



Transforming Narratives

# From the Margins to the Mainstream

*Capturing Women's Voices in Inter-cultural Dialogue*

Musrut Dar

June 2019

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the 70 women who generously gave their time to participate in this study and share their experiences in the hope that their voices are heard by those genuinely interested in taking them from the margins into the mainstream.

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Finally, I would like to pass on the many messages of thanks to Transforming Narratives from the women who took part in this research for being given the opportunity to have their voices heard.

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## My Mother



I know my passage into this world was equal,  
As I passed from the comfort of my mothers  
womb, to a world that was full of strange  
faces, Stark lights, and a cold maternity room.

As I inhaled my first breathe,  
And let out my first cry,  
I felt the warmth of my mother's arms,  
And knew I wouldn't die.

Through my colic & sleepless nights,  
She comforted & sacrificed.  
Tired, but yet so loving,  
Was the look in her brown eyes.

I was one of five children,  
Three girls and two boys,  
Born into a migrant family,  
My parents struggled and strived.

In a strange land and language,  
Ruled by her majesty,  
My father did the night shift,  
Whilst my mother made ends meet.

As I grew up I soon realised,  
That this world was not so just,  
even though we baked the bread,  
we only got the crust.

I watched my mother struggle  
Every single day,  
The racist abuse hurled at her,  
Whilst she went her way.

From lush fields  
and wide havelis she came,  
Basking in sun,  
In fields of water melon she played.  
Now confined to an inner city street,  
Heaven, was once the village under her feet.

My mother did not go to school,  
So the only world  
Was what she saw.  
She had dreams for her daughters,  
And for them, she wanted more.

Through my mothers struggle,  
And the power of word,  
I learnt to dream of a different world.  
In which I would be equal,  
In gender, race and class,  
Where my sisters around the world....  
....would be.. free...at last.

I read his-story and her-story  
British and Black,  
About ..isms and scisms..  
Gender, race and class.

I learnt about my ancestors,  
The feminists of old,  
The steps that they had taken along this  
dusty road.

Warrior Queen Nzingha,  
And brave Queen Ashanti,  
They fought against the British  
To stop rape and slavery.

The Rani of Jhansi,  
She led a whole army,  
To free India from occupation,  
She was my inspiration.

Emily Pankhurt and the suffragettes,  
Fought for voting rights,  
Whilst women campaigned against  
violence, And reclaimed the streets at  
night.

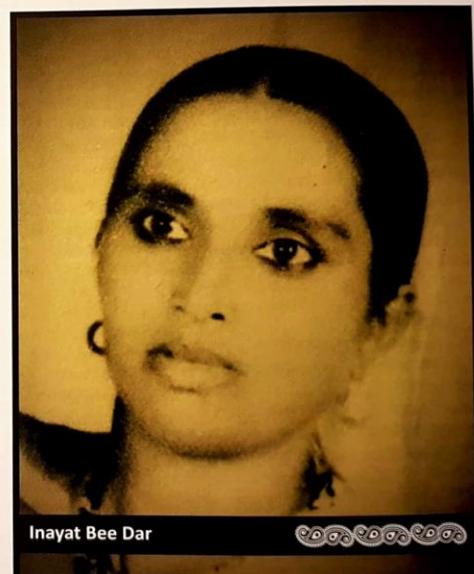
The countless women in this world,  
Who continue to give their lives,  
From small acts of bravery,  
To the ultimate sacrifice.

And in this world my mother,  
Helped to push a boulder,  
Through the dreams and the visions,  
That she passed onto her daughter.

In great halls and museums,  
My mother did not tread.  
Unlike the relics and antiquities,  
Taken from the land that she once  
left.

Yet, resilient and a brave heart,  
A queen worthy of respect,  
Made small by imperial  
grandeur, she is never,  
nonetheless.

So, if you look with my eyes,  
You will see a diamond cut.  
The Kohinoor in the crown, she  
is the finest work of art.



Inayat Bee Dar



Poem by Musurut Dar

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# Executive Summary

'Transforming Narratives' commissioned research in April 2019 to understand the current narratives amongst British Pakistani, Kashmiri and Bangladeshi women in Birmingham around contemporary culture, their sense of connection with their country of origin, their engagement with the city and their experience of the city's cultural life.

## THIS REPORT PROVIDES:

An understanding of women's relationship with the cultures from their country of origin.

Information on women's experience of living, studying and working in Birmingham.

A mapping of the cultural assets in Birmingham used by women.

Information on the issues and barriers faced by women around participating in the cultural life of the city.

Information on what women would like to engage in and the gaps in cultural provision for women.

## Scope of the Research

The scope of this research is fairly limited. A timescale of six weeks was given to undertake the research and deliver the final report. This meant that the period in which the research could be carried out fell within the month of 'Ramadan'. This is a time when Muslims observe fasting and during this period engagement amongst Muslim women as they ensure that 'Iftar' meals are prepared for families in order to break their fasts.

The report was commissioned to capture the voices of Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women in inter-cultural dialogue. To ensure that the research captured these distinct voices and experience, three separate focus groups for Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women were organised. This was in recognition that whilst these women may share certain experiences, they also have distinct history, language, cultural heritage and experiences which will influence them. Therefore, this study provides an insight into the experiences and perspectives of Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women, rather than offering a firm conclusion, this is a starting point rather than an end point.

Given the limited time frame, the primary focus of this research has been to capture new data in terms of women's voices. This means that a literature review has not been undertaken to form part of this report. This report should be read in the context of reports focusing on the demographic profile of Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani communities living in Birmingham, future population projections and their socio-economic status. Particular attention needs to focus on reports and research that focus on inter-sectionality to understand the experiences of Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women. There have also been a number of lengthy studies, including the Arts Council's

Report on *'Equality and Diversity within the arts and cultural sector in England' (2013 and 2016, Consilium Research and Consultancy)* which help to explain the significant disparities in engagement within the arts and cultural sector amongst marginalised communities.

## KEY ISSUES:

This report finds that Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women have a deep sense of connection with their country of origin. Even for women born in the UK who rarely visit their country of origin, links through their family has meant that their country of origin continues to influence many aspects of their life in Birmingham, both consciously and unconsciously. Equally the research found that the women who took part in the survey feel a sense of connection with Birmingham and feel it is their 'home' and spoke of the many positive aspects of living in the city. The concerns which they expressed about Birmingham were mainly around issues of litter, crime, and a lack of opportunities. Notably, across the three ethnicities a significant number of women expressed their fears about being a target of racial hatred and some shared their experiences of being a victim of Islamophobia.

The research found that socialising with family and friends as well as a desire to pass on their cultural heritage to their children were largely the drivers for this cohort of women to engage with arts and culture. Their attendance was highest where arts related to their cultural heritage as this provided a link to their country of origin and an opportunity to share this with their children.

In conversations about what might be a barrier to participating in mainstream art and cultural venues: cost, the timing of shows and the unavailability of halal food were most cited. The genres and cultural art forms the women wanted to see which are not being currently offered by the mainstream arts and cultural venues were: Islamic art, food festivals, film screenings, folk music, poetry, theatre in community languages and textile exhibitions which relate to their country of origin.

This report recommends:

TN engages Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Kashmiri women at a strategic level to ensure relevance of it's programmes to the women it seeks to engage as audiences.

TN creates opportunities for local women at a grass-roots level to develop their artistic and creative talent & provide opportunities to engage in the artist exchange programme

TN provide funding and capacity building to support the development of art and cultural organisations led by Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women in Birmingham

TN creates a programme that is driven by what is of interest and relevant to Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women

TN addresses the barriers faced by women in terms of; cost, provision of halal food and timings of events/shows, as highlighted in this report

## Introduction

Transforming Narratives is a three-year initiative, managed by Culture Central and being delivered in partnership with The British Council and 12 diverse Birmingham-based cultural partners. It has been made possible through funding from Arts Council England's 'Ambition for Excellence' programme and support from the British Council. It seeks to establish Birmingham as a leading international centre for contemporary South Asian arts practice, presenting multi-art forms through an artistic exchange programme, for the mutual benefit of Birmingham and cities in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

This initiative is working to deliver a step-change in the cultural relationships between Birmingham, Pakistan and Bangladesh and to focus on the reciprocal exchange of contemporary cultural practices between these countries and the UK. Whilst the project is rooted in the histories of the connections between these three places, its focus is resolutely on the contemporary cultural practices being shared between the cultural sectors in each place.

In order to connect with the Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani communities in Birmingham and inform the audience development plan for the project, Transforming Narratives has commissioned this research to understand what influences and drive women's participation in the arts and culture in the city. The focus of the research is to:

- Document and describe the identity profile of Birmingham's Pakistani and Bangladeshi community, focusing on the Women's voice.
- Identify themes, points of interest and contemporary culture through informal and formal methods of consultation, for example: face to face interviews, workshops, online consultations, focus groups, with British Pakistani or Bangladeshi women.
- Seek to establish what drives the demand for cultural attendance and appreciation amongst Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Kashmiri women audiences/ participants in Birmingham.
- Identify those spaces and places where their participation is at its highest and where they feel most comfortable
- Identify what genres and cultural forms they most enjoy and feel most connected with
- Identify issues they experience around participating in culture in the city
- Explore their relationship with the traditional cultures in their background and their feelings around those inherited cultures.

This research enables Transforming Narratives to have;

- A grass-roots connection with marginalised women's voices
- A mapping of cultural assets used by women
- New information on the contesting experiences and perspectives of what is relevant to this cohort of women
- A baseline of information in order to plan future work
- Ideas for engaging these women as new audiences

## Methodology

This report has been compiled using mixed methodologies, enabling the researcher to collect a wide range of women's voices within the Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani communities. In order to compliment the research being undertaken to capture the voices of younger people, the target age group for this research were women over 25 years of age.

The methodologies employed were as follows:

- A confidential on-line survey was shared on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp targeting women of Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani heritage in Birmingham. In addition the survey was emailed to Hidayah LGBT group and members of SEED (Supporting Education of Equality and Diversity) in an attempt to capture more marginal voices. Forty women participated directly through the on-line survey.
- Three separate focus group discussions were organised for Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Kashmiri women. A co-facilitator of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Kashmiri background with the relevant language skills and experience in women's engagement was employed to organise and help facilitate each workshop. The focus groups all took place after Ramadan in Bangladeshi and Pakistani owned restaurants in Small Heath and Alum Rock. During the workshops, women were supported to complete a paper copy of the on-line survey which was later uploaded to the on-line survey. This was followed by a facilitated and interpreted group discussion to enable the participants to explore their experiences and perspectives in more depth. In wanting to facilitate an open and honest discussion and respecting the some of the women's wishes to not appear on camera, the discussions were recorded on audio and notes were made on a flipchart. In total, 30 women took part in the focus group discussions.
- Finally, interviews with a Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani woman were conducted to provide a more in-depth understanding of each woman's relationships with their inherited cultures, their life in Birmingham and their engagement with cultural assets in the city.

