s in Australia



sugar industry in the 1880s, all resulted in economic competition with white labourers because coloured, indentured labour was available at cheaper rates. A range of eugenic, social and cultural fears among white people all contributed to calls for the total exclusion of 'coloured' people. The prevalence of certain race theories such as polygenism and Social Darwinism couple with economic concerns, eventually enabled the Commonwealth Government to enact the Immigration Restriction Act, 1901.

Under this Act, all aliens who attempted to enter Australia had to submit to a medical examination at their port of call and to a dictation test of fifty words, in any language chosen by the immigration officer. The dictation test remained on the statute book until 1958, and it was administered in a language unlikely to be understood to ensure that the applicant failed it. This resulted in a rapid decline in the arrival of 'non-white' people, including Muslims, into Australia. Although a small number of Asian labourers were permitted to stay after 1901, they were subjected to various restrictions such as denial of naturalisation (or the right to become British subjects), family reunion and economic and political disadvantages. Only their sons when turned 21 were allowed to join their father in Australia. Among this small number of labourers, some Bangalis were also retained such as Abdul Aziz. For each visit Aziz produced two character references from his Australian employers to obtain the Certificate of Exemption from Dictation Test from the Commonwealth of Australia Customs and Excise Office.

Since the 1920s, Australia witnessed the arrival of more European labourers. Along with the Southern and Eastern Europeans, also arrived the Albanian Muslims. This pattern of migration continued for a few more decades. However, the arrival of Nazir Mia, a Bangali Muslim from Begumganj, Noakhali, in Brisbane in 1942 revealed that some Indians being 'British subjects' still enjoyed the privilege of entering Australia in spite of the Immigration Restriction Act, 1901 (National Archives, Qld).

By 1973, the need for more labour led to the influx of immigrants and the introduction of an official 'Multicultural' period in Australian history. In 1975, the Anti-Discrimination Act declared discrimination on the basis of race, colour and ethnicity as illegal. Subsequently Muslims from many different nations (including Bangladesh) have settled in Australia, with a major influx occurring in the past thirty years.

Like other immigrants, the Bangladeshi-born immigrants are also making a smooth transition to their host country. Most of the Bangladeshi-born immigrants are highly skilled people. They are successful in the Australian labour market and are working as engineers, doctors and academics. In social and cultural aspects, like other immigrants, the Bangladeshis are enjoying their traditional food and cultural celebrations. For example, Muslims enjoy the halal food, Ramadan and Eid, while the Hindus enjoy Puja festivals and so on. There are about 100 mosques in Australia, including the Sefton mosques, which the Bangladeshis have established in Sydney in 2000. The ethnic and cultural associations of the migrants, ethnic radio stations, Islamic schools and colleges Australia wide are the strength of the Australian multicultural spirit. Internationally, the cricket matches between the Bangladeshi and Australian teams are the positive developments between the two countries. The Bangladeshi-born immigrants also take pride of their dual citizenships of both Bangladesh and Australia. It is great that we can be in touch with our roots our motherland, Bangladesh.

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