Chapter Five

Problematising Representations of Relationships

5. Introduction

The chapter probes the ways in which male-female relationships are reflected in BrAsian women’s writing, how they configure the BrAsian woman’s identity, and rewrite social formations as well. The first section points out how the consistent narrative focus suggests the importance of these relationships to the texts. The emphasis on homing desires is discussed here, and a conceptual model is defined, which will be used to trace the intersectionality of these desires and the socio-cultural milieu. The second section shows how historical patterns of BrAsian relationships have been configured alongside transnational influences; how religion, caste, region, class and race configure these unions; how aspirations towards modernity and upward mobility mark BrAsian society; how endogamous practices continue among BrAsians and how women respond to the question of marriage in these communities. Close textual analysis tracing conventional marriages, “love marriages” and non-conventional relationships inform the sections three, four and five. Section six offers a glimpse of contemporary BrAsian practices of finding partners or marrying. The chapter ends with the findings and conclusions offered by the chapter, traced in sections seven and eight respectively. All the primary and secondary sources are referred to in this chapter.

5.1 Male-Female Relationships In BrAsian Fiction By Women: Narratives Of Homing Desires.

Edmund Leach (cited in Ballard 2001) suggests that “every domestic group follows its own distinctive processual trajectory”, controlled by life events such birth and death, and by its members’ decisions with respect to residence, marriage, household formation and so forth. Those decisions are in turn related to group members’ traditional expectations about the organisation of interpersonal relations within the household, and also conditioned by its members’ efforts towards upward mobility “through the obstacles and opportunities facing them in their immediate environmental context” (Ballard 2001: 16)

This chapter investigates how the BrAsian women writers project the challenges, joys and pains of dealing with friendship, sexual relationship and marriage in the context of making a home, and how they depict the feeling of loneliness and the
need to belong. Thus male-female relationships and marriage are an important segment of authorial concern, along with desire for modernity and respectability that is always a part of South Asian homing desires. In this chapter this search for a home incorporates a search for a real, tangible place to claim in British soil, a safe territory of ownership, where fulfilment comes from belonging, from a combined love of self and community, of work, pleasure, romance, a desire for cultural representation, and a need to define political identity. This desperate seeking of multiple aspects of human existence is implied by the term “homing desire”, it is not only a mythic desire of looking back to a home in the imagination, it is more of the lived experience of life in Britain, its smells, heat, dust, snow as Avtar Brah describes. Brah points out

Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In the sense that it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin.’ On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. (Brah 1996: 192)

Laura Rus (2006) describes her search for the meaning of home in her article as “a journey from ‘home’ through the self (into the community) to a diasporic space of belonging, back to the self and then again to the “global” community,” (para 38). In this thesis, the homing desires of the female protagonists involve self, community and diasporic space of belonging, rather than a sense of the global community. This thesis recognises the overemphasis on mythical representations of home in contemporary dispora theory, even in Avtar Brah’s writing, as Rus points out, and suggests that for BrAsian women, the desire for home stems more from a socio-political hunger for belonging than a sentimental longing to be fulfilled by the imagination or otherwise.

As a result of the homing desire as defined above, the development of the protagonist’s identity becomes the major focus of the writers, and their adult engagement with love and sexuality occurs alongside the development of their socioeconomic identity. The women in these novels are seen as the main stakeholders in the growth of the family or community as an identifiable unit. It is these women of the first and second generation migrant families who are entrusted with, and often see themselves as, keeping the image of the Asian community as “successful” unsullied, in England and their family or biradiri as respectable members, both in Britain and in the subcontinent, mostly through marriage (Ballard 2001; Ahmad 2003). Most of the short stories and novels do deal with marriage and its consequences as the main focus, but they are invariably linked with alienation anxieties or other trauma associated with
uprooting or being “routed” as C. Vijayasree (2001: 132) suggests. There are also stories or novels which delineate, somewhat tangentially, male and female friendship, which is the foundation for respect and equality between the genders, alternative sexualities, non-conventional relationships.

According to Mohanty (1991) Western ideologies not only construct fixed ideas of Third world women, but also control academic writing on them by those scholars who choose to work on them, thus perpetuating myths and stereotypes within academia, about how to problematise their identities. She gives examples of how different categories of women, as victims of male violence, as universal dependents, married women, women and familial systems are all cast in the image of the tradition-bound “average third world woman” (176) who is the opposite of the self-representation of emancipated Western women. Hasmita Ramji (2003) analyses how academic work on South Asian women in Britain “perpetuates their status as victims”, specially within the analytical framework of the incompatibility of traditional (South Asian) and modern (normative white British) social forms, and also upholds the “clash of culture” thesis universally (228). For example, Pnina Werbner (2004), who has had a long and fruitful engagement with BrAsian culture studies and offers perceptive analysis, seems to have got diverted from the main focus of her article on South Asian Muslims in Britain to a careless discussion of a few popular romances as the norm of BrAsian writing. She understands that South Asian high cultural works like “The Satanic Verses” are not effective, not even widely read, and that they are obsessed with love and marriage, whereas popular romances portray a defiance and caricature of old traditions and elders. The latter are according to her, “inclusive, absorbent, experimental, reflexively satirical and politically incorrect, rooted in bodily pleasures, sexuality and desire”, as opposed to the high cultural works. Werbner’s objections fall into this category of academic writing which prefers to focus on negative stereotypes, or on cultural aspects of BrAsian society which are different from the western norm, as shall be examined further in the concluding section of this chapter.

Looking Through The Prism: Aim Of The Analysis In This Chapter.

This thesis aims to differentiate between Eurocentric notions of South Asian women and the evidence of their agency that the present body of literature affords: BrAsian women writers show how their protagonists are actively creating agency where it is denied, across gendered, racialised, ethnicised and classed formations of
power. Ramji (2003) regrets the “real dearth of material on women as cultural reproducers, who actively manufacture their identities, who do not merely perpetuate but *modify* their cultural systems by engaging with them positively” (230).

The effort of this thesis will be to probe into this aspect of BrAsian womanhood as cultural producers, as makers of new community norms as they develop new homing anxieties in the diaspora. Along with analyzing the varieties of male-female and same sex relationships in a heteronormative society, this chapter will try to correlate anxieties about relationships that sometimes trouble the protagonists, and how success in their careers or a better understanding with their community or parents are linked with these anxieties. This may lead further to a better understanding of BrAsian women’s “role as cultural entrepreneurs who are actively engaging with cultural frameworks, whilst continuously transforming them”, which, Ramji says, “is one that is largely absent both from the majority of the literature and from common-sense understanding” (ibid). Fauzia Ahmad (2006) gives a detailed account of existing applications of patriarchy theory in (mis)understanding the notion of arranged marriage within BrAsian societies. Ahmad suggests how these studies produce “seriously flawed, essentialised and reductive” analyses of BrAsian families, silencing women’s agency and difference from the existing social structures, and promoting “hegemonic, colonialist-inspired discourse of Western cultural superiority” (2006: 282). The following analysis takes into account difference and diversity within families, communities and individuals, and posits a BrAsian woman’s agency as an expression of her BrAsianness, her racialised, classed and gendered identity, which distinguishes her from South Asian women, and is not merely a result of the “liberating” experience of her location in the first world, as she is also different from British women of the mainstream. In fact, a prismatic model, in which the three plane mirror-surfaces represent Asianness, Britishness and British-Asianness, with each plane reflecting the multiple aspects of each of these social formations, standing on the base of contemporary social relationships, might be able to surpass the binary mode of oppositionality which locks and freezes the mainstream and the host. This model might bring alive the idea of intersections and overlaps between borders on the apparently seamless multicultural Britain, which is actually made up of little islands of communities, searching for a place to call home, negotiating each others’ claims to name their frontier of the metropolitan centre. This discussion might bring a better understanding of the similarities and differences between such negotiations. The aim
of this thesis is to bring to the forefront the cultural representation of largely second-
generation BrAsian women by articulate members of the same cultural matrix, and
this chapter focuses on their identities as partners in male-female relationships, both
sexual and Platonic, conventional and exceptions to the normative.

5.2 BrAsian Marriages: Strategies For Survival.
In a growing migrant community like that of the BrAsians, the questions of
love, marriage and sexuality are related to some amount of control by the older
generation. According to Charlsey and Shaw (2006), there are new patterns of
transnational marriages that have emerged over time. They argue that not only does
marriage emerge as a very important institution “for the production and
transformation of transnational networks, but marriage practices and affinal
relationships are themselves transformed in the process, underlining the dynamic
nature of transnationalism” (Charlsey and Shaw 332).

The researchers also suggest that studying such marriages allows exploration
of “the motivations for maintaining connections, between diasporic populations, and
between diasporas and homelands, as well as the experiential dimensions of the
migrations (and sometimes immobilities) involved” (ibid). This agrees with the
prismatic model suggested in the previous section. Love, marriage and sexuality are
special nodes of assertion of individuality and identity of adults in a given
community, and it is expected that there may be found newer combinations in the
pattern of such assertion in a newly formed “second generation” of BrAsians. In the
1960s, 70s and even early 80s, the sub-continental migrants preferred to continue the
older pattern of arranged marriages, refraining from mixed marriages once the
community grew larger. Anxious to preserve purity and transnationally carried values
of the native society, the BrAsians of the older generation, the parents, grandparents
and uncles and aunts, are known to have exerted much control, and are still doing so,
over the personal lives of those younger, collectively known as the “second
generation” (Alexander 2006: 271; Ballard 1994). In a diaspora community, marriage
is far more than a conjugal partnership between two individuals: it is the best way of
ensuring cultural continuity into the next generation. It is also a method of renewing
kinship patterns, which mark the Asian diaspora in Britain, especially among the
Punjabi Hindu and Sikhs from India, the Pakistani Muslims and the Sylheti and other
migrants from Bangladesh. Yet just why and how does marriage play such a key role?
Marriage not only ensures the continuity of the blood-line through children, it also secures the "stable domestic environment within which the children can be socialised into the group's own specific norms and values" (Ballard 2001: 30) firmly entrenched by the mother. Thus it is important to select marriage partners carefully so that children are "appropriately socialised", and prepared to sustain the kinship loyalties into the next generation.

Roger and Catherine Ballard show how, after an initial stage of "rebellion" against restrictions, Sikh youths prefer returning to a "modified version" of BrAsian cultural norms "in their late teens or early twenties" (Ballard and Ballard 1977: 43-44). Despite opposition however, BrAsians have also sought, are seeking, and will seek partners of British origin still, seeking happiness in their marriages or relationships which finds 'home' in British soil.

From "Back Home": Transnational Influences.

There are problems with partners coming to Britain from the subcontinent: these subcontinental partners come to Britain carrying cultural practices that may be in conflict with those of the host country, expecting support and understanding which may not be forthcoming, fighting isolation and cultural barriers, sometimes succumbing to forces beyond control, sometimes emerging victors. Moreover, cultural difference is often highlighted in marriage, thus the discussion on marriage in this chapter brings into clearer focus the idea of cultural difference among different groups, the British mainstream and the Asian, BrAsians of the two generations, BrAsians and South Asian partners in transnational marriage.

The book Sari 'N' Chips (1993) by Ram Gidoomal and Mike Fearon gives an insight into the clashes between Asian and Western cultures and how BrAsians adapt or do not adapt to Asian culture. It examines changes of cultural pattern to those of the eastern culture, entry into clubs and institutions, the subject of inter-marriage and development of a sense of their status and place within the host society. The book differentiates between the degree of socialisation between two groups of Asians in Britian. Those who came into British culture through say, Uganda, seemed to assimilate more readily, as opposed to those who came directly from Pakistan or India. Ram Gidoomal became a Christian and so it is written from his Asian background and his Christian beliefs, in order to help both 'sides' understand conflicting issues better.

Yasmin Hussain (2005) in her extensive analysis on South Asian women's
writing in Britain, writes about the “conflicting expectations between partners from different cultural backgrounds”, in the case of cross-cultural marriages, either between two South Asians – one from the diaspora and another from South Asia – or between one South Asian and someone from a different South Asian background, perhaps regional or linguistic or religious, or another background altogether. She shows in her analysis, how “As some of the novelists illustrate, culture shock can subvert and even destroy such marriages” (14).

Taboos And Barriers: “Other” Cultures.

One of the major reasons for arranged marriages arise out of the set of taboos held close by each community which threaten the expressions of emotions or sexualities of the members of these new migrant communities. The other is the need to survive and succeed in economic and material terms, that is to say, to gain in status, which had either suffered a temporary setback in the host country or had been a transnational aspiration for the family (Gidoomal 1997; Ballard 2001). It is important to remember that the transnational relationship between the mother country and the host country has grown stronger not only due to satellite television and globalisation (Vijay Mishra 1996; 2001), but also due to intermarriages between the diaspora Asians and those at home (Ballard 2001). The initial pattern of marriage in the earlier generation of male migrants was either to marry or live with a white woman; or marry a South Asian girl, keep her back at home and maintain another wife or mistress, perhaps from the majority community; if possible, get married to a girl from home and bring her to Britain; or, never bring the Asian family to England (Visram 1986, 2002; Brah 2006; Ballard 1994, 2001). But gradually, with the increase in the number of migrant families from every community, and with bitter inter-racial relationships in the post-Powell period, marriages began to be arranged in the U.K. or with transnational partners, for both male and female BrAsians.

The first credential for arranging a match is to look for the same religious affinity: Muslims and Sikhs would not electively arrange marriages with Hindus or Christians and vice versa (Gidoomal 1997). Even love marriages outside the religious affiliation is frowned upon, often boycotted, the couple disowned by both religious groups unless the more dominant one accedes, as was the case with Gidoomal himself, who converted to Christianity in England. The next criterion for match making would be caste: the two parties seek each other out due to caste or community affinities, so that the blood line, profession, business and wealth proliferates.
Networking being the most important resource of the BrAsian business community, the caste system actually helps resources to stay well within the social group, which works for mutual benefit in new, somewhat hostile circumstances in Britain. The regional barrier is another strong one which works against alliance formation: North Indians do not prefer South Indian alliances, people from different states and linguistic nominations prefer same state or linguistic affiliations in their partners, BrAsians from India or Pakistan are not seen as the ideal choice for East African BrAsians (Gidoomal 1997). However, within the same religious group, the last two barriers, related to caste and region, are sometimes overlooked. These three preconditions for arranging matches are the same as normal South Asian practice, and above all else, class plays another crucial discriminating factor in the choice of partners in both BrAsian and South Asian marriages (Ramji 2003: 233).

**BrAsian Yuppies: “Buppies”?**

As a diasporic body, the BrAsians are noted for their identifiablity with the upper classes in social formations, even if their origins may have been working class, either in South Asia or in the host country. This is true of South Asian Americans (Kurlantzick 2002: 54) as well as BrAsians (Ballard: 1994). In fact Gayatri Spivak (1987; 1999) has written widely on the issue of the diasporic middle-class of non-European middle-class, to which contemporary BrAsians belong, and their complicity in upward mobility and international division of labour, which completely erases the indigenous poor, women and labourers from the rural areas of the sending nations. By appropriating class positions, retaining notions of respectability, and exploiting the domestic, physical and reproductive labour of their women, migrants of the non-west actually prove, according to Samir Amin, whose work supports that of Spivak, that there has been a “social-democratic alliance” between the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the affluent non-western metropolitan working class (cut off from unprivileged minorities, women, etc), and the satellite/comprador bourgeoisie at the periphery (Amin 1980). Thus the migrant from the economic South, the margins of the non-west, who, by virtue of migration, aims to assume the status of the bourgeois of the west, must do so by allying with the controllers of international finance, labour and industry. These may even be the bourgeois, often the racist privileged class, the capitalists of the west. This makes the women they marry and bring, or marry in the west from the diaspora community, party to their project of upward mobility. Thus,
the rights to the earnings and the emotional and other investments of these women are either appropriated, or seen as subservient to the male migrant’s contribution to the status of the family (see Chapter One section 1.4). What is central to this discussion of Spivak, however, is that women’s bodies, along with those of other marginalised groups, though situated physically in the economic North, continue to be constructed in the same racialised, classes and gendered manner as the bodies of indigenous women of the developing South, as the discussion on women’s labour in Chapter Four reveals.

In tune with the project of upward growth, the first generation immigrant focuses on earning, saving and transferring funds to the transnational family, and then after gaining foothold in Britain, relocates the family (Ballard 2001). Soon, the members of the family start earning to support the increase in the domestic budget, and as basic needs are met, demands for tangible goods associated with prosperity are bought, like a washing machine, television and other consumer durables (See Sumitra’s Story), followed by a house, a car and sending children to private schools, though maintaining frugal habits (Gidoomal 1997). Kuli’s son Anup calls BrAsian or brown yuppies as “Buppies” (A WOW 100). It is this class which often gets some of these items ‘gifted’ by the bride’s family, or paid for in cash as dahej, daj or dowry, as in South Asian marriages (Ahmad 2003).

Thus class aspirations are negotiated through the marriage alliance, hard work and frugal habits, and the BrAsian family as a social unit aspires to the upper classes. Inability to maintain one’s class, or to rise to the upper class is an occasion for the community to rally around and support, but there is exploitation behind such support, usually of women, who work from home, part-time, or as domestic help in a relative’s family (Day CRE 1993; Wilson 2006). Inequality of class origins of spouses in marriages leads to unhappiness and misunderstanding, often reasons for divorce, an increasing phenomenon among BrAsians today. A visible rise to the higher classes is, similarly, equated with happiness and well-being, despite domestic unrest and mental incompatibility (Wilson 1978). Ahmad speaks of how BrAsian women, specially Punjabi women, negotiate their financial independence despite remaining embedded in the traditional structure of arranged marriage and dowry: “Instead of remaining passive in the process of dowry exchange, their greater financial autonomy meant that they exercised a high degree of control over the contents of their dowries, with the often full expectation of control over the contents once they were married” (2006: 275)
Arranged marriages are often thought of as based on corporate interests, in contrast to ‘love marriages’ based on romantic attachment between the couple. In South Asia and its diasporas marriage is often a key vehicle through which a family’s status is improved or expressed, though there may be other factors involved in weighing the attractions of a particular match, as Charlsey and Shaw (2006) suggest. This logic is extended in transnational marriages, with the benefits of immigration and citizenship providing additional motivations (Ballard 1987; Shaw 1988 and 2000a cited in Charlsey). There are positive impacts of this, say, when the tradition is suitably adapted to the rigours of globalisation and migration, and negatively, the tradition can be seen “as the sacrifice of daughters on the basis of material aspirations” (Mooney 2006, cited in Charlsey 338).