The findings presented in this report are based on the feedback from the online survey and the feedback from the focus group discussions.

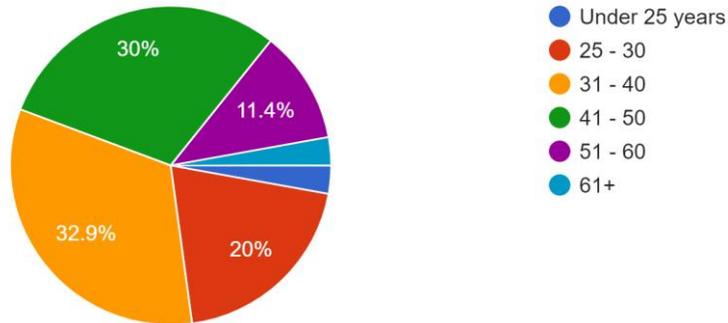


# Findings

## PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

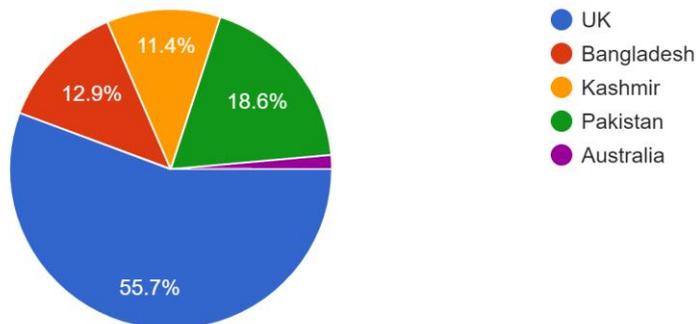
### 1. What Is your age?

70 responses



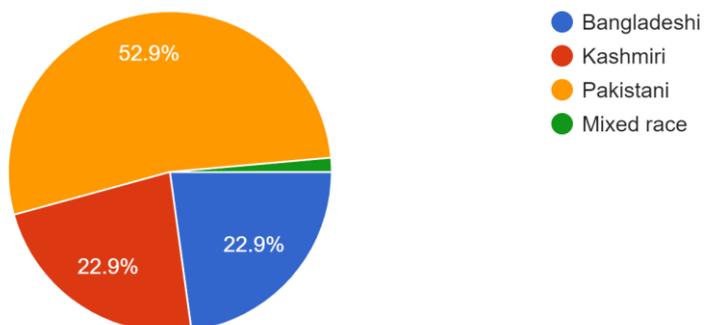
### 2. Where were you born?

70 responses



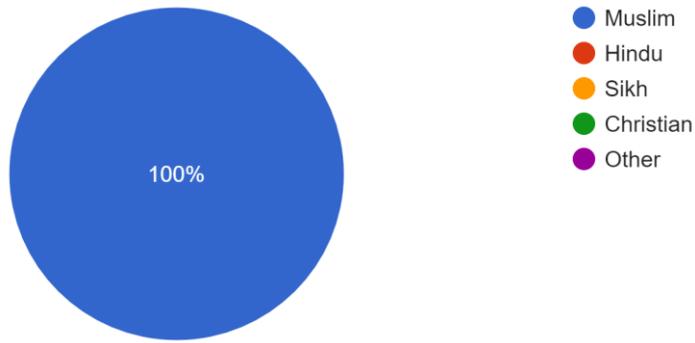
### 3. How would you describe your ethnicity?

70 responses



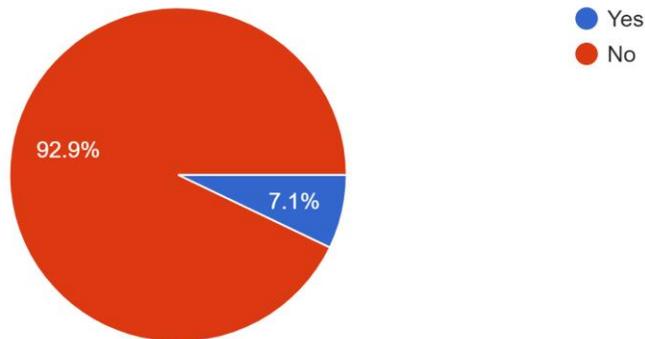
#### 4. How would you describe your religious identity?

70 responses



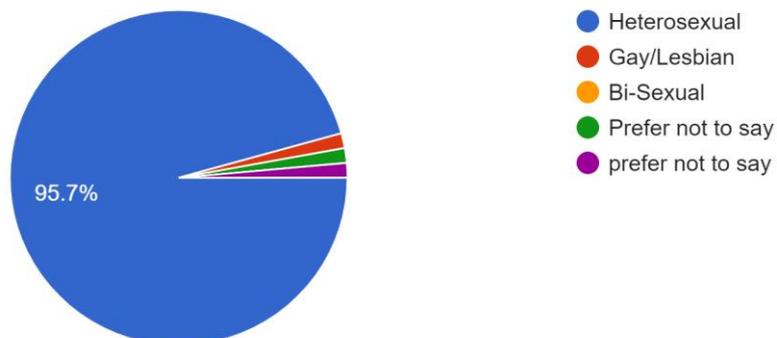
#### 5. Do you have a disability?

70 responses

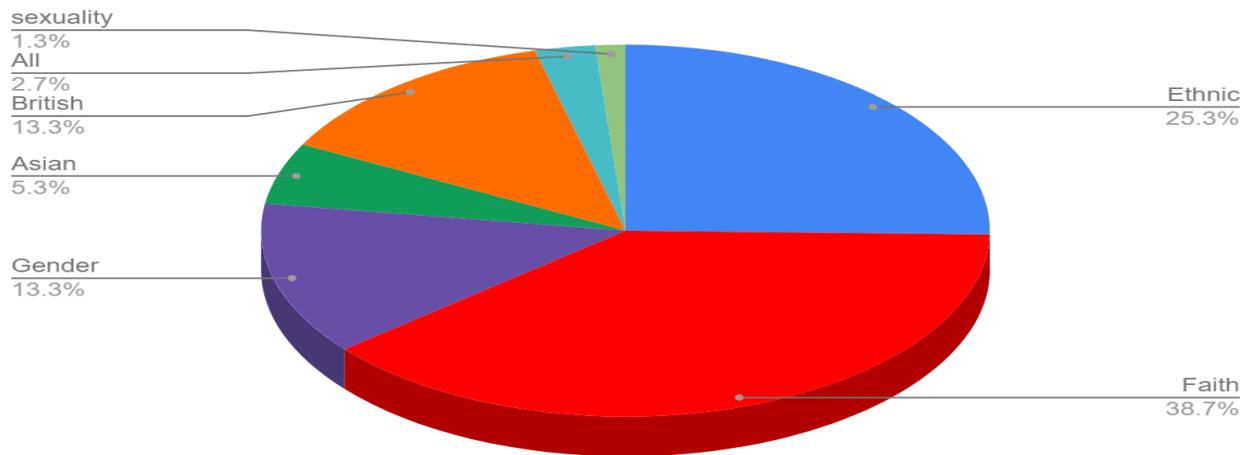


#### 6. How would you describe your sexuality?

70 responses



## 7. What aspects of your identity is important to you?



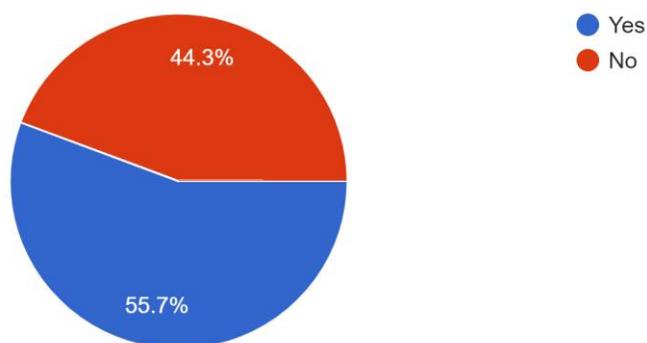
*"My culture and religion are very important, so too are the values and the culture of this country where I live and will die. It's my home but I have roots to my birth country and my parent's home and family in Pakistan."*

*"My (Kashmiri) ethnic culture, the vibrant colours, being British, a Muslim, a mother, my creative heritage, our musical traditions - this is who I am"*

*"Every part of my identity as a Bangladeshi, Muslim Woman living in Britain is essential to who I am as a person and this is what defines me"*

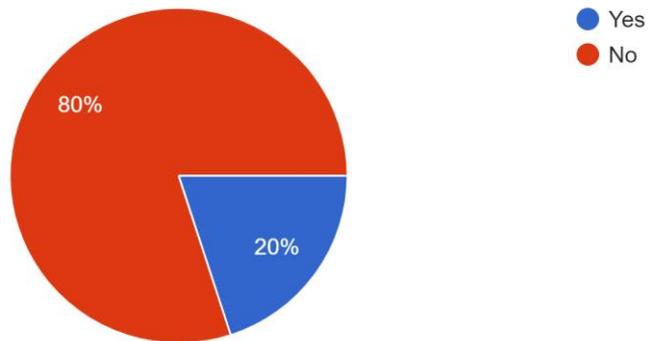
## 8. Are you employed?

70 responses



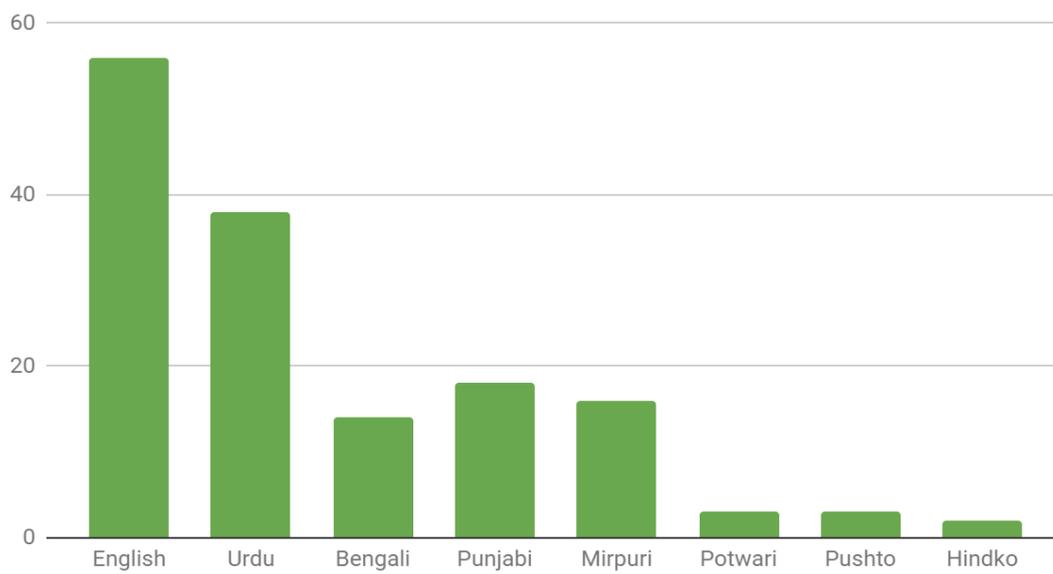
### 9. Are you studying or in training?

