CHAPTER THREE

Identifying and Contextualising

Acculturation Strategies

in

Writers of Indian Origin

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.

- Simone Weil
This chapter proposes to identify strategies used by immigrant writers in certain selected diasporic texts. The diasporic writer is a person displaced and thus his writing renders shades of his experiences as an immigrant. As he struggles to adapt and survive, he deploys various ways and means to create an identity using physical, social, psychological, religious and cultural strategies. His home in the present and homeland in the past, all create an interplay where physical situations and emotional issues vibe for a solution. As a first generation immigrant his adaptation strategies differ from that of the second generation.

The dichotomy between the east and west, the oppressive political rhetoric, the difference in terms of value systems, cultural and physical dislocation, all struggle to find expression. The second generation who has no additional mental, moral, emotional baggage and better exposure is challenged to take up a middle path, where he does not leave the old for the sake of the new but negotiates and creates a new identity with acceptance by the dominant culture. The strategies that both generations use to acculturate are based on the strength of one’s personal identity and are not static but an ongoing process.
Home and Homeland – Movement and mobility can be considered as the major tropes of the contemporary postmodern scenario. The diasporic subject represents herself in relation to a home which may be an actual place or just exist in her memory. Jasbir Jain says:

The word “home” no longer signifies a “given”, it does not necessarily connote a sense of belonging, instead it increasingly foregrounds a personal choice which the individual has exercised, and “home” and “homeland” are for all practical purposes separable units.¹

The homeland and the home as explored in this chapter are conjoined, each borrowing sustenance from the other. Bhikhu Parekh expresses the view that far from being homeless the migrant today has several homes. Parekh suggests that the Indian diasporic subject can share and co-exist in several homes and distances need not only mean fragmentation and loss.² Diaspora Indians acknowledge the Indian-ness of past homes, whether in terms of origin, cultural affiliations or even duty. The word ‘home’ for them immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, a secured sanctuary, a place of nurturing and safety. The first generation, retains its cultural identity by celebrating it through family gatherings, or mehfils. These become a forum for reaffirming one’s own identity.
Locating home in the domestic space brings about a negotiation in cultures, identities, heredity and environment. Culture specific customs become for the displaced immigrant a way of retaining and reaffirming nostalgic, familiar and community bonds between him and his home culture. Festivals like Diwali, Rakhi, Onam have significance for the first generation whereas for the second it signifies the usual collection of their relations, the same customs, the same gossip. Angie clarifies:

Every Diwali it was the same. At the beginning I would think it was ok and I'd sit through the 'get married' suggestions, then I'd hang around while everyone took their blessing from the gods, then we'd eat and then the night would go on till two, three in the morning with the men and women finally together, though still talking to their own sex. They'd all laugh and reminisce over old times, argue about which kind of mangoes were the best ones. The men would be bullied into making the coffee for once in their lives. Then they would all eat paan that turned their saliva orange. There was always someone who would sing and someone who would recite poetry and everyone would shout 'Wah', 'Wah'. More people would come to visit and I'd sit there like a lemon telling the same things to all of them. Yes, I would try to wear shalwar more often, yes, I was working for Channel 4 and no, I wasn't thinking of getting married. (Srivastav, Transmission, 53–54)

A dominant theme in diasporic writing is a nostalgic search for a lost home and a pursuit for another – a central motif found in many novels. The homeland left behind, here India, is recalled as a place of warmth, refuge, strength especially during times of trouble and anxiety when the world outside becomes ‘the other’ and only the home is construed as a ‘sanctuary’. There is a difference in the way the two generations see their homes. The first generation longs for the homeland and subconsciously displays many representative markers or symbols. There is
yearning, longing and underlining everything is the positive feeling for all that was good in the past in the homeland. The first generation’s feelings about staying in Britain are in contrast to the second generation. Meena in Anita and Me knows no other culture and witnesses her adopted ‘extended’ family despairing at their life in Britain: “my aunties did not rage against fate or England when they swapped misery tales, they put everything down to the will of bhagwan” (Syal, Anita and Me, 67). Displacement increases the nostalgia for original homes, homes left behind. It colours the loss and longing for not merely the home country or a parental home, but for that sense of claim and belonging often connected with childhood homes. The markers of identity by the first generation included souvenirs from the homeland which would inevitably occupy a pride of place in the main room or in the bedroom away from prying eyes. Meena’s house displays tie-dye hangings and brass ornaments from India, Hardjit’s mother in Londonstani constantly warns his friends to be careful about the silk bed sheets from Mumbai. In Looking for Maya, Tash attempts to re-do Mira’s house look like that of a ‘pukka Indian writer’ by putting up the Rajasthani wall hangings she had picked from Delhi.

For the second generation their homeland is London, through which traces of India filter through – an India constructed from memory, associations, images from books, media, friends and relations. The Indian-ness in the homes created abroad can be read as attempts at acculturation, as they assert their identity and difference and also demonstrate a kind of resistance to the dominant culture. It
was their own to be protected from the West. Home for the displaced Indian belonging to the first generation was,

...the homeland is a series of objects, fragments of narratives that they keep in their heads or in their suitcases. Like hawkers they can reconstitute their lives through the contents of their knapsacks: a Ganapti icon, a dog–eared copy of the Gita or the Quran, an old saree or other deshi outfit, a photograph of a pilgrimage or, in modern times, a video cassette of the latest hit from the home country.  

Trying to understand the desperate need of her family to preserve the past, Meena expresses curiosity at the suitcases which are packed with relics and preserved carefully:

I had always assumed this was some kind of ancient Punjabi custom, this need to display several dusty, bulging cases overflowing with old Indian suits, photographs and yellowing official papers, as all my Uncles and Auntes’ wardrobes were similarly crowned with this impressive array of luggage... Her mother explains, 'We just keep all the things in the cases that do not fit into these small English wardrobes, that is all.' However, I had noticed that everything in those cases had something to do with India, the clothes, the albums, the letters from various cousins, and wondered why they were kept apart from the rest of the household jumble, allotted their own place and prominence, the nearest thing in our house that we had to a shrine. (Syal, Anita and Me, 267) (italics mine)

Children slip easily from the clutches of parents, experimenting with their own survival strategies as they become assimilated or fluent, in the new culture inspite of cultural conditioning from them. The home, maintained as in the homeland, serves as a primary site of grounding children in the ways of the
parents – a strategy to continue links between generations and help in the acculturation process. Mira states about her home in London. “... And at home, India had continued as surely as it had in Delhi and Bombay: Hindi was spoken, food cooked, values drilled, connections given, histories recounted, gods entertained”. (Srivastava, *Looking for Maya*, 142). Home is, after all, where much of culture is practiced, preserved, and transmitted to the young. In turn, the distribution of responsibilities and power at home has a major impact on the second generation. The emotional aspect of the homes in the diasporic space is felt by the second generation and accepted, but only acknowledged internally. Home symbolized the ultimate return to the place of safety and sanctity.

Whenever I had felt low or bogged down at university, I had phoned home to complain. RaviKavi asked what the matter was, was the difficult, were the tutors bad, hadn’t I made any friends. I didn’t know, I just felt low. Come home darling, Mum would say, just come home. Home had always been the place where I had got back to myself, even it was the place that I was forever plotting on leaving. (Srivastava, *Looking for Maya*, 67) (italics mine)

It is not possible to ignore the guilt trips that parents lay on the children reminding them that these new houses, liberties and opportunities have been possible by the sacrifice of their generation. Br Asian families saw education as the legitimate way, an emotional strategy to a better future. Aware of this Meena says, “If I failed my parents five thousand mile journey would have all been for nothing”. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 212–13), Hardjit’s mother warns her son’s friends, “Play the fool. Good, good very good. Fail your exams, live on the street. Verry good".
(Malkani, *Londonstani*, 73). The Aunties in the novels had unsolicited advice for everyone’s children, upon whose futures they pinned all their unfulfilled desires.

The parents want the children to validate their suffering by acknowledging it. And one way of acknowledgement they insisted on was an acceptance of the ‘Indian’ ways. Moving away from these notions of Indian-ness is often seen as disloyalty and betrayal and an attempt to integrate. The idea of home included a spatial connotation for the child, but for the adult was a strategy of memory – deliberately conjuring images of the transnational home left behind – and bringing about a reverence not associated with the present home in the hostland.

The continuation of Indian-ness in the home is a socio-psychological strategy which ensures intragenerational links and also an association with the homeland. Knowledge and acknowledgement of the parental background and a larger ethnical, cultural past which they had left in the homeland was an important strategy as it provided the necessary bond for continuity and community building. It was a strategy of negotiation to develop stability within, an aptitude to survive in the hostland and most important a constant reminder of home something which the second generation rebelled against. The immigrant from the second generation identifies a different strategy to acculturate in this home. Not desiring to be alienated from the mainstream or have any of the practices at home ridiculed by the peer group, she keeps both worlds separate. A physical strategy, handled with psychological understanding, it affirms values and the importance she gives to both the groups. Anjali is constantly surprised at the continuance of
her family’s Indian ways in London. Her people are still not acculturated into the system. It was as if they were not living in a different country, a different world.

Can I turn the heating down?’ I asked. As usual it was up full blast. As if the desi vegetables, Indian videos of trashy films, Indian friends were not enough of a re-creation of the life in Delhi. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 19)

Although the telephone had been quite happy on a little shelf by the front door, it was decided that it would be so much more convenient to sit and use the phone, instead of having to stand by the door. And so it went on like that. Every new object found its own rationale and gate crashed its way into the house. Hat stands and coat hooks; nests of tables and paintings; ice buckets, typewriters, encyclopaedias’, vases, lamps, and a vast paraphernalia of wedge wood, crystal and glass figurines. Every available surface was cluttered up with the junk. The rest of the dining room was full of the pillars of magazines that dad collected. *Time* magazine, *India Today* and oddly, The *Independent* colour supplement. And what with Rax’s overflowing boxes of records, No 10 was teeming. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 21–22)

South Asian diasporas, by bringing their ethnic legacy into their new homelands have successfully created global identities for themselves and their places of residence, both past and present. Women negotiated their identity making their homes a sanctuary, a site of Indian-ness.

Some houses had got Om symbols stuck on the wooden front doors behind glass porches, some of them had Khanda Sahibs and others had the Muslim crescent moon. All of them had satellite TV dishes next to the main bedroom window, stuck up there like framed dentists’ diploma certificates. If there weren’t no symbol on the front door, you could still tell it was a desi house if there was more than one satellite dish. One for Zee TV an one for Star Plus, probably. You could tell if someone was home cos the daal and subjhi smell would mix in with the airport traffic on Great West Road. (Malkani, *Londonstani*, 17)
The first generation writers recorded instances of alienation and related feelings of restlessness, longing, a desire to return, an attempt to glorify the past through memory and stories. The sense of loss and desire to look back and reclaim is aptly described in Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands*.