“Marrying In”: The Importance Of Endogamy.

The importance of endogamy for the success of the Asian diaspora communities cannot be underrated. In Britain too, the Asian community is endogamous to the point of practicing racism in their selection of spouse profiles, as internet responses to such discussions, quoted later, show. There are wide BrAsian and transnational networks, and marriage bureaus, internet services for arranging marriages, speed dating and agony aunts who help to “assist” marriages (Ahmad 2006: 286-288). The system has evolved into a convenient method of spouse selection for many modern educated, financially independent BrAsian young women, who prefer the strength of the community and the dynamism of modernity to let marriage evolve into a durable institution, rather than a disruptive, or outmoded social system (Ramji 2003). They electively opt for marriage within the community with like-minded spouses, who would be the “right balance between the old and the new” and because they “can’t stand people who are ashamed to be Indian” (233), as one of Ramji’s respondents tell her. Their choice of partners from within the community reflects, rather than social control or culture clash, respect for racial origin, and a serious concern with homing. As Ramji writes:

The importance wealth, class and caste considerations have in spouse selection needs to be understood not just in terms of qualities internal to this group (caste, economic status, etc.), but also of external influences (racist ideological and structural forces) arising from experiencing Britain as a member of a racialized minority (ibid).

Roger Ballard (2001) shows how commitment to endogamy is very useful for
transnational kinship networks. “If high levels of endogamy can be sustained, such networks have an excellent prospect of being able continuously reconstitute themselves. If not, networks are likely to be an evanescent phenomenon which run into the sands once their founders have passed away” (30). Bhattacharyya et al (2001) point out the linkages between race and power which contain the interpellations of race on class, gender and sexuality even in contemporary globalised economies:

... the construction of gender and sexuality also takes place through global structures and this impacts upon the lived experience of racialised class. The intertwined mythologies of race and sex continue to inform the construction of racialised boundaries and fears in the global era. (110)

Thus an attitude of open support for intra-racial marriage conceals a suppressed fear or hatred of the Other, both on the part of the older and the younger generation in selection of partners. Alongside class compatibility, race and culture are thus two other factors which inhibit inter-racial alliances. Members of the black races and the dominant white are both disqualified on account of class and cultural difference more than skin colour or race by the BrAsian community, of which there are many examples in the texts. Negative stereotyping produces inhibitions in both communities about forming permanent bonds.

**BrAsian Women And The Marriage Question.**

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), Gayatri Spivak (1987), Kamala Vishweshwaran (1994) have shown how the position of the third world woman does not change dramatically due to migration into the first. British scholars like Yuval-Davis and Pnina Werbner (1999) have, in their work on British society have shown how contemporary politics has generated a new discourse on citizenship with its impact on multiculturalism, race politics, immigration issues etc. Taking these observations into consideration, one may infer that the BrAsian women’s position in the family in Britain was not only inscribed by the South Asian inheritance of the concept of womanhood, but the British construct of the modern Third world woman as well. It must also be remembered that the South Asian communities in Britain, doubly exposed to modernism via host and mother country, were quick to practice the excesses of modern consumerism. They were also thus, very eager to assume, in the 1980s, post-globalisation liberal consumer-oriented market, the practice of large dowries to emulate a better lifestyle. Not only was this true, but as Ram Gidoomal (1997) shows, the BrAsian looked for ways to increase the family income by the...
involvement of every member of the family, and took for granted women’s labour, both at home and outside, as also discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter interrogates the way BrAsian marriages and romantic relationships position the women in their socioeconomic and cultural roles.

The issue of migration raises fundamental questions about the social life of the community in diaspora, and studies like these ask questions about the nature of such societal formations, and attempt to answer them by analyzing authorial representations in available texts. In this chapter on male-female relationships, questions on the BrAsian woman’s identity are raised, which impact upon the masculine subjectivities and the identity of the community as a whole. Studies on BrAsian women’s positions as victims of unjust social norms like arranged marriage are found in large numbers in British academia, but there are only a few which project the BrAsian woman’s newly enabled position in British society (Bhachu 1991, 2003; Brah 1996; Jhutti 1998; Ahmad 2001, 2003; Puwar and Raghuram 2003; Ramji 2003). The analysis of the authors’ persistent engagement with the career and social lives of the young second generation BrAsian woman contests the claim of critics like Werbner (2004), who wish to typify BrAsian fiction with Bollywood’s obsession with romance and marriage. C. L. Innes (1995, 2002), Martina Michel (1998), Helge Nowak (1998), Susheila Nasta (1999), Crane and Mohanram (2000), Mala Pandurang (2001) and Mark Stein (2004) are a few literary critics who share the view that there is more to BrAsian writing than the portrayal of the agony of arranged marriage. The following sections probe into the aspects of BrAsian women’s writing, which draw portraits of enabled women, who seek out cognitive, and corporal agency by negotiating gendered geographies of power in spaces inhabited by them. What enables them, who are their inspirations, who gives them support and strength, why do they remain inscribed within their natal society despite its transnational association with oppression and patriarchal control, what do they seek out of love and marriage, how do they deal with sexuality and aspects of modern living proliferated through popular culture and lifestyle, in opposition to South Asian sexual and marital norms? In other words, how does the light reflected through the prism of their three-planed existence illuminate their lives? These are some of the questions sought to be answered in the subsequent sections: in the next section, traditional intra-racial marriages between BrAsian partners of older and younger generations are discussed which should open spaces for further theorization on BrAsian culture studies.
5.3 Here To Stay: Conventional Marriages.

Among the many types of male-female relationships portrayed in these novels, the most common one is that of arranged marriage among Asian immigrants of both the first and the second-generation. In this section, the emphasis will be on the way marriage is discussed or debated upon in these novels: is there any interrogation on marriage and compatibility by the female characters, is marriage considered an enabling option than being situated under parental authority by the younger girls, or is it seen as yet another way of patriarchal oppression? Some of the early texts deal with marriage with a greater emphasis, and they have been discussed more expansively, and others with brief but perceptive observations made by characters at relevant places have provided useful scope for discussion of related aspects of Asian marriages.

In the fictional space-time of most of the texts written by women raised in Britain, the portrayal of lasting bonds between their parents, who were mostly partners in arranged marriages, is very much the norm. The parents might occasionally complain or taunt each other, like Nina’s parents do in Beyond Indigo (2004: 32-33; 51), and yet Nina thinks that they “really grew to love” each other, and that “they were really compatible and I could never imagine one without the other” (33). Nina’s father tells her in his often caricatured wrong English, how “Kavitha understands me, I understands her. We have the family, the culture, the traditions, the security. That is what is making the marriage” (51). Essentially, Nina’s parents share the view offered by a priest in the novel, on adjustment in marriage: “It is not easy, but you must work hard. Western notion is romantic but it does not last. It is hard work, commitment and the understanding which do” (204). This is the view shared by most of the older generation, the mothers having marriageable daughters (SS, AWOW, Hj, LI, CC, CCC.) The portrayals of arranged marriages among the older generation is largely of mutual adjustment and contentment in adversity. Tania (LI) questions her mother’s submissiveness, as we saw in Chapter Four section 4.3, but all the novels mentioned above reflect a certain commitment made by the partners towards the project of upward mobility. If one of the partners, usually the husband, is not able to live up to the standards set by himself, the other is supportive, like Tania’s mother, Ghazala’s mother Fahmida (HJ), Sumitra’s mother Mrs. Patel (SS), or Resham, (HJ) or Tara (T).
Hari-jan (1992) is a text that offers a detailed portrayal of the immigrant couple struggling to succeed: there are Resham (Harijan’s mother) and her husband, a Punjabi couple supportive of each other’s commitment to work hard and succeed in running a supermarket, and the Muslim couple, Ghazala’s parents, who try, but fail to make a successful living out of their small retail store. Resham says: “we wanted to make something of our lives, opened a shop and so on... Life here is very hard. There’s no-one to help you. And Indians are becoming very Westernised, the sense of ... of ... belonging to each other, of helping each other has gone” (Hj 65). Ghazala’s father’s story of failure is another case in point: he tried hard to make his business succeed, and help from the community and family was not enough (56), so he publicly declared that his family “needn’t have any responsibility for him ...” (57) etc. His wife Fahmida did piecework at home to save the family from starvation, and he helped in ironing the clothes she sewed at home (54). The lives of these two families stand in stark contrast to one another; the lower class, uneducated Muslim is almost left to his own devices after repeated attempts to rehabilitate him after his retrenchment from factory-work fail. The Punjabi family on the other hand pulls all resources together and survives, perhaps because of some access to capital from the earlier generation of migrants, Harjinder’s father’s parents. Both the families have women working doubly hard to keep their homes together, and both partners are affectionate, caring and loving parents.

As noted in the earlier chapters, the younger generation, Rax and Angie (T), Mira (LFM), Nina (BI) Tania, or Sumitra often comment on their parents’ habits. They regard their frugality, disinterest in fashion or conspicuous consumption, the habit of buying at Tesco for good bargains, and the fondness to buy from discount-stores as funny or quirky, thus missing out the habit of saving in their parents that has given them their present affluent status. Despite the hard struggle of those early years after immigration, these couples maintain a supportive and loving attitude: poverty and discrimination do not embitter them, but provide motivation to succeed (Gidoomal 1997). The texts thus reveal how the process of rooting and rerouting has brought some of the couples closer in the alien land, in the early years after immigration, and how their children mostly perceive the settled companionship of the parents as an unquestionable given, often ignoring their sacrifice.

“Assisted Marriages”.

The modern version of arranged marriage is not such a frightening proposition
as most mainstream research suggests. There are second-generation protagonists who actually welcome arranged marriages or “assisted marriages” as fictional BrAsians like Naina’s father (CC) or Sunita’s father (LI) like to call them. These second-generation BrAsians are from the educated middle-class, the new migrant non-European bourgeois Spivak (1999) identifies as colluding in the globalisation of capital and erasure of the indigenous person.

Hari-jan (1992) discusses the relationship between arranged marriage and wealth or material ambition, all the while juxtaposing it with the extended story of the romantic love escapades of the heroine. There are four detailed references to arranged marriage in the novel. Hari-jan’s cousin Bindi’s negotiated “love” marriage, is technically termed “co-operative traditional” by Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1990). When Bindi finds the man of her choice at Mark’s and Spencer’s, she tells her mother, who wishes to find a “kwality” man from the upper class for her daughter, and thus approves of Ashok. Though the marriage ensures all the trappings of an arranged match, complete with the vicholi or middle man, it is the shrewd negotiator Bindi, who has arranged the match for herself, falling in love with Ashok, seeing him from a distance, without his knowledge. This is almost something that Harjinder allows to happen to her as well. The text thus shows how the two generations agree on status and wealth as the primary prerequisite of a “good” match, with emotional compatibility as a secondary concern. Ballard’s research reveals “whilst backchannel negotiations between young people themselves have often been commonplace, an ever-increasing number of Jullunduri marriages are a product of personal courtship, whose roots are subsequently presented as being far more traditionally grounded than was in fact the case” (2001: 35).

Secondly, what surfaces gradually in the text is Ghazala’s nearly self-imposed, poverty-driven arranged marriage with her cousin, which is abandoned because he already had someone else in mind (125). Ghazala thinks that marrying her cousin, a common Muslim practice, would be a very good idea, a relief for her anxious parents. Ghazala herself is deeply hurt by his declaration his love for someone but she seeks self-empowerment through other means than the easily available option of marriage. Ghazala reappears as a proactive agent of change in the textual configuration she is not a victim, unlike stereotypes of Muslim girls in forced marriages (Ahmad 2006).

This text, targeted to young readers, clearly shows how wealth and materialistic urges prompt arranged marriages, and the conversation of the first-
generation immigrant women, her mother Resham and her friend Lakshmi, which Harjinder overhears (65-66) sound like the advertisements in *Asian Bride* and other popular magazines dedicated to the marriage market.

Finally, along with the constant discussion on marriage in Harjinder’s family, her own love story is plotted. Though Harjinder is in love with Suresh, he is partly white British, tall, fair and handsome, coming from a good family, popular among fellow students, with a good female following, excellent leadership qualities and well-entrenched transnational cultural contact. Harjinder is just as firmly inscribed in her class role as young marriageable person as her cousin Bindi is, or her mother was, with the promise of even better social status due to academic superiority, and good managerial skills demonstrated through college activities. Thus this text, like most of the other early texts, portrays the ways in which materialistic benefits accrue by arranged or approved marriage, especially in the now educated upper class, which is actually a converted working class.

*Life Isn’t...*(2000) begins with Chila’s arranged marriage staged passionately by her upwardly mobile mother. When Deepak, a well-placed eligible bachelor is found for “soft-in-the-head” Chila, she is blissful, but when he betrays her with her friend Tania, and attempts to steal their new-born son, she decides to live separately, and even plans to visit India alone. Syal paints a bold picture of an ordinary girl from a conservative background who is able to withstand community pressure and prioritize her needs and desires: Chila finds agency with the help of her friends, as well her own innate strength of convictions as a young BrAsian. The culture-prism locates her right in its centre, from where she is able to resist the negative outcome of her “assisted marriage”.

*Chapatti or chips?* (2002) is a racy novel about love, sex and romance set in contemporary London. Though the novel clearly falls in the category of pulp fiction, it engages in interesting discussions on the system of arranged marriages. The cover announces the slogan “Should she marry the man her parents choose? Or does she have a mind of her own?” In the final reading the book actually offers an answer in the negative, as Naina is actually dragged from her wedding venue by her white British lover while she is about to marry Ashok, the groom her parents have chosen for her.

Naina thinks Ashok was “really nice”, not only for the diamond choker he gifted her, but because he was “the perfect partner for her” (247). She really started to
believe that he would be “one who would most certainly take care of her, one who would make a good husband, one she would have a good life with” (ibid) but feels guilty for not wanting to marry him. However, her lover Dave dissuades her by reiterating the importance of love in a marriage (166). The novel offers an interesting reading into the arranged marriage system from both its negative, and “positive” aspects. Naina’s relationship with Dave is analysed in another section.

Thus, the concept of arranged or assisted marriage throws to light issues that are not often covered in serious academic discussions or popular debates: the young second generation BrAsian woman actually, often decides in favour of the arranged marriage to ease out the process of mate selection, in addition to the prospect of security and social acceptance. She is not really averse to her parents’ benevolent interference in her life, as she is often unsure of her own abilities to find a suitable mate who would complement her tastes, background and homing desire.

“Re”-Arranged Marriages.

Though arranged marriage is examined for its negative impact on women’s labour, identity and personal ambition or agency, in some of the texts, the same kinds of marriages are “arranged” by the BrAsian girls to avoid them or resist being coopted into some other dangers. Kulwant’s story in A Wicked Old Woman (1987) offers a unique perspective on arranged marriage. This text is important for its portrayal of an arranged marriage on the part of a young woman who herself insisted on it, rather than her family. As discussed in Chapter Three, her boyfriend Michael comments that she had made him “feel sorry” for her, he had wanted to “rescue” her made Kulwant very angry. She gave up school and insisted on an arranged marriage with a boy from India, at which her parents were “perplexed and angry”, saying “We’re supposed to force you, not you us” (52). Her parents had differential responses to her idea of marriage: her father gave in, but her mother had other dreams for her. But Kulwant repudiates her mother’s dreams of freeing her from the exploitative project of married women’s domestic and other labour, and enters into a loveless marriage with an Indian doctor.

Kulwant has four children with her husband, and she alienates her grown-up children when she, who never loved her husband, throws him out of the house when he seeks love in the arms of a young Muslim woman, Kurshid. The text briefly engages with her marriage, in a matter of a few pages, but moves on to her struggle for identity throughout her life. She wants to be either British or Asian, fully, never
both, never a hybrid, and realizes late in her life that that is not entirely possible. Lyn Innes (1995) writes about her adoption of the arranged mode of marriage as only a strategy to cope with the pressures of living in a racialised and gendered social structure:

> And only in later life does she begin to understand the paradox that her attempt to become Indian and reject assimilation into Englishness, took as the signifier of Indianness that special feature emphasised by Europeans as the mark of difference and unacceptability, the arranged marriage. (31)

Rahila Gupta’s heroine, Zara, in “Leaving home” (FS 1988) is also prone to disguise and subterfuge: she lives, as seen in Chapter Three section 3.4, two different lives at home and outside (32-33). As it was quite common in the 1980s, Zara decides to pay for a marriage of convenience, in which a young Asian man would get a passport if he could have a BrAsian wife. Thus Zara goes on to “marry” a man on “approval” from her parents, “from a cosy and quite acceptable niche of that hierarchy” (33). Her strategy backfires when Ahmad, the “groom” decides to assert his conjugal rights, which was not a part of the arrangement. Quite inebriated after the wedding party, Zara warded him off but continued having nightmares about “walls parting with riderless horses” (40): symptoms of her insecurity and erotic fears. Attacked again, she took refuge at the local Asian Centre Asha (41), where the social worker as if “hooked by the decadence of this generation of Asian girls” (41-42), advised her to go back to her parents or the marriage. The rationale she gave bears quotation. She said: “I think you have made a serious mistake...You have misunderstood the depth of parents’ love in our culture. They were only trying to do their best for you by giving you a comfortable secure home and planning a good marriage for you. By going your way, you have landed yourself in hot water” (42).

With helpful advice from her firend Suri, Zara hopes to recover money from the agent Pradeep and is reunited with her loving family. Gupta’s personal experience as activist for the Southall Black Sisters makes the story vivid and poignant: the way BrAsian girls are influenced by “these gorais (whites) they go to school with” (ibid) is taken cognizance of by the activist. The rashness of young girls in leaving home as if that was the most attractive option, their collusion with dangerous illegal agents like Pradeep in the story are suggestions of the limited thinking of BrAsian adolescents about the institution of genuinely well-intentioned arranged marriage, its safety and security. Forced marriages are not portrayed in the texts, though there may be stray
references to girls fearing them, as in Zara’s or Sumitra’s case, and taking resort to rash means to avert such possibilities.