70 responses



### 10. What languages do you speak?

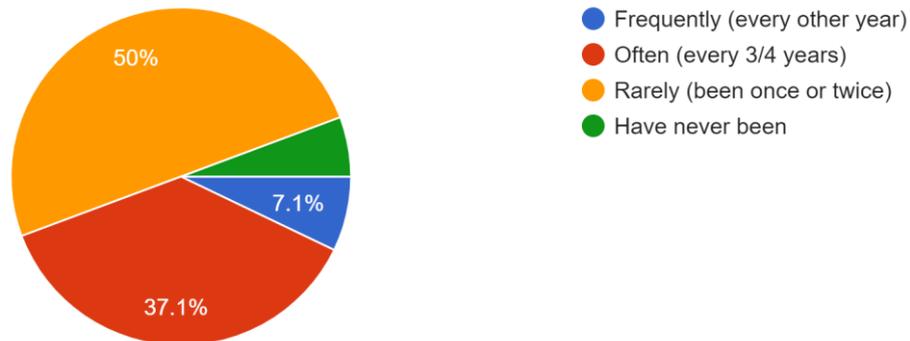
Languages spoken



## RELATIONSHIP WITH COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

### 11. How often do you visit your country of origin?

70 responses



### 12. How connected do you feel with your country of origin? Can you describe your relationship?

75% felt a connection or a strong connection with their country of origin. A quarter of women across the various age groups surveyed, didn't feel connected to their country of origin whether they were from Bangladesh, Kashmir or Pakistan.

*I used to feel very connected with Bangladesh as we used to visit often when I was younger but since marriage, I have not been so my connection is weaker.*

*I was born in Kashmir & left when I was 7, I haven't visited for almost 10 years, prior to that I would go every 2 years. I feel very connected to my country & I would love to go back. I often watch videos online to see how it looks now, certain smell like the smell of fire or the smell and taste of guava takes me right back to my childhood. Growing your own fruit and veg was something I grew up with and so I really enjoy gardening and I try my best to get my kids involved so they can appreciate nature and open spaces, things I took for granted as a child.*

*Despite not visiting often, I do feel a deep sense of connection with Pakistan. It is where my family is from and therefore, I have a sense of having 'roots' there. When I was younger, I felt very romantic about Pakistan but over the years, my relationship has changed and I am far more critical of Pakistan and its politics. The truth is, I don't feel I belong there and because of increasing racist narrative's I don't feel I belong here.*

*Very connected to Bangladesh through cuisine, culture, tradition and language. It is a vital part of my identity and heritage and I feel it is incumbent upon myself and my children to uphold the customs and values of our race/ethnicity and heritage because it makes us who we are and enriches our lives and society at large.*

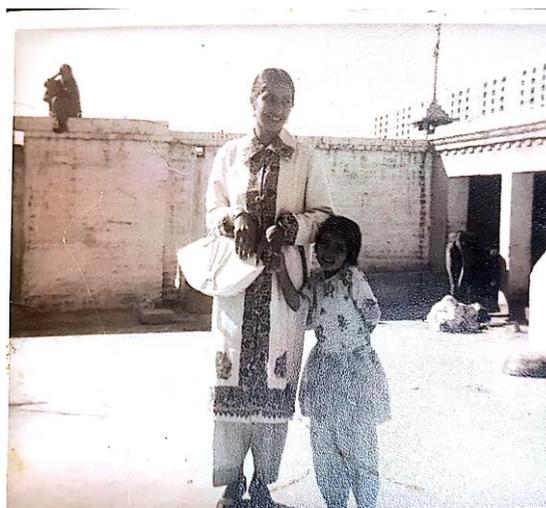
*Pakistan is very much part of my identity as is Britain even though I have only visited once, there are many things that draw me.. Pakistani art and in particular, artists like Zubeda Agha who introduced modern Art to Pakistan and whose work stands tall alongside the likes of Dali. I also am interested in agriculture as my ancestors were farmers. I would like to explore practices and growing conditions when I visit the lands of my ancestors. I am also educating myself on the creation of Pakistan and its political path and discourse over the years.*

13. Why do you visit your country of origin. What do you enjoy about your visit?

PAKISTAN

How Connected do you feel?  
 Its home  
 Lok Virsa  
 Parent's graves  
 Samasa  
 traditions  
 grandparents  
 Miss the open space  
 Manjis  
 darbars

What is your relationship?  
 I go on holiday  
 festivals  
 animals  
 the celebrations  
 childhood memories  
 Village life  
 Sweetcorn  
 traditional clothing  
 Street food  
 Mango's  
 tandoors



BANGLADESH

How connected we feel  
 Visual arts  
 Nice to see the Boats  
 MUSIC  
 Mangrove Forests  
 poems + songs  
 Friends  
 Royal Bengal Tiger

Our relationship  
 Through parents and family  
 New Year celebrations  
 phita  
 Festivals  
 Bengali Language movement  
 Eid  
 Jute  
 Shapla flower  
 Jack fruits



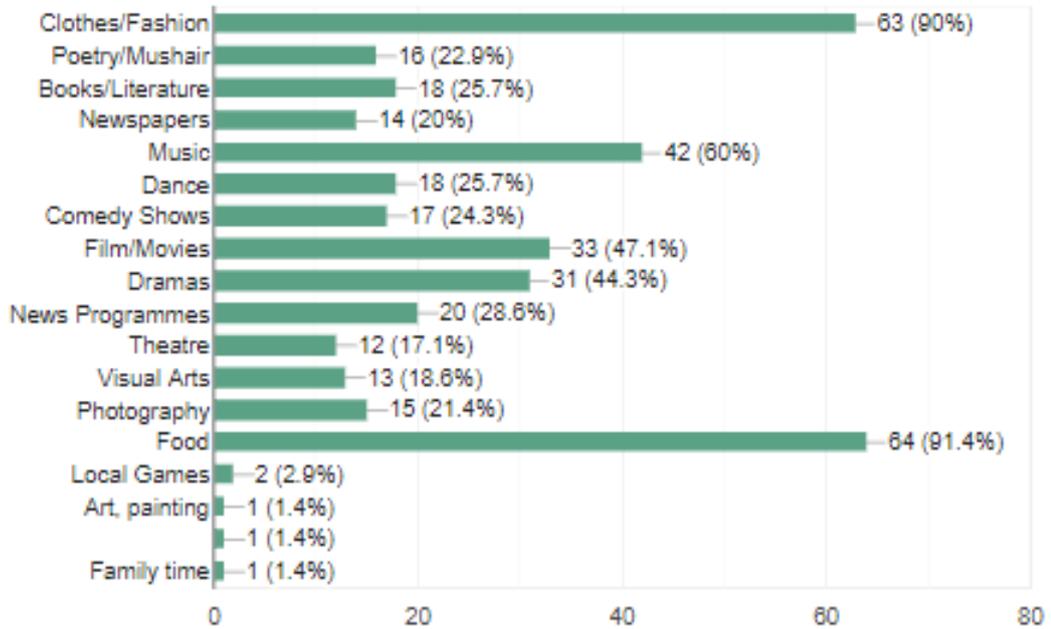
KASHMIR

What is your relationship?  
 Its my Country  
 food & festivals  
 I don't feel as connected  
 clothes  
 Darbars  
 I like the monuments  
 Shopping & Culture  
 Sight seeing  
 festivals

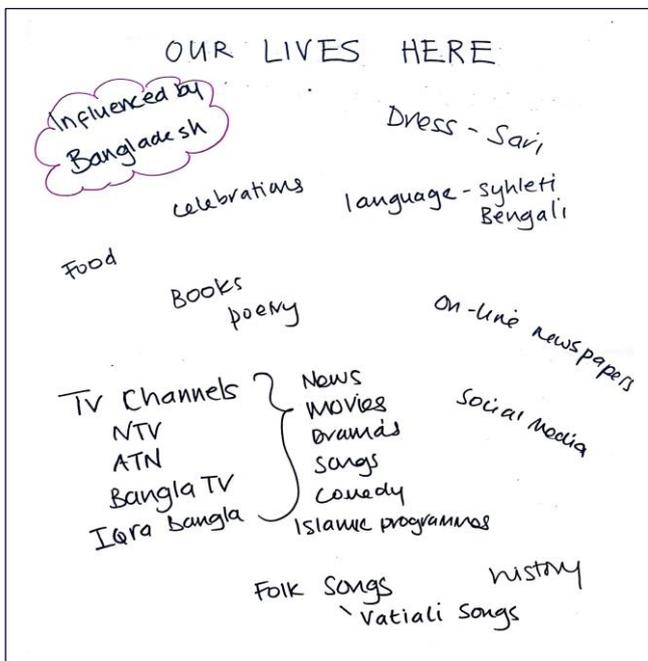
How connected do you feel?  
 Its restrictive  
 I was born there  
 My family is there  
 animals  
 Music  
 Murree  
 shrines  
 village life

14. Thinking about your life in Birmingham, what cultural activities do you engage in that originates from or is influenced by your country of origin? Pls tick all that apply.