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India’s of the mind.\(^4\)

The second generation immigrant has a distinct advantage of being able to fit in with other cultures easily because of the shrinking, porous, globalized environment and cosmopolitan attitudes. Identified as the Indian Londoner, with the mental make-up of the second generation, Priya always treated London as her own. She returned to India to visit her mother only to come back to England, where she felt she had made her own life. The fierce independence of mind and the self-reliance she had inherited from her mother helped her in the adopted home. Ironically, it was her mother who realized that Priya was not happy in India. She wrote a letter putting things in the right perspective, helping Priya understand and acculturate. There are variables in the details of cultural negotiation regarding food, clothes, marriage, worship, but also greater freedom to choose. There is understanding and a sense of conflict that prevail with changing aspirations and ambitions between generations:
I had been led to believe that for the Hindu, the guest is god and I had seen more gods at close quarters in our semi-detached in N3 than I had ever seen in the Mid Range Income colony in Bandra. Where once we had lived amongst clerks and managers and schoolteachers speculating about Foreign, in London we welcomed gods who constantly talked of India. *There was nothing stronger than the umbilical cord of the past, nothing more potent than the rope of familiarity, nothing as sure as home.* This relentless marination led to the coating of your character with strength and vigour and gravity. *Without the endless layers - of family, tradition, acts of good faith - you became a drifter, a person in search of himself in an alien land.* This was the unwritten constitution of my parents, yet I was constantly on the lookout for getting swamped by an alien culture. (Srivastava, *Looking for Maya*, 89) (Italics mine)

Avtar Brah posits another idea of home as the ‘... lived experience of locality’ (192). In this connection she clarifies that the associated traumas of dislocation are found here and also are the site of hope and new beginnings.

The concept of home and the homeland has been defined and re-defined in fiction written on colonizers, the colonized, newly independent people, exiles and immigrants.

The meanings of home – multiple and fluid – shift across a number of discourses: from private to public spheres, between the nation as an imagined community to mythic spaces of belonging, ‘home’ can mean where one usually lives or it can mean where one’s family lives or it can mean one’s native country.  

Sunita’s relief when they move to the East End suburb was occasioned by conditions of familiarity. “...we acquired lots of neighbours who joy of joys ,
looked just like us. (That’s when my Dad stopped ordering a daily newspaper. He said if we wanted to know who was doing what in the world, all we had to do was pop next door.) (Syal, *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, 73). (Italics Mine)

Home for the first generation back in India stood for support, it was where they got understanding from their own, a shared work culture and unstinted love and affection. In the host land, it was just the opposite. Looking listlessly at the sky swamped by work, loneliness, the birth of a baby and more importantly acute homesickness Daljit feels defenceless, unable to cope. She says:

It’s the same sky. The same sky in India. It’s hard to believe, isn’t it? . . . I can’t cope anymore, Shyam. Back home I would have sisters, mothers, servants . . . ‘The stars were her family, his family, she was crossing them off one by one, naming them to keep them alive. I can’t do this anymore. I can’t.’ (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 196).

In an article on *Defining Home: Divided Loyalty or Dual Loyalty* posted on 25.01 2003 in *Economic Forum* Homi Bhabha says,

We don’t get to define where we come from. We are defined by where we come from. We carry where we came from in the stories we tell and the food we cook. The most important thing is to bring these things to a new home and combine them without losing the sense of their uniqueness...
The majority of the second generation does not desire much contact with home and India preferring their independence over anything else. And yet, when swamped by loneliness, indecision and homesickness, a feeling they could not define, it is home that comes uppermost in their minds.

Anjali in a process of introspection after handling a major disappointment in her personal and professional life says:

"I wanted to go home, to the quietness of No. 10 because no one would be home, to the lingering smells of onions, and crawl into bed. I felt as if I had been wandering around the past few days in a continuous mist of a hangover." (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 253)

Home, despite its clutter has always been a center of stability. Though Mira was embarrassed by her Indian antecedents, she desired to have all that she had refused to accept, when she was alone in London without her parents:

"When I was growing up, I remember always being embarrassed by that smell..."(a smell of turmeric, chillies and garlic) which she feels, 'clung to my coat and my hair'. I used to come home from school and race upstairs to put my coat in the bedroom so it wouldn't reek. When I had made no friends at the school... I would silently accuse that smell of garlic, hold it responsible, and both my parents responsible by association. I don't know when it was, but at some point after my parents had returned to their country, I started looking forward to that smell. Now it smelled of home. I would cook dahl and lace it with a sizzling tarka, a concoction of seared garlic and chillies, and breathe in the aroma. I would mix it with steamed Basmati Rice, Tilda, (none of your Uncle Bens was found in our house) and sit cross-legged..." (Srivastava, *Looking for Maya*, 106).
Home in the zone of acculturation is a place of shelter, comfort, familiarity – all strategies cleverly put forth by parents who realised that ‘Home is where the heart is’. The texts deliberate on food and home together. As second generation immigrants Anjali, Maya, Meena and Tania always derided the focus on Indian food in their homes – each of them individually preferring the taste of Western cuisine. The connection between the two, the fact that they have missed home was inexplicable even to them. When Meena was hospitalized and had to stay back for quite some time, she finds on her return:

I was sniffing all the old smells I missed from the kitchen, hot, buttery, smoking griddles, potatoes frying in cumin seeds, onions simmering in garlicky tomatoes. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 295)

Manju Jaidka in her influential essay mentions “the homeland, that the diasporic sensibility reconstructs is not a real one. The desire to replicate the frames that provided stability and held families together are the frames of the meta-Indian home that continue to contextualize these new homes”. The members of the first generation treat their home as a fortress against the world. It is a temporary, spatial and psychological retreat for them against the threats of racism and indignity they have to face. Makarand Paranjape notes, the replication of Indian-ness by visual signs was far stronger in first generation and poorer immigrants whose ties with the homeland were virtually severed once they left India. However, in the twenty-first century, spatial and emotional distances have been reduced by the popularity and availability of Bollywood cinemas, music, cheaper telephone communication and availability of Indian food.
The contrasts shown between the green open spaces in The Punjab and the upper class affiliations in Delhi are a deliberate ploy to highlight the disorganized kitchen, the farty sofa, the garden with its herbal output sourced for the traditional curries in Meena’s house in Tollington. It is a contrast between the openness and space back in the homeland and adjustments they have to make in the hostland. Assimilation is not complete and keeping the icons of home, is only an attempt at recreating home in the hostland.

Unable to cope being so far away from the green spaces in India, Daljit strategizes by not settling in a modern flat unlike her immigrant friends who were nostalgic about India, but in the hostland stayed in houses with all modern amenities including extra strong flushing systems, ... can opener on the wall, ... two minutes’ walk to all local amenities ... (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 35). Instead she settled for a house with a medieval kitchen, an outside lavvy and apology for a garden. For Daljit the significance was different, “... she saw fields and trees, light and space, and a horizon that welcomed the sky which, on a warm night and through squinted eyes, could almost look like home”. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 35) (Italics mine). The dislocated migrant writer used these yearnings as psychological strategies to strengthen longing for the motherland.

The hostland is not an extension of the homeland for the first generation who are busy recreating it as home while the second generation either fantasises about
their homeland or are disdainful of the flies, dirt, the smells and the people. Meena feels the need to fabricate, turn to mythology as she claims with her diasporic status she is denied of history. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 10). Extravagant lies like telling a group of visiting kids in the park that I was a Punjabi princess and owned an elephant called Jason King, or one of my major whoppers – telling my teacher I hadn’t completed my homework because of an obscure religious festival involving fire eating... are common to her. She knew she had to stay back and belong to Tollington and claims her right to do so by projecting herself as part of the ‘exotic other’.

The opulent lifestyle in her homeland, India, in *One Hundred Shades of White* foreshadows the transplantation Maya would undergo – from Bombay to London, South London to an East End seedy flat, where they would stay with the paint peeling off from the walls in a dirty neighbourhood. Home in India offers a contrast and is highlighted, a psychological strategy to remember all that was good, to stay united with her brother and mother and face the trials brought about by race, class and her gendered being in the hostland. The strategy teaches her to value relationship instead of emphasising on material things as her mother achieves some agency totally on her own merit.

For the sugar diaspora ‘home’ signified an end to iterant wandering, in the putting down of roots, ‘home’ for the masala diaspora is linked to the strategic espousal of rootlessness, to the constant mantling and dismantling of the self in makeshift landscapes.⁹
Most of the Indian homes discussed are sites exhibiting oppositional attitudes emerging – sites of contesting aspirations and ambitions. The constant network of memories spun about the loved homeland was also a strategy by Meena’s parents, as much for themselves as for their child. Though she valiantly tried to be a Brummie, she herself took a different stand on India when inspite of a spatial dislocation and distance she claimed that India sounded like the ‘only home she would know’. Meena learns about the hospitality her idol Anita Rutter offers the hard way. Daljit goes out of her way to make Anita feel at home, but Meena is not given permission to step inside the Rutter household.

Recalling homelands from a diasporic space is not uncommon among writers of the diaspora. The recollections of the homeland are fantasized. The network of memories are a psychological strategy inspite of the spatial dislocation. Identity is maintained by the characters taken up here who belong to the first generation. It is with the characters of the second generation that integration aspects can be found, though total assimilation is not established. Meena plans to visit India, deeply affected by Nanima and her stories. She realizes the importance of preserving her ethnic identity as she says, “I desperately wanted to visit India and claim some of the magic as mine” (Syal, Anita and Me, 211). The desire to visit the mythical, glorified homeland is deeply appealing.
Chila in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* decides to take her son to India and reconnect with him. Mira in *Looking for Maya* has also enjoyed her visits with her parents. When Maya goes back to India for business she rediscovers many things, but above all, is the “…sense of peace and stability like I had never felt before.” (Nair, *One Hundred Shades of White*, 252). She introspects about the visit since it revived a part of her that was lying dormant. “That colours, aromas, contradictions, emotions from the place that we are from are born with us, and at some point we are asked to rediscover them?” (Nair, *One Hundred Shades of White*, 253).