Preethi Nair’s *Beyond Indigo* (2004) is a recently published text which presents yet another mockery of the arranged marriage system: the heroine Nina Savani, agrees to it to keep her parents quiet, and dissolves her engagement when it is convenient. The writer, whose earlier novels (*GM, OHSW*) were both committed studies of the cultural upheaval of two generations of migrants in Britain, with compassionate and involved portrayals of BrAsians, answers to the demands of the mainstream popular press in this novel. She does this by commodifying her beautiful, smart and sexually active heroine, by ridiculing her parents as typical BrAsian stereotypes, by linking their later acceptance of her because of her material success. Nisha Minhas’ series of BrAsian marriage novels also reflect similar attitudes of mockery and belittling of the institution of marriage (see Chapter One section 1.4 for references).

There are some cases of forced marriages which are highly publicised in Britain, but very little attention has been given to the positive aspect of arranged marriage as a system (*Stopes-Roe and Cochrane 1990; Ballard 2001; Ahmad 2006*), which can admit the occasional corruption of its form, and yet withstand the test of time. Committed authors like Randhawa and Gupta therefore explore the possibility of such aberrations or misuse of the institution as Kulwant or Zara perpetrate in the texts, whereas other writers like Nisha Minhas or Preethi Nair merely mock the age-old institution, without being able to explore viable alternatives successfully in their writing.

**The Bride From “Home”: Culture Shock/ Easy Targets?**

Many of the texts find protagonists suffering within the system of arranged marriages with partners from the subcontinent: the authors seem to be questioning the validity of such arrangements in the changed scenario in the migrant community, in which suitable partners may be found from the BrAsian community rather than rejuvenating transnational ties. But, as Roger Ballard (2001) shows, marriages were often negotiated transnationally. These marriages, among Mirpuris, Sylhetis, Jullunduris or other communities often turned into emotionally, physically and psychologically torturous situations for the spouses, mostly the rural, traditional, often uneducated, non-English-speaking women. These women, arriving in Britain the 1950s and 60s, had experienced the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 in their
childhood, or had family members speaking about the event as it rendered them homeless (Meena’s nanima, AM), landless (Nargis and Bulquis, RB), and invariably left them mourning the loss of some family member (Aunt Shaila, AM). Thus, the memory of a recently partitioned subcontinent firmly entrenched the idea of a secure home in the minds of these border communities from Punjab, Kashmir and Bangladesh. Class aspirations, desire for economic independence, sometimes abandonment and also the need to support the natal family back in the subcontinent often caused further emotional upheaval. The combined anguishes of modernity write the lives of these migrant women into the books of exploitative middlemen and sweatshop owners as happens to Sabah (RB), Qaiser’s mother in “Cassandra and the Viaduct”, Nalini (OHSW), Vino (HSDY) and others. Three examples show the pain of cultural rerooting, the pain of psychological disturbance, physical decay and emotional pain of some of these women, and wherever mentioned, the impact of these on their children, and their husbands’ reactions.

Other than portraying the cultural adjustments, adoption and rejection of roles by Kulwant, AWOW (1988), as mentioned earlier, offers valuable insights into the early years of immigration in other cases as well. Kurshid, Kuli’s husband’s mistress, is a young woman from a broken home, one in which the father Mr.Khan lived with an English girlfriend. In such cases, the BrAsian community sent for the family of the erring man, and as Ballard notes, “At that point the restrictions of purdah were frequently ignored: wives set out in person to sort the matter out” (Ballard 24). When the Khan family arrived unwanted from India, they were treated as rejects by their father. The author describes an important aspect of immigrant life, the first shock of arrival, in this case of Kurshid’s family in Britain, poignantly through their father’s embarrassed eyes:

he had been shocked at their peasant appearance, recoiling from this segment of India deposited in his home. They couldn’t speak English, they didn’t know how to cook on gas, they didn’t know how to behave the English way, they didn’t know how to shop, they talked too loudly, they wore their bright embroidered Indian clothes and got looks in the street, and they cried for their home. (AWOW 64)

This kind of description highlights the sense of rejection so keenly felt by both the parties, the traumatized women and children, uprooted out of compulsion; and the frustration felt by their feckless husbands in trying to cope with the stress of their hidden personal life being exposed to the public eye in the alien land. Only
imaginative fictional accounts record such moments of migrant experience, sociological records often smother these experiences by theorizing stereotypes rather than validating private experience. The adverse effect of this rejection, and their father’s affair with a white woman Diana on the two sisters of Kurshid, her mother and on herself has been discussed in Chapter Three 3.4. Thus, the focus of a text like *AWOW* shifts to issues related to the emotive, social, psychological and cultural impacts of migration: it is still not a novel of love and romance despite the sizeable portrayal of marital relationships.

A similar rendition of private moments related to the shock of arrival is described in some other texts, notably, “The Nightmare” by Rukshana Ahmad in *Right of Way* (1988), which describes the reaction of Salim, the immigrant who brought his family ten years after he migrated, as was the custom among Pakistani Muslims (Ballard 2001). The text also deals with the problem of mental health of his wife, the newly immigrated woman Fariha, described at the moment of arrival thus, “and now look at her, what an old-bag she’s become... she looked ... “fat”... And so much older than she ought. And the children, too. They looked so dark and, for some reason, poverty-stricken ... sadly, he realized, in England they’d all be inescapably brown” (*RW* 22).

Despite Salim’s “Operation salvage”, to convert her from the country bumpkin to a smart wife with new clothes, a hair-cut, weight loss and therapy Fariha suffered from “loneliness, the frustrations and the daily humiliations of her ignorance” (23). Put away at a mental asylum at Shendley, Fariha was given intensive drug therapy, which made her forget everything about herself, her present and her past. She kept thinking of her happier past, and dreamt of a dove being attacked by a vulture, unable to fly. Furnham and Bochner (1986: 76-88) show how a number of studies are done in the 1960s and 70s on the large number of immigrants registered as mentally disturbed within a few years of migration, across age, gender, class and country of origin. Fariha must be one such patient who was driven to mental illness, but could have been rehabilitated with better attention from her husband rather than being put away in an institution. When Salim got a job in America she was declared so unstable that her visa was being rejected, she was as good as abandoned, cut off from her children, completely obliterated from her husband’s life. When she hears this, Fariha does not cry: she “just looked away absently at the pills and went to fetch herself a glass of water” (25). In Fariha’s mind, the poor little dove attacked by the vulture finally died.
The writer symbolically liberates Fariha by giving her a strange cognitive agency, through the symbolic account of the nightmare of the dove and the vulture, which makes her aware of the way she had been duped by her husband her. Fariha finally tells her husband, who jokes about her nightmare, that the dove cannot fly as it is dead, not because she cannot fly. When she says this aloud to her husband, Fariha becomes a victor, no longer a mentally unstable victim of racial, institutionalized, and marital indifference.

Even today, in the 21st century, there are records of a staggering amount of Asian women who are mentally unstable, or are declared so by their husbands and the psychiatric units dealing with them. Most of them may be agonizing over the loss of community support, but many are targets of domestic violence, abuse, dowry problems and other types of victimization. A paper published by the Commission for Racial Equality (1996) records the plight of many such women, and Amrit Wilson (2006) names institutions or supportive centers like “Roshni”, “Zindagi” and “Ghar se Ghar”, where they can get help to a certain extent, in terms of physical, financial and legal resources. It is true that accounts like Wilson’s confirm negative stereotypes and theories of culture clash and patriarchy, as Ahmad (2006) claims, but there is stark truth in such accounts, which must be placed alongside those in which women seek agency, and are not to be read as only happening in BrAsian families, but also the majority community, other Asians and black communities.

Some of the relationships between couples in an arranged marriage in more contemporaneous texts are threatened by external forces: betrayal, other lovers, fear of upsetting the community members, and inequality of aspirations. Both Durga and Heera (CCC) are unhappy in their marriage: Heera’s husband had already made her promise not to want to have children after marriage, and later comes out of the closet to start living with a man. Durga’s plight has already been described, her marriage may break, as she might wish to separate, living with Roman. Brick Lane (2004) describes the life of Nazneen, a young Bangladeshi girl following her husband to the Tower Hamlets in London in 1985. She considers herself fortunate to have been wedded to Chanu, a pompous, educated, no-good clerk at the council, but her loneliness, nostalgia and boredom are a heavy weight on her mind. When she comes to England in 1985, she feels very sad: though “she had everything here”, in her mind’s eye, she would often “walk across the jade-green rice-fields, and swim in the cool green lake” (21). Chanu leaves her and the children in London, and goes back to
Bangladesh in search of happiness, and Nazneen's affair with the politically active Karim is also terminated abruptly when he goes underground. Though Nazneen finds herself locked into labour and responsibility of her daughters, she is happy to maintain only epistolary contact with Bangladesh, never thinking of going back or giving up her so-called "freedom", however illusory that may be.

Thus the difficulty of socialisation within the transnational marriage system in this day and age is delineated carefully and sympathetically, by the authors. They are able to record individual trauma, which becomes emblematic of the general rot that creeps into any social system that needs to adapt to change in different geopolitical situations, in different time-frames. The tearing apart of women's loyalties between the filiative and the affiliative torments them, and it is only the exceptional who can seek subjecthood in these gendered geographies and power geometries. The polish of the mirrored prism fades, its opacity threatens to assume the aspect of a pyramid, burying, smothering the aspirations of the migrant woman in search of a home.

**The “Perfect Match”: Response Of Two Generations.**

Incompatibility of mental, emotional and intellectual levels, or personal aspiration, is often another cause for unhappiness in transnationally arranged marriages, in which partners do not often get to even meet each other, leave alone know each other. In “The bamboo blind” by Seema Jena, (FS 1994), deeply rooted patriarchal and class values affect the life of a recently migrated wife of a BrAsian man in strange but cruel ways. The author narrates the way in which traditional methods of women's oppression give way to modern ones, in which even the younger males might collude. Razia had been brought up in an orthodox Muslim family in Lucknow, the seat of aristocratic Muslims, where all women lived behind the *chilman* or bamboo blind, in the inner courtyard of their ancestral home (FS 156). Razia “had loathed the arrangement,” complained and resented the segregation, as she was ambitious and aspired to a better life. A college student, she had to suddenly give up her studies to get married to Razak, a young, handsome man who lived in “vilayet”. She had thought “living in England would be a dream come true” (157). Though her marriage was “a grand affair”, (ibid) with a honeymoon in Simla, she came to an orthodox joint family in Manchester, much like her natal home. As Charlsey and Shaw (2006) analyses,

...the geographical imaginings within which transnational marriages take place are often highly gendered, with some men seeking brides...
from South Asia in the expectation that they will have ‘traditional’ views on marital relationships, while the same women may expect a husband from the West to be more ‘modern’ (Constable 2005 cited in Charlsey 337).

Razia’s dream of emancipation in “vilayer” turns to naught as she is kept in segregation, and denied even the pleasure of gazing out of her window. She cried to her husband and complained about his “being partial to his family, her loneliness in a strange country, his lack of concern for her” (160). The next evening, Razak brought a venetian blind for her window, where she could now stand, without being seen from the outside by strangers. Razia saw how her life had come full circle again, this time circumscribed in her own room with what she still called the chilman, by her husband whom she looked up to as an agent of liberation. Instead of rebelling, “She looked at his kind and earnest face and smiled. She did not wish to seem ungrateful” (161). The story catches the poignancy of the educated woman’s claustrophobia in the arranged marriage in an alien land, where orthodox patriarchal practices seem even more fossilized in the general atmosphere of social freedom. It is to be inferred that even in the land of opportunity, as her constant television viewing (160) might have shown her, Razia is caught in the “power geometry” of the joint family, in which even her young husband is an actor/accomplice. The new chilman makes her alienation from the world outside complete, and to seek agency out of such a gendered geography would need more than ordinary strength.

*Gypsy Masala* (2000), and *The Cambridge Curry Club* (2004) also have references to differing attitudes and aspirations of such spouses who, until married, are strangers to each other. *Gypsy Masala* (2000) deals with unhappy marriages between many couples portrayed in the novel, but here the BrAsian couple Bali and his wife Sheila are in focus. Devastated by his first wife’s death, Bali married Sheila, a Goan Christian from India, while still a student. When she learnt that he had concealed the fact of his earlier marriage from her, Sheila was shocked. Sheila describes her monotonous, lonely routine, (107-108), and gradually reveals her lack of familiarity with her husband’s life (108). Sheila’s homing desire was partly fulfilled when they moved into a better house and she became pregnant, but lapsed when she lost the child. Bali remained distant, uncommunicative, non-participative, almost a stranger to Sheila and their adopted daughter Evita.

It is only when Sheila follows their young daughter to America for an enforced break in Nevada, that she finds her true self. Though the sudden turn of
events seem very improbable, with America as the ideal site for personal fulfillment, they reveal the desire in the writer to invest women with agency. Even dependent women, with hardly any material resources can have vast reserves of energy and confidence to follow their minds. Sheila draws inspiration from her daughter who did not let life overtake her, and thus she comes back to Bali’s life with confidence and self-worth. She goes to university, studies and is invited to give lectures there. The marriage, though initially painful, eases out into a quiet companionship. The text thus offers valuable insights on loneliness and alienation among older migrant women, and how influence from the younger generation help to cope with these feelings.

Saumya Balsari’s *Cambridge Curry Club* (2004) describes Swarna and Durga, her younger colleague discussing arranged marriage. Swarna was eager to marry her daughter Mallika to a nice Bengali boy if she could, but Durga argued vehemently against arranged marriage. Swarna was sure that “you always give your love to the man you marry” (*CCC* 45), and talks about acceptance, adjustment, of knowing that for a married woman there are “things she wants but cannot have” (ibid), and that Asian girls in Britain are too influenced by the pressures of wanting to do things which are taboo. She advises Durga to ask her parents to find her “an intelligent boy, good personality, same values, same social background” (ibid). Ironically, Durga was married to one such boy, then quiet, reserved Dr. Atul Patwardhan from Cambridge, from an orthodox Maharashtrian Brahmin family, who was terribly attached to his mother, and was called back to attend to her in Pune. Durga never found herself happy with him though she enjoyed her life at Cambridge, studying, aiming higher, working part-time, and then hoping to embark on a full-fledged career. Later, Durga falls in love with the imaginative, sensitive American Roman Tempest, an American scholar whom she was to probably travel all over the world with (241). America appears once more in a BrAsian novel, to disrupt the protagonist’s life, as in Angie’s life in *Transmission*, and take her away to an uncertain future, but a future full of possibilities. What is important to Durga is a spin around the world with her caring lover Roman, rather than spending mosquito ridden loveless nights with Atul in Pune, that is, companionship instead of the comforts of a settled life.

The last three texts throw open the debate between first and second generation BrAsians in the diaspora about their differential approaches to culture, specially marriage: even a “perfect match” may not result in a mutually satisfying relationship,
there are needs of companionship, of caring and commitment which may not accompany social position or wealth. Moreover, these partners are not shown to have meaningful interactions with the community, either host or migrant, which also hinders their positive socialisation. Later discussions of “happy” marriages show how proactive community interaction affects the success of a marriage, and vice versa.

The text, *Sumitra’s Story* (1985) also offers very important discussions on the system of arranged marriage. Some incidents in the text determine the approaches to arranged marriage by the author, who examines the changing responses to it among different members of two generations of the Ugandan-Asians in the late 1970s and early ’80s Britain. Her cousin Leela confides in Sumitra, declaring that her “life has been spoiled” (115) by her early marriage, she could have had better options, like a more helpful husband, more “Western than Jayant” (ibid). She warns Sumitra, to avoid becoming “the slave of a man and his family” (ibid) thus suggesting the dangers of an oppressively patriarchal system. Sumitra, who planned to be an air-hostess, realized from her English friend Maria that gender roles are not as fascinatingly different in other communities, nor do love marriages always work out well (80).

When she finds out through media reports that a BrAsian girl, Varsha Nahri, had left home to avoid coercion and physical torture for a forced marriage, Sumitra finally decides to leave home. From this twenty-one year old girl’s example, eighteen-year-old Sumitra is led to believe that life within a BrAsian family is a living death, and that instances of suicide and escape from home, are the typical fate of BrAsian girls who seek independence.

Thus, in this early text of the 80s, the only one to examine the impact of migration of Ugandan Asians in detail, Sumitra is shown to succumb to the stereotype of the rebellious early second-generation. Instigated by mainstream and media projections of negative images of the system of familial security and protectionism, she opts out of it despite risks. The main focus in the text is not love and marriage, but the desire to break free of stereotypes of dependence in the BrAsian community of the late 1970s and early 80s. The self-help rendered by the community to the Patels is seriously undermined by the author, whose focus is on the restrictive practices of BrAsian society, not on their concerted effort to make life easier for the Patels to live in the mainstream society which did not quite welcome them.

The portrayal of arranged marriages are found to have been intimately linked, in the texts, with the family’s material well-being. Class boundaries were always
sought to be transcended through well-arranged marriages, which were embedded in the project of modernity in late capitalism, and would ignore mental or emotional compatibility as unimportant. This happens in Sabah’s case in The Red Box or Chila’s, in Life isn’t.... Marriage, especially arranged marriage, was for the family to achieve a better social status, as the discussions in the texts like Hari-jan or Life isn’t... or The Red Box show, and the couple’s happiness was taken for granted as a result of the upward mobility that the family was undergoing. The emotional and sometimes physical needs of the woman like Nazneen (BL) or Heera or Durga (CCC) were least of the priorities of those who undertook the task of arranging marriages, or their spouses, as these texts show. Emotional torture by the husband or his family, and the husband’s indifference to wives are also discussed with care in some texts like “The Bamboo Blind”, “The Nightmare”, A Wicked Old Woman, Life isn’t.... The final picture which emerges is that the older women of the first-generation, and the younger second-generation BrAsian, when caught in an arranged marriage situation, may be quite similarly disadvantaged: they are regarded as bonded bodies for labour and propagation, who should be thankful for the “comforts” of the technologically advanced first world, and therefore contribute to the material well-being of the husband’s family without allowing emotions to come in the way of such progress.