70 responses

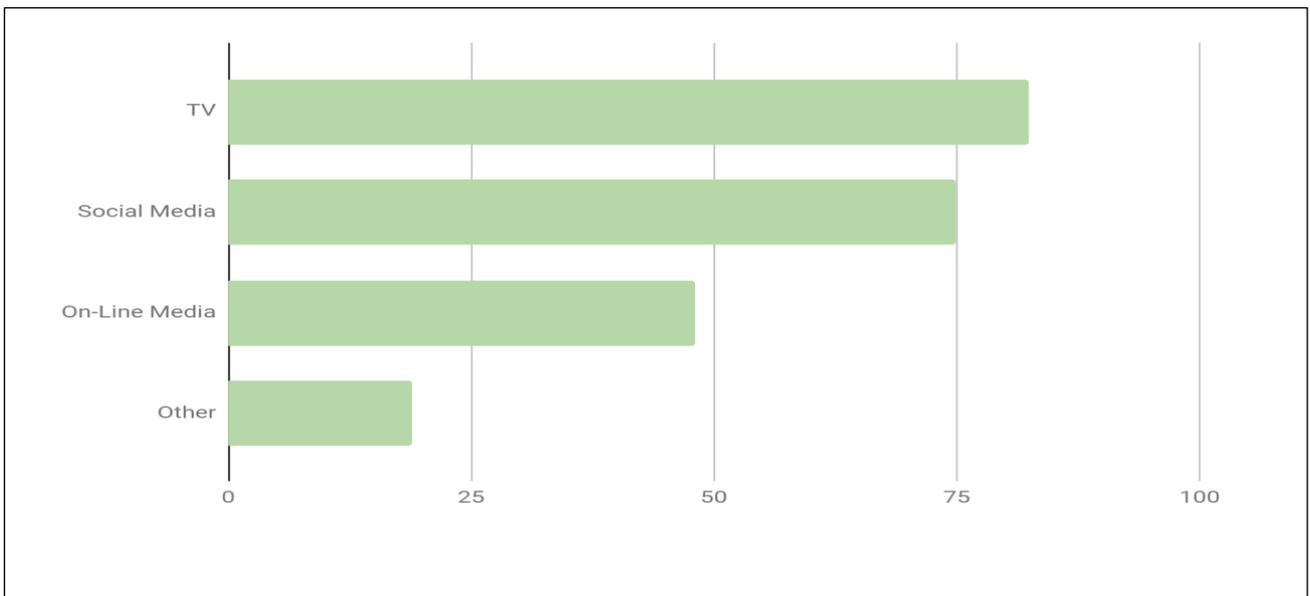


Feedback from focus group discussions : What cultural forms do you engage in that originate from or are influenced by your country of origin?



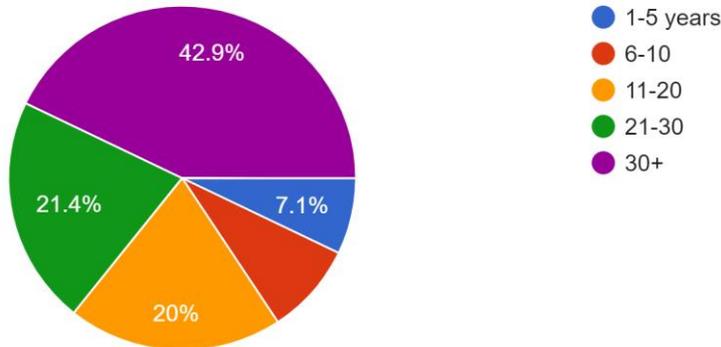


15. How do you engage with these?



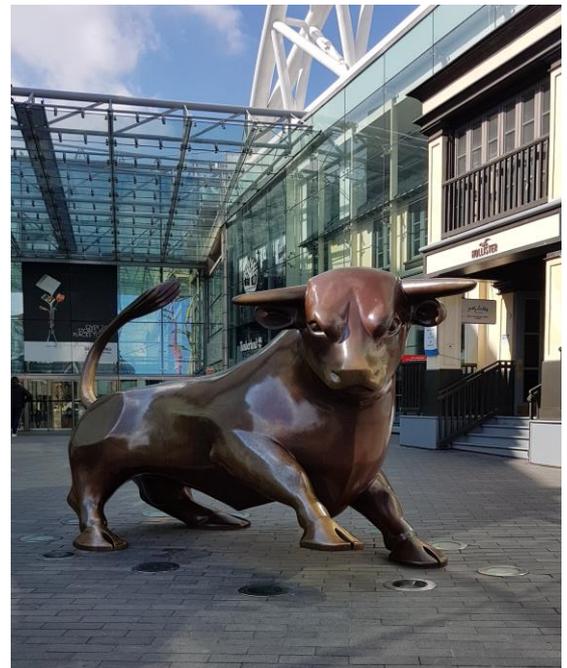
### 16. How long have you lived in Birmingham?

70 responses



### 17. Please can you describe your experience of living/working or studying in Birmingham?

The majority of women survey said they have lived in Birmingham for over 30 years and therefore know the city very well. Most women were positive about their experiences of living, working or studying in the city. Many felt it was good place to live because it is a multi-cultural city, however there were also concerns expressed about feeling unsafe because of racism towards Muslim women.



*It is my home and I love this city that has empowered me and also given me the right to live according to my culture and practice my faith freely.*

*It where I live where I will die its where my parents are buried so it is really my home city. I have worked in the communities here and continue to do so to create bridges and understanding.*

Kashmiri woman

*It is the best place to live in the UK in my opinion. Very friendly rich in various cultures and multicultural and there is so much undiscovered talents and ideas that are blooming from this city.*

Bangladeshi woman

*Even though I was born in Pakistan I still love Birmingham and cannot live more than a few months in any other place. I love the people who are friendly in my neighborhood but sometimes I feel scared about what is going on nowadays.*

Pakistani woman

*I believe that Birmingham is a multi-cultural city that had great acceptance of other religions and cultures.*

*However, recently I feel slightly unsafe in Birmingham being a Muslim and wearing a hijab. I am afraid of becoming a victim of terror attacks and hate crimes- such as acid attacks. I believe these fears were provoked when I was a victim of a hate crime. This was due to me wearing a hijab.*

Pakistani woman

18. What do you like about living in Birmingham?

There were many reasons given by the women surveyed on what they liked about living in Birmingham. This included its diversity, the availability of food from around the world, Asian clothes shops, transport links and its location in the centre of the country.

*Multi-faith, diverse, different cultures. A lot of clothes and food shops and it's easy to do shopping for wedding. everything can be bought in one area but in London.*

Bangladeshi woman

*I love the food, it offers so much variety from fine dining to fast food, desert lounges and coffee shops. I love the shopping experience it offers, not only in the city centre but the local high st which are full of colourful outfits but also let you experience street food. I love that during Ramadan these places come alive at night and are buzzing till the early hours of the morning. You feel like you're abroad.*

Pakistani woman

*Everything is easily accessible by public transport, the museum's and parks. and mosques.*

Bangladeshi woman

*It's central, not too far from London or Manchester and not too far from countryside.*

Kashmiri woman

*I like the freedom I have to be who I am and not get harassed. It is very diverse so many communities live together tolerate and respect each other*

Pakistani woman

*People of all backgrounds and cultures can make this city their home and be part of the community. Most people are accepting of difference.*

Pakistani woman

*I love how diverse Birmingham is! Living in Birmingham has exposed me to so many cultures and ethnicities and I am able to try cuisines and fashions from all parts of the world - I can visit so many countries without stepping foot out of Birmingham!*

Kashmiri woman



## 19. What do you dislike about living in Birmingham?



The main responses to this question included; frustration about the litter, concerns about crime, the feeling that communities were becoming more segregated and a fear of the rise of racism towards Muslim women.

*Racism and the knife crime at the moment*

*There isn't an inclusive mosque within the city and the mosques and cultural centres are run by men with very specific worldviews - a lack of religious diversity.*

*I don't like it when people look down at me because I am Pakistani and I wear head scarf. Sometimes they call us racist names that really makes me sad. Nowadays racist attacks make me feel scared to go out and travel.*

*Certain areas are becoming monocultural. I don't like the litter and increasing levels of crime. Also, despite being the second city, I don't think we have the diversity of cultural and arts offer that London has. I love the fact that in London you can access so much in terms of arts and culture from different communities in various venues- Birmingham is lagging behind.*

*The Pakistanis cast run councillors. The filthy Asian roads that represent us Pakistanis. Like Stratford Road, Alum Rock Road, Soho Road, etc*

*Homelessness is a becoming a very big issue in Birmingham as well as lack of funding for ethnic minorities/ for youths of lower income families & the increase in crime because of the lack of resources. I also dislike how people from my own community don't look after the environment they live in in.*

*The litter and graffiti makes the city look unsightly and reflects badly on the residents.*

*The usual..litter, traffic, knife crime....also parts of the city are becoming segregated.*

*Rubbish, gun crime lack of facilities for youth, loss of morals and empathy for others, not enough women in key roles*

*The segregation of communities, lack of natural spaces, crowding*

*Knife crime has increased. Local stay and plays have closed. Not enough youth projects. The amount of litter in certain areas and lacking of funding going into those impoverished areas.*

## 20. How can Birmingham be improved?

Suggestions for improving Birmingham largely focused on: providing opportunities for young people, providing empowering opportunities for women, more police to tackle crime, more community cohesion events and shared community spaces, and people taking responsibility to reduce the litter.

*More funding into youth centres, early years centres, more police on the streets.*  
Bangladeshi woman

*More funding for projects to bring people of different backgrounds together. Better education for Migrant adults.*  
Kashmiri woman

*More inclusive and shared spaces. Tackle poverty in the city which can be exploited to cause divisions.*  
Bangladeshi woman

*Improve the local services especially the youth services there is less crime and more investment in the public by the government. Reverse the cuts which have unjustly affected Birmingham more than any other place. Stop being so London-centric.*  
Pakistani woman

*Better local trains, more opportunities for South Asian women to engage in sports and the arts.*  
Pakistani woman

*There needs to be more things available for children to access and learn in safe environment.*  
Bangladeshi woman

*Better integration and initiatives to bring people together and have an insight into each other's lives. More green spaces needed.*  
Bangladeshi woman

*Less crime, more opportunities to celebrate the good things the community is doing. More open conversations about what we need to be a more equal society for women.*  
Pakistani woman

*More police, youth clubs and after school clubs. Activities for young people at the weekend.*  
Kashmiri woman



## 21. Thinking about yourself, what do you care about or what are you interested in?

*"I care about the environment where I live and where my children are living because it is getting scary to go out there and get judged by how you look and dress. Before it never used to be like that."*

*"Integration, green spaces, academic achievement"*

*"Cheap affordable housing so you don't live your life renting would like to develop my painting skills but no childcare"*

*"I care about the Schools in the inner city. Our south Asian children are lacking in good role models, Schools are all failing, leave this generation in direct need of help. We need drastic intervention in better schools, better policing, and better councillors."*

*"Challenging both islamophobia and also patriarchy...both of which impacts on Muslim women."*

*"Concerned about rise in knife crime. Drug dealing in the city. Increased segregation among racial lines. Safety of women at night."*

*"Refugees. Women's issues. Environment"*

*"I am interested in our local youth and keeping them engaged in positive activities in order to deter them from a life of delinquency. And also working with local women and children in the community finding facilities for them where they can come together in a safe space and socialise."*