She affirms:

> And after India, something came alive in me, it was a sense of belonging, the smells and colours of that country were all running inside of me, so potent that I felt unable to handle it.( Nair, *One Hundred Shades of White*, 282)

Taking a quote from M G Vassanji

> We are but creatures of our origins, and however stalwartly we march forward, paving new roads, seeking new worlds, the ghosts from out pasts stand not far behind and are not easily shaken off.\(^1\)

Strongly connected to factors that aid in acculturation like home and homeland are markers representing them and making ties stronger like music, food, customs and traditions, clothes which are strong connectors with the homeland, ties which bind them together in the hostland. These become a medium for
reaffirming. Meena’s family always wore their best clothes whether it was with their own group, Indians or with their neighbours:

…the immigrant hopes to keep the clothes and ideas, because they are familiar possessions; on the other, the immigrant hopes to break away from that part of the paternal and ancestral influence which limits and restricts.11

During festivals, the Indians felt obligatory to dress well as they would have in their mother land which was intriguing to the second generation immigrants. Meena relates:

… I glanced around at my elders who looked so shiny and joyous in their best Diwali clothes. I had seen all of them at some point in their workday clothes of English separates and over coordinated suits. But on occasions like Diwali, they expanded to fit their Indian clothes and at this moment ,seemed too big and beautiful for our small suburban sitting rooms.(Syal, Anita and Me, 112).

At least four of the novels explored have mentioned Diwali. Anjali describes the scene where all the women are dressed in bright, shimmering sarees : “All of them had put fresh red powder in their partings, and bright red bindis on their foreheads”. (Srivastava, Transmission, 51)

Meena wanted her mother to dress like the ladies whom she saw around her in Tollington. But her mother,

… never wore those dull, pastel, English room colours, she was all open-heart cerises and burnt vivid oranges, colours that made your
pupils dilate and were deep enough to enter your belly and sit there like the aftertaste of a good meal. No flowers, none that I could name, but dancing elephants, strutting peacocks and long-necked birds who looked as if they were kissing their own backs, shades and cloth which spoke of bare feet on dust, roadside smokey dhabas, honking taxi horns and heavy sudden rain beating a bhangra on deep green leaves. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 43)

Daljit knew from experience that she would get fewer stares and whispers if she donned any of the sensible teacher’s trouser suits she would wear for school, but for her, *looking glamorous in saris and formal Indian suits was part of the English people’s education. It was her duty to show them that we could wear discreet gold jewellery, dress in tasteful silks and speak English without an accent.* (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 25) (italics mine)

Other Indian women dressed differently:

…in embroidered salwar kameez suits screaming with greens and pinks and yellows (incongruous with thick wooly socks squeezed into open-toed sandals and mens’s cardies over their vibrating thin silks, evil necessities in this damn cold country), with bright make-up and showy gold plated jewellery which made them look like ambulating Christmas trees. Mama would acknowledge them with a respectful nod and then turn away and shake her head.’ In the village, they would look beautiful. But not here. There is no sun to light them up. Under clouds, they look like they are dressed for a discotheque. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 26)

Hybridity in dressing became part of the Br Asian style in the late nineties. They were experiments that were sometimes successful or incongruous. What the
second generation fought for against the mainstream society became an accepted way with the third generation, who experimented with music, clothes, hairstyle and dance.

The teenagers lounged easily against each other, girls in customized Punjabi suits, cut tight, set off by big boots and leather jackets, others in sari blouses twinned with khakis and platform trainers; one of them had placed bindis all around her perfect belly button. The boys favored tracksuit tops or kurtha shirts love beads and pierced eyebrows; one of them had a turban, another wore his hair in a thick plait that lay like some fat black snake on his back. None of them noticed Tania. When did it become easier? Tania wondered with a sharp stab of envy….if it hadn’t been for her and all the mini wars she had fought on this road, maybe they wouldn’t be loafing around in their mix and match fashions listening to masala music with not a care in the world. (Syal, Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee, 44-45).

By putting the Third World into the space of the first, the clothing practices of South Asian youth uproot the notion of what was before rooted cultures. The mixing and matching of both clothing and accessories projects a hybrid moment for the third generation. It is a global culture in flux, yet highly syncretic as the immigrants negotiate identity within complex and shifting perspectives. Another strong association from the homeland were relatives, who either descended in hordes or came singly. They were revered, welcomed – they reaffirmed memories, temporarily removed loneliness and aided in the recapitulation of stories.

Nanima plays a vital role in awakening Meena’s interest in her native land by fuelling her curiosity and bringing out aspects of collective memory. What Maya remembers about Ammama are strong, vital points about India. All that is
associated with her are quintessentially Indian, even her advice – “You won’t forget the language, the smells, colours, the people will you, Mol? Don’t ever forget where you are from” (Nair, One Hundred Shades of White, 16) presaging in a premonitory way that her roots was essentially Indian and that one day she would come back. This is probably why in the last part of the story she is reminded of her grandmother again. About to eat her wedding meal which has been lovingly prepared by her mother she sees a grandmother and a granddaughter on the beach laughing and then she hears a voice which whispers, “I will always be there for you, even on the days of doubting.” (Nair, One Hundred Shades of White, 294). The two grandmothers presented here are not only chroniclers of the past life in India, the family history but pillars of strength. The change in Daljit and Nalini after the arrival of their respective mothers, speaks volumes not only of the love they share but also of the value system they have imbibed. Meena realises that the whole situation at home changes when Nanima comes home. The arrival of Nanima, right when Meena is grappling with disillusionment as her strong desire to be a Brummie undergoes several stages of transition, is an authorial strategy to turn Meena ‘inward’ and ‘homeward’. Nanima’s unshakeable presence, her tenacity to straighten everything in the cluttered house – Meena’s friends to her little brother’s sleeping habits, all create some sort of stability as she takes over. Meena is drawn into her orbit even if she cannot understand Punjabi. Her stories of India change her perspectives, remove the strong conviction she had about assimilating as a Tollington wench and arouse a deep desire to visit India. Her mother changes
overnight, looking fresh and girlish as if some invisible yoke had been lifted from her shoulders and she regained the lithe legs and strong back she must have had when she cycled to and from college. “...I vowed, I would never leave her this wrenching of daughter from mother would never happen again”. Daljit was a good daughter to her mother full of the values which the Indian culture had taught her. She differed from the English in their rejection of parents, bringing up children and family values. Emphatically she tells Meena:

I will never understand this about the English, all this puffing up about being civilised with their cucumber sandwiches and cradle of democracy big talk, and then they turn round and kick their elders in the backside, all this It’s My Life, I Want My Space stupidity, You Can’t Tell Me What To Do cheekiness, I Have To Go To Bingo selfishness and You Kids Eat Crisps Instead Of Hot Food nonsense. What is this My Life business, anyway? We all have obligations, no one is born on their own, are they? She was in one of her Capital Letter speeches, the subtext of which was listen, learn and don’t you dare do any of this when you grow up, missy “I mean Mrs. Worall is their mother, the woman who gave them life . . . I tell you, if my mother was so close, I would walk in my bare feet to see her everyday. Every day. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 58-59)

A major strategy in Indian parenting is indirect explanation of the code of conduct that children must maintain because they are not Westerners. Respecting elders and parents was an unwritten rule. Correct behaviour is always implied and never enforced. The aunties of the first generation saw their dreams realised in their children. Believing in karma, they knew that besides prayers and best wishes they could give nothing more to their daughters as their sons would carve out their own lives. There was genuine happiness for Chila and her pregnancy:
...murmurs of agreement, kisses, smiles, many of them genuine, a few muttered silent prayers as mothers reached for their daughters ‘hands and wished fervently and genuinely for the health and wealth of their sons-in-law, actual or yet to come. By worshipping their daughters’ husbands they were ensuring their daughters’ happiness, for wasn’t everything dependant on that? Knowing that a kind, decent man would be caring for their beloved girls when they were no longer here to check up on everything? ...Hadn’t they seen what damage a goonda husband could do, trapping a woman like a fly in a web, free to play with her cruelly as he knew his wife would stay, believing the misery of a bad marriage was preferable to the stigma and loneliness of separation? (Syal, *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, 198)
Family: Families play a seminal influence on characters mainly as an important anchor of support in a land where even the second generation immigrant is not considered to belong but is the ‘other’. Families are a locus of tradition and learning, a transmitting centre for tradition, culture, memories and myths of the first generation. Gail Low suggests that the functioning of the Br Asian family depended on traditional values and norms as well as patriarchal traditions of control and domination. The functioning of the British Asian family depicted in all the novels discussed depended on traditional values and norms, various socio-cultural referents and patriarchal traditions of control and domination. The family in the hostland translated to add grandparents, acquaintances, distant relations, countrymen and even neighbours and well-wishers. In the adopted homeland they become part of one’s extended family. Every event becomes a festivity. Religion and celebration of festivals also form an important part of social gatherings as the sense of bonding is an important strategy to overcome psychological pressures like alienation, longing for the homeland, racism and acculturate in the hostland. Music plays an important strategy in the diaspora, a psychological one, in cohesively binding the listeners together, evoking the past and also inspiring emotional aspects into play.

The mehfiis filled all with deep seated yearning for the homeland they had left behind reliving the past. Even to Meena who had come to England when she was only five, the songs evocative of the past unleashed strange feelings, the songs were in a language she, ... could not recognize but felt I could speak in my sleep, in my dreams, evocative of a country I had never visited but which sounded like the only home I had ever known. The songs made me
realize that there was a corner of me that would be forever not
England. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 212)

All these aspects have been strategically used by the immigrant writers selected,
to further a sense of nostalgia, heighten emotional feelings about the homeland,
invoke desire to visit one’s own people and country. Meena says, “... when I
looked at my elders, in these moments, they were all far, far away.” (Syal, *Anita
and Me*, 72)

The change in music, the entry of a hybrid variety comprising both original and
the mainstream youth culture by the second and third generation Br Asians is
also brought out by Syal and Malkani, who describe the experimental music of
the second generation.