But portraying the exceptional woman is the BrAsian author’s distinctive task, thus there are portrayals of women like Sumitra, Kuli, Chila, Durga and Nazneen, who struggle against ideas of meaningless conjugality, as opposed to the others who succumb to various pressures of society in their married lives. On the other hand, there are young second generation women who astutely seek the institution of arranged marriage as the most dependable of options before them, which would accommodate all aspects of their homing desires. Hari-jan and Bindi are sure of its success, while Kulwant, Chila, Evita, Durga, or Naina are willing to venture into the journey with an unknown man towards the home they seek to make in the uneven world of British-Asianness. Their failure only attests to the need for change, not for the abolition of this unique feature of BrAsian society. The BrAsian authors, except Nisha Minhas and Preethi Nair, do not use their fiction as a vehicle to demolish the institution or chastise practitioners of the system: they accept its viability, but they argue for greater adaptability and flexibility in the system, for severing transnational links, for resisting hybrid corruptions creeping into the system, and for allowing it to emerge as a viable mode of peopling the diaspora cultural spaces.
5.4 “Love Marriage” Or Hard Work?

There are quite a few “love marriages” portrayed in these texts, which must be studied in detail, as they often provide encouragement to the young BrAsian girl about marriage as an institution which has a direct impact on the partners’ happiness. As opposed to parents’ choosing their spouses, partners in a love marriage, though they maintain distance, usually give the appearance of seeking parental approval after they have fallen in love, as the texts show. Most of these happy marriages are found among the older generation of the immigrants, who had fallen in love and married in India, before immigrating, as portrayed by the British-raised authors in this group. In the portrayal of successful love relationships or marriage among BrAsians, there is a noticeable focus on commitment, sharing, being united in the project of modernism and upward growth, as well as being committed to children.

Most noteworthy among the couples still deeply in love after years of marriage are Meena’s (AM) parents, Daljeet and Mr.Kumar, who had a typical romance in the olden style, with “Long negotiations” after “love at first sight”. All the adults Meena overheard always drooled over theirs as “Such a love story!” (32). Meena formed an image of her parents “as epic, glamorous figures, touched by romantic tragedy” (ibid). But of course Daljeet wanted to keep this aspect of her life secret from her daughter, who might want to get married to a white British boy for love. Their love still continued unabated, as Meena sometimes precociously observes: “Mummy and Papa were talking again, soft whispers, sss sss sss, my mother’s bracelets jingled as she seemed to wipe something from her face” (27). Meena’s parents had migrated for a purpose, and Daljeet was as ambitious as her husband, as her long “capital letter speeches” reveal to Meena, and that this led to their unity against adversity. Despite their materialistic ambition, they did not compromise their values and community obligations, which ultimately helped them achieve their aims, and keep them devoted to each other. Thus Meena’s ideas on love and marriage are positively reinforced by her parents’ marital relationship.

The same is applicable to two other couples, Tara and her husband in Transmission (1992), and Ravi and Kavita Chowdhary in Looking for Maya (1999). Tara and her husband, Angie’s parents (T), had met through friends and they fell in love before others decided to arrange their marriage. Their great companionability and
mutual affection is one of the greatest assets of their lives, and the narrative focuses on their equal participation in conversations, family events, debates and discussions, thus highlighting their parity and mutual respect which positively influences their children.

In *Looking for Maya* (1999), Mira’s parents, who seem to be clinging to each other and their values, their only wealth, stand out in these texts as an outstandingly committed married couple. Their echoing each others’ thoughts and ideas made their daughter call them “RaviKavi” as if they were one and the same person, indistinguishable, whole, united. Her father knew her mother’s poetry by heart, and Mira envied their fount of shared experience, emotion and knowledge. Mira realised that they did not ever have to demonstrate their love, unlike herself and her boyfriend Luke. She muses: “I had imagined that perhaps we were like RaviKavi, or that one day we would be like them, standing in love, not having to snog in public over it, knowing and loving each other because of our shared knowledge. But we did not have a shared knowledge” (17). Mira does make fun of them, but cannot help remembering them when her personal life is in turmoil. Mira’s poor bank allowance from her parents was more than balanced by their support and strength.

Ravi and Nalini (*OHSW*) seem to be the ideal couple of the younger age group in these texts, whose commitment, especially Ravi’s to family and friends is remarkable. Ravi’s respect for Nalini’s dignity and pride make him discreet in his support of her entrepreneurship. It is he who provides the care and security that is constantly needed in the seasonal, erratic food business that Nalini ventures into. Moreover, his care and concern for Maya and Satchin seem exemplary, especially in the light of the earlier abandonment by their natural father, Raul. Even though Raul returns, Ravi continues to support Nalini through the crisis of blackmail and personal turmoil. Ravi’s respect for Maggie and her contribution to the children’s and Nalini’s well-being is also foregrounded in the text. Thus, Ravi extends emotional, material and moral support to Nalini as the ideal spouse, and his example is one that even Maya recognises as vital in her late, but mature understanding of his outstanding personal attributes. Ravi and Nalini’s successful married life reflect the ideal blossoming of homing desires among BrAsians: they have successful children, respectable status, reasonable material success, social respectability and a good standing and acceptability in the white British and BrAsian community.

Thus “love marriage” in the older generation is shown with great attention to
the mutual respect of the couples, their dependence on each other’s counsel, their support of their mutual ambition or a common goal of material or social success, and their active relationship with the community. Daljeet and Mr.Kumar, Tara and her husband stand for old world values which keep their wayward children focused, RaviKavi represent emotional strength and abiding loyalty in a ruthlessly competitive modern world.

The younger BrAsian generations’ love and marriage occupies brief narrative focus, in some texts (LI, OHSW). Sunita’s marriage (LI), Maya’s relationship with Suri (OHSW), are some examples of committed BrAsian love relationships in the texts. Akash and Sunita (LI) are fellow students at University, who decide to marry, make a home, and their fulfilled life suffers a setback when their careers seem to be at a low ebb, and their sexual demands of each other wane, though the expectation of fulfilment continues to torment them. This foregrounding of their physical needs is carefully correlated to their failing self-image, of which Sunita’s habit of self-harm is a manifestation. A brief romantic interlude with Krishan gives Sunita some comfort, and she learns to value her life as a woman, a mother, a wife, which add up to, not take away from her feminine appeal according to Krishan. But she realises that “fairy tales always ended with a wedding. Whoever began a love story with ‘They had just got married...’” (310). Sunita decides to play it by the book: “honesty, tell him how the lack of communication in their marriage had led her to seek comfort elsewhere, albeit emotionally, and that Krishan ... was merely a symptom of a much deeper problem that had to be aired in a civilized and frank manner ...” (ibid). They fight for Chila’s child together, and their reunion soon follows, thus reiterating the active role of the community life in personal happiness, something Tania for example, forfeits until almost the end, before she changes her interests and relocates herself in the community.

Maya and Suri (OHSW) are childhood friends, sweethearts led apart by Maya’s suspicion that Suri had been responsible for Suri’s accidental death. Their love was heightened by the mutual knowledge of their hidden histories: Maya’s father had abandoned them, not died, and Suri’s parents were not rich doctors but ran a store, and were really middle-class. Suri returned to Maya’s life when she refused Marcos’ offer of marriage, and when she needed him most, when she was re-turning to the community looking for a final home. Their mutual affection transformed into homing desire in adulthood, and they sought fulfilment of their selves through each
other and through the community and family life they shared.

**Abandonment: Britain, A Dump(b)ing Ground.**

Many other portraitures of marriages are not so ‘happy’ or committed, in fact the unhappy Asian couples, both in arranged and love marriages, and couples whose lives together end in deception and abandonment are many more than the happily married ones. In the first few decades of the sixties and even in the seventies, when immigration with the families was still new, there were many problems the young migrating couples faced. Added to culture shock, for most of these couples there might be a sudden transition from the educated upper or middle class status they had in India, to a working class in Britain (Ballard 2001; Brah 2006). The unhappiness in their married lives thus had a close link with their changed financial status. Sometimes the involvement of their husbands with British women or other BrAsian women brings grief to the family, the wife in particular. Often the family is abandoned, when either the husband or the wife leaves. The texts portray a number of such troubled relationships, and this part of the chapter examines the causes and effects of these transgressions, combined with the alienation of the migrant, on the lives of the migrant women of the first or second generation.

In *Flaming Spirit* (1994), there are at least four stories, which deal with unfulfilled relationships or love marriages. One of them, Smita Bhide’s “The Beggar King” presents the story of an unnamed narrator, a young second generation BrAsian woman, living in an empty married life which she abandons suddenly. She apparently is not quite rooted in the BrAsian community, as there is no mention of it in the text. Restless and awakened by her frightened children one stormy night, the narrator started thinking about her life, her present, some time in the past and a still earlier time. Her two sons’ and her husband’s need and love for her do not seem to hold her together; she leaves for an unknown future, alone and free, walking tall like the King of beggars she had once seen on the street with her friend Bruce. The text thus points out new trends in BrAsian fiction, which recognizes the need for representing BrAsian women, married and secure, to feel such passions and desires. The narrator leaves home, to chart the unknown path without male support, stifling her commitment to motherhood, to the family and community, and without guarantee of any future. The ending of the story bears quotation, and is eloquently self-explanatory:

I couldn’t believe I was doing this, not even as I shut the front door
behind me and felt the first drops of rain speckle my face, bringing me and felt the first drops of rain speckle my face, bringing a sense of utter relief from the heat. I smiled and at the same time, wept. I hadn’t lost my chance after all. It hadn’t passed me by. It had waited for me, all these years, until I’d finally managed to catch up with it. (FS 129)

One hundred shades of white (2003), by Preethi Nair, portrays the woes of recently migrated women, specially women who have been abandoned by their husbands. Nalini and Raul had eloped from their Kerala village to Bombay, succumbing to a highly spontaneous physical attraction, as both had nothing in common. A year after he went to stay in London, Raul called his family there and abandoned them for a lustful bigamous marriage and a completely new life in America. It is America again, which has a dubious connection with BrAsians, which ensnares him away from commitment to his family. The text describes Nalini’s moment of discovery and her way of coping with the situation as follows:

I screamed and screamed until there was no breath left in me. “Ma ... where are you? Help me.” I lay on the ground like some animal, pulling at my hair, choking on the tears. I looked up and saw his pictures on his table. I crawled onto my knees and threw them to the floor, smashing them with my fists and cutting my hand on the pieces. Why? Why did he bring us to this place only to leave us? Why? Didn’t he know what it would do? If he were planning to leave, why didn’t he prepare us? (85)

Nalini’s reaction may appear crude and a vulgar demonstration of her weakness, but such a reaction is plausible in a South Asian girl from the rural interiors. She asks herself if she had missed signs, wonders whether he left them money or air tickets, and frantically searches the house, in vain, and to cope with the stress, goes about cooking, hands bleeding, tears streaming down her face. She rages against her husband, but unlike most South Asian women, does not blame herself or her fate. She hated his cruelty, for being a husband and a father of this sort. “Security, stability, certainty, kindness; he pretended to have all these things, to give all those things but he took them away so ruthlessly” (8). Nalini decides, like Vino (HSDY), to tell the children that Raul died in an accident while trying to save a child, for she had resolved not to let him “disrupt our lives” (ibid).

With help, Nalini finally becomes a small entrepreneur, living off her culinary skills, and her new husband Ravi, and Tom, her friend, and his sister Maggie, help her to reinstate her family with dignity. The author views unhappy marriage as a challenge and a motivation for success rather than doom, and the suffering wife as
ultimately a role model, a financial and social success, because she stays committed to her role in the community as some sort of a spiritual mediator, by curing people’s grieves with spices, an art she had learnt from her mother, a village cook in Kerala. Havent Stopped Dancing Yet, Brick Lane and Cambridge Curry Club also have detailed pictures of unhappy marriages and abandonment, and have been discussed before.

"Out Of Their Minds": Violence, Suicide And Self-Harm.

Promothes and Esha in Moonlight into Marzipan (1995), have their love story told sporadically by the author, but though they were poor and yet very happy in India, their life in England ended tragically. Promothes and Esha had unequal sociocultural backgrounds: he a poor young student, she a barrister’s daughter whose brother was at Cambridge (49). Ambitious for her husband’s fame, as he was trying to research how to turn gold to grass, Esha takes him to London to achieve it. Esha’s suicide at the Paddington Underground is perhaps the result of the unfulfilment of her dreams of huge material success for her husband, and his love affair with Alexandra Vorobyova, the recorder of his story in English, who vanishes following an American lover. Thus the linkages with material wealth, or its desire, seem not to augur well in Esha’s and Promothes’s lives: their search of material well-being is spurned by fickle fortune and faithlessness.

Sunita’s love marriage, (LI) “assisted” her parents called it, with Akash, was very happy till she was in her mid-thirties, as discussed in the earlier section, had an abortion without his knowledge and allowed the distance between them to grow. Her traumas of ageing, lack of time for fulfillment of sexual desire make Sunita a woman in deep agony. She would infect wounds on her upper arm with her razor, regularly, but all this changes with kind support from her friends, her admirer Krishan, and love and understanding from Akash, who actually loves her deeply. In conceiving of the lonely character of Sunita, Syal surpasses similar depictions in so many other novels and short stories in this study. All of them in different ways, repeat the same truth about isolation, inadequacy and self-hate experienced by the protagonists, like Kuli, Meera, (FL) Moni, the unnamed protagonist of “The Beggar King”, by Smita Bhide and Zerina in Ameena Meer’s “Rain” (FS), Niharika and nearly all the older women in The Cambridge Curry Club. Self-harm, writes Amrit Wilson, “has also been explained as “‘a symbolic way of expressing deep distress’, the body being used to externalise and articulate feelings in a non-verbal manner so that they can be dealt
with in a more visible way (Harrison 1996, cited in Wilson 119)."

Incidentally, at the background of the story of the three friends is the report of the multiple suicide of the husband and children of British Punjabi woman, Jasbinder Singh, and several other such reports. At the fund-raiser for Jasbinder’s case, Chila, and many other Asian women in the audience, learn of atrocities faced by Asian women in Britain. Suki, an activist, told the assembly about how the court held Jasbinder’s husband not guilty, but she also asserted that:

“This court ruling must be overturned, for all the other women out there, like me. For Leila Khan, who was stabbed to death when collecting her children from a custody visit. For Priya Kumar, whose ex-husband kidnapped her son and has been missing for five years. For Jyoti Patel, who let her ex-husband take her children on holiday and when he returned...” (218).

As the detailed accounts suggest, the author prefers to add these gruesome stories to lend a horrifying hidden dimension to the lives of the three protagonists, a life that many others like them lead unknown to them. The picture of BrAsian lives offered in the novel would be incomplete without these accounts of violence and obsessive proprietary rights that Asian fathers, like Deepak, sometimes display. A short poem “Blood-lust to Dust” in *Right Of Way* (1988) is dedicated to the memory of Balwant Kaur, who was, as the note on the poem says, “an Asian woman who was brutally stabbed to death by her husband in front of her children at the refuge to which she had escaped. The Balwant Kaur campaign held a fund-raising memorial at which this poem was read out” (*RW* 133).

Amrit Wilson’s (2006) accounts for many Asian women’s torture at their husband’s hands which goes unpunished by British law. It is astounding to think that a liberated, developed society like that in Britain, allows some of its citizens to be brutalized in the name of privacy, incompatibility, mistake or “cultural problem”. Such violence often lurks under the untold stories of Asian women’s lives even in the 21st century, and literary representation should not smother them out of sight of readers, but point out instances of courage, solidarity and community self-help to counter these stray occurrences, as the Kiranjit Ahluwalia case does, for example. Some of the short stories in *Right of Way* (1988) also bring to fore the incompatibility of men and women in marriage and its outcome: abandonment, alienation or insanity. “The Nightmare” (*RW* 19-25), shows how abandonment goes hand in hand with insanity, and both are actually the result of loneliness and insecurity in many BrAsian wives of the first-generation migrants. “War of the Worlds” (155-162) describes the
plight of many Punjabi women, voiced by two young girls, but otherwise hidden from the public eye, for which they want action to be taken by the community leaders at their Gurudwara. As discussed in Chapter Three, the girls refer to torture, adultery, incest, wife-beating, abandonment, dowry problems as some of the evils they want to be redressed, (159-160), and the solutions they seek. The sexual crimes BrAsian men often commit against BrAsian women were openly discussed by them, like running prostitution rackets and committing incest with their daughters, thus laying open before the shocked, seemingly pious congregation a sordid picture of the underbelly of BrAsian domestic life.

Thus unhappy marriages are more commonly projected as inevitable part of immigrant life. Whether it is arranged or love marriage, or sexual relationships between consenting adults, if there are conflicting material ambitions between partners, or the lack of involvement in community activity, personal happiness suffers.

Sailing In The Same Sea: Marriage Patterns In The Mainstream.

Some of the texts portray, usually as a means of comparison or contrast with the BrAsian marriages, pictures of both happy and unhappy marriages in the majority community. Many times these marriages are used in a contrapuntal way: if the white British couple is happy, the relationship throws the unhappy BrAsian couples in a sad light, and vice versa. The examples of happy couples in the white British mainstream often encourages the youngsters in the BrAsian community to emulate them, to make for mutual respect and equality exhibited by them. This is all the more important to them because elders in their community who experience contentment in marriage do not express it overtly. At other times, the inherent sameness of all marriages are subtly underlined in such portraitures. Some authors like Rukshana Smith, Ravinder Randhawa, Meera Syal, and Shama Perera have foregrounded many such families of British origin which are brought together or are torn apart by the uneven relationship of the partners in marriage.