*"Community cohesion, inter-generational intersectionality, gentrification"*

*"Providing services for our elders. I'm interested in having a greener city and cleaner one. Id like to see better transport links. I'd like to see more arts events to come to the city, id like Birmingham to have the same buzz London does."*

*"Looking after the environment. getting people more involved in things like gardening helping children in cities become more aware of nature. Helping young mums who can often feel isolated. helping mothers who can't speak English to become more involved in their children's education."*

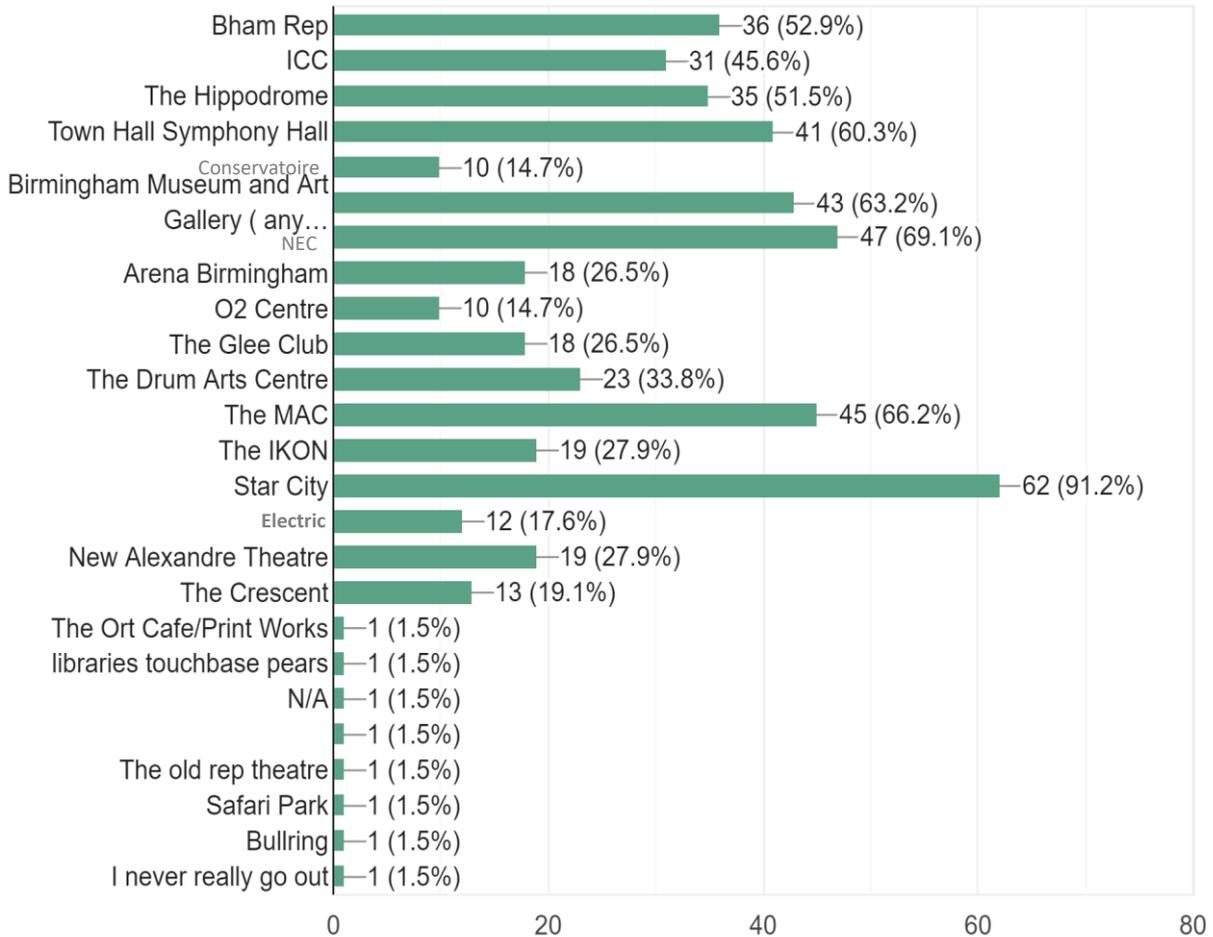
*"Feminism, women's rights, education"*

*"Community cohesion. Elderly and young people being ignored, uncared for. Helping vulnerable, less fortunate."*

## ENGAGEMENT WITH ARTS AND CULTURE

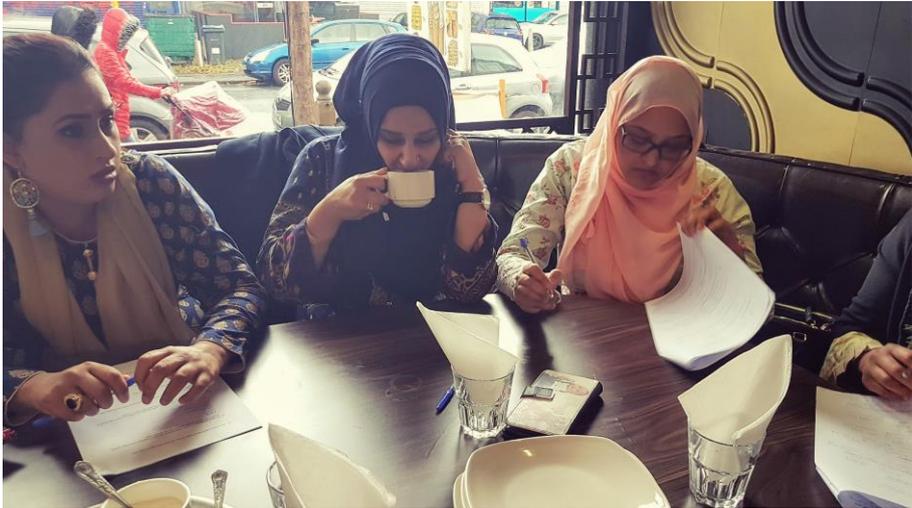
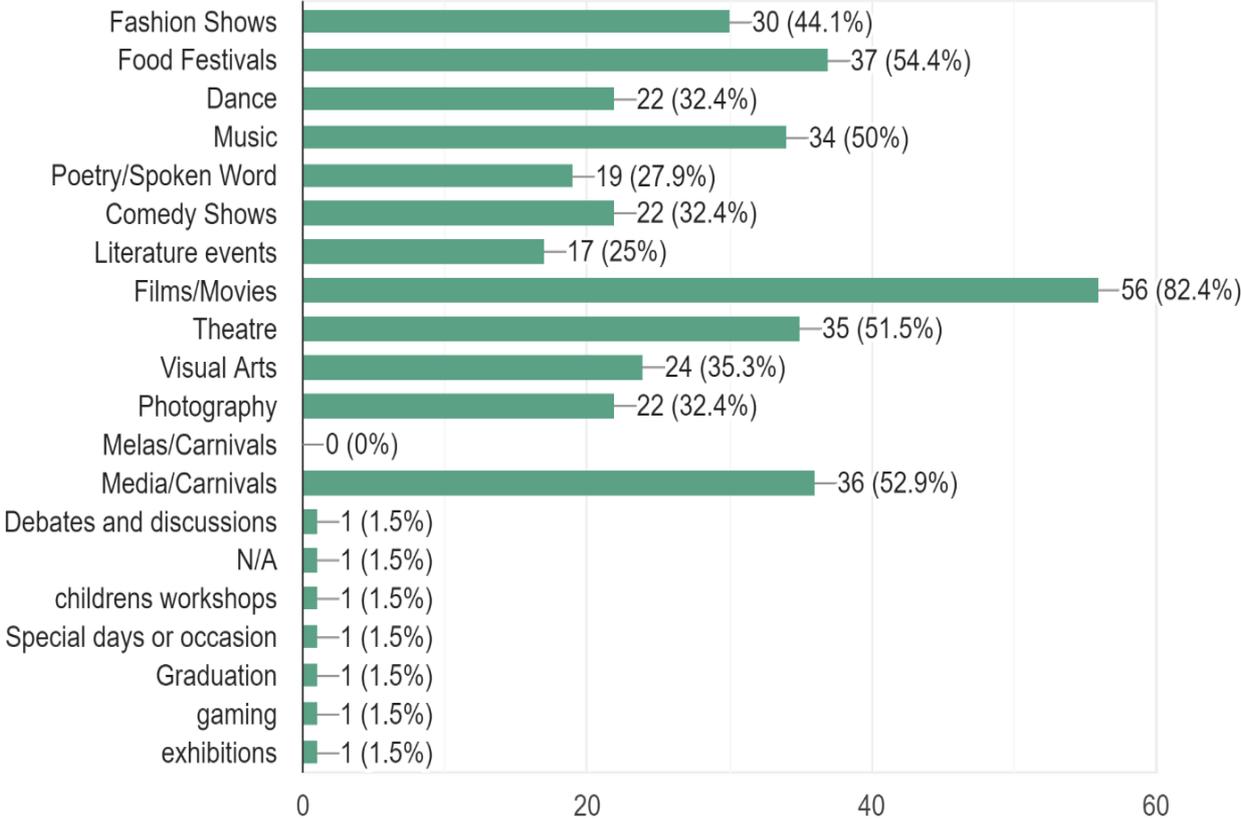
22. Which of the following venues have you attended? Pls tick all that apply.