The drums they knew, their parents’ heartbeat, folk songs sung in
sitting rooms, the pulse of hundreds of family weddings; but then
the guitarists, cold, steel and concrete, the smell of the Bullring, the
frustration bouncing off walls in terraced houses in Handsworth,
hurried cigarettes out of bathroom windows, secret assignments in
libraries hurrying home with a mouthful of fear and desire. The
lyrics parodied I Love You Love Me Hindi film crooning, but with
subtle, bitter twists, voices coming from the area between what was
expected of kids like them and what were they really up to. (Syal,
*Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, 41)

The idea of Hindu tolerance percolates to the children from the beginning when
captured in the multicultural sway, they are taught to celebrate both Diwali and
Christmas with at least a present. (*Anita and Me, Looking for Maya*). When the
Aunties and Uncles objected to this her parents replied, “Meena would feel left out. It is not fair when all the children are getting presents.” Kavi arranged for a friend to invite little Mira so she got a taste of the real English Christmas. Daljit informs Meena that Hindu tolerance in India is evident in the manner in which many religions co-exist. These aspects reinforce Meena’s understanding of India and also her parents. When Daljit says “there are more Muslims in India than there are in Pakistan …Every path leads to the same God…” (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 92), these were not dry homilies poured down her ears – her parents practiced this tolerance by sending her to Sunday school at the local Wesleyan church. Meena’s acceptance of life in a multicultural society and the fact that as an immigrant she has to integrate both with the mainstream and her own people helps her. Her father preferred to believe more in serving humanity as hard core religion had never been an integral part of his upbringing. Her parents never enforced anything in the name of religion. As Sikhs, she had never seen her parents bow their heads in prayer or sing haunting aartis like Aunt Shaila. Mr. Kumar explains that she had to listen to the voice of her conscience – the voice which would lead her to God. It would be there, ‘no matter how many temples you go to.’ As conscientious parents, Daljit even drives her to the gurudwara once, but more than religious awakening, it gives Meena an insight into the intolerant behaviour of the Whites and their racist remarks. Somewhere, a sense of maturity is demonstrated as she tells her father on her return, ‘I learnt that mama is really a good driver.’ Religion is a strategy to pray to that source, for easier acculturation in the hostland and the festivals were an attempt to capture
the essence of the homeland  Nalini superstitiously placed Annapurna wherever she started her own shop, a habit which Maya continued. Satsangs are regularly held to form an integral part of their social life. Describing Hardjit’s house where religious symbols are not only revered but also openly displayed, Jas narrates:

Up on the landing the subjhi mixed with the incense sticks burning in bedroom number one along the long L shaped corridor. There weren’t no bed in bedroom number one. It was where they kept their copy of the Guru Granth Sahib on a table. They’d hung their pictures various Sikh Gurus on the landing walls outside. They’d even got a couple a pictures a Hindu Gods too. Usually you will only get Hindus who’ll blend their religion with Sikhism but Hardjit’s mum an Dad were one a the few Sikh families people who blended back.(Malkani, 51)

The first generation parents are projected as uninformed of the trials assailing their children, busy catching up their extended family, serious about education and a little disoriented by what is happening around them. While a career is important so is learning to cook and raise a family. The kitchen forms the epicenter of their existence where problems are solved and disagreements smoothed out. There is a focus on eating together and homemade Indian food at that. Intergenerational conflicts do occur as the second generation has acculturated to a great extent and at a spatio-temporal distance from the homeland their affiliation is more towards the land they are residing in. The parents’ generation are displeased with the behaviour of their offspring who they feel are only out to resist their advice and shock them into accepting their new-fangled ways. They are slow in acculturating to the West though they accept the comfort and advantages which the western world has given them, the reason why they
left their homeland in the first place. Both sets of parents in *Transmission* and *Looking for Maya* are un-acculturated continuing life in Britain as an extension of their Indian habits and culture. Angie commenting on the close bonds between her parents and uncle says:

> It was incredible the way they carried on sometimes: saying each other's thoughts, anticipating each other's anxieties, talking across continents over the breakfast tv. 'And today of all days,' she said and sighed. She was worried but dad didn't hold her hand or say don't worry sweetheart as my English friends' parents would have done. He put the paper down and dialled the number again. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 25)

Intergenerational difference is evident in the families depicted. The first generation wanted to adhere to the norms learnt in the homeland and the second generation is ready to relearn, unlearn and modify them. Mira's parents were in Delhi, building their own flat but expected regular phone calls and letters and reports, refusing to believe she had grown up, still advising her about speaking every week and keeping all doors locked. For Angie’s parents formality was observed with outsiders, not with one’s own. She says:

> For years I had tried to train the family in simple behavioural habits: hello, goodbye thank you, please, knocking on doors, not opening my letters...all to no avail. They continued to have conversations without breaks, to make judgments as if we were not living in a different country, in a different world. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 19)

The children are often embarrassed with their parent’s English, their old fashioned ways and yet return each time, sure not only of their love but also
aware of their importance. Whether it is stubborn Meena, soft Chila, rebellious Tania, smart Angie, angry Maya or the Londonstani boys Hardjit, Ravi, Amit or Arun in spite of their modernity, their allegations against their parents, the swearing and cussing, respect for their matriarchs is evident. Their aggression is fuelled not simply by a struggle against society but by a more complex struggle to be men against overbearing mothers who would rather their sons remain boys. The Londonstani boys have a rule about their mothers – ‘Don’t cross her, don’t argue, don’t talk back’. Fathers play a secondary almost stereotypical role in South Asian families and mothers are centered as the real nurturers. The embarrassment of the children is caused by their loud voices, perpetual complaining attitude, late entries, oily, spicy and strong smelling food, pressure for marriage, ungrammatical use of language, tendency to treat all Indians as their own flesh and blood and constant emotional blackmail. Anjali relates about her mamaji,

He was her younger brother. Like all good Indian girls she had looked after him as if she were his mother, especially when my gran left the family for long periods of time to go on marches and meetings against the British. Maama ji had been more or less brought by ma and she indulged him in ways she never did us. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 20)

When dad had the money to buy a house it was unthinkable that maamaji should carry on living in his room so we all moved together to the leafy suburb of Finchley. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 21)

The childhood memories of their parents help the second generation shape their attitudes about their homeland and sometimes evoke a desire to visit the
homeland. Despite their discomfiture, the second generation are sure that their parents are the ones who can resolve all kinds of crisis. Meena who gives out long suffering sighs at the arrival of her numerous aunties explains to her neighbour, Mrs. Worall, why relations are important, Anjali lashes out to protect her Mum, the Londonstani boys in spite of their bravado and machoism respect their parents to the extent that Arun commits suicide as he is unable to make them see his point of view on marriage. Tania consciously had a desire not to be like her parents, their repressed desires, ifs and buts nauseated her. Tania, Chila and Sunita are all embarrassed by the loudness of their typical Indian families, perpetual late entries, oily and spicy food in packed Tupperware containers, their constant matchmaking. Tania resisted the matchmaking attempts of her parents adroitly, Sunita settled the issue with her own choice Akash, it was only poor Chila who despite her survival strategies failed and had to submit to a series of matchmakers, each more trying than the other. Years after her mother’s death, Tania finds herself alone and terribly lonely after all the battles with the tough British world. News of her father in coma, with whom she disagreed on everything, brings her back and she shows a new makeover altogether trying to revive her comatose father:

…the armfuls of silver bangles I’d chosen and jingled them near his ear, making them choon-choon softly, Mum’s theme tune as she waddled around the house. He enjoyed the alarm clock I’d found, encased in white plastic domes, whose alarm is a muezzin calling the faithful to prayer. He held very still as I waved packets of spices under his nose—not the red chilli powder or the coarse black pepper, obviously, but he seemed to recognise the ground cinnamon, the garam masala, the special chana masala mixture that he likes sprinkling on fresh fruit. And when I broke off some leaves of fresh
coriander and crushed them beneath his nostrils, I saw them wrinkle, I’m positive. (Syal, *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, 316-17)

Mira finds her parents perpetual togetherness, even in their names, Ravi Kavi out-dated and yet, when she is with her middle aged Indian lover she longs for that typical closeness which she shunned earlier. Indian Londoner Priya has accultured so well that despite being a first generation immigrant her attitude towards accepting its ways is like the second generation. Almost assimilated in London it was only after becoming a mother that she felt, “Can any of us ever get enough of our mothers? It was only now when she thought of the impossibility of leaving Whacka for than ten hours at a stretch that the hurt of her mother’s absence had begun to strike”. (Vakil, *One Day*, 35).

Fathers are not always portrayed as overbearing and authoritative. Meena’s papa is not only charming, handsome, a good singer and a good father who attempts to understand his daughter’s teenage ways. They also instil values:

Warning her about friends and the importance of family her papa tells her, “They will leave you when times get bad, and then all you will have left is your family Meena. Remember that”. (Syal, *Anita & Me*, 150)

The typical hard-working Indian parent is always focused on studies and is sure that this is what will guarantee success. Tania’s father had a motto before they went to school —“...Be better than the person in front. No loafing Understand ?”. 

134
RaviKavi in *Looking for Maya*, had clambered eagerly to participate in the PTA meetings, sports days, prize-givings and school plays. She used to roll her eyes at their discussions and observations. Ballard\textsuperscript{13} points out “As compared with the white majority a much higher proportion of young South Asians continue in full time education and training beyond the age of sixteen and their rates of enrolment is nearly double the White norm”. Even as a child Meena was aware that she had to strategise: break social, moral parental boundaries if she had to rise above the constraints of her colour, class and race and survive in the community. But it is this enforcement of social norms which enable the young adults to seek agency where denied and create their own niches especially while working as they fought for equality against pre-conceived notions and society norms.

The greatest strategy created by the parents consciously or subconsciously is emotional, the fact that they are always present for the children, their physical presence and unquestioning moral support, a surety in the lives of this second generation who must experiment, try out different things but sooner or later return like homing pigeons to the roosting nest, fully secure that they will be accepted back. Anjali had her generational conflicts with her mother but admits that even when with friends her mother’s face and voice would lodge itself inside her head – berating her and scolding her for her wrong ways. She relates an incident where she flushed down a cheat slip she had carried for an exam, unread down the toilet as her father would not only be furious but contemptuous. The
importance of family life is understood by the highly placed young women who are assertive and brilliant in the job front but easily hand over all credit to their potbellied husbands:

Speaking of the roots, the survival instincts, Tania’s Asian friends employed different strategies to run their homes even if they matched up on par with the British men.