One of the authors to highlight a happy British couple in counterpoint to several strained Asian marriages is Rukshana Smith in Sumitra's Story (1985). Maria and Mark are one such couple who fall in love and marry during the course of the novel, and they show Sumitra what a happy marriage can be as opposed to a life of clichéd routine. Caring for each other, helping others, tolerating each others' poor attempts at housekeeping or cooking, Mark and Maria are an example of what
Sumitra wants from her marriage in future. The Pattersons, Hilary’s parents, and the Bakers, Lynne’s parents are also older couples inviting admiration from Sumitra. About the Pattersons, Hilary’s parents, she writes, “The house was old, but the atmosphere was one of warmth and trust. Hilary and Greg were treated as equals, working in the same direction as their parents, not as servants or inferior beings” (78) About the Baker’s house she says little except highlighting their opulence, but it is Mrs. Baker, Lynne’s mother, a community worker, who comes to her rescue, and convinces her father that Sumitra needed to be given more personal freedom, as she was nearly an adult (121). She seems to be lucky enough to have been influenced positively about marriage in the majority community from these couples who seem to enjoy family life, are caring and supportive of their children without choking their selfhood, and also reasonably well-disposed to the growing multicultural community. They are definitely seen as better alternatives to Sumitra’s more traditional, controlling parents. Influences from such happy couples reinforce the idea of respect and tolerance for the mainstream, which is often perceived as racist, disruptive, vulgar and abusive to their family. However, unhappy marriages in the majority community are also mentioned in the text, and are discussed in the next section.

Anita and Me (1988) shows other examples of happiness in marriage among the many unhappy couples in Tollington. Uncared for by their three sons and their grandchildren, the Worralls live alone: the cheerful Mrs. Worrall is like a grandmother to Meena before her Nanima arrives, and a big help to her mother as well (58). Back from the Second World War, Mr. Worrall is really in a pitiable condition, maimed and helpless. Meena learns a lot about what it is to care for a spouse from her, as much as she does from her parents, who admire her selflessness. Meena sees Mrs. Worrall not as English, but as a symbol of something I’d noticed in some of the Tollington women, a stoic muscular resistance which made them ask for nothing and expect less, the same resignation I heard in the voices of my aunties when they spoke of back home or their children’s bad manners or the wearying monotony of their jobs. (670)

Meena also sees a romance unfold, between Hairy Neddy, a newcomer to the village, and Sandy, a widow with a child. Meena saw how Sandy looked at him “with a strange expression on her face, amusement maybe, tender certainly, almost motherly” (50-51). He “was staring helplessly at Sandy” (ibid) and started avoiding her, and Meena having watched this “most romantic moment” (178) in her short life,
felt very excited, and started forming her own idea of romance and love, of course on a much more adventurous and romantic level, seeing the two of them.

In Haven’t Stopped Dancing Yet (1999) Mala finds something similar in her contact with her white friends’ families. Battered and ruined, Janice’s mother gives birth to children she cannot care for, yet her older children are so loving and caring of their siblings. Allie and Janice both stand by their partners whom they later marry, in contrast to their much-divorced and battered, alcoholic and abusive parents. Mala’s father had abandoned them, so she draws lessons in commitment from the Irish girls.

One Hundred Shades Of White (2003) tells a similar story of love and caring by a couple with sorrowful pasts. Maggie, the farm girl from Ireland, had had a child by a farmhand who left her after that. She raises him as her “brother” Tom, working as a prostitute in London. She meets the elderly Jack many years later at Nalini’s spice shop, and they gradually fall in love, which is like a healing for their injured lives, because Jack was devastated by his wife’s long suffering due to a terminal illness. After she died, Maggie gradually took her place and was very happy to set up her own home finally (131-132). Nursing him through his illness, Maggie had to finally lose him to death. Though she had initially cringed from her when she learnt about her past, Maya later learns to respect Maggie for her courage and unselfish care for Tom and Jack, and learns lessons in commitment from them, as opposed to her father’s abandonment.

Thus, family values are reinforced through these examples of care and commitment among the dominant majority, which is usually dismissed by Asians as comprising uncaring, selfish and disruptive people (Ballard 1994; Brah 2006; Hussain 2005). However, though there are a few powerful portrayals of successful marriages foregrounded from time to time in these novels, the majority group seems to be engaged more in unhappy rather than happy relationships or marriages, just like the Asian couples. Some of these maybe in the background, unobtrusively present but a potent reminder of the same staleness of marriage and betrayal, like Jean’s divorce in Sumitra’s Story, which makes her so bitter and angry with those in the guest-house who are more fortunate as families, like the Patels. Anger brings out bitterness as jealousy from her and the unwed mother Rita, as they find the immigrants being helped by the British Government which seems indifferent to them, citizens by birth, rather than its newest workforce (SS: 43; 59; 64). A Wicked Old Woman shows another facet of the impact of unhappy marriages in the host community on the
migrants’ lives. Kuli’s mother frowns upon Pauline’s friendship with Kuli because Pauline’s mother is a divorcée, and “Nothing else could have damned Pauline more” (15). The influence that this might have on Kuli, tenuous though it may seem, is nothing but harmful, her mother believes. So the question of Kuli visiting Pauline’s house could never have met with an affirmative answer. However, Caroline, Kuli’s closest friend, also divorced her husband later, and Kuli herself threw her husband out. Though there were many instances of wife-battering, abuse, abandonment and adultery within their own community, BrAsians were, specially then, very eager to point fingers at the white British who are, according to Asian standards sinful, evil, or immoral. At present there may be some more tolerance, but divorce was seen as a taboo in the early phase of immigration in the 60s and 70s (Wilson: 1978). Thus Anita Rutter’s (AM) mother’s walking out on her own children, eloping with a man, was seen as something utterly contemptible by the Kumars, though Anita was, apparently, indifferent to her loss. The efforts taken by Meena’s mother to look after Anita were because of, and after, her mother’s elopement, rather than any motive of genuine concern for her daughter’s friend. The contempt Daljeet had for Anita already, was reinforced by her mother’s wrongdoing even more. Janice’s parents’ and Bethany’s mother’s lives also have a similar effect on Mala Fonseka’s mother Vino (HSDY).

Finally, in A Sin of Colour an unhappy marriage of a white British couple forms the base for the plot of the novel to unfold. Daniel Faraday and his wife are unhappy from the start, but when Daniel falls in love with the young BrAsian scholar Niharika, he does not divorce his wife Alison who is successful, earns more, and hardly takes care of their child. Perhaps Daniel waits for the child to grow, and when he inherits his homosexual friend Morgan’s money, he feels he can leave his family to pursue a more meaningful relationship with Niharika.

Thus unhappy marriages in the majority community are looked upon largely as negative influences upon the younger girls of the BrAsian families, and as pointers to why they should not marry into it. Actually, however, the uneven outcome of all marriages in the novels make the protagonists more aware of the possibility or such experiences in their own lives as well, whether they choose their own husbands, or whether they seek assistance from their parents for their marriage. Kuli’s comments on women and marriage present this truth eloquently: “We may be sailing in different boats but the sea is the same” and “Women weren’t women only, they were also their colours and national fears”(48).
5.5 Non-Conventional Relationships: Turning Points/ Re-Turning ‘Home’?

It must be said that male and female friendship is not really one of the major concerns of the novels under study though romantic relationships abound. The reason may be that South Asians are known to maintain male-female segregation (Gidoomal 1997) and look upon women as weaker, and thus less worthy of male attention as equals (Ramu 1989). Except for the novel Sumitra’s Story (1985), written by the East-European immigrant Janna Eliot or Rukshana Smith as she calls herself, there are hardly notable instances of friendship between men and women free of sexual attraction. Some examples of BrAsian women befriending gay men are found in the novels A Sin Of Colour, Looking for Maya and the film Bend it like Beckham discussed in the following sections. Moreover, non-conventional modes of sexual relationships like living together (Tania and Martin in LI), love between an older man and a younger woman (Amrit and Mira in LFM), or asexual relationships born out of the fear of contamination of HIV (Lol and Angie in T), same sex relationships (AWWC stories) also feature in the texts considered. Often these relationships are also intra-racial.

Relationships Based On Sexual Attraction: “Living In”/ “Leaving Out”.

The concept of living in with a partner for cohabitation and companionship is fast gaining popularity among BrAsians, specially those who are sojourners or recent migrants. These texts also show a number of relationships in which one of the partners is a BrAsian of the second-generation, living with, or having a relationship with a lover outside of marriage, despite community pressures and restrictions. Though the BrAsian authors are bold enough to portray sexual attraction as the basis for love between modern mixed-race couples who do not feel the need to marry, these relationships are by and large abandoned by the women, as they seem to demand much more than their seemingly kind, sensitive and committed partners offer. Lol and Angie (T), Mala and her boyfriends (HSDY), Maya and Marcos (OHSW), Dave and Naina (CC), Michael and Nina (BII) are today’s generation of such couples, featuring in the novels. Two such pairs attract more attention than the others, namely, Angie and Lol, and Naina and Dave.

The descriptions of Naina’s relations with Dave in Chapatti Or Chips? are the stuff of modern day metropolitan romances. Brand names, exotic foods, hitech interiors and architecture, mood music, slang and visual and auditory extravaganza
scream for attention more than the mental processes of the BrAsian girl and the young Englishman who often gives her good advice on how to value her own choice for marriage. The best example may be found at the turning point of the plot when he declares his love for her, it is Naina’s wedding day and he says after “He whipped off his Armani shades”, “Naina, I love you, I want you, I fucking love you” (446). When they go to Kate’s house after the “wedding”, they listen to Guns n’ Roses, Naina having taken off her Indian jewellery to become the “English Naina”. In Kate’s bedroom there are, Kevin Costner posters of The bodyguard, Perfect World, Robin Hood and JFK. Metal wind-chimes, red tulips in a Dumbo vase, a half-drunk bottle of vodka and a pile of make-up on the bed formed the rest of the décor. Naina asks Dave to promise: “No matter what, no matter who, even if things don’t go well or smooth, there is no way that either of us will ever miss an episode of EastEnders” (450), and Dave asks her to move in with him, in response immediately afterwards.

This seems to be the only way the novel could take the long drawn out story forward, the way modern day romance-fiction ends, on promises of fun, sidestepping permanence, and possible conflicts and barriers in the way of wish-fulfillment. The novel seems to be targeted to the watchers of EastEnders, Londoners who identify with the love and longings of Dave and Naina, who are themselves possibly, caught up in impossible mixed race relationships, immured in cultural wrangling and the pressures of urban life. These are citizens at the border of new life states, where cultural boundaries are made to cross, where part of the challenge of daily life, even at work, lies in understanding the psyche of the stranger across the negotiating table who speaks with traces of quite another civilization.

A novel rendering a special relationship is found in Transmission (1992), which speaks of a passionate relationship between Angie and her “contact” Lol. The BrAsian researcher Angie falls in love with Lol, the ex-husband of her “subject” for a television show on HIV-AIDS, after they meet at a club. But though he is intimate with her, touching and kissing her, they do not have sex. Lol is also supportive, kind and sensitive to protect Angie’s future. Srivastava’s treatment of Lol and Angie’s relationship reduces the issue of race and sexuality to irrelevance, and the uni-dimensionality of male-female relationship expanded to accommodate an intimate, asexual love, if one may name it so. Their carefully negotiated asexual relationship is particularly relevant to the times of rave parties in London, when young people avoided sex, took safe drugs and danced all night as Angela McRobbie analyses in her
article on youth culture and its relationship with rave dancing and changing modes of femininity (Shiach 1995: 65).

The living-in relationships are all mixed-race, and one wonders whether they imply a certain reticence to cohabit with a fellow BrAsian on the part of the woman. Would such a possibility exist, or would it lead to marriage inevitably? The texts do not answer these questions. Maya and Marcos separate, Dave and Naina start a live-in relationship, the destiny of Michael and Nina’s realtionship is not foretold by the author, and the most fulfilling of these mixed-race relationships is asexual (Lol and Angie). Moreover, even a modern woman like Mira is hardly able to continue a sexual relationship with Amrit unfettered. Thus borders are drawn, redrawn and crossed over and over again wherever most of the non-marital sexual relationships of BrAsian females are concerned, whether with a BrAsian or a white British male.


Mixed race relationships are discussed in many of the later novels, but most of them still involve a certain amount of stress and strain. Perhaps this is due to the fear of incompatibility instilled by the two communities over time. Or, there are normal problems which acquire an added dimension when racial overtones are read into them. With detailed references of her ethnographic study, Alibhai-Brown records the happy marriages of mixed races, which are still troubled by the unhappy communities to which the partners belong. The community has little regard for the personal happiness of the couple: they are still anxious to maintain the pure blood and ancestral name intact. Alibhai-Brown argues for a change of outlook and calls for a fresh evaluation of the idea of bloodline and ancestry in the new world. To quote Alibhai-Brown:

When a nation begins to grow a population which is of mixed heritage, the national identity of the country is transformed. The myths of purity and bloodline begin to lose their grip and in many ways private acts by individuals redefine the country itself as hybrid. None of this is easily done, nor can be easily undone. Audre Lorde has pointed out: “It is out of chaos that new worlds are born.” These new worlds are here and we should be better aware of them. (2001: 96)

Throughout colonial history, this fear of having to recognize black or brown children as their own has driven the white European or American to formulate laws and social practice that is clearly racist in ideology. However, white women have always been eager, as white men, to take black or Asian lovers. Alibhai-Brown
documents several cases of long-lasting marriages of white women with black men, and an equally large number of “hidden” children produced out of forbidden relationships in the 20th century itself (2001: 64).

Despite an extended phase of large-scale immigration, attitudes are still as stringent, and pain and misery follow those who try to cross cultural barriers in the U.K. in more permanent ways than mere social exchange affords. The predominant pattern of male-female relationships among BrAsians is still intraracial marriage, which has now become as institutionalized as South Asian marriages. In the following sections, there will be a discussion on the portrayal of the following types of mixed race marriages and relationships: mixed-race relationships of compromise or forced commitment; unhappy mixed-marriages or relationships that turn sour; happy marriages between Asian males and white British women; Black and Asian relationships.

In these texts, there are several instances of mixed-race relationships based on aspirations, material or cultural, rather than bonding: Luke and Mira (LFM), Tania and Mark (LI), Moni and Anthony (MR), Durga and Roman (CCC), Heera and Brian (CCC), Maya and her Spanish lover in (OHSW) are all involved in relations that involve material or cultural aspiration, of wanting to acquire status, or agency, or wanting to possess the cultural Other. They imply certain border crossings, cultural, physical, psycho-social, and usually involve recrossing when the border threatens homing desires or material aims.

Atima Srivastava’s second novel, Looking for Maya (1999), has Mira as the protagonist. Mira was perfectly assimilated into English society, had white friends, wrote English novels, ate, drank and dressed according to contemporary British fashion. In short, she wanted to adopt a Londoner’s multi-cultural spirit from the outside, from the cafes and bars, restaurants and parks (19). Srivastava’s novels deal with this new breed of metro-savvy young women, determined to succeed in making an ever-changing identity of their own, as inheritors of urban chic and possessors of every new gadget. But, from time to time, Mira wonders whether she herself is too inauthentic, like Tania in Life isn’t, “a hybrid out of place, with a cockney accent and a yen for decadence, contradicting the deep-seated austerity of a country which had changed beyond contradiction” (LFM 88).

With Luke Mira always felt that they were full of their differences, unlike her parents’ shared knowledge and togetherness. She says: “We were constantly in touch
with the differences; it fascinated us, this lack of sameness” (17). She acknowledges her feeling of being “utterly alone” even when she was in love with Luke and living with him, and “revelled in it” (ibid). Mira did not like one of Luke’s friends, half-Armenian, and disfigured, and she was about to chide him for liking “ethnic people, black people, people who are not English, but it wasn’t fair or true” (18). Mira knew that Luke was actually devoted to her, and yet Mira liked Amrit more than Luke because of his romantic appeal, his Indianness, his love for poetry, the sudden intimacy and the emotional content of his conversations with her (28-30), that she did not find with other men of her age or social realm. At this stage in her life, Srivastava seems to suggest, “sailing without a plan”, Mira’s gendered geography craves to make space for men who are more successful, apparently rooted to their culture, older and more mature than Luke. The novel thus contrasts two ways of life, and portrays the way a young author, growing up in multi-cultural Britain, is able to selectively enrich her life experiences because she is an inheritor of the hybrid nature of contemporary London, where she frequently trangresses flexible borders.

Tania, in Life isn’t... is in a relationship with Martin, an Englishman who apparently takes her very seriously. He really adores her for who she is, and treasures her looks, her presence, her capable and confident personality, as well as her funny ways. “It was her paradoxes that ensnared him: the tailored suit and the leonine mane of blue-black hair, the delicate hands banging savagely on the table, that perfect face spitting fishwife bile” (106). He was the one bringing in fusion CDs and recipes and fireworks for Diwali and she refused to join in, not speaking much Punjabi, not close to her family or community. Of course he felt left out when Tania went out alone, and sometimes Tania “did not feel like answering the hundreds of questions there always were” (60) at such times. She seems to be impatient with his cultural difference from her community, despite his geniune interest to belong. Tania came back home one such time, and snuggled up to Martin, but she did not know why she felt tearful, after watching Chila and her husband Deepak, and when Martin asked her what was up, she said this to herself: “Tania did not know how to tell him. What was up was that she wished he would call her jaan” (72).

Martin’s friends teased him about her: he knew there was something in Tania he always found “fascinatingly alien, and he did not know if that was a racial or a female thing” (106). She had to tell him one day, that though “brown was the new black” as he felt, she was “the genuine article”, and thus does not have to try, she can
just be, whereas he, being middle-class, white and male, had “to try any bandwagon, because what else have you got?” (108) as she shockingly asked. It was easy for Martin to take the hint, specially after seeing Deepak and Tania kissing on the terrace (182). He left one day, without a “forwarding address” (188), moving in with an Italian girl, putting an end to his infatuation with the gorgeous, professionally successful Tania. Tania’s rejection of Martin’s devotion seems as cruel and hurtful as Mira’s rejection of Luke, and yet both men move on with other European women in their lives. Thus once again, when sexuality, cultural needs and material success are the bases for intensely romantic relationship in a young, mixed-race couple, the relationship is short-lived, the borders having drawn again by the woman in control. Seen through the prism of socio-cultural interaction, Tania’s image is refracted, bent and distorted till the light of realisation of her unique responsibility of being a young BrAsian woman, a daughter, a friend, an employee and a socially committed individual, finally dawns upon her. Finally, the light reflects on her sparkling personality, her gifted nature shines brightly across cultures, social mores, and considerations of gender, class and race.