68 responses



### 23. Please tick all the arts or cultural events and activities you have attended in these venues?

68 responses



## Bangladeshi Women’s Focus Group – Engagement with mainstream arts and cultural centres



The 10 women were asked which venues they had visited:

<b>Name of venue</b>	<b>No women attended</b>	<b>Genres/cultural forms</b>
Birmingham Rep	3	Children’s Theatre
ICC	2	Business Event/School Event
The Hippodrome	1	Schools Theatre
Town Hall Symphony Hall	4	Choir/Graduation/Bangladeshi New Year
NEC	2	Railway Xpo/Disney on Ice
The Arena	3	Dinosaur Xpo/Concerts
Museums/Art Galleries	5	Art Collections
The MAC	3	Literature events/Belly dancing classes/Yoga classes
Star City	10	Movies/Food/Leisure
Others: Sealife Centre Cadbury’s World		

## Kashmiri Women’s Focus Group – Engagement with mainstream arts and cultural centres



The 10 women were asked which venues they had visited:

<b>Name of venue</b>	<b>No of women attended</b>	<b>Genres/cultural forms</b>
Birmingham Rep	2	Thousand Splendid Suns/Sigh of the Musaffir
ICC	5	Graduation/Awards ceremony/Rahat Fateh concert
The Hippodrome	3	Children’s theatre.
Town Hall Symphony Hall	4	Orchestra/Graduation/Nasheed Concert
NEC	6	Asian Fashion Show/Food Show/Gurdas Maan Concert
The Arena	1	Concert
Museums/Art Galleries	4	Collections/Faith exhibition
The MAC	2	Cinema/Pakistan Film Fest
Star City	10	Cinema/Food/Leisure
Others:		
Glee Club	2	
Alex Theatre	1	
Old Rep	1	

## Pakistani Women’s Focus Group – Engagement with mainstream arts and cultural centres



The 10 women were asked which venues they had visited:

Name of venue	No of women attended	Genres/cultural forms
Birmingham Rep	1	Children’s Theatre
ICC	3	Work/Graduation/Schools
The Hippodrome	4	Pantomime
Town Hall Symphony Hall	7	Schools Music Concert/Graduation/ Work do
NEC	9	Asian Bridal show/Dog show/Motor show/Home show
The Arena	2	Disney Shows
Museums/Art Galleries	10	Collections/International Women’s Day with Community Centre
The MAC	6	Children’s activities/Art Exhibitions
Star City	10	Cinema/Food/Leisure
Others:		

24. What is your experience of these venues and what they have to offer?

*"Not much representation or diversity at all. Makes you feel out of place"*

*"Experience is limited. Shame local libraries do not offer more or have a volunteer scheme. MAC is amazing. Has a lot on and plenty on offer".*

*"It's okay although given the size of our community they could do more to cater for us."*

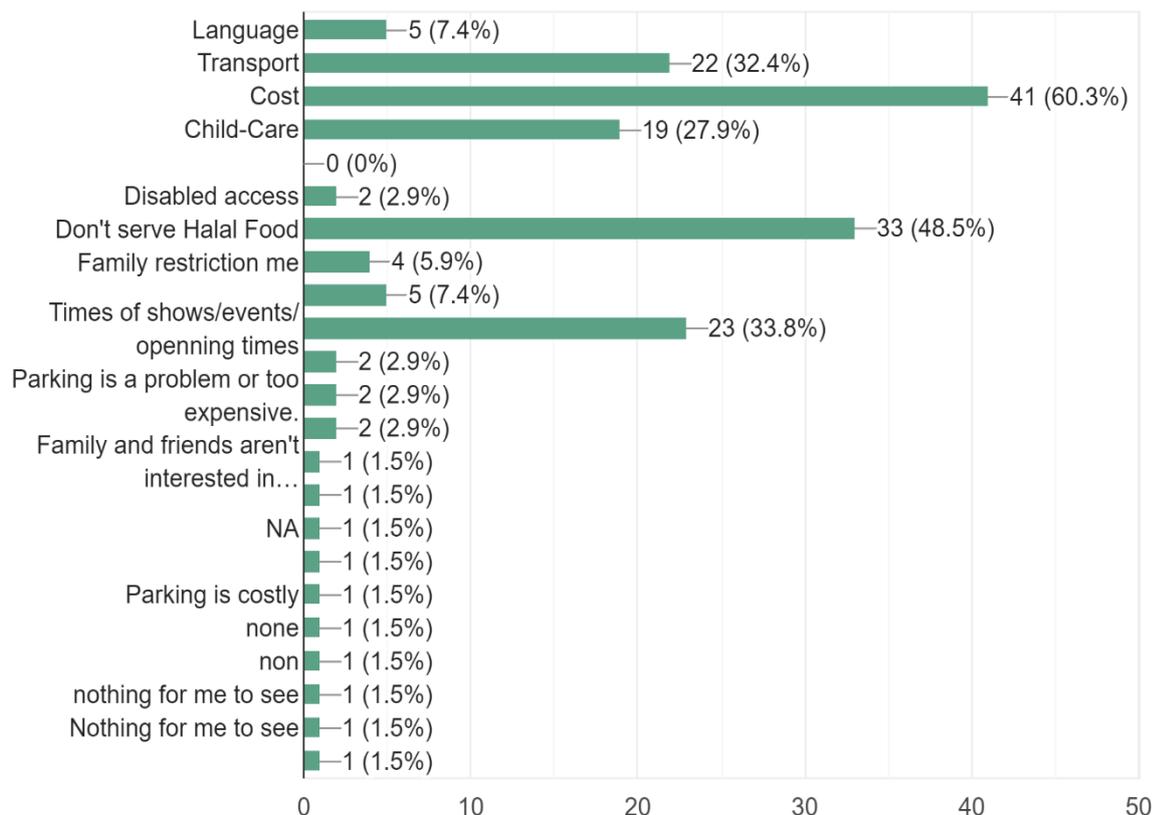
*"My experience some are well attended by all ethnic groups but others lack diversity"*

*"Great entertainment"*

*"Good although more difference and diversity needed. More BAME events."*

25. Are there any barriers or issues which make it difficult for you to engage with or attend cultural events in the cit... at these venues? Pls tick all that apply

68 responses



**Barriers - Bangladeshi Focus Group**

- Not family-friendly
- Timing of shows
- Not much of our culture in these places
- Nowhere to put pushchairs
- We won't see women with headscarves
- Don't know what is on

**Barriers - Kashmiri Women's Focus Group**

- Timing of shows
- Not family-friendly
- Parking
- Don't know what's on
- Cost
- Travel
- No one to take me (older woman)

**Barriers - Pakistani Women's Focus Group**

- Nothing appeals to me
- Cost
- Transport
- No Halal Food
- Timing of Shows
- Not Family-Friendly

26. Is there anything (in terms of South Asian arts/cultural events) that you would like to see or attend which is currently not on offer by the major arts and cultural venues?

### **Bangladeshi Women**

*"Grechoshaw, bosha, sharot, hemontho, sheet boshento"*

*"Textile sessions, art designs (mehndi designs), ladies only nights."*

*"Food, traditional nakshi-kata sewing."*

*"Bangladeshi music shows."*

*"Food festivals, clothes and fashion festivals (cultural shopping at low prices, similar to Bangladesh)"*

*"More theatre dramas play to fill in the inter-generational gap"*

### **Kashmiri Women**

*"more on history of ethnic art Arab Asian origins more organised locally for adults to develop their skills in the arts"*

*"Exhibitions on Kashmiri history/heritage"*

*"Folk music/ Mahia Tapeh events"*

*"Handicrafts"*

*"Ladies nights"*

*"Our struggles in the 60's/70's/80's/90's on racism in this country"*

*"We want places for our elderly to go and for their stories to be told through theatre and spoken word"*

### **Pakistani Women**

*"Yes, I would like to see far more in terms of our history in the museums from our perspective and not a colonial 'orientalist' perspective. i want to see exhibitbits which*

*show how advanced our histories were and also the negative impact of colonialism. I would like to see more art forms from the South Asian Sub-Continent and also listen to folk music originating from Pakistan. I would also like to see alternative spaces flourishing which promotes and champions Pakistani arts and culture"*

*"More theatre produced by our communities in community languages. Support for local women to visit and have access to these spaces."*

*"Sufi poetry / Sufi dancing"*

*"Calligraphy Exhibitions"*

*"Yes, more on Pakistani qawwali please but not to be programmed but a white person, plenty of Pakistanis to that job!"*

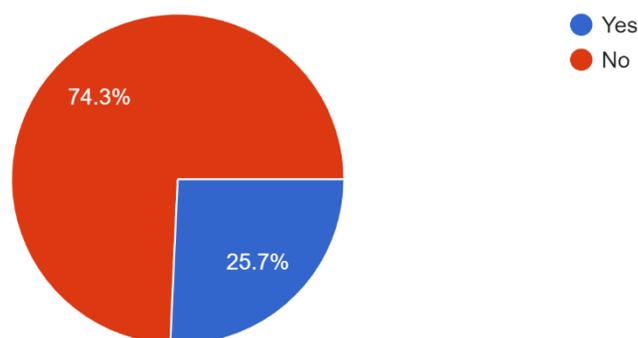
*"Art exhibitions by Pakistani Female Artists"*

#### Mixed Race

*"More experimental innovative immersive ways of delivering culturally relevant narratives"*

27. Are there any community based venues that you attend to access South Asian Arts or cultural events?

70 responses



28. If yes, where do you go and what do you see?

There appears to be very few places where women are able to access South Asian arts and cultural events. The most frequently mentioned was the MAC followed by local community centres and some libraries

29. This research will inform the audience development strategy for Transforming Narratives and shared with their partners - Is there anything you would like to say to them?

*"Birmingham needs more spaces for different communities to mix and interact. We don't all wish to stay within monoculture/religion social groups and access events that chime with our ethnic roots."*

*"If you walk amongst us, you will see that we are skilled, talented and creative and we have stories to tell. We have overcome adversity and the greatest of challenges. But if you continue to deny us opportunities and access to resources, if you stereotype us, if you ignore inequality, if you allow others to allow others to speak for us - we will not be your audiences"*

*"Support local women artists"*

*"Yes it would be great if there were opportunities for south Asian ladies to have something to do, which they could relate to also it would be a good opportunity for the wider community to learn about other cultures."*

*"More advertising on arts events especially through schools and community centres"*

*"It was refreshing to read about the aim/initiative of the study as it was different, relevant and applicable to issues of today! Thank you"*

*"Keep delivering and creating platforms while changing conceptions through creative immersive art"*

*"Birmingham is a growing city but with room for development. Nowadays arts practices don't always do enough to address the need to represent diversity and address socially important issues. It's important to address the two and also find the funding to do to."*

*"It was refreshing to read about the aim/initiative of the study as it was different, relevant and applicable to issues of today! Thank you"*

*"Highlight the immersing cultures amongst young professional ethnic communities and the differentiation from all the different generations"*

*"Yes. We need more safe spaces for women to come together so that they have a community around them. Where they can learn new skills and meet other women to make friends as many women are very lonely and confined to their own homes due to cultural or financial/social restrictions, or simply lack of confidence."*

*"Ultimately same commissioners equates to same content. Panel needs to include and represent the target audience."*

*"I think it's amazing that you're doing this, and feel grateful that you're putting stuff like this on for us all"*

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# Interviews

**Halima**

**Age:** 32

**Born:** Wales

**Origin:** Bangladeshi

**Religion:** Muslim

**Languages:** Sylheti, Bengali, English, Urdu and bit of Welsh



## **How would you describe your identity?**

*Muslim, British Born UK and Welsh. Even though I've been to Bangladesh, I still feel I'm not from Bangladesh. I'm born and bred here. I feel connected with Bangladesh because my family is from there but I feel more comfortable here. 'Back home' is Wales because I was born in Wales.*