Ask most of my girlfriends, ranging in hue from tinted copper to Dravidian blue-black; between them they run business empires, save lives on operating tables, mould and develop young minds, trade in non-existent commodities with shouting barrow boys, kick ass across courtrooms and computer screens. In the outside world they fly on home-grown wings. Then they reach their front doors and forget it all. They step over the threshold, the Armani suit shrinks and crumples away, the pencil skirt feels blowsy and tight, the head bows, the shoulders sag, within a minute they are basting and baking and burning fingers over a hot griddle, they are soothing children and saying sorry, bathing in-laws and burning with guilt, packing lunch-boxes and pouring oil over choppy waters, telling everyone who will listen they don’t mind, wondering why they left their minds next to the muddy wellies and pile of junk mail in the front porch. …I’ve seen it happen right before my eyes, the most frightening and speedy transformation since Jekyll and Hyde...We meet the world head up, head on, we meet our men and we bow down gratefully, cling to compromise like a lover who promises all will be well if we don’t make trouble. We hear our mothers’ voices and heed them, to make up for all the other imagined transgressions in our lives. (Syal, Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee, 146-48) (Italics mine)

The attitudes of her friends make her aware of the sacrosanct ties of marriage, the sacrifices attached to a family life especially if there are children involved. Anjali chucks away a promising career and shapes an end with Indian values for
it seems as if she is getting her karma right this once as she voluntarily destroys the box containing the film – a strategy where tradition wins over modern liberal ways. As she concludes, “I sort of did something. I thought about and it was the only thing I could think of, it seemed to put itself forward. And it made me feel clean. Clean”. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 266). There is integration and confidence as she shapes her life, but also an understanding, reconciliation and acceptance with her actual self. She finally recognises herself for what she is: “I was young, gifted and . . . brown! Hell I could always go back to waitressing”. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 201)

A major strategy found in all texts is the closely bound relationship the diasporic Indians shared with other people from their country. Meena explains how they “...sit in each other's lounges, eat each other's food and watch each other televisions...” (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 29). The Aunties were collectively addressed ‘the Greek chorus’ and were a formidable mafia. Articulating about them she says, "Their serenity masked backbones of iron and a flair for passive resistance of which Gandhiji himself would have been proud.” (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 110). None of them were related by blood, Auntie and Uncle were the natural, respectful terms given to any Asian person old enough to boss her around. Her neighbours expressed amazement at their numbers rolling in on celebration days, and how her parents managed to accommodate so many relations. Yet Meena, ‘... could not imagine life without them, although I hated the way they continually interfered in my upbringing, inevitably backing up my parents
complaints (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 30). The ‘communal policing’ made her feel ‘safe and wanted’ (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 31) (italics mine) inspite of being scolded or pinched or given a cuff by them. Scolding each other’s kids was an affectionate and normal thing to do. She was aware of the intensity with which her ‘parents valued these people they so readily renamed as family faced with the loss of their own blood relations.’ (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 31). The strategy to socialize among their own, brought emotional satisfaction, reconnection and an inner strength to move on in the hostland as they rallied around. Get-togethers at regular intervals with Indian cuisine, music, nostalgia, tears and reminiscences were attempts to capture all that was quintessentially Indian. These were strategies to make the hostland ‘almost home’ – a collective will to survive. The women devised strategies by giving it all up “…to the will of Bhagwan, their karma, their just deserts inherited from their last reincarnation which they had to live through and solve with grace and dignity”. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 67). Mira is always amazed at how many strangers, acquaintances whom she sarcastically called, ‘Visiting Gods’ came to visit them and were enthusiastically welcomed by her parents. “…the Visiting Gods who stayed in the house and belched their way through the London itineraries prepared by my parents”. (Srivastava, *Looking for Maya*, 8)

Fat ladies and swarthy men pummelling my face with podgy fingers, exclaiming with surprise at how I’d grown, dispensing tales of my antics as a baby. What a piece of the moon I had been, they’d say, always willing to be entertained by any number of people, leaving RaviKavi free to talk and discuss. They all knew each other’s families, asked after someone’s cousin’s sister-in-law as though they were all connected. They couldn’t leave each other alone. I used to stare at them pityingly, those fragments of the past flapping in the London streets. I didn’t believe any of them had ever had a real life, not the sort people had in London where they were
free from families and honour and restraint and duty and being good. RaviKavi used to hoot with laughter at the American chat shows where children clutched their estranged parents and declared, 'I love you, Mom.' 'I tell you, these programmes are set ups,' my dad would say suspiciously; ‘they pay actors.’ (Srivastava, *Looking for Maya*, 196-197)

Besides helping in recreating a second home, being emotional anchors, advisors, these effective blackmailers also create a guilt complex in the second generation immigrants and keep them grounded. These aunties also have a great understanding among themselves, pitching in to help in ways the patriarchal head did not and so are effective in enabling the process of acculturation to continue. Esterino Adami\(^{14}\) feels that the Aunties, “tumultuously extend the domestic space of the Hindu family and constitute a symphonic texture of intertwined traditions and family ramifications.” The Aunties have been effectively used in the novels as a strategy to improve understanding of the homeland, as disciplinarians, intermediaries within family disputes to create an imaginary homeland where during get-togethers the observation of rituals with further strategic binders like food, music, clothes and carefully preserved memories evoke a feeling, as if they were back home once again.

Discussing the issue of women in the diaspora includes analyzing the related trajectories of family and food as discourse. Memory plays a vital role with women and children as they negotiate the domestic space clinging on to markers of identity, their baggage which they attempt to pass over to their children. Cora
Kaplan puts forward the theory that, ‘the discourse of food subverts firstly the
very notion of ‘language’ by privileging the ‘language’ of food as the ‘highest’
most impactful channel of communication…’\(^\text{15}\). The diasporic identity defines and
outlines cultural positions, focuses on the aspect of love, an idea integral to the
theme of Indian-ness and the Indian family where food acts and alchemizes
relationship building. As Sudha Rai writes “Food and love are connected at the
root, based on the art of nurturance through caring”\(^\text{16}\). Preeti Nair’s \textit{One Hundred
Shades of White} projects cooking as a ‘cure all’ for all kinds of maladies bringing
about a rebuilding both physical, spiritual and mental not only for others but also
for oneself. There are multiple narratives as three generations seek to sort out
what life gives them. Here is a generational and intergenerational clash, as
Sudha Rai feels “…women’s writing, projects the potential of the personalized
domain, through food metaphors, for effecting social transformation through
connection, communication and creativity”\(^\text{17}\). There is internal gratification and
the trajectory helps in building and rebuilding identity even if it is suffused with
feelings of nostalgia. Food forges a bond with the imaginary homeland and
brings it back strongly. In India, this domain is a woman’s prerogative thus further
strengthening the patriarchal dominance but also forming a bond with other
women, a bond which transcends time and space. Food is tantamount to good
life and living, evoking memory and a treasure of references that yokes together
individuals across time and space. Food is not only a necessity but also a
strategy to bring about greater closeness. It helps in constructing a collective
identity as members of the same group get together to cook and eat arousing
strong feelings of togetherness and memories of homeland. Mountains of food were normal; the Aunties showed tremendous capacity to cook and were almost fire resistant when it came to cooking. “I had seen all of them at some point lift up dishes straight from the stove, pat and shape dough onto smoking griddles”.

(Syal, *Anita and Me*, 117).

My mother … standing in a haze of spicy steam, crowded by huge bubbling saucepans where onions and tomatoes simmered and spat, molehills of chopped vegetables and fresh herbs jostling for space with bitter, bright heaps of turmeric, masala, cumin and coarse black pepper whilst a softly breathing mound of dough would be waiting in a china bowl, ready to be divided and flattened into round, grainy chappati. And she, sweaty and absorbed, would move from one chaotic work surface to another preparing the fresh, home-made meal that my father expected, *needed like air*, after a day at the office about which he never talked. From the moment mama stepped in from her teaching job, swapping saris for M& S separates, she was in that kitchen; it would never occur to her at least not for many years, to suggest instant or take-away food which would give her a precious few hours to sit, think, smell the roses that would be tantamount to spouse abuse.

I’d never seen my mother use our oven, I thought it was a storage space for pans and her griddle on which she made chappati. Punjabis and baking don’t go together, I’ve since discovered. It’s too easy, I suppose, *not enough angst and sweat in putting a cake in the oven and taking it out half an hour later*. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 61-62). (Italics mine).

Sudha Rai puts forth a beautiful explanation of the same, “Food becomes a ‘language’ for processing her experiences, effecting a holistic unification where the material, the mental and the spiritual come together, apart from its discoursal potential for describing, narrating, projecting and evaluating human relationships and cultural values”.

*One Hundred Shades of White* is an attempt to create
relationships in a land hostile to them where food becomes the binding force, the thread in relationships between characters. Sudha Rai opines, “while representing food as a contested site between tradition and modernization in the globalization of cultures impacting the lives of second generation immigrants human relationships are narrated, projected evaluated and judged on the basis of food.” The relationship between mothers and their children is often connected to food and cooking. It reaffirms the bonding and also stresses on the mother fulfilling her responsibilities in teaching her daughter to cook, a practice she would continue when she married. Food had to be provided from home, it was a connect between the mother and her child and was nutritious. The mother is the hostland had to fulfill dual roles, teach her children and validate the values she had learnt in the homeland. When Rax runs late for work yelling he didn't have time to wait for the sandwiches his mother shouts, “Ten minutes out of your life. It will save you ten years”. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 194). Angie periodically had to help out with the cooking supervised by her mother:

> Arrey, turn the rolling pin around as you roll. What are you making, dumplings?’ Ma was sitting on a stool behind me as I made chapattis on the counter.

> ‘Thinner, thinner. What you want everyone to get indigestion?’ She reached out from behind me to press one side of the rolling pin. ‘That's it. Good,' she said and settled back to watch.

> I had to concentrate on rolling out one chapatti while the other one cooked on the skillet. Just as I'd finished rolling, the cooked one was ready. I picked it up with the tongs and held it over the open flame next to the skillet. It darkened and puffed up like a ball. Perfection! I turned to look at ma and raised my eyebrows three times to indicate the tour de force. She was always expecting it to sink.
'Arrey, get on with it. You want a round of applause. In the time you have made five I will have finished.' She was smiling, putting ghee on the finished chapatti, and stacking it on the pile in the stainless steel bowl.

'Yeah, but you just chuck them on, I'm giving them TLC,' I said smugly, rolling out another carefully. It had gone into a triangular shape.

'TLC, PLC ... Pah! Turn it round, round. It looks more like a samosa,' she said, pressing one end of the rolling pin again.

... Twice a week we'd gone through this ritual, ever since I had returned from university. Every time she would be itching to do it herself in half the time, but if I was going to learn then she had to content herself with directing and criticising the proceedings.

'At your age! Taking ten years to make chapattis. Who will want to ... ?' she started.

'I know,' I said solemnly and put on a tragic face. 'Who will want to marry me ... ?' Then I burst out laughing.

She pursed her lip and then laughed along with me.

(Srivastava, *Transmission*, 103-104)

Mira had always cribbed about the ‘Visiting Gods’ and their demanding nature. But, on the day of her book release she realises the importance of having her own people around her, as she could identify with them and their values. She insisted on the menu at the event:

'You don't understand,' I had explained to my bewildered publisher who had planned on peanuts and crisps. 'You can't invite Indian people to a party without any proper food, there' ll be a riot. It's simply – not done.' All the Indians had paper plates loaded with ‘snakes’ as they guffawed and shouted proprietorially at each other. (Srivastava, *Looking for Maya*, 210).
Discourses on food show the inner workings of a displaced people and also transport one to a mental plane where geographies of identity are handled. Women in the diaspora get a chance to escape from the stifling claustrophobia of everyday chores. Sudha Rai conveys, “in contemporary societies, the discourse of food is an enabling mode for problematizing questions related to cultural roots, national and diasporic identities, gender roles, gender history, tradition and indigenous philosophies, scientific experimentation war and politics, colonization and neo colonialism, modernity and globalization”. The domain of food not only defines cultural positions and intergenerational conflicts but also touches on women’s issues like role overlap, power sharing between mothers and daughters, older and younger women.