Memories of Rain (1992), gives us a totally different glimpse of immigrant identity. Moni, or Monideepa, the protagonist, followed her British husband Anthony to London, crossing all borders known to her. Their marriage was the result of a deeply sexual attraction. Moni, who had thought of Anthony as her “enchanted benefactor”, actually finds that she does not achieve anything by way of emotional or intellectual power while in England. Moni learns of his betrayal of her love soon, and yet they remain in this meaningless relationship for years, until she leaves him stealthily, taking his child away from him forever, with surprising cruelty, on her birthday, having got everything ready for a party. She repudiates the modern West and heads for the decadent East, rather than trying to acquire positive agency in the altered circumstances of her gendered geography, thus borders cannot contain her spirit.

In the novel One Hundred Shades of White, Maya finds out that her Spanish lover Marcos has been betraying her, and gives that as a reason for wanting to break contact with him, but she had mentally distanced herself from him when she was in England to see maggie; in fact Maggie’s death arouses the love for her community and family in her, which she had suppressed for a long time. Maya might have enjoyed a much higher socio-economic status with the aristocratic Marcos, but she finally settles down with Suri, her childhood sweetheart, who has a modest
Perhaps the earlier materialism of the older immigrant generation is contrasted with a more emotional approach to life among the progeny, an openness which might have been the result of Maya’s exposure to Maggie’s values than the survivalistic approach of Nalini. Maya crosses the border, and yet she retrenches herself back into her community, recrossing the divide.

Roman asks Durga in *The Cambridge Curry Club* “would she hold his heart in hers and take both into the Mumbai monsoon?” (240) and comically swears to travel all over the world with her, carrying a collapsible bed. Durga muses: “Roman belonged to a society that encouraged individuals to seek their own paths, one in which a path that did not lead anywhere could be dropped, she reasoned. But could a relationship, a marriage be dropped simply because it was dull?” (239) Though Durga knows that her American lover “Roman could not last, passion did not last; she would soon find something she didn’t like about him” (ibid), she believed in the promise that with him there were “worlds to cross, and it was no longer easy to stay flippant” (ibid). The concept of having characters like her, poised at the border of the two worlds, though situated spatially in the first, constantly carrying the Other world in the mind, is something that contemporary transnational migrant fiction often elaborates on.

Thus not only stagnating or forced mixed race marriages but strained love relationships between people of different races seem to be the result of unequal perceptions of cultural needs. All of Sunetra Gupta’s novels problematize male-female relationships, and specially those involving the two races. Atima Srivastava portrays the difficulty of commitment in the lives of young Londoners of her times, and the dubious sexual life of Asian men of the older generation, whereas Saumya Balsari and Preethi Nair show the BrAsian women sorting out their priorities in life. All the women finally choose the security of loyalty to the diaspora community or the promise of fulfilling love from the Western male, rather than sexual attraction of the cultural Other, or the appeal of hybridity, or permanence in a financially secure upper-class position.

*Moonlight into Marzipan* finds Yuri Sen and Anya locked in a loveless relationship, after giving birth to a nameless child, *Looking for Maya* has Amrit and his wives and mistresses, as well as Mira and Luke, *One Hundred Shades of White* shows Maya and Marcos, Raul and his American wife in relationships based on a forced commitment that threaten to split their lives asunder. Debendranath and
Jennifer’s marriage (ASC) has been discussed in the previous chapter, and this inter-racial relationship is based on dependence: of Jennifer on Debendranath to make some difference to her ordinary life, twice over, and of Debendranath, on her love, her domestic and physical labour in the early years, added to caring for him in his later years of blindness.

Looking for Maya finds the treacherous BrAsian man Amrit Kaushik, a lady-killer, living alternately with two white British women, three children and a young BrAsian lover. He explains his several other complicated relationships to his young Asian lover Mira. He had had a fiery romance with a young girl called Maya in India, but could not marry her because of caste and class differences. In Britain, the English Clarissa, one of the women he had sex with, wanted a child with him regardless of his involvement, because she had money and communal support to look after the baby. Amrit said he would help her “financially and practically” (80) but he would come and go as he pleased. Another girl he was seeing then, Susan Jones, who was supposed to be infertile, got pregnant then, and later had twins. Amrit had to take responsibility of both of their children. Mira was troubled by the sound of one of the twins, young Ashok Kaushik’s voice on the telephone, the resigned voice of a boy who had almost given up on his father, and who yet demanded contact with him on his hour of pride, at the school concert.

Thus Amrit continued his double life with his two “families”, and occasionally had affairs with other women like Mira. He wanted her because she was so full of the promise of youth, a writer with a future, but he could not end his other relationships, as he says, “I can’t abandon things, there are obligations I must keep” (123). He describes Clarissa as a cat, who wants to be left alone, only for him “to pay the bills and sign the house over to her” and “Jonesy clings” like a dog. Matty, Luke’s mother, whom he had seen earlier, was a doormat, and Mira he called “sharp as a crease on a trouser”. Amrit’s power and sexual control over women, both Asian and British, makes him out to be an embodiment of male virility, colonizing the bodies of women as their private territory, to be abandoned or trespassed into as it pleased them.

Yet, Yuri Sen and Amrit carry the burden of their relationships without love but with concern for the children they have produced in the relationship. All these incomplete loveless relationships, threatened by a forced sense of duty, or concealment, or incompleteness, make the portrayal of mixed race relationships in some of these novels very uncertain, and often disruptive. The role of the BrAsian
woman in these remains invariably uncertain: hovering between her Asianness and her loyalty to a more liberated westernized upbringing, she is sometimes unsure of her preferences, though the BrAsian male in forced mixed-race relationships relegates his emotional involvement to the background, assuming the more powerful position of provider or protector as his social conditioning inscribes him.

"Race And Class": Mixed-Race Marriages.

One of the couples portrayed in a happy marriage based on commitment is Arnold and Shirley in AWOW, the other Harry Singh and Mirielle in AM. Kulwant’s youngest son Arvind/Arnold and Shirley in A wicked Old Woman are chronologically one of the few third-generation couples in a mixed-race marriage portrayed in this group of texts. Doomed as a couple initially, they were victims of racist attacks, but they supported each other through bad times: Arvind started a garage, and Shirley set up home, as perfectly Indian as her cooking, even better than Kuli’s. Shirley regretted not being married in the proper Indian style, bedecked with gold, more for the sake of the children who would have one day looked at their photographs and accepted their marriage as sanctioned by the community. She wanted to build a house in their native village in India, so that the children could go there on holidays. She wished that his brothers and father treated Arvind better: that for his sake at least, they should have accepted her on their wedding day. When Kuli asks her son whether he was happy or not, he says something which few other people in the text could, with so much sincerity:

Colour’s not everything. She didn’t have a home, and neither did I. I mean not a home that we could belong to, so we belong to each other... Hardly likely I was going to meet an Indian girl, was it? ... And even if I had met one ... I wasn’t the right type, was I?... That’s how it is. (97)

Thus being declassed and deracinated, rejected by family and community Shirley and Arvind, sought strength from love, which made their bond stronger, their lives happier than many other couples. Kuli finds Arvind and Sheila contented, both making so many adjustments for happiness and material well-being, making their decisions both shrewdly and instinctively for the good of their mixed-race children. Their community service, their unselfish care for the elderly draw out Kuli’s admiration as well: it is not that they are selfishly enjoying their prosperity, but they strive to bring joy to the lonely elders of the migrant families in the locality. One need not hesitate to brand them as the ideal mixed-race couple in these novels. They are the
occupiers of the threshold space into a new world where economic success matters as much as social contribution, where shrewd business sense makes social responsibility a major motivator for better performance, where learning Hindi or Punjabi is needed to survive in the shrunken world-city of London.

In *Anita and Me* (1998) Harry Singh and his French wife Mireille are another couple featuring in Meena’s life in an important way. Mysterious owner of the “Big House”, Harry is a rich landowner, investor in properties, failed lawyer and loyal husband to his French wife. With his dog he went to rescue Tracey from the old mine pond, while his wife kept Meena warm with her tales and hot cocoa, definitely not repeating demon acts befitting their acquired reputation in the village. She talks about how she and “Arry” participated in their lives, though shunned by the village and demonized by the children:

“We ’ave lived you know, through all of you, so fascinating, the tiny things that happen every day. We felt proud, like parents. There are not many places left like this now... And in here, we needed only each other. Oo else would have understood us, strange creatures like us?”

(319)

Meera Syal combines the shared status of the BrAsian and the French Mirielle as permanent outsiders, who are so full of love but so much feared by the Tollington community in ignorance. Instead of being fearful objects of mystery, they bring back life and happiness, for little motherless Tracey and the Kumars as well. They are not only spatially etherised in the isolated “Big House”, but culturally isolated from both the dominant and the migrant community.

Poverty brings these mixed-race couples closer, and material success isolates them more: as Mireille recounts, initial failure to rise to the expectations of an otherwise stable BrAsian community creates a barrier which Harinder Singh hesitates to cross until Tracey’s accident, or as Arvind/Arnold, much loved by BrAsians in the neighbourhood, keeps away from his parents and brothers.

**The Colour Of Love: Black And Asian Relationships.**

One particular facet of BrAsian lives stands out very noticeably: as a community they do not like to maintain any contact with the other non-white communities, particularly the African or Afro-Caribbean communities (Alibhai-Brown, Chandan, Brah). In the novel *Transmission*, Angie has a close friend, a West Indian called Maggie, but that is about all. The only two texts to deal with even a hint of a friendship between an Asian girl and an Afro-Carribean man are the short story
“Pedal Push” in *Right of Way*, and the novel *The Cambridge Curry Club*, and the film *Bhaji on the Beach*, discussed in Chapter Three, describes such a relationship with a little more depth.

The unnamed narrator of Randhawa’s short story, “Pedal Push”, a young BrAsian girl, has an Asian boyfriend Pradeep he wants to marry her and go to the U.S. for further studies. At the lawyer’s firm where she works, she meets a client, a friendly young black man, Tomas, who bantered with her about the Afro-Carribeans, BrAsians and the white British, about which community gets attacked frequently, and who joins whose side (9). Then onwards, they become friendly, Tomas inviting her and her boyfriend to his gig. He requested her to wear one of her sparkly scarves at his trial so that he could look at its lights “in that boring courtroom” (11). Her going to the Black music show angered her parents:

> They couldn’t understand why she wanted to go off to this Black music thing; she knew it wasn’t so much the music as the Black and she thought, something’s got to change somewhere, and ... she wore one of her sparkliest saris and when she met Pradeep at the tube he wanted to know why she was so dressed up. (ibid)

Tomas was in jail for six months and was considerate enough to ask her not to visit him as she may have problems at home. As a gesture of solidarity and rebellion, the narrator decides to get her hair braided and beaded. The narrator spoke to Pradeep about her belief that her parents have “got to come round to being friends with Tomas” (12). Pradeep left her alone then, he did not even ask her to accompany him to America. Knowing that it was because of her defiant association with Tomas and her decision to speak her mind, she let Pradeep go, sad though she was. Thus association with a black man symbolises rebellion against accepted notions, and could bring only sorrow to a BrAsian girl in the seventies or eighties.

Even in *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), the women in her community frown upon Hashida’s association with the young Black man Oliver. Mira Nair’s film *Mississippi Masala* (1991) is the one of the few films made by a South Asian which deals with issues of migration, belonging and love between a black man and a South Asian girl. The film extensively narrates the anguished lives of the couple who have to leave home, business and everything they ever called their own, to be together. Jigna Desai (2003) shows how discrimination brings the lovers closer to an assertion of their different identities and that their mutual respect for this self-assertion brings them together, rather than separate them. Perhaps similar attitude of mutual respect can end
the inhospitality of the black and Asian peoples towards marriage or sex between the members of the two races in the present times in Britain, as Alibhai-Brown (2001) suggests.

In the other text, published as recently as 2004, Mallika (CCC) befriends Joseph, a Nigerian boy next door, but her father mistakes their friendship as a threateningly dangerous romance. Mr. Chatterjee is even more doubtful about the boy’s father’s occupations: he thinks that the rich Nigerian must be an illegal exporter of ivory, and he forbade his family from visiting them, and continued to worry about the younger boy’s corruptive influence on Mallika. His stereotyped fears increased with Mallika’s changing musical preferences: he was suspicious of “gangster rap” and “garage” music that Mallika had started to like in place of Rabindra Sangeet, and started worrying about “the frightening fate that might befall his own household” (80) because of the strange Black neighbours. In contrast to his worries, Mallika learnt so much about the rich and colourful world outside Cambridge, England, from the boy that she became eager to explore it herself: she applied to Stanford University, and was accepted, thus challenging her parents’ sensibilities even more. The author seems to suggest that positive, open-minded interventions from the younger generation are the only ways to demystify cultural stereotypes. The results of such efforts can not only end the troublesome relations between Black and Asian fellow immigrants but can also change lives.

Even on the level of friendship, then, association with Black men causes doubts in the early twenty-first century, as much it did in the early period of immigration in the seventies or eighties. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2001) writes: “Economic equality is one of the main underlying causes of the deteriorating relations between black and Asian Britons” (88). She talks about the new hateful stereotype of the “successful” Asian as opposed to the black people who are “full of drugs and bad habits”, “have no ambition and culture” (ibid). She writes about many black youngsters attacking Asian schoolchildren and shopkeepers. It is important to know that sometimes Asians too, like the white majority, perpetrate a lot of racist attacks on black people. The black youngsters are perceived as dangerous to walk past, always carrying knives, ready to attack, rape or murder, and unworthy of friendship or social interaction because they are “kallos”, a perversion of the Hindi word “kala” for Black. Thus, just like the hate-word “Paki” is used by people of every colour about Asians, “gorai” describes the white and “kalloo” describes the Black people for
Asians, all slang terms. Early accounts (Chandan 1986; Anwar 1988) show how the Asians and Blacks had united in their struggle against the white mill and factory owners and the government, and recent writing brings out their articulation of difference (Modood 2001; Anwar 1988; Brah 1996; Alibhai-Brown 2001). Film and fiction, which often discuss inter-racial issues, have also dealt with this aspect of racial relations with neglect. In the 1960s, when many of the writers in this sample might have been very young, films like *Man Alive* (1968), *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *Flame in The Street* (1963), *Sapphire* (1965) portray social revulsion to love or sex between the black and white races, as Alibhai-Brown analyses. But, Asian-black relations are not often dealt with in fiction or film, except short films like *Jump, Boy, Jump* (2000), and features *Mississippi Masala* (1991) and *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993).

The Asian attitude to the Black man is something very similar, and such relationships are not found described among this other group of immigrant writers either, that is, the Afro-carribean group. Such omission shows that the communities are mutually exclusive, the Asians and Afro-Carribeans marrying either within their communities or into the majority community, rarely intermarrying. Also, the absence of Afro-Caribbean characters in the novels read under the present survey shows how an entire community, with similar problems and struggles, is noticeably absent in an otherwise rich body of literature. So, it may be concluded by any student of contemporary British society who looks for evidence in cultural products, that there is little or no interaction between these two groups of immigrants in Britain for more than half a century of their migration histories. If at all there is, it leads to hatred and brutality. Such hatred, mutual suspicion and mistrust can only create more fissures in the already cracked social ferment of multiracial England.

**Friends And Soul-Mates: Platonic Relationships.**

Very few of the texts depict Platonic relationships among BrAsian women and both BrAsian and mainstream males, except *Sumitra's Story*. The novels (*SS, LFM, ASC, GBB*) and the popular film *Bend it Like Beckham* (1993) focus on gay males and their friendship with BrAsian women. *Sumitra's Story*, (1985) describes the early 70s when perhaps Asian girls were a matter of curiosity or admiration because of their sheer novelty. A new tenant Mike at the guesthouse finds an instant attraction for Sumitra, and though Mike knows he cannot really date her because of her orthodox parents, he offers her a Saturday job readily, and helps her in many ways later (58-60). When Mike helps her earn, her father allows Sumitra to be picked up...
and dropped in his car to and from work, but their friendship would otherwise be frowned upon. Even the young Roger, a colleague at Hanbury’s, and his friends take her out to the museums and the local pub, where Sumitra is spotted by her cousin Jayant and later punished (115-116). She seeks rational support for her friendship with boys from her parents during their confrontation but finds none. Thus the novel points out the cultural barriers which discourage male and female friendship in a multi-racial society, but only when it begins to challenge the socio-religious affiliations of the family structure. More permanent and therefore threatening aspects of social interaction like romance and friendship are seen to transgress an unwritten religious and moral code. As discussed earlier, the material benefits of the Western mode of life are accepted wholeheartedly by many among the Asian community in diaspora in Britain, but they often undermine or negate cultural claims of the society to which they have repatriated. Thus Sumitra’s parents and relatives tried very hard to keep the dominant groups from their lives as they had kept their African fellow citizens out of their homes. Rukshana Smith or Janna Eliot, an immigrant herself, and a keen observer of BrAsian society by virtue of close friendships with girls like the fictional Sumitra, is able to bring out this stark manifestation of racism among the Asian communities. She records in detail how the Patels maintained social exclusivity from other races in Uganda or in Britain, and the way overtures of friendship are repudiated or exploited depending on the materialistic benefits accrued to the family.

The other novels do not focus on the intricacies of friendship in a similar manner. In her early writing Ravinder Randhawa portrays young working class men or women engaged in rivalry and power play rather than bonding as friends like Rani/Rosalind’s and Kuli’s friends in the novel *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) or the characters in the stories “Pedal Push” and “Games” (*RW*: 1988) described in chapter three. Even Randhawa’s later novel written for teenagers, *Hari-jan* (1992) finds Harjinder at first engaged in challenging and then in love with her schoolmate Suresh Robinson rather than simply being friends. Perhaps Randhawa and most of the other writers in this survey find that any relationship possible among young men and women is tinged with power and romance or sexuality. Friendship, which is based on a certain amount of equality of social status is perhaps difficult to form in the face of such inequalities as exist among South Asian men and women, whether in the East or in their adoptive Western countries.