## **How often do you visit Bangladesh?**

*2 years ago and before that 10 years ago. I wouldn't mind going every year but with kids at school it's tricky. 2 weeks is not enough. I went for 3 weeks and visited villages, in-laws, museums, melas. I enjoyed seeing the landscape and how hard they work to grow crops.*

## **What aspects of your identity influences your life here in Birmingham?**

*It's the culture from back home we follow. Everyone is Muslim, but our culture is from Bangladesh. So, we speak in Sylheti, respect for elders, have get togethers, keeping our communities together. We wear saris. We eat Bangladeshi food. My husband was born in Birmingham and he loves Bengali fish, which I make for him. We also like watching the dramas. Sometimes we go to go to see Bengali singers in a hired Community Centre near Yew Tree in Yardley with dancing, food and singing. Also, at Eid time we go to Eid celebrations in Brick Lane. Famous male and female singers come from Bangladesh to sing. They're family events and even women wearing niqabs go because they don't want to miss out*

*In the car I listen to English, hip-hop, rap, Indian, Urdu, when I'm on my own but when I'm with my husband, he likes Bengali songs. I also went to a Bangladeshi fashion show, in the NEC at the start of the year. Sometimes I listen to the news on Channel 5 and NTV (TV Channels). Bangla channel is always on in my in-laws' home.*

## **What do you like about Birmingham?**

*I've lived here for 9 years. I like it because there are fashion shows, Islamic events. I used to visit Birmingham, before I moved here, for Eid shopping etc. We'd go to Stratford Road for sari and Soho for eid and lenghas. I follow fashion on Instagram and have ordered clothes online but I prefer to buy from the shops because the quality is not always good on-line*

*I love going to restaurants. We try food everywhere in Birmingham, e.g. Ladypool Road where there is a variety of grills, Pepes Chicken, steakhouse, noodles. It's nice to try and find somewhere new you like.*

**What do you dislike about Birmingham?**

*Nothing. It's not like London which has too much traffic.*

**What is Halima interested in and care about?**

*Family, friends and a good future for my children. There has been a lot of hate in Birmingham, there has been a lot of racism, knife stabbings. Scary to think someone might be watching you. I have 3 kids, I'm always out and about. We don't want to stay scared at home, we want to be free to go out, to the park etc.*

**Do you go out to the main arts or cultural centres in Birmingham?**

*No. Used to go to the museums in Wales, but not in Birmingham. I also went to see 'Disney Princess Dancing on Ice' at the NEC. I've been to the Mac café and park but not any of exhibitions.*

**What stops you going to the arts centres or museums?**

*I don't know what's going on and also child-car. The cost is restrictive, unless you get a Groupon discount. I've got a 7,6 & 3-year-old so can't go often as it's expensive.*

**If you had childcare, where would you go with friends?**

*Go out for Indian food, stay out late, love to go to see theatre performance (Snow White) or music concert. I'd like to see Bengali fashion, singers, music, dance. Performance in theatre, in Bengali or even English language.*

**Have you been to events in the local community?**

*I've been to ladies' nights locally and had fun. I also went to the Nowka boat races in Edgbaston. They had a mix of Bangladeshi singers, as well as Zac Knight. I saw the posters and then on Instagram and my sisters came from Swansea, it was big.*

***In Yardley and Small Heath, there are a lot of women who would like to go to places locally or short bus ride away.***

**Do you have a message for Transforming Narratives?**

*Yes. I'd like to see more for youngsters, singing, dancing, has to be average price range, not too expensive.*

Salma:  
Age: 42  
**Born:** Birmingham  
**Origin:** Pakistani  
**Religion:** Muslim  
Languages: English, Punjabi, Urdu



***How connected do you feel to Pakistan?***

*I feel pretty connected although not as much now that I'm older. I still have family there. I know my children don't have that connection which is really sad because that's my parent's country and its part of their life. I first went to Pakistan when I was about to start university. It was a brilliant experience that I will never forget. The smells and flavours and meeting family. Watching the hustle and bustle - I absolutely loved that. The lifestyle in the village was completely different and seeing people living with their cattle – it was such a brilliant experience - that is what attracts me. But still, I've never really thought of Pakistan as home - Birmingham is home and that's where my heart is.*

***What part of your life in Birmingham is influenced by Pakistan?***

*Definitely the clothes and food. I do watch dramas when I go to my mum's house but that's to give me connection with my mum. My dad is an avid news watcher so when I go and visit them they have the news on the TV and it's interesting to find out what's happening there. I listen to Asian music especially Sunday morning on the radio. When I was growing up we used to hire videos from a local store and watch Bollywood movies but over time we've moved away from it but was definitely a big part of my childhood. My husband went back to Pakistan and lived there for 9 years in Jhelum so he has lots of memories and stories.*

***What is your experience of living and working in Birmingham?***

*I am 1 of 8 siblings. Half of my life was spent in Bordesley Green. We had quite a poor start a small terraced house. Our street was a good mix but our school was predominately Pakistani girls. We all use the same language and families knew each other. In our class we only had one white girl one Chinese and maybe two Indian. Mum and dad taught us to treat everybody with respect and we just played with everybody and we had an open-door policy and that's the kind of mentality which carried to my sixth form and to university where I had a mixture of friends. Because of that I didn't feel that I belong to a particular type of community of people. I've always had a connection with being British because I was born here. I connect with people and in interested in their stories.*

**What do you like about Birmingham?**

*It's all I've ever known. I'm a born and bred 'Brummie'. I love the memories of going to the flea market, getting chips on the way home. Riding on the buses. There's a community spirit. Our mums were at home with their children, kids playing on the street. My dad was a bus driver and I'd wave at him as he'd drive by.*

**Anything you don't like about Brum?**

*I think things can be improved but it's political. I don't think enough is being done for the youngsters or women by the mosques. We don't need more mosques, we need to improve the ones we have. In my work, I see that poverty is a big issue and this really upsets me, seeing people that struggle when we are a wealthy country. Certain areas are definitely neglected. Going into inner city areas like Handsworth, Alum Rock Sparkbrook and Sparkhill --is it the people making the mess or organisations not doing their jobs?*

**What do you care about?**

*I do think about the elderly. My elderly parents have got family to look after them, but what about those that don't? I'm also concerned about young people, I remember when we were growing up there's always things for us to do and I do worry about what opportunities they have and what Birmingham holds for them. I'm also concerned for women. When I see women coming into the office where I work that don't know what opportunities available to them, and that's both for the Asian but also the poor of white women.*

**Which places do you most frequently go to see Arts and Culture?**

*The Mac definitely. It's local and accessible. I'm always checking see what's happening. I don't really go to other places like the Rep or Hippodrome. I think the MAC feels more multicultural in what they offer in their live productions and cinema. I went to the Mac on mothering Sunday and watched a Spanish film by myself. I don't go to many theatre events. I like the exhibitions and food festivals at the MAC. I used to go to NEC but it's overpriced and they don't have culturally diverse foods. I also like Moseley food market.*

**Are there any barriers to you going to any of these places?**

*I don't think there's enough events on the things I'm interested in culturally, so it's limited and it stops me. Also a lot of the events are not family friendly and I have children of different ages.*

**Any thing you'd like to see?**

*Shows like 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' is accessible to everybody. I'm really not interested in dance. I'm more interested in spoken word and theatre plays. I know my mum and my mother-in-law would love to go somewhere and watch a play if it was in a community language. I've taken my mum and my mother-in-law to Star City to see films and then loved it. My mum and dad haven't ever been to the theatre. It would be great if there were performances in Urdu or Punjabi so I could take my parents. Historical aspects of our countries – a lot of the history in museums is Egyptian history or Anglo-Saxon and we don't really connect with that, but if it was to do with Islamic history, Turkish history or South Asian history then I would be more interested. My mum loves going to the national trust houses and walking through the houses and seeing the textiles and looking at their gardens.*

### **Any Community Venues?**

*I went to the Ort gallery to an exhibition and I thought that was really interesting. What really annoys me is that so many things happened in London it's always London-centric what can never comes up to Birmingham, like tabla and sitar. I try and use as what's on Birmingham to see what's happening but there's very few things around south Asian arts and culture.*

### **Message to TN?**

*Not everyone is on social media so it would be good to have a specific listing around South Asian arts and Culture. I do think that more than ever they need to make sure that they cater for the young people and what they're interested in and look out for exhibitions and shows that would interest them.*

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**Nageena,**  
**Age:** 35 years old  
**Born:** Birmingham  
**Origin:** Kashmir.  
**Languages:** Urdu and Potwari



### **How do you see yourself, how do you define yourself?**

*British Muslim, British Pakistani. I have strong roots with back home, even though we've lived here all our lives, I still call Pakistan, back home.*

### **How often do you visit Pakistan?**

*Quite often, I like going Pakistan, we have family there. Try to go every year, if not, once every two years.*

### **If you had to explain your relationship with Pakistan, how connected do you feel?**

*I love Pakistan. I always get really excited about it. I feel free every time I'm there. We live in the village, not in the city. We do have family in the city, but the village life is amazing, it's so carefree, stress free.. I still listen to Pakistani music. My children have been. They all have a special bond with it, we talk about it all the time.*

### **What part of your life in Birmingham is influenced by Pakistan, e.g. the clothes?**

*People call Birmingham the 'Little Pakistan'. People walk around in shalwar kameez, we wear it as well. The food culture of Pakistan. We have desi tea with lots of spices in.*

*What other aspects, e.g. listen to music, watch films whilst you're in Birmingham?*

Yes, Pakistani dramas on TV. Recently, I started going to music shows a lot. I also go to see films, the last one was 'Waar', a good Pakistani film, in Star City Vue. They've started to put on a lot more Pakistanis make films which tackle taboo subjects which is good.

I love Mahia Tapeh, absolutely love it. There's a music academy in Alum Rock where people get together and play different musical instruments and that's free on Friday evening. Live music, they're practising. Tariq someone, comes there and he's got an amazing voice and he does 'Tapeh' and traditional folk songs, I really enjoy it. There's not enough. It's nice, but it's not a very welcoming place. Looks like a closed down factory, it's a bit dodgy. I would love for that kind of thing to happen somewhere, where it's more comfortable for people to go and listen to this kind of stuff.

**Do you go to the theatre?**

I have been. Last thing I watched was 'A thousand splendid suns' which was really good. I would like to go more, but I probably don't go enough. I didn't realise that I liked it. The last thing I went to see was Pinocchio, that was ages ago. I didn't realise how much I enjoyed the theatre. So, I have started to go a lot more now, it's something I enjoy doing. It has to be the right thing.

What is the right thing?

'A thousand splendid suns' I loved that book, so it was about again, it was connected to Afghanistan, connected to home again. So, things that I can relate to or feel that it's closer to home for me.

