportunities and integration are inter-related to and inter-dependent upon one another.

In this paper I am going to explain why people of a minority ethnic will join Scottish community in which they are not second class citizens and will not be treated unequally, thereby noting the urgent need for community integration and cohesion of Bangladeshi into Scottish culture.

It is imperative at the outset to give an overview of both Scotland and Bangladesh before justifying a practical need for the integration and cohesion of a minority ethnic group into Scottish culture.

Scotland – a separate experience

Scotland is a country of 5.1 million people that make up 9% of UK population.

Scotland Population as recorded in the 2001 Census

England	49.1 million	83%	UK population	
Scotland	5.1 million	9%	”	”
Wales	2.9 million	5%	”	”
N Ireland	1.7 million	3%	”	”

(Source: National Statistics)

The country's own history, own legal and educational systems, own design of bank notes, different values, customs and traditions often give the first impression to new arrivals that Scotland is a different and separate experience. It has one of the most dramatic thoroughfares and wonderful settings in the world. It is the country of Robert the Bruce, the champion of Scots. It is the country of Nancy Macle hose. It is the country of Robert Burns – Scotland's most celebrated poet whose poems in Scottish dialect was published with such success that all Edinburgh society fell at his feet. Scotland is the country of Adam Smith – the great classical Economist. It is the country of James Scot who made the first steam engine. It is the country of mountains, lochs, rivers, monuments, battlefields, and more people. Of course, it is the country with people of almost all nationalities who have been living, studying and working in Scotland for many decades. No wonder, Scotland is the country with a unique mix of festivals including religious ones. It is the country of Hindu devali festivals, Muslim celebration of Eid, Jewish celebration of customs and rites and spectacular fireworks that are displayed on Bonfire night. However, Bangladeshis know Scotland mainly for two reasons: First, pupils at schools and colleges in Bangladesh are familiar with the name 'Robert the Bruce' because of his outstanding characteristic feature – perseverance. Secondly, every Bangladeshi is aware of Scotland's most beautiful settings in the world.

Bangladesh – a colourful country

Like Scotland, Bangladesh is situated in between hills and sea. It is a country with colourful events, cultural relics, customs and traditions. The country maintains ties of friendship with the international world. It has already attracted increasing attention of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the OIC, the Commonwealth, the D-8 (Developing eight countries including– Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey), the BIMSTEC (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation), other nations, and various international organisations.

The Old and New Bangladeshi arrivals in Scotland

People of Bangladeshi descent are one of the largest minority ethnics in Britain today who travelled to study, work, and settle in to Scotland throughout the 1950s.

The old arrivals came to this country as a labour force when Britain had not enough people available for the task of rebuilding the country at the end of the Second World War. Eventually these groups settled in, established their curry business in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford, Bedford, Luton and many other cities in England and made an excellent contribution towards British economy. In the 1960 and 70s few Bangladeshi arrived in Scotland, settled in to Scotland's populous cities Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, and Aberdeen and subsequently established their curry business. In the 1980s and 90s, the new arrivals came to the UK as students, professionals, scholars and workers. Since 2002 more and more Bangladeshis have been coming to Scotland to live, study and work. This recent flow of migration to Scotland has brought Bangladeshi more in close contact with the Scottish. The reverse is true. The existence of Bangladeshi or any minority ethnic community in Scotland has enabled Scottish or other people to become more aware of other culture, environment, values, customs and traditions.

Bangladeshi in Scotland today; a road to integration and assimilation

Bangladeshis in Scotland are now very active. Bangladeshi students at the Scottish Universities are making excellent progress with their studies and research. Bangladeshi restaurants in Scottish towns and villages attract increasing attentions of European visitors as well as local customers.

In this great country Bangladeshis always feel that they are their own home. The Scottish lowlands and highlands often remind Bangladeshi of the hills and the sea in the south east of Bangladesh. The memory of the country's most celebrated poet, Robert Burns remind us of the rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam.

The existence of over 30,000 Scots of Bangladeshi origin in Scotland indicates the fact that they have their right not only to have an opportunity to live in the Scottish community but also to have a free choice to study and work alongside and in the same manner as people of Scotland. These opportunities and free choices in fact provide a fertile ground for the promotion of integration and cohesion through active participation in the community activities. It is in this sense that promoting community integration and cohesion provides.

As people have a right to live in the community and the same opportunities as anyone else therefore community integration includes the concepts of place and participation. Arguably, if someone chooses freely to live in the Scottish community he or she must be engaged in community life and involved in fulfilling social roles such as employment, family, and citizenship. The engagement or involvement can be self-directed. There is no hard and fast rule for that. But the sense of belonging, equal opportunities, personal well-being, recognition and validation are important parts of everyone's life which steam from active participation in community life and involvement in fulfilling community roles.

A practical need for integration

No wonder people from Europe, Russia, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean have come to Scotland or to the United Kingdom to find safety, jobs and a better life. Today, ethnic minority groups in Scotland make up only 2% of the entire Scottish population (5.1 million / 9% UK population). As recorded in the 2001 census 0.3% Asian Bangladeshis make up 0.5% of the total UK population. Today about half the members of the Bangladeshi community were born in the UK.

It is no secret Bangladeshis in Britain today have been working very hard partly because of customers' confidence in their curry industry / business and partly because they want their next generation have a better and prosperous future in this country. Arguably, there is nothing wrong in the way they are thinking. But the sense of belonging, equal opportunities, personal well-being, recognition and validation are important parts of everyone's life which steam from active participation in community life and involvement in fulfilling community roles.

It is not enough for any minority ethnic group just to live and work in the Scottish community. Similarly, it is not enough for the majority to live just beside the minority with different cultural backgrounds. What is important is a joint investment to be made by both the majority and the minority for the community they are living in. This investment, however, can be made through effective communication and understanding between the majority and the minority, acceptance, peace and tolerance, positive learning about other cultures and active participation in overall community activities. When positive lessons are learned from both the majority and the minority cases / communities and active role is played only then community will be truly integrated and equal opportunities will be truly promoted.

Despite all these facts, there is a widespread concern about community integration and cohesion as the certain number of minority ethnic have shown their disloyalty to the United Kingdom and unwillingness to observe laws faithfully and fulfil their duties and responsibilities as a British citizen.

Equally worrying is non-acceptance of the minority ethnic by the certain number of the majority community. There is ample evidence to suggest that the growing number of Brits have shown racial disharmony, non-acceptance and ignorance in their treatment of the minority.

Recommendations and suggestions

As mentioned earlier over 30,000 Scots of Bangladeshi origin live in Scotland. Although this is not a big figure still their contribution to enlighten Scotland can be an important element to a cohesive, dynamic and well-integrated society. Bangladeshis in Scotland will have to understand this harsh fact no matter how busy we are or how hard it is for us. As a British citizen we all have affirmed our allegiance that we will give our loyalty to the country first, respect its rights and freedoms, uphold its democratic values, observe its laws faithfully and fulfil our duties and obligations.

We can do this if we work within a common framework of rights and responsibilities that are acknowledged by the state and applied to all. We, the Bangladeshi, can make a vibrant and inclusive Scottish community by building better understanding and tolerance not just within the Bangladeshi community but also within and between other communities in Scotland. We can make a dynamic and cohesive Scotland by creating opportunities for people from different cultural backgrounds. We can make a well-integrated community by meeting the people of Scotland openly and share the history and customs of their traditions and cultures. People of Bangladesh as well as other minority ethnic descent will have to come forward to play a supremely important role in building Scotland a vibrant and attractive country in which to visit, study, work and settle in.