Even when there is a degree of depth in the male-female friendships portrayed
in some of the novels, as mentioned earlier, there is a sense of the homoerotic in it, like the friendships between gay men and heterosexual women. It is as if only if they are de-gendered, can men really befriend women, as Morgan befriends Niharika, (ASC) or Frank supports Mira (LFM), or Jess is saved by her gay BrAsian friend Tony (Bend It Like Beckham). Jigna Desai (2003) observes in her analysis of films made by the South Asian diaspora that the emphasis on heteronormativity in these films erases gays and lesbians from them, by giving them minimal roles devoid of agency. Notably, all the three women protagonists in these texts are troubled in their love relationships with the heterosexual men in their lives: Niharika loves the married Englishman Daniel Faraday who is also frequently separated from her across continents, Mira loves and loses first her English college mate Luke, and then the much married older Asian man Amrit, the Sikh girl Jess loves her Irish coach Joe knowing that her friend Jules adores him as well. The gay men play crucial roles in shaping these women’s career and personal lives, and the following analysis debates on the applicability of Desai’s opinion on women’s writing in the British South Asian diaspora.

Morgan (ASC) looks after Niharika in America, of course as Daniel, whom he passionately loves as well, asks him to. He finds the antecedents of the pigmy in the Bronx zoo, who was the subject of Niharika’s thesis, thus making her academic work come alive to her. The wealthy Morgan also uses his contacts in the publishing industry to help Niharika’s thesis to be published in the form of a book, much ahead of schedule, in London and New York (ASC 96). She realizes that “in him she had found a companion like no other” (98). She has to confess that he can “read me (her) like a book” (ibid). Morgan gives her a place to stay, and accompanies her to her book promotion lectures after she has met with financial and literary success with her book, (105-108). Niharika actually enjoys his frankness, his curious zest for life, his quirky nature and good humour. Niharika thus feels that she has every need other than sexual, for the moody Morgan in her life, and finds that their mutual obsession with Daniel Faraday and their interest in the pigmy in the Bronx zoo throw them together. In fact sometimes Niharika feels she might farcically marry Morgan and show him off as a “charming, rich and cultured American” (102), a husband to be proud of. Thus Niharika is conscious of how “useful” Morgan can be to her socially and materially. Finally, Morgan is instrumental in sending the two people he loves most to find happiness, by bequeathing his property to Daniel. Morgan remains the distant lover, his
unrequited passion for Daniel never quelled, but fuelled by the presence of Niharika, Daniel’s heterosexual partner. Thus, though he provides emotional, physical, material and moral support to Niharika, Morgan the homosexual is effaced out of the text before her “true” male partner acquires material agency, from Morgan, to claim her.

In *Looking for Maya* (1999) Frank is Mira’s close friend, who knows the details of her personal life sufficiently to bail her out on occasions of crisis. Frank, being thwarted in his own love life as well, understands what Mira must be going through. In fact he understands her better than her girl friends, her parents or her boyfriend Luke. Mira is able to spend her vacation alone with him in Spain, and call him when she is in crisis, whether it is grief over Luke or Amrit, publication of her book, or abortion of her child with Amrit. Their friendship is even more devoid of any echo of a possible sexual relation than that between Morgan and Niharika: they are like siblings, like two women when they go on a holiday armed with cosmetics, giggling like schoolgirls on Spanish beaches, teasing each other about the men in their lives, comparing notes. Though Mira slept right next to Frank in the hotel, they did share an asexual pure friendship, Frank making her laugh all the time (111).

Three moments stand out in significance in their encounters: one is when Frank gives her paternal advice against Amrit like, “You must be careful ... He’s not a reliable person” and “...I know you think this is the man of your dreams and he isn’t. He’s just another married man who is dishonest and without honour. Luke’s a good man. He loves you” (110). The second significant moment occurs when Frank confesses to his own sorrow about not being able to be a father (206), and this makes Mira realise why he had been so quiet when he had taken her home after her abortion. The third time, Frank reveals his fraternal feelings towards Mira is when he says that she is like his sister and makes him worried: “You always make people feel they must look after you” (208) and “...Because you just barge into things. You don’t think about it, you rush in”. Frank even grants sexual favours to Mira’s agent Torquil, arranges her book launch party, helps her organize it, and shares her grief over the abortion. Frank acts like a surrogate father or brother to her, giving her the freedom to do as she wants by accompanying her, supporting her in fulfilling her fond wishes, and yet guarding her, something which her absent father, or parents she jocularly calls RaviKavi, should have done. Like Morgan, Frank too remains unhappy in love, occasionally seeing men, but mostly alone, doting over Mira who needs him more than any man or woman. Though Atima Srivastava brings Frank into the narrative’s
crucial moments, and gives him a likeable, flesh and blood character, his own life has no plot to speak of, he drifts along as unsure as the early Mira, looking for the “ten-year man”, “sailing without a plan”.

In *Bend it Like Beckham*, (2000), Jess Bhambra and the young Punjabi boy Tony, a closet homosexual, share a close friendship and warmth because they both “love” Beckham, of course differently. Tony helps Jess on many occasions to play her matches without her parents’ knowledge. He even declares that he “loves” her, and wishes to marry her, and accompany her to the U.S., only so that she can study law and play football at an American university. Tony’s action is intended to preempt her father’s plan of getting her married and sending her off to America to finish her studies. Jess is able to confide in Tony, much more than she could with the English girl, her teammate Jules. In fact though she does not pinpoint the reasons, Yasmin Hussain (2005) writes that the scenes between them “seem much more authentic than the bonding she has with Jules” (Hussain 79).

Thus, in some notable cases, their committed male friends rescue the women protagonists in some of these BrAsian texts from their predicament, or provide support when needed. It is true that they do adopt proprietary attitudes over their friends, in socially designated protective roles of a father or brother, but that is usually with the consent of the sometimes vulnerable or seemingly helpless heroines, who emerge skilful negotiators after the timely interventions of these friends in their emotional lives or their careers. As the texts discussed suggest, perhaps some contemporary texts of film and fiction are moving closer to the appreciation of male and female friendships in different parameters, without the trappings of lust and passion. But inevitably, the gay male is a loner in these texts, distracted by his friendship with the BrAsian girl, and though he participates in negotiating her own heterosexual love life, his love life is either compromised or unsuccessful.

The only novel dealing with bisexuality/male homosexuality at some length is *Cambridge Curry Club*, which dares to explore new areas of the British Asian experience. Heera’s husband Bob had been a closet homosexual, who prefers to call himself a bisexual, before his marriage with her. Seventeen years after marriage, Bob begins to grow attentive to Adam, his colleague, and starts living with him. At the end of the novel, there is renewed warmth in their friendly tolerance of each other. It may seem to the reader that the reexamination of self, undertaken by the thoughtful, elderly Bob, leaves him with the sense of being abused or misused by Adam, his
white British, male, gizmo-loving, adventurous, hip partner, and his respect and sympathy for the dignified but lively Heera grows. Bisexuality brings in its own very peculiar dilemmas, as the novel seems to suggest. The use of an elderly white British, male character to explore the intricacies of bisexuality places Balsari as a mature writer, clever enough to tap the comicality of Bob’s otherness, his several embarrassing experiences, and yet humane enough to highlight his sorrow, his loneliness and need for being loved.

**Marriage Of True Minds: Lesbian And Gay Relationships.**

Another aspect of BrAsian life that is coming to light through art, film and photography is the secret life of same-sex lovers, and BrAsian women’s fiction is showing signs of maturity in its treatment, as opposed to BrAsian film by women. The portrayal of homosexuality and lesbianism in this body of work comes as a sign of the maturity and level of acceptance of different sexual preferences. In a still conservative society, BrAsian women authors bring a noticeable tone of sympathy, acceptance and understanding of same sex love in their portraiture of gay men and women. Though the theme does not find a focus in the novels, there are two short stories by two women writers, very much a part of the Collective’s second publication, *Flaming Spirit*.

The story, “Still Waters”, has already been referred to in Chapters Three and Four, and its layered discussion of a young British Asian’s first brush with betrayal by her lover, a white British girl, makes it a compelling story. Placed in the context of the protagonist Shazia Rashid’s decision to take time off from her study at Oxford, the story closely follows the impact of separation and gradual withdrawal of affection from her lover Fliss. Fliss and Shazia had been “weaving bold crazy futures together...” (8). But before she leaves for Oxford, Fliss already talks about her plans to be in London, as “this pit of a town” was not a place for her, “there’s more of a life for women like me in London” (10). When she visited her in London, Fliss was flirting with another girl and later she refused to let her visit her, advised her “to travel light”, “make a new start in Oxford”, (12) and even told her about Cathy, her new lover. Here, it is appropriate to quote Rani Kawale’s analysis of South Asian lesbians in Britain, in relation to the dominant group: “White women often stereotype South Asian women according to stereotypical notions of traditional Asian family life, and therefore regard them as being unable to construct lesbian or bisexual identities or lifestyles in the same ways as white lesbians” (2003: 185). Devastated by Fliss’
indifference, Shazia tried to ask her tutor Miss Hinton about taking a break for a year, but the tutor Miss Hinton gave her active sympathy, and showed her acceptance of her alternative sexual preference. Shazia then felt confident enough to secure her future at Oxford. Through her narration, it is clear that she came from a poor background, with the mother doing outwork at home, so, Shazia’s parents would never know, nor understand or accept her grief over the indifference from Fliss, but their aspirations would have faced a setback if she left Oxford. The story correlates class mobility with personal, sexual ambition. Fliss would have probably continued her relationship with Shazia back in their working class town, or elsewhere if they were together, but going to Oxford would have imposed a sudden change of Shazia’s status in her eyes. As R.Raj Rao (2001) says, the intricacies of race and class also affect same sex relationships with tragic consequence: “South Asians see the gay mainstream as hostile. They are convinced that this mainstream has no desire to coopt them ... because a superfluous ethnicity acts as a barrier” (145).

Same-sex relationships are not untinged by unhappiness either, but when race and sexual choice are on the same side, there seems to be better chance for success in a relationship, as the story “Suhaag Raat” by Parminder Sekhon suggests. The story celebrates the joys of lesbian love between a newly “married” couple of then same racial origin, Mehtab and Sangeeta. Though they are from different Indian communities and speak different languages, they celebrate each others’ beauty and freedom from heterosexual bonds of a past life. They were products of a community, which never understood their love, and therefore they sought to make their own rules, marry and live with Mehtab’s child Amrita. Their “marriage” took place during the “paat” of the Guru Granth Sahib at a Gurudwara. It was as if they wished to be blessed in their new lives by their community and religion: the poignancy of their story lies in their desire for acceptance by the community they loved to belong to, though they knew that god did not care for “any feminist lesbian separatists” (192).

Mehtab recalls how hurt she had been when she was married to a man called Raj, and how happy she was now with this “marriage”. She recalls an earlier lover who broke off with her because she feared having to lose her to an arranged marriage, though Mehtab knew she was not a lesbian really, and had met several such women before (193). Mehtab weeps incessantly over her earlier suppression of her sexuality, her painful rejection of the heterosexual marriage she was subjected to. She wished to have daughters with her new partner, and live in bliss forever, unafraid of social
rejection. The women spend their “honeymoon” in Torquay, deliberately choosing a predominantly white area by the sea, either to be more accepted or left to themselves. They made love in their hotel room, free at last from fear or persecution: “Let love spill out and over the balcony, on to the promenade and into the pockets of those who cannot dream, into the sea” (196). Thus the story brings to light the fear and sorrow of lesbians among BrAsians in a predominantly heteronormative society, and their courage and daring to come out into the open, gradually accepting their own identity as same-sex lovers, or couples needing their own family unit. They wish to be seen and accepted as Asians, not dressing differently, but being very feminine in their dress, very soft and beautiful, rather than aggressive and deliberately plain, supressing their femininity with short hair and jeans and ill-fitting clothes, as Rani Kawale observes (2003: 193). The description of their saris, their hair, flowers and mehendi, the religious terms they use, the occasional slips into Punjabi or Hindi make them out to be fully in love with their Indian identity. They seem to be echoing in practice, what R. Raj Rao (2001) writes in theory, “... what I’m really asking for is the recognition of sexual orientation as an autonomous category. Sexual orientation must be accorded the same status as: (i) race; (ii) caste; (iii) class and (iv) gender” (146). Mehtab and Sangeeta’s voices seem to be far away from the materialistic overtones of a predominantly heteronormative discourse of the BrAsian novel, far from status and aspirations, in very few of the novels have there been portrayed heterosexual love of such profundity or simplicity.

The story of Shazia, a young BrAsian girl, and her white lesbian partner Fliss, in “Still Waters”, is riddled with anxiety, longing and rejection, but in this story of two BrAsian lesbians, in the same volume, there is freedom, courage and happiness. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown says that some of the happiest couples she has found in Britain were mixed-race and gay (2001:146-147), though she also gives examples of race domination in gay relationships. Does it need two Indian minds of similar backgrounds, and in this case same gender, to be so complete in love? This hypothetical question maybe answered by researchers and writers of the future, who will certainly continue to delve deeper into the human psyche, into its intricate recesses to provide new answers and raise yet newer questions about human relationships. Alibhai-Brown partly answers it when she says that these relationships endure because of a “shared history of exclusion” and “discrimination on all fronts”, which leads to “long-term stability”, “supportive and strong” relationships without.
any need “to explain things all the time” (147). Pratibha Parmar’s feature film *Nina’s Heavenly Delights* (2006) handles the theme of lesbian love between a BrAsian girl and a white British girl, partners in running a restaurant, who are found, at the end of the film, slowly getting acceptance in their communities and families.

Varanee and Avani are two gay BrAsian men appearing in “Death Rites” by Maya Chowdhry (*FS* 1994), alongside the white British Alex, Billy, now dead, and Stephen, all of whom have the deadly AIDS virus eating into their bodies. They grieve their friends’ deaths, and are acutely conscious of their marginality, but they are defiant, joking, praying, dreaming or reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* to draw strength from. Their occasionally humorous, often mystical attitude to life, love and death suggests a world full of fun, love and compassion, far away from the daily squabbles about race, class and gender etc. The fact that a woman writer has invested her interest in the gay male community of BrAsians (references to the Khush Klub *FS* 148) and the mainstream, and expresses the poignancy of their feelings at the extreme edge of marginalisation, is indeed a sign of moving ahead with the times. This story also takes the reader far away from the main, the sociol-anthropological focus of the AWWC collection, into philosophy of existence, into *karma* and world politics, into life after death and the value of life itself. However, the gay men here are all facing death, and straining to cling to the vestigial life they have. Maya Chowdhry is one of those writers whose contact with film, radio, theatre, and writing lends a certain versatility and depth, which is often shared by similar writers in the Collective.

The inclusion of these stories about the gay and lesbian community speaks for the commitment of the Asian Women Writers’ Collective to giving space, time and voice to the numerous Others in British society. In these texts discussing inter-racial heteronormative and homoerotic sexuality, racialisation fears are a common factor. BrAsian women writers do not only share the same emphasis on heteronormativity and impulse to erase male homosexuals out of agency through their writing (Desai 2003), but they also let them be coopted into the logic of modernity and upward mobility of the protagonists. Moreover, their financial resources and even their sexual preference may be compromised as a result of their association with BrAsian female protagonists. The number of gay men present in this body of work, and the roles they play, occupy greater narrative focus and plot significance. However, though almost a token inclusion in the AWWC volume, the lesbian stories are boldly and confidently written by stylistically mature writers. Also, the two stories that deal with lesbianism
show agency and confidence in the BrAsian women, who are willing to proceed in life despite occasional setbacks. The differential treatment of gay males and lesbians in BrAsian fiction may gradually be corrected, as readers and writers from heteronormative societies make place for the sexual other to be normalised. Bhattacharyya et al (2001) suggest that anxieties related to sexual propriety are a subtext in racialised class attitudes: “Although an anxiety about sexual propriety can be traced from early histories of European experience, our argument is that this legacy adapts to the circumstances of the “newly” global economy” (110).

5.6 Contemporary BrAsian Marriage: Popular Media and Authorial Representation.

The changing configuration of South Asian marriages, with its attendant evils like dowry, harassment of the bride due to unending expectations, divorce and the obsession with grand ceremonies of marriage have all marked the diaspora communities abroad. Purnima Mankekar (1999) shows how advertisements and television serials by the state-sponsored Doordarshan projected the idea of a modern post-globalisation India in the 1980s, and what linkages it had on gender roles and on consumerism leading to huge increases in dowry. In Britain, the same kind of institutionalized extravaganza in marriage celebrations have encouraged the mushrooming of bridal magazines dedicated to the institution of South Asian marriages like Asian Bride. Other publications like Asian Woman, and newspapers Eastern Eye, Asian Voice which carry advertisements are quite popular in the U. K. for the last ten years. Undoubtedly, this has much to do with the rise of consumerism, which feeds on and leads to extravagant spending on marriages.