Time and again, the satiation offered by food from the homeland comes up. Responding to a pang of hunger Priya spontaneously orders for a samosa in London.

Priya ordered a plate of daal and bread for the sake and sentiment, telling herself it was auspicious to eat this food on her son’s birthday. Good luck or saagan as her Parsee friend Shireen called it. Piping hot in a soup plate, speckled with roasted cumin and crisply fried onion, accompanied by two rotis and some slices of white bread, the daal was served just as in some railway station restaurant in India. (Vakil, 179).

Miles away from the homeland, the typical Indian food becomes a symbol of something deeper, answering the need to have a connect with her homeland, a strategy to bring her mother closer especially as she missed her deeply. Satchin
and Maya in *One Hundred Shades of White* wish to assimilate but realize food is a barrier as the oil, spice, and colour make them different and unacceptable to their friends. And so they strategise and their attempts to acculturate bewilder Nalini who wants to keep India alive in the children’s mind with the only tangible support she can think of, unaware that the children prefer their personal memories to food. Meena develops a fragmented personality as she swings between accepting native Englishness and Indian-ness, initially desperate to belong to Tollington and later equally eager to see India for herself, the India which the collective memory of her extended family had so lovingly painted. To belong she projects herself as a staunch believer of the English customs lifestyle.

Food is a culture-specific discourse and cannot be separated from social and linguistic connotations which are not fixed but ever evolving, as these signifiers take different meanings in different contexts. It has an agency in Indian culture and acts as a tool to attack the vicissitudes of life in the hostland. The writers attempt to bring about a sense of rootedness and negotiate displacement from one’s homeland. Food has become a major marker of the diasporic identity – whether it is social, psychic or cultural. “Food is a social signifier a, a bearer of interpersonal and cultural meanings.”

Nalini in *One Hundred Shades of White*, uses food as a strategy to introspect, fight feelings of alienation and find answers. As she cooks, she remembers, and
when she can forgive, she forges a beautiful bond between the past and the present. Finally she can forgive and become whole again. Cooking becomes a form of Catharsis. Sudha Rai upholds the aspect of food and food-centric discourse “...Informed by a spiritual discourse drawing on Indian values, a possible convergence of epic, bhakti and maternal divine traditions, food symbolizes an alchemic process for unifying the fragmented female self, and the alienated community through the practice of love”.23 The Indian mothers projected from the first generation are startlingly similar in some ways, “My mother never ate out, never, always affronted by paying for some over-boiled, under seasoned dish of slop when she knew she could rustle up a hot heart-warming meal from a few leftover vegetables and a handful of spices.(Syal, *Anita and Me*, 26). She resented the fact that her mum somehow found it quicker to make a fresh vegetable subzi than fling something from a packet to a frying pan.(Syal, *Anita and Me*, 54). Often she rebels openly muttering, ‘Why can’t I eat what I want to eat.’ (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 60). – a cry echoing intergenerational conflict with Maya, Mira, Tania, Angie. Her mother’s cooking in their crowded, chaotic kitchen was fresh and homemade, like air to her father back from work. The second generation rarely realised the necessity to learn cooking. Steeped in the world view of her mother’s family who saw themselves as philosophers and thinkers and never spoke of money as that was vulgar, Priya was idealistic and felt financial troubles could be sorted out at a later date by someone else.
A birthday party included champagne, beer and fruit juices, good weather meant a barbecue, meat must be marinated in three different ways –differently for children and separately for elders. . . Then there must be all kinds of snacks, peanuts and chewda, samosas and kebabs, watermelon and fruit salad. This was all very well in the motherland, where there were cooks and servants who could prepare all day, lay the tables, serve the snacks and wash up afterwards. But if Ben dared mention the word ‘servants’ to Priya another flurry of ‘you don’t understand anything about my culture’.

….Priya would emphatically educate him about the Indian hospitality. ‘What do you want me to produce she would ask, ‘curried eggs, pork pies, crusty sandwiches, Kia-Ora?’ Cold British food was like the dirty baths, the net curtains, the grey winters, the empty milk bottles outside the door.(Vakil, 16-17).
Women – The seven novels taken for the study include nostalgia, rootlessness at the dislocation though the new country encourages freedom, independence and economic assurance. However, they carry their own countries and imaginary homelands with them. Diasporic writers make use of memory, recreate it from fragments and autobiographical aspects like childhood memories, anecdotes, personal narratives which act as a form of catharsis and memoirs. Women in the diaspora have a hyphenated identity. The hyphenated identity brings about a disconnect with the homeland, but there is a sense of belonging by the second generation, attributed to better and cheaper accessibility between the adopted country and the homeland. The acculturation of the South Asian woman is a contested, dynamic and dialogical process. The diasporic women are often given the chance of perpetuating anachronistic customs and traditions. Sam Naidu says:

By writing her own life story or incorporating elements of it into her fiction, the woman writer takes charge of her subjectivity and is able to resist imposed subject positions....The feminist strand of the narrative is enmeshed with her accounts of reconfiguration of self and adaptation to her diasporic community.

The first generation immigrants have to handle the loss of desh or home despite its well established hold on their memory and their embodied longing. Immigrant writing has proved that this affects women more. In women, loss of mother tongue leads to further psychological scarring; trying to negotiate a new culture is
a transit fraught with pain, fragmentation of memories and also alienation. Their identities are seen in a multiple light of hybridity, nationhood, globalization, transnationalism and multiculturalism. Maternal sacrifice and self-effacement were part of the social conditioning of the idealized Indian diasporic motherhood. Women establish links across time and space creating networks which serve as their emotional and psychic support systems. The question often addressed is - are women victimized or empowered in the diaspora? Both first and second generation women are shown to have lives constrained by patriarchy or racism. Patriarchy modes echo even in the new land as the physical and emotional distance from the homeland does not exactly distance men from the attitudes they have inherited even if they belong to the second generation. Women continue to boost and symbolize their traditional identity and the men their patriarchal one. Diasporic women have to switch roles between the traditional and the modern, the local and the global, sometimes resulting in the subversion and dismantling of these binarisms. The female domestic spaces are offered in contrast to other male dominated spheres, where women are often silenced or abused. Domestic spaces are an important place of action where women use traditional expertise and advice from mothers and aunts to handle the exigencies of everyday life and living.

Women create systems which sustain them amidst the pressures created by the governing dominant culture. They are universally accepted as repositories of a culture. They continue the traditional role as nurturers, ‘culture carriers’ in the
hostland: a role which is both a limitation and a strength. There is cultural homogeneity between men and women. Diasporic women are often caught between stereotypic visions by the host and community, of their role within cultural boundaries which they have not surrendered. An immigrant woman is made aware of her difference in terms of colour, race and gender. It is important for the first generation immigrant to balance the dual affiliation between the inherited tradition in the homeland and the new culture. Their baggage includes culturally acquired roles, role expectation and value systems which complicate the process of relocation. As the first generation in multicultural Britain, they try to maintain their ethnic distinction in a plural society rather than assimilate into a melting pot. They devise their own strategies to transmit their knowledge, values and belief systems to the next generation to handle social, cultural and personal conflicts effectively and efficiently.

It was established that women in these diasporic narratives are doubly colonized as women and as Indians. Women belonging to the first generation were also considered to be stereotyped. There is a patronizing and condescending attitude of the West towards the women from the East which arises from their inability to use the language efficiently, homely attitude, lack of economic empowerment – aspects which are aggressively addressed by the second generation as they are already partially or fully acculturated into the system.
The characters from the first generation are Daljit in *Anita and Me*, Nalini in *One Hundred Shades of White*, Freida in *One Day* and Kavita addressed as Ravikavi in *Looking for Maya*. The mothers who play an important role, but their individual names are not stated are from *Transmission*, *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, and *Londonstani*. Mothers play a strong and important role as nurturers, supporters, career makers always ready to encourage their children and help them to acculturate better.

Daljit is the epitome of the modern Indian woman refined, petite, educated, a graceful and warm hostess with an unthreatening charm and proud of her Indian background. She strategises in various ways to keep her family together in the cold, alien land. A patriotic feeling continuously instilled into Meena, was “Don’t give them a chance to say we’re worse than they already think we are. You prove you are better. Always.” (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 45). Daljit had set high standards for herself, her family and Meena – who was not allowed to use rude abusive language—“Just because the English can’t speak English themselves, does not mean you have to talk like an urchin. You take the best from the culture not the worst”. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 53). There were no shortcuts, if she lied or was caught in some unforgivable act – her mother was fierce, resembling to little nine year old Meena, Goddesss Kali herself. It was a strategy employed by her to discipline the child effectively, but it was a side only Meena saw. Her reasons for acculturation were sacrosanct and clear. They had come to the West for economic gains and to give their daughter the best education. She would not
compromise by losing her Indian-ness, her culture, her people and most importantly the memories of her homeland. She was so helpful and charming that even the villagers said “You’re so lovely. You know, I never think of you as, you know, foreign. You’re just like one of us”. (Syal, Anita and Me, 29). Nalini is the other immigrant drawn out with clarity. She marries Raul Kathi and goes to London with her two children where after some years, he betrays her by marrying again. Nalini left alone in the strange land with her children is financially constrained – she cannot leave the country and desperately needs to acculturate into the system for economic empowerment. Unlike Daljit, she has not made any in-roads into the system, is not educated nor does she have the support of her community people. She has always hated England and hoping to return to her homeland one day, has never attempted to acculturate. Her major strategy turns to be cooking; she turns her only talent into a professional pursuit and prospers.

Freida described in a cameo by Vakil is a fun loving mall girl from Mumbai with only a single reason to acculturate. She is far away from her homeland, without the support of her parents; she works hard with the children in a day care centre and is loved by all including the parents who admire her. Her strategy is simple and effective – she works hard for sustenance.

‘Mothers’ form a major part of the diaspora narratives and are discussed collectively here. They are without names or any other identifying features, though what sets them apart, is their role in enabling their children to acculturate
in the adopted land. Taken collectively they were of all kinds – formidable, kind, understanding, theatrical with the best interests of their children, at heart.

As Tania describes her Mother and mothers in general,

...feeding everyone, supporting everyone smiling at everyone, keeping the family going. ....They were big women, our mothers in all senses of the word. They had plans, boundaries, a place. Why would you think you were in prison if you never saw the bars? (Syal, *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, 110-111).