**What is your experience of Birmingham?**

Birmingham is home. So, I feel we have a lot of opportunities in Birmingham, because it's so mixed, there are so many different cultures and communities, all living together.

**What do you like about living in Birmingham?**

I don't know anything different. We've got everything on our doorstep, where we live. We don't have to go too far for: hospitals, music, theatre, shopping.

**What do you dislike about living in Birmingham?**

In our area, not enough happens for our communities. Not enough for the younger generation. The councillors don't pull their fingers out, as much as they should. Hate so much rubbish around.

**How can it be improved?**

Tough one. We worked through 'I love Alum Rock' trying to everyone to get together and clean up the area...it's about education, educating the people.

About yourself as Nageena, what things are you personally interested in?

Enjoy my culture and community. Help the women in our community, I want to be someone, who my girls and son, look up to. I want to be role model for him too. It's not just a man's world anymore, we can do whatever we want as well.

**Are there any other barriers to you attending the city centre arts scene?**

Times of shows are late, so getting back is an issue. Cost wise, sometimes they are a bit expensive. If they were cheaper, we would probably go more often. So many times, there is a group of us, then a few drop out, because it's too expensive. If it was cheaper, more people would attend.

**Is there anything from South Asian arts, that is not being offered by the big, city centre arts organisations?**

The problem is, I don't hear about things. They need to advertise it more. I hear about things when it is too late, they've sold out or finished.

### **What would you be interested in, that would make you attend?**

*There is a gap. All the things I hear about, e.g. these tupeh, they're for men. This one is backstreet, this was a mixed event, but you don't hear about these ones so often. It's not that women don't want to go, but because they are so male dominated, the women wouldn't feel as comfortable. If The Rep, put things like this on, then you would get a mixture, e.g. A Thousand Splendid Suns, there were many women and a mix of white, black, Asian. I believe because the music is good, if the larger arts venues hosted these events, women would come.*

*I recently went to see Sigh of the Mussafir it blew me away, especially hearing the Azaan, the Hindu prayer and Sikh (Guru Nanak) prayer. Showed how our cultures are so similar, as we all came from the same place. Felt there was a sense of that throughout. I went with my sisters and Baji cried throughout it all. It really moved us, I can't wait to see the bigger performance, it will be amazing. I really enjoyed it, the atmosphere and never appreciated dance like that before -that girl could really move and she did it so beautifully and gracefully.*

### **Is there anything you would want to say directly to Transforming Narratives?**

*Definitely a need for this. Music and food bring people together. When they get together they talk about not just what's going on there, but other opportunities. Sometimes, without even realising, you connect with people who just needed that somebody who needed someone to talk to, someone to just hear them and their side. Platforms like this, help those people. We need more around culture and arts, we don't do enough. This project might be that first step, by getting everyone together and doing something on a bigger scale.*

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## **Conclusion**

This report concludes that for the vast majority of women of Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani origin there is a deep sense of connection with their country of origin. During the focus group discussions, women's faces lit up as they recalled and recounted their memories of their country of origin and what it meant to them. Women commented that they felt;

*"Very connected through cuisine, culture, tradition and language. It is a vital part of my identity and heritage and I feel it is incumbent upon myself and my children to uphold the customs and values of our race/ethnicity and heritage because it makes us who we are and enriches our lives and society at large."*

*"It all goes back to roots and we cannot shake that off or try to. It is a culture that gives my traditions and how I look too".*

*"I do have a deep sense of connection with my country of origin and heritage. It helps me understand why I am here in the UK"*

*"I'm really proud of our Bengali language movement and our Nowka boat races"*

A smaller number of women commented that their only connection to their country of origin was through their family or that over the years they did not feel as connected with their country of origin. Yet despite this perceived lack of connection, over 90% of all the women taking part in the survey said their country of origin influenced their clothes/fashion choices and the food that they cooked or ate.

Nearly half of all women surveyed said they had watched films or movies from their country of origin, whilst 60% listened to music which included folk music from their country of origin;

*"I enjoy listening to Bangla songs, mainly Vaitali but also re-mixed songs and Bollywood.*

*"I really enjoy Nusrat Fateh Ali, Arif Lohar, Atif Islam"*

*I love all kinds of poetry....George Elliot, Parveen Shaukut, Allama Iqbal, Faiz Ahmed FAiz, Galib, Baba Bulleh Shah"*

Engaging in cultural activities which originate from their country of origin does not however translate into feeling less connected with Birmingham. The study revealed that for the vast majority of women, including those that had settled more recently (less than 10 years), they considered Birmingham as their home;

*"I lived in Birmingham most of my life. It's a vibrant, multi-cultural city and you can easily access culturally specific food, clothing and other items."*

*"At the start when I came here, it was a bit difficult because of language, culture and environment, but after a few years, it feels like home. I'm enjoying living here with my family as well as working".*

*"My life is here. I was born and bred here and I class myself as British but I appreciate the origins of where my family came from".*

All but three of the women surveyed were positive about their experiences of living in Birmingham with the majority suggesting that its main attraction and strength was that it is a diverse and multi-cultural city. This also meant that there they were able to access Asian clothes shops and world foods;

*"The diversity, the food, easy access to halal meat, lots of activities to do."*

*"I love how diverse Birmingham! living in Birmingham has exposed me to so many cultures and ethnicities and I am able to try cuisines and fashions from all parts of the world I can visit so many countries without stepping foot out of Birmingham!"*

*"I love the food, it offers so much variety from fine dining to fast food, desert lounges and coffee shops. I love the shopping experience it offers not only in the city centre but the local high street which are full of colourful outfits but also let you experience street food. I love that during Ramadan these places come alive at night and are buzzing till the early hours of the morning. You feel like your abroad"*

When asked what they disliked about Birmingham, the majority of the women expressed concern about litter, crime, and a lack of opportunities for women and young people. In addition, there were comments which suggested the women felt the city was becoming segregated and there was an increase in racism;

*"The segregation of communities, lack of natural spaces, crowding"*

*"I don't like it when people look down at me because i am Pakistani and i wear head scarf. Sometimes they call us racist names that really makes me sad. Nowadays racist attacks make me feel scared to go out and travel."*

*"It's segregated along race in certain areas, crime rate rising and has a rough feel about it at times."*

*"Racism and the knife crime at the moment".*

Given the concerns expressed, it is not surprising that some of the suggestions on how Birmingham could be improved included;

*"They should organise community meetings and share everyone's culture, art and their food that they use to experience in their own country."*

*"I think lots of work with engagement with diverse communities and activities for young people"*

*"Better integration and initiatives to bring people together and have an insight into each other's lives. More green spaces needed."*

*"Residents need to own their space by being a part of it by understanding that community means outside your 4 walls. Create community cohesion by working together to improve each other's lives"*

*"Better local trains, more opportunities for South Asian women to engage in sports and the arts."*

*"More encouragement for BAME involvement in work opportunities, more development in arts and creating creative opportunities for diversity"*

*"We need to address poverty and deprivation in the city. We need to support artists and creatives from different backgrounds."*

The women's comments suggest that they feel that both women and young people need to be given opportunities to engage with the arts and also they recognise that the arts have a vital role to play in building community cohesion.

This study also examined which venues Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women attend; what genres and cultural forms they enjoy the most and what the drivers were for their attendance. Notably, their attendance was highest where arts and culture reflected their inherited culture and where they feel that they are likely to see women that reflect how they look. For example, 90% of all the women surveyed stated that they had been to Star City. The reasons given for this is that the venue screened Indian movies and within its complex there are a variety of restaurants offering halal food. The venue is also family friendly and has leisure facilities and often has a fun-fayre during Eid. The second most popular venue mentioned was the NEC, with over 68% of the women stating they had attended: wedding fayres, Bollywood shows and fashion shows relating to their countries of origin. It is clear from the survey that commercial venues like Star City and the NEC are far more responsive to the cultural needs of Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women than public funded arts and cultural organisations in the city. They are able to attract the audiences and make it commercially viable. According to the survey, the third most popular venue amongst this cohort of women was the MAC which was considered family-friendly and has both exhibitions and films relating to the cultural origins of the women. Cannon Hill Park also hosts an annual 'Eid Mela' which will bring audiences into the MAC.

In analysing the feedback from the focus group discussions on women's engagement with the public funded mainstream arts and cultural organisations, we can see that women have attended some of these venues for graduation, business and school events rather than to consume arts and culture.

In discussing what might be the barriers to participating in mainstream arts and cultural centres, women stated that: the cost, timing of shows, the unavailability of halal food, the lack of programmes which they were interested in, and a lack of family friendly events as the main reasons. Another barrier amongst women could be the reluctance to attend venues which are unfamiliar to them or which do not reflect them as an audience due to fears about Islamophobic hate crime to Muslim women. As one woman who wore a hijab commented;

*"I don't think I'd enjoy the theatre as there isn't appealing to my ethnic group, I might also feel uncomfortable because I wouldn't see many people like me"*

Therefore, whilst some of these barriers appear to be psychological, others are practical and institutional barriers which need to be addressed in order to encourage the participation of Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women as audiences.

This report has highlighted the genres and cultural art forms which Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women want to see but which are not currently being offered by the mainstream arts and cultural venues. This includes; Islamic art, food festivals, film screening, folk music, poetry, theatre and textile displays that related to their places of origin.

# Recommendations

This report makes the following recommendations

- Engage Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Kashmiri women at a strategic level to ensure relevance of TN programmes to the women it seeks to engage as audiences.
- Provide funding and capacity building to support the development of art and cultural organisations led by Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women in Birmingham.
- Create opportunities for local women at a grass-roots level to develop their artistic and creative talent and provide opportunities to engage in the artist exchange programme.
- Create a programme that is driven by what is of interest and relevant to Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women.
- Use local community-based venues to deliver art and cultural programmes
- Partner with community-based organisations working with Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women to arrange visits to the mainstream arts and cultural centres.
- Address the barriers faced by Bangladeshi, Kashmiri Pakistani as highlighted in this report including facilitating participation by offering discounted 'family group' tickets and early events/shows.
- Create a listing for South Asian Arts and market programmes through schools and libraries.
- Provides halal food at a reasonable cost at venues

## Finally

This research was commissioned in April 2019 and a timescale of six weeks was given to undertake the research and deliver the final report. This meant that the period in which the research could be carried out fell within the month of 'Ramadan'. Due to the limited timescales, this study can only provide an insight into the experiences and perspectives of Bangladeshi, Kashmiri and Pakistani women. Rather than firm conclusions, this study should be seen as a starting point rather than an end point and further time needs to be taken to analyse the rich data collected.



*Pakistani women's arts group in Yardley, Birmingham*