



Young Indian women shopping in London. They are wearing trousers, scarves and the **traditional sari**.

Indians in Britain

Introduction

Indians are Britain's largest ethnic minority: about 23% of the total ethnic population - people from Asia, China, the Caribbean, etc. – are Indian.

In the nineteenth century, India was part of the British Empire and Indians could enter the UK because they were British subjects.

But the majority of Indians began to immigrate to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. Many found jobs in factories, especially factories making clothes. They planned to spend a maximum of ten years to earn enough money to go back home. But when they found jobs and a place to live, their families could come and stay with them. As a result, many Indians stayed in Britain; large numbers made their homes in areas such as Bradford in the north of England, Leicester and Birmingham in central England, and parts of London.

By 1961, more than 100,000 people of Indian and Pakistani nationality were resident in Britain.

A taste of home

Of course, moving to a different country was not easy. Many Indians left behind large families and, at first, they were lonely in Britain. But gradually the British-Indian community grew bigger and bigger. They opened specialist shops where people could buy Indian food. They could then cook traditional dishes which reminded them of home. Today, curry has become part of British cuisine: some people even say that ‘chicken tikka masala’ is the most popular dish in Britain.

Popular culture

Ravi Shankar, a famous sitar¹ player and father of the singer Norah Jones, helped introduce Indian music to the western world in the 1960s when he taught Indian music to the Beatles. Recently, British Asians have developed ‘Bhangra’ music, which has become popular in the United Kingdom. This music combines western disco and reggae music with Indian folk music.

Indian culture can now be found in British television programmes and films, like the 2002 hit *Bend It Like Beckham*.

In the 1950s and 1960s life was hard for Asians in Britain: they were treated badly by some white people. But they brought different tastes, music and traditions with them and today, although there are still some problems, Asian communities play an important part in the multicultural society of Britain.

1. sitar :





Dancers celebrating **Diwali** in Trafalgar Square, London. Diwali has become one of London's major festivals.

Festivals

Diwali, 'The Festival of Lights', is the most popular Hindu festival. Diwali is celebrated on the night of the new moon in the month of Katrika in the Hindu Vikrama calendar. This is usually in October or November and the festival lasts five days.

It is a New Year festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance.

It is known as the festival of lights because people decorate their homes with lights. They place lamps called 'diyas' in windows and doors which are left open, so that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, can come into people's homes.

As well as decorating buildings with lights, Hindus celebrate Diwali in other ways: they give each other presents, they clean their homes, they wear new clothes and they have firework displays.

1 Comprehension check

Answer the following questions.

- 1 Why could Indians enter Britain in the nineteenth century?
- 2 Why did many Indians enter Britain in the middle of the twentieth century?
- 3 What is curry?
- 4 What is the impact of Asian culture on contemporary Britain?

2 Discussion

What is the biggest ethnic minority group in your country? When and why did they start arriving? What is their cultural impact?

INTERNET PROJECT

Connect to the Internet and go to www.blackcat-cideb.com or www.cideb.it. Insert the title or part of the title of the book into our search engine. Open the page for *Home for Christmas*. Click on the Internet project link. Go down the page until you find the title of this book and click on the link for this project.

On page 55 you found out something about Diwali. Now let's find out some more. Go to the first website and find out

- ▶ what the name Diwali comes from, and what it means,
- ▶ what presents people give each other,
- ▶ what two important legends explain the beginning of Diwali.

Go to the second website, which is the BBC's dedicated website for Asians in Britain.

- ▶ Look at the homepage. How much of it seems to be about music?
- ▶ Follow the link to the soap opera, 'Silver Street'. Find out more about the characters. How many of the families are Asian? What ethnicity are the other families?