A strategy used by the mothers was emotional blackmail – to exploit their children, exercise control over them in the new land and enforce values from the homeland. Meena recounts how she was made to remember photos of her relations and memorise their personal details, as if it would bring them closer. They called on their Gods, their mothers and ancestors to help them reinforce the children’s guilt when they misbehaved. Hardjit’s mother says:

I make you bache pakoras and samosas and you embarrass me in front of my guest with this, this ... ruffian behaviour. Is this the way I bring you up? Like fighter-cock badmarsh ruffian? . . . God give me strength an Waheguru. Then she started givin it her usual shit, askin what had gone wrong in the world that young bache like us showed such a lack of respect for their elders. . . . All the time playing the fool in my house. Always. Play the fool. Good, good, verrry good. Fail your exams, live on the street. Verry good. (Malkani, 73)
Women in this novel, especially mothers, are disparaged, yet they often call the shots. They believed that education was the passport to success and often overemphasised according to the second generation. Career was sometimes given secondary importance over marriage which was the penultimate goal and the birth of grandsons the ultimate success. Each of these novels show strategies promoted by them to help in the acculturation process. In the novel, Meena understands the sacrifice but feels smothered by her ambitious parents who tell her ‘education is her passport’. For Sunita in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, her brothers could get away with murder, but her mum and dad always insisted she should get her education and then think of marriage, if she wanted. Aware of the advantages of a financially empowered background Angie’s mother always expected her to do well in the university. Angie was conscious that her mother was worried about her job and cashed on it:

…ma fidgeted anxiously about my next assignment. She would scan the job pages of the newspapers daily and photocopy them for me; talk incessantly about her friends’ children who had regular jobs with guaranteed sick pay and holidays. When all else failed she would turn the subject to marriage. ….Ungelliee, you are such a lazy bum and see if you got married then you could spend all your life doing nothing but then we wouldn’t have to worry.’ ‘You, you don’t know what hardship is, what scarcity is,’ she would say. Thank God, at least Rax had his full time job at British Telecom. (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 29)

Whatever she said, I knew ma was all for me having a career and was well proud that I worked so hard.(Srivastava, *Transmission*, 56)

Having left the homeland for the adopted land and often without economic empowerment themselves, the mothers emphasised this aspect for their daughters. It is observed that the emphasis for economic freedom is always
enforced on the girl child. It was ultimately a strategy to belong, a strategy which brought out the rudiments of being accepted and establishing themselves in the society. Most of the mothers were highly superstitious and fearful that their children should not be affected by the evil eye. It was both a strategy to keep their children close together and also a conditioning formed in them from the homeland. It spoke of an amalgamation of centuries of handed down wisdom, fatalism, old wives tales, personal histories, Indian-ness, the supremacy of one’s ingrained culture, everything flowed down to form one’s cultural identity. Sunita expresses:

When Chila was expecting I asked her if her mum had been getting to her, those old-lady superstitions about not having anything ready for the baby before it actually arrives, in case all those mysterious unseen forces we call fate or sometimes God notice we are too happy, too smug at our good fortune, and decide to teach us a lesson in humility by taking it all away. ‘Nazar nahin lagthe! Don’t tempt the evil eye.’ Of course, being Punjabi, it came out as ‘evil eye’ which somewhat lessened its dramatic impact, but her fear always alarmed me. (Syal, Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee, 238).

Sunita from the second generation rebels against what her mother expects from her but accepts finally.

Was it so bad to celebrate the good things occasionally? Were we so ungrateful, so presumptuous, that one glancing reference to a possible blessing would bring a lava-wave of ancient wrath into our house, sweeping us away like spindly weeds? Maybe this was just my mother’s way of teaching us to count your blessings. Unfortunately, all it taught me was to hope for the best, very quietly, and expect the worst, very stoically. Clearly anything good that happened was merely a fortunate, whimsical accident, a mistaken jewel spotted glinting in the dust which we might admire for a while, possibly hold for a moment, before. (Syal, Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee, 238).
Spirituality was a major source of sustenance in the alien land. Psychologically it gave the immigrants strength and succour to face life in this land, far away from one’s own people. Satsangs continued, aartis were performed as in India. Festivals were held as a reminder of what went on at home, but the focus was more on a celebration of togetherness and eating, as far away from one’s own people bonding was more important than rituals. The mothers were generally religious and tried to impart the same values to their children. Tania says:

My mother believed that those gilt-painted statues on top of the fridge were actual divine beings. She would talk to them like best friends, bow and cry to them, go to cover their ears if any of us said a harsh word in their hearing, ask them for blessings that they repeatedly ignored, like her health, and her children’s future weddings. (Syal, *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, 139)

Syal suggests that the culture resources from ‘home’ that first generation immigrants attempt to impart to their children are frozen and fossilized in the ‘usual immigrant bubble where Indians abroad are more traditional than their counterparts at “home”, over-anxious to preserve what they remember as the homeland.

Strategies are employed by the second generation in different social locations of power: school, street, yard, and playground and with their hybrid status. These help them to adapt better as adults in the workplace and in the society, combat insults, racial abuse and even retaliate. Parents without such efficient resources continue to be shocked by the racist attacks and cannot recover inspite of having
stayed on for years. The children fought their own battles, often bonding to tell the bitter truth to their siblings, but not to their parents.

*Anita and Me* portrays a young girl caught in between bodily and emotional changes as she battles for herself in the process of constructing and reconstructing her identity. Meena’s sense of inadequacy originates from her fractured identity divided between the English lifestyle, she badly wanted to adopt and the traditional Indian family milieu. Meena’s personality is fractured as she swings between accepting native Englishness and Indian-ness desperate initially to belong to Tollington and later, after a first-hand contact with her grandmother equally eager to see India for herself. She projects herself with many strategies – a staunch believer of English customs, food habits, trying hard to emulate her idol Anita Rutter. Meena too strategizes as the spokesperson of the second generation South Asian immigrants. She learnt early on that she had to fight her own battles.

... I had to live amongst my neighbours’ kids, who were harder tougher versions of their parents, and I needed back-up. I had already been in quite a few ‘scraps’ where I felt obliged to show I was not one of the victims that would be chosen every so often by the bigger lads for their amusement. And whilst I hated the physical pain and the nervous nausea of these ritual ‘barneys’, what I hated even more was having to hide my bruises and tears from my mother...But Mama was not a yard mama, so I learned early on there were some things I would have to do for myself. (Syal, *Anita and Me*, 52-53)
Meena’s strategy for survival among the yard kids was physical. She handled the fights and bruises on her own, despite wanting her mother to be her backup. She often responded by using the famous Tollington accent, a brilliant mimicking strategy devised to show the gang that she was ‘one of them’. The ethnic reinvention Meena makes of her ‘self’ was an useful strategy and showed her resourcefulness in countering the opposing, native forces and undermining their effects by humour, mimicry and playacting.

Suave, self-assured and fiercely independent Tania could out drink most of the White men she went around with. She took her own decisions, fought to maintain her position as a documentary film maker, dressed and spoke like the natives. Unlike Chila, she devised her own strategies rather than trusting the fickle workings of fate. Tania consciously made a choice about the kind of life she wanted to have. “When things go belly up, Chila always blames karma, Sunita blames her failed university career, I blame no-one but myself.” (Syal, Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee, 148) . The warm portrayal of the friendship between Tania, Chila and Sunita is one way in which the text represents positive aspects of being Asian women, though patriarchal norms and domination in marriage also exist. The story plots Chila’s growth as a feminist when self-realisation of her marriage falls apart with her husband’s adulterous relation with her best friend. She emerges stronger out of the whole event pushing behind all notions of ‘right behaviour’ enforced on her by her mother, the visiting aunties and the society. She strategises to move ahead with her child. Sunita the most intelligent of the
trio has a promising career as a lawyer laid out for her but an early marriage and two children seems to have reversed her priorities. What she can focus on now is only her family which threaten to drive her overboard, her friendship with Chila and Tania serve as an anchor in her life. Tania, the rebel teaches Sunita and Chila never to show any sign of weakness in school as they would be ridiculed and bullied further.

Mira and Angie are young, almost integrated women, who are not rootless and disoriented but are able to handle the odds they are pitted against quite like the natives. Bright, beautiful and bold, they are ready for the experiences life offers and do not consider themselves as outsiders. Angie slips into Americanese when required with an easy attitude, smoking joints, drinking, spending time in pubs, sleeping with others and driving fast. She describes herself as a successful television researcher who usually observed – “listening and learning the ways of cool.” (Srivastava, Transmission, 1)

I also know all the speed traps, the slowest traffic lights, the shortest routes from Stoke Newington to Finchley. I have always made it my business to know what I need to know so no one would get the better of me. (Srivastava, Transmission, 16)

Mira is a migrant at ease with herself and the adopted country, which she doesn’t see as a hostland. Sitting with her boyfriend in Bar Italia in Soho, she slips into a reverie of her own and is amazed to realize that, “I hadn’t been aware of Luke for
these delicious minutes of knowing I was living in my beautiful city.” (Srivastava, *Looking for Maya*, 2)

Like Tania, Anjali, Maya and Sunita, Priya loves London and has a sense of home when in London. She came as a seventeen year old and was absorbed by everything around her. Expressing herself she says:

The truth is, I know the weather’s horrible, all grey and dark and depressing and all. I thought I’d get used to it, but in a way you never get used to it. But then you get a bright cold day like this. Everything becomes so sharp. Sometimes – it’s funny – but when I look out of the window and it’s raining again, I can almost find the rain comforting. I think to myself, I can stay indoors and do my work or I can get into bed and read a book. (Vakil, 52-53)

Rakesh, sums up the second generation’s ethos, “You’re nobody unless you’re somebody. And you’re somebody if you got money. If you control. If you can control you got everything. Simple really…” (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 149)

Paul Gilroy25 speaks of the ‘rhizomorphic fractal structure of the transcultural’ which is obvious in the speeches of Maya, Tania, Angie and Mira who are metropolitan yuppies with attitudes that transcend cultural ties of one nation or one state. They were aware that the outside space did not exactly match with their indoor personal and family space which was still basically Indian, from meals to clothes to celebration of festivals. In the border crossings and
multicultural spaces they find themselves marginalized as third world women, the transformation into the first world is never complete, the various changes bringing out a fragmented personality. Awareness of life in a heterogeneous society with articulation of different identities does have an impact while integrating into a multicultural set up. The narratives of these women protagonists is sometimes triumphant in spite of racism because assimilation is democratic in UK, their ethnicity is not always considered an impediment and a compromise but a natural by-product of their process of democracy. Gender relations are repositioned and women get a different, though not necessarily a more equitable space. The educated Indian women essay the same role as their counterparts in India – giving priority status to home, the family, as nurturers and caregivers to not only their own, but the extended family. While first generation women were the reservoir of culture and values which they grew up with and carried in a latent way from home, they displayed a static role as opposed to the children and the men. There were adaptations however both inside and outside, while the home continued to function as in India, external features like travelling by public transport, learning the alien language, learning to drive, working on par with men from the first world also continued.
NRSA – The Non Resident South Asians investigated in these novels have been put into three slots. Those belonging to the first generation are the uncles and fathers who have primarily come to UK to shape a future for their children or like mamaji, who had come to complete his education, ‘his head full of Shakespeare and Wordsworth.’ They are swamped by nostalgia as they attempt to acculturate with their families. The fathers here are caught up in the whirlpool of their noisy emotional spouses and yet are major support systems for the children, especially the daughters. The tutoring of their children proves to be the most important reason for acculturation as they attempt to give them the best education. The call of the homeland where they attempt to keep their children connected is done by bringing an awareness of their customs, tradition, hospitality, music and value systems. They are bewildered at the racist attacks and express their helplessness as they cannot protect their own children. Relations and friends whom they meet, visitors from the homeland India are an important socio-psychological strategy used by them to reconnect with their past. Some of them are patriarchal, dominating figures reinforcing their Indian-ness in the hostland.

The second group are the husbands belonging to the second generation who have accultured into the hostland with their wives who were born in UK or have migrated at a very young age. Deepak and Akash in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, show no special strategies to acculture though they demonstrate strategies
to maintain their families. There is no memory of the homeland and thoughts of it are not even evoked. Ravi in *One Hundred Shades of White*, a migrant twice over is a successful businessman. What he offers Nalini and Maya is an absolute acceptance of their background and character. He helps Nalini acculturate, set up shop and proves to be supportive and caring husband even if he knew about her earlier marriage. Maya's acculturation process was easier with Ravi, giving her strength and motivation to move on. Mr. Kumar in *Anita and Me*, was a soft-spoken parent whose world centred around his daughter and wife. His strategies for acculturation were both physical and psychological especially during racist attacks. He encouraged Meena to study and tried to understand the changes in her personality which helped her evolve as an individual.

The third group belongs to the Londonstani boys who were born in London and do not consider themselves as natives or immigrants. The second generation boys were totally acculturated Br Asians. Gautam Malkani in an interview states: “their aggression is fuelled not simply by a struggle against society but by a more complex struggle to be men against overbearing mothers who would rather their sons remain boys.”

Racism leads to a sense of being ‘othered’ or ‘racialized’ and this accentuates the pain of dislocation and displacement. John Clement Ball comments:
Members of the parental first generation, for whom the promise of an open and accommodating Britain was largely betrayed are shown in a kind of spatial and psychological retreat. They are nostalgic, cautious voices newly (if shallowly) rooted in the metropolitan dwelling that represents their only site of continuity and control, a fortress against the affronts to cultural identity and dignity they constantly endure as a function of their precarious perches on the nation’s margin.²⁷

All of nine, yet Meena knows what not to tell her parents, the details of what Anita did or even of the racist fights she tackles on her own, realising what had happened to her must have happened hundreds of times to her father. It was a battle they all had to wage, the price they had to pay for staying in a foreign country. Br Asians were subject to racist stereotyping, the commonest abuse ‘Paki’, being thrown at them often resulted in physical assault. Resourceful ways to counter racialised stereotyping included ‘mimicry’ and ‘playacting’ used by all the children of the second generation to acculture. Often humor is used to defuse racism. Tania’s strategy in school was to wade in:

arms swinging, talons outstretched, teeth bared, and always silent and unblinking. She wouldn’t even flinch when Chila and Sunita took turns in wiping away blood and, on one occasion, trying to reinsert a large molar. ‘Attack is the best form of defence,’ Tania had lisped. ‘Don’t even give them time to think. (Syal, Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee, 48)

The acceptance by the Whites was not complete despite integrating into their system. The attacks continued on Angie, Mira, Tania and Meena, though the attackers were different. When asked about racism, Tania was careful to always answer what they, the White interviewers, wanted to hear:
She made up stories of skinheads and shit through letter boxes, because that’s the kind of racism they want to hear about. I never tell them about the stares and whispers and the anonymous gobs of phlegm at bus stops, the creaking of slowly closing doors and the limited view from the glass counter (we never get as high as the ceiling), which all scar as deeply as a well-aimed Doc Marten. (Syal, *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, 145)

Sunita and Chila would groom me like two maternal monkeys, checking my teeth and hair, producing tissues to dab away blood and spit, putting me back together neatly before returning to our families, because we all knew what hell there would be to pay if our parents sniffed any scandal clinging to our uniforms. It was simple really, only having to choose between two worlds: home and everywhere else. (Syal, *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, 319)

Immigrants are aware that their survival is bound to be a struggle against race, class and their gendered identity. Hybridity brought about a better level of adjustment in the host society, but the racist attacks did not cease. Differences in skin tone, cultural habits, economic empowerment and social practices angered the natives – the attacks took place at physical and psychological levels. The manner in which the immigrant handled them was circumstantial involving physical retribution by the immigrant, more so by the second generation who did not accept that he was a second class citizen. The first generation demonstrated a stoic and fatalistic acceptance by tolerance, indifference and pretense. An Indian who is a bus driver says:

I came here sixteen years ago and look at me, I don't own a thing. I live in a stinking room in Deptford, do this menial job. I drink pints in the pub. I eat out of takeaways, suffering the humiliation of threats. The scum, they vomit and use abusive language. They have no shame. It is no life. …I have lost all my courage, saab. All I wish now is that I should finish things properly. I would like to go back to
my village and lie down in a small place. I would like to die where I was born.’ (Srivastava, *Looking for Maya*, 216)

The second generation more prone to equality faced the attacks head on as they are aware of the problems peculiar to their community, class and gender. They take their own decisions spurred by the racist policies and subsequent actions of the mainstream White community. Maya arrives in London on her fourth birthday and falls in love with England in her young little mind unconditionally:

I loved my school, my teacher, the food, the television and I didn’t want to go back. If I was asked to make a choice, I would choose England every time. It wasn’t that I forgot India or my Ammamma but India became less and less important…. In the first school they are accepted for what they are and they assimilate quickly. The challenge comes in the second school where racist attacks, accusations of being a Paki, threats to be removed by the teacher start from the first day. (Nair, *One Hundred Shades of White*, 26)

Maya and Satchin acculturate beautifully taking strength from each other. They learn to cover up in front of Nalini and pretend that all was okay. Integrating into the changed environment was difficult but the only thing to do because there was no other way out and returning to India was an impossibility accepted by the young children. Maya manages to beat a bully on the first day of school when called a ‘Paki’. This earns her the respect of her classmates and confidence to handle situations in the alien world.
Racism also occurs at a psychological level, building up pressures and upsetting the elders and parents. Sometimes, it is the second generation children who create a strategy of facing the racist attacks on their parents by comforting them with reminders of earlier situations handled by them. This is indicated when Rax describes the crank call received by ma late one night, which has shaken her.

Angie comforts her and says:

…there's nothing to be scared of. We're safe. The doors are locked. It's never happened before. Don't let them scare you. That's their victory.' She was nodding and looking at the floor.'...Hey,' I said grinning. 'Remember that time we were on a bus and those skinheads said, "Go home paki?" Remember? When I was still at school, doing my A levels? And you hadn't even heard him? And I started shouting at him to piss off and you told me off for swearing. I thought you were being ridiculous but you said why waste my breath. And then you turned to him and you said ever so politely: "Young man I am from India. Pakistan is another country." You held your head up, Ma. You remember that?' I had mimicked her accent and was prodding her in the arm, urging her to remember. She looked up and smiled weakly. 'Yes. Yes. They were only boys.' (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 145)

Though semi-assimilated into the system, Angie also faces instances of racism. This occurs when an old woman attacks her in the train with a broken glass bottle, swearing:

You weren't born. You were spewed up. Fuckin' cunts. Coming here. You're everywhere. Stinking up the flats. Your fuckin' cars and your shops. You fuckin cunts. Who do you think you are? You're a bunch of cunts ...' (Srivastava, *Transmission*, 254)
Angie could have retaliated in a similar manner, but she preferred to avoid confrontation. The immigrants strategise to face the assaults of racism collectively which often is disturbing. But to a great extent it also makes them strong internally as it teaches them to face the exigencies of life in the hostland and to develop strategies to acculturate better. Racism is a subverted term in Londonstani, where it exposes three young boys who assert their own brand of British-ness neither integrating nor keeping their Indian-ness distinct. There is a change over as the rude boys, second generation Br Asians have accultured. It is the enforcement of social norms which makes them seek agency that was denied as they fought for equality against pre-conceived notions of identity. When a White boy calls them Paki, Hardjit almost reduces the young boy to pulp as he felt it was his civic duty to educate everyone in this basic social etiquette that all desi boys were not Pakis “U bhanchod b callin us lot Paki one more time an i swear we'll cut'chyu up, innit. (Malkani, Londonstani, 4). They regarded their being desis, as a matter of pride and had a street identity where they, deride “coconuts”, Asian kids who are brown on the surface but white inside. Once while ragging, Hardjit shouts,

Fuckin batty boy,u sound like a poncey gora. Wat's wrong wid'chyu, sala kutta? U 2 'embarrass'd to be a desi? Embarrass'd your own culture, huh? Thing is ,u is actually an embarrassment to desis. Bet'chyu cant' even speak yo mother tongue, innit I should come over there n cut your tongue out... Wat's wrong wid your own bredren ,brown boy? Look at us. We'b havin a nice car, nice tunes nuff nice designer gear,nuff bling mobile. But no ,you wanna be some gora – lovin ,dirty hippie wid fuckin radiohead playin in your car. (Malkani, Londonstani, 23-24)
Constantly moving between two nation states, two cultures, two religions, two languages – the immigrant does not project a single unified self. Straddling both worlds he is successful only with his hybrid identity. The novels show the syncretic immigrant acculturating as he positions himself in a liminal state between two worlds. Probably this is what Rushdie meant when he said, “our identity is at once plural and partial, sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures: at other times that we fall between two stools”²⁸. The immigrants belonging to the second generation are definitely all syncretic border individuals as they effortlessly reach out to both cultures and learn to balance both.
Endnotes :


16. Rai, Sudha. *The Discourse of Food in Contemporary Women’s Writing*, p.135

17. Ibid. p.135

18. Ibid. p.141

19. Ibid. p.142

20. Ibid. p. 142


23. Rai, Sudha. The Discourse of Food in Contemporary Women’s Writing, pp.139


26. Malkani, Gautam. Londonstani, ON 02 Jun 2010
   < http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/londonstani.html >