From the analysis and from contemporary media coverage, it is apparent that the BrAsian second generation is not only looking outside for fulfilling homing desires, they are increasingly certain of finding suitable partners from within, and from the international South Asian diaspora. The current pattern, according to a British Telecom survey published on February 14, 2007, shows, 25-29 year old males and 22-26 year old females looking for spouses, hesitant to cohabit before marriage, and willing to live with their in-laws. Yasmeen Khan (2007) and Fauzia Ahmad (2006) refer to the variety of agencies to help make these choices. This is borne out in the texts as well, by the presence of people like Rax (T), who is about to make his career as a wedding planner of sorts, and Nina’s (BI) mother’s network of
matrimonial negotiators. The ESRC research project of Roger Ballard suggests that the BrAsians, especially Jullunduri Punjabis “frequently deliberately look for partners who are likely to be in a position to aid and abet their future career plans” and that “the marriage market, (and the networks) within which the most successful of them now operate, is now explicitly global in character” (36). Auntie Gee’s and other agencies (Ahmad 2006: 287), matrimonial columns in the newspapers, informal networks and negotiators, cyber dating and speed dating programmes bring a host of possibilities of looking for partners or spouses from home and abroad. As Charlsey and Shaw (2006) also show, “The use of photography, videography, email, marriage websites and newspaper adverts in identifying and arranging matches is not restricted to transnational arrangements, but such technologies come into their own when marriages are being arranged across great distances” (Charlsey and Shaw 337). RIFCO produced a play called Deranged Marriage by Pravesh Kumar (2005) at the Waterman Arts Centre, which caters to largely white British audiences. The play was advertised as taking “a fresh look at Asian marriage with a British twist” and “it welcomes its audience as wedding guests”. This is yet another attempt by a native informant, who has earlier produced good work, to cater to the tastes of the British audiences by a humorous take on the arranged marriage, but the texts that were studied in this chapter show how, despite its occasionally funny peculiarities, the young men and women most often attest to its viability than otherwise.

How do women react to the new possibilities of dating, choosing the partner, “approved” marriages, etc? The successful, aggressive BrAsian woman is quite demanding, according to Black, White and Asian male respondents to an internet article by Yasmeen Khan (2007) on BrAsian women looking out for mates (www.bbc.co.uk). She is not able to find mates because she is looking for the impossible, according to them. Tania, (LI) an older single BrAsian woman, seems to be one such woman, as the text finds her unhappy in nearly all relationships with men, and when she herself speaks on how even young and successful BrAsian women’s married life is full of compromise, she seems to suggest why she is looking for the ideal mate and not finding one.

Tania’s mother, and many other women in Life Isn’t...(2000) suffer agonies meeting both ends on an alien land. Tania is particularly sensitive to how BrAsian women allow themselves to be treated by their men. Tania had been trained by her mother to remain silent and as unobtrusive as possible, “silver and silent as mercury”
She says that this is how the second-generation predominantly reacts as well: it is “our defence against the corruption outside our front door” (ibid), as typical East End Asians would like to believe. Tania recalls her friend Meena’s lifestyle, and how several friends of hers, who are the svelte Armani-clad bosses at work, and “then they reach their front porch and forget it all” (147). Meena may be sacking her staff at work, but she was seen by Tania, “simpering away around her husband” (ibid) for something for which she was not to be blamed. Tania concludes:

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 mother’s voices and heed them, to make up for all the other imagined transgressions in our lives. (148)

Perhaps this search for an ideal mate incorporates these homing anxieties, these possibilities of daily compromise and misplaced gratitude sometimes women have to face in marriage across communities, race and class. However, the predominantly endogamous pattern of spouse selection is probably going to be perpetuated unless major socio-cultural restructuring heralds change. Ballard asserts that “it is the perceived benefits of network membership, rather than mere custom, which has underpinned continuing high rates of endogamy” and unless there is some change in “the long-term maintenance of transnational networks” there “is a strong probability that such networks will be sustained” (46).

Thus, while representing conventional patterns of marriage, arranged or love marriage, and non-traditional, inter-racial marriage, same-sex relationships and bisexuality, the BrAsian women writers are confident, skillful and truthful. The analysis yields several interesting findings, which may be studied to theorise BrAsian culture and its representation as a bold, new aspect of culture studies in contemporary times.

5.7 Findings.

One of the most important findings relate to the ways in which relationships affect the decisions related to the careers of young BrAsian women and vice versa. Young educated BrAsian women commit themselves to meaningful love relationships before marriage, but they are very careful to terminate them if they come in the way of their careers (Mira in LFM) or personal life in the family or community (Maya in OHSW, Mala in HSDY), or if they tend to be dominated by their male partners, as the
nameless narrator of Randhawa’s “Pedal Push” does, or Tania in *LI*, Maya in *OHSW*.

The other interesting revelation comes from the analysis of arranged marriages and their relation to material wealth or prosperity, modernity and upward mobility. The young, educated BrAsian woman finds herself dually imbricated in the society’s framework of material success and traditional values, without always seeing them in conflict (Tania in *LI*, Hari-jan in *Hj*, Maya in *OHSW*). The older generation’s concern for a meaningful value system that retains essential humanity is shared by the younger generation, the women being as sensitive to carry it forward as the men (Arvind/Shirley in *AWOW*, Rax and Angie in *T*, Suri/ Maya in *OHSW*).

The third boldly drawn feature traces the importance of successful relationships as role models to youngsters. Marriages or successful love relationships between partners, either BrAsian, white British or mixed-race, shine like examples before young protagonists, who are affected by the nuances of these subtle bonds, rather than their overt manifestations or expression. They cherish the security, confidence and respect that such relationships bring to the family or community. Meena notices her parents, her aunts and uncles, the Woralls, Hairy Neddy and Sandy, and evaluates them against the brazen sexuality that usually governs the working class male-female relationships in her village. Mira, Angie, Tania, Maya, Mala learn to look up to the examples set by their parents, older loving partners or married couples within or outside their community. Similarly, failing or strained marriages affect young BrAsians like Tania, Maya, Mala Fonseka and Sumitra, who are afraid to marry or stay committed in relationships for long, and who are still unsure about their commitment to the community in which they belong.

Most of the women authors are not very forthcoming about homosexuality and lesbian relationships, but the intensity of the description of these relationships in just the few texts discussed, balances the paucity of number. It is important to know that BrAsian women and men, are still finding it difficult to come to terms with their sexuality, and even if gay men are portrayed, they are mostly from the mainstream, like Frank or Morgan, or Bob. A gay BrAsian like Tony, is still a closet homosexual, and Varanee (“Death Rites”) is already facing death and loss. The portrayal of the lives of BrAsian lesbians (Shazia, Mehtab and Sangita) takes into account their negotiations with community, class and race along with their sexual preference. The celebratory approach to a lesbian “marriage”, though a mere token, is rare, in a short story with a mainstream, heteronormative readership, so the political agenda of the
AWWC writers and editors must be recognized: they wish to admit the coming of age of BrAsian writers who are committed to portraying alternative sexuality, and its problems in a racially discriminative, gender-biased society.

It is not really a coincidence that, as in this case, some of the friendships between the Asian British and the Irish are frequently found in novels and films. Though relationships between other British immigrant communities are rarely found, these two communities, with shared histories of colonisation, discrimination and some similarities in terms of family bonds and staying together to survive crises, are often embedded in lasting bonds. There are references to this in popular culture as well as in literature. One example is the way film *East is East* (1992) in which Mr. Khan’s Irish wife bears with his bullying and battering for the sake of the family, much like a South Asian wife. Another is found in *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002) where the Irish football coach Joe is in love with, and mentor to, the Sikh girl Jess Bhambra. The Irish brother and sister Maggie and Tom (*OHSW*), perhaps named deliberately after the legendary brother and sister created by George Eliot, are the only support to the Indian Kathis. The reticent and aloof Irish woman Eileen (*CCC*) loves her BrAsian friends, supports and helps them, remains committed to her Thursday duty only to be in their company.

Despite the closeness between Irish and BrAsians, the major disturbing finding after reading this body of work from the point of view of racial harmony, stems from the exclusivity of the community in general: there are no in-depth explorations of inter-racial marriages and their impact on the lives of children. The children are either unnamed, like Anya-Yuri’s daughter (*MIM*); or unknown to the reader, like the little dead child Ayesha, born to Bethany’s mother with Luxy Fonseka (*HSDY*); or not focused on like Shirley and Arvind/Arnold’s sons (*AWOW*), Amrit and Jonesy’s son Ashok Kaushik (*LFM*), or Meera and Mike’s daughter Amrita in *Amritvela* (*FL*). Alibhai-Brown and other social researchers (Sian Peer 2000, Ravinder Barn et al 1997 cited in Brown 2000) articulate their worries about this kind of marginalisation of mixed-race people in film, fiction, social policy and mainstream life in general. Though in certain sections like fashion, theatre, art, music, mixed-race youth are very successful and “happening”, (Alibhai-Brown 2001; *Hard Times* 1999; Brah 2006), in most cases in British, not only British Asian, fiction, we hardly find descriptions of mixed-race marriages or the lives of mixed-race children. Some British writers of diverse origins have tried to engage with these subjects. The popular
novel *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith contains portrayals of mixed-race characters who seem unreal, too happy to even be contemporary Londoners, who do not worry about who they are, and where they belong. Alibhai-Brown discusses how a few, not so popular novels like *Admiring Silence* (Penguin, 1996) by Abdulrazak Gurnah deal with a mixed-race relationship extensively, as does Ahdaf Soueif’s novel *The Map of Love* (Bloomsbury, 1999). But among BrAsian writers, mixed race relationships are nearly always under a cloud, as in Hanif Qureishi’s novels, or the many novels by BrAsian women writers read in this chapter, which deal with inconclusive, destructive, unhappy or abandoned relationships rather than fulfilling, mutually satisfying, lasting alliances. Portraits of children born out of such relationships are thus hardly likely to be found here, as a result of this poorly represented part of mainstream BrAsian life. The few mixed-race couples with children located largely in urban centers may not be a demographically visible part of the BrAsian population, preferring to stay aloof from the cultural and social scene of the Asian community which would readily coopt them into an umbrella ‘Asianness’, if only they were less visibly ‘white’ or ‘black’. Acceptance of mixed-race children, specially of black and Asian mixed-marriages, is like a dream to some of those mixed-race families living in Britain. One of her interviewees quoted by Alibhai- Brown says: “This dream will take a long time to come true. ... We have a long way to go. It will not happen in this lifetime. Not even in the next generation, I don’t think” (2001: 160). There is an urgent need for change in public debate on diversity policy, multicultural education, appropriate legal and marriage counselling, adoption policies for mixed-marriage couples. Community leaders should themselves engage in these debates related to the well being of the nation, instead of unrealistically invoking the bogey of racial infiltration and counting the “diminishing” numbers of their race.

**5.8 Conclusions**

The conclusions drawn from such findings point to the importance of male-female relationships in the BrAsian novel which is always in a relation of tension with the educational achievement and career of BrAsian women. Thoughts about women’s careers and relationships dominate the mental processes of these writers, most of whom are second-generation BrAsians, or migrants who have lived in Britain since childhood. This is expected in the “model migrant” community of South Asians
internationally, but here, in this body of work, women’s contribution to the community’s development is taken very seriously specially by the second-generation women writers, who allow no slippages in their portrayals of social commitment in their protagonists. They never, unless briefly, for education or personal reasons, leave the country or disown their community: if they ever do, they return to let their lives be reinscribed into BrAsianness, like Maya (OHSW) or as discussed in Chapter Two, Meera (Amritvela). On the other hand, novels written by sojourners or first-generation migrants construct fluid identities of their protagonists, as Sunetra Gupta or Saumya Balsari do: their characters travel from country to country, taken from city to city in their search for life’s meanings, whereas their BrAsian counterparts introspect within their preinscribed geographies, their gendered geographies of power.

Arranged marriage is not seen as a cruel and oppressive system by the educated young BrAsian woman of any class: it is an institution that can make for individual growth and agency, economic independence and social prestige, and can be negotiated carefully if one is educated and earning, as the texts show. Moreover, as a complex social institution, it can help construct the community’s identity against racial discrimination by collective effort, increased numbers and greater visibility in public spheres. As Amrit Wilson writes, “The Asian family is seen as a source of strength against the world outside. It is all important for survival ... even in the context of mental illness” (116). She also adds a note on the limitations of the Asian family as an institution: it refuses to admit any “weakness in its structure, lest this admission weaken it further”, and it defines problems faced by women in it as “non-existent” because of its patriarchal structure (ibid).

The authors portray happiness in marital relationship, with an exclusively heteronormative focus: happiness or unhappiness is located within male-female relationships or heterosexual marriages, gays and lesbians are generally kept out of the pale, though one or two tokens of intense portrayals of these are available in BrAsian fiction.

As the texts imply, youngsters of second generation can influence others to cultivate better social contact with other communities like the Afro-Carribeans, the white mainstream, other Asians and European migrants. A more open society will result from more open social conclaves, greater political participation, more visible efforts at community organization for self-government, which will lead to better
visibility in the political arena, in high offices and decision-making bodies. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown says, in the concluding chapter in her book *Who Do We Think We Are?* (2000) that there should be a public debate on how the nation defines itself in the next century: maybe a new national flag with Black in it, public policy admitting black people in high places, political parties and the government doing the same. Alibhai-Brown uses Black as a political term of resistance, in which Asian or any other non-white person is nominated. She hopes that the media responds well too, with more Black people in “gate-keeping positions” (272). Education needs a change too, it should stop stereotyping Black male under-achievement and challenge it. Feminism should become more inclusive and less ghettoised, there should be such action that “all our daughters and sons can support” (273). Family life must be reassessed as new moralities are taken on board, that are neither too absolute nor too relative. She agrees with Fred d’Aguiar and Bhikhu Parekh that differences can be overcome and that a national identity should be created which should affirm unity and distinctiveness. She hails the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Report, investigating the death of a young Black man in April 1993 placed before the Parliament in February 1999 as a positive step towards ending racism, and that “Many more Britons today are convinced that the difference between the tribes is bridgeable, must be bridged, and shall be bridged” (274).

**The Question Of “Artistic Obsession” And Reader Reception.**

It must be reiterated that the subjects of career choices, and their linkages with love, marriage and sexuality, are central to the writers’ psychosocial engagement, thus quite a few stories in this sample are based on intertwining these themes. As referred to in earlier chapters, Pnina Werbner makes a number of generalised allegations about the BrAsian novel from her reading of a few unnamed novels on marriage and sex, as is apparent from her description of their themes, though she does not mention a single title. Based on a reading of novels like “The Satanic Verses” Werbner argues that “most high cultural works by South Asian intellectuals” have had a minimal impact on the “organization of the South Asian diaspora” and that “much like Bollywood films, their artistic obsession with themes of love and sexuality in the family simply reflects a pervasive South Asian concern with marriage and familial conflict” (2004: 904). She also shows how, popular novels and new age films by Hanif Kureishi and Gurinder Chadha focus on debunking tradition, portraying outdated social norms held sacred by the older generation, and presenting satirical
portraits of the community in general, which are seen as very desirable, very much in place by her. The question of audience reception of South Asian high cultural works has been raised in Chapter One section 1.4, and should be answered in each subsequent chapter and the conclusion, but Werbner does not name even a single writer other than Rushdie, whose writing hardly deals with the thematic concerns of the BrAsian diaspora. Critics like Mark Stein claim that the transformation of British society is taking place through the Black British Bildungsroman, which is also contested in this thesis as too absolute a term, and he too names Syal and Kureishi only. This kind of privileging of a few BrAsian novels completely ignores the fact that there are many other committed writers among BrAsian women. Mainstream critics do not usually go beyond mentioning Meera Syal’s novels, or Randhawa’s or Leena Dhangra’s first novel, whenever discussing BrAsian women’s fiction, whereas Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi feature in any discussion of BrAsian diaspora fiction, whether they are relevant to the context or not. The BrAsian women writers are producing work which does not claim the status of high culture, but when critics like Werbner leave them out of the scope of discussion, and comment extensively on new wave film and a handful of popular romances, it seems that they concentrate on creative production which projects the desired dimension of culture-conflict to the mainstream. Films like My Beautiful Launderette or East is East have been appreciated by Western readers and critics for their authentic and defiant portrayal of inconsistencies within the community. But these critics would rather not engage with discussions on My Son The Fanatic or BrAsian novels read here, as they question stereotypes, suggest similar inconsistencies in the lives led by BrAsians and the white British, with equal amounts of exploitation and marginalisation of the poor, of women, and the displaced. Monica Ali is lauded as “another rising South Asian woman writer”, whereas Meera Syal and Zadie Smith are mentioned in the endnotes, and only their first novels are referred to in Werbner’s article.

Werbner objects to the “artistic obsession” with love and marriage in the high cultural works, which she does not name, but she fails to read deeper into such discussions if she means novels by Randhawa, Dhangra, Srivastava, Preethi Nair’s early novels or Sunetra Gupta’s novels. If the BrAsian novels considered in this thesis had been read, such an objection would have not arisen, failing which, it is inadmissible to allow it to influence academicians regarding these texts. There are other reasons for the poor visibility or slow or lukewarm reception of the BrAsian
novel (see Chapter One, section 1.4): these reasons may not be due to their subject matter, and the subject matter of love and sexuality may not be just a typically “South Asian” obsession or concern. Contrary to what Pnina Werbner finds, this study has tried to show how much more of focus has been given on careers or professions than on love and marriage by the British Asian writers. In fact the authors postpone any serious closure in, or avoid making a “final” statement about the love life of the heroines. Instead, they integrate romance or marriage with self-development, relationships with parents or the social position arising out of successful careers or professions or other aspects of homing desires (AWOW, HJ, ASC). The involvement of the heroines in romance is usually undermined by their interest in other aspects of their lives as BrAsians, choosing their career, promotion, changing career, further migration for career development etc (AWWC stories, T, GM, LI, CCC). The romance is often a subplot, usually abandoned or reconfigured at the end of the text, and controlled by authorial intrusion, comment or self-reflection by the protagonist (MIM, MR, LFM, FL). It must be noted that these texts are written by educated women, to whom marriage and social relocation are as central as career choice, thus the novels and stories read here, will have a clear focus on both of these issues as integral parts of homing desires. Being novels by young women of South Asian descent, most of whom share some feminist concerns, they would prioritise career and emotional relations, over which the women in their diaspora communities all over the world are slowly gaining control wrested from patriarchal and other forces.

Writing by women is concerned with the sensitive portrayal and nuanced expression of individuation at crucial phases of everyday life. This needs to be addressed by theory for a more meaningful growth of any society. Representation of both Asian, British and BrAsian community life gives a unique flavour to their work: “border-crossing”, “writing from the frontier” and other terms appear limited in addressing the vast variety of lived experience that these writers bring, they are really “narratives of a new belonging” a term Roger Bromley uses to describe writing of the diaspora that incorporates a “multi-locational imagination” (2000). The textual strategies used by the authors reject the notions of purity or invincibility, superiority or otherwise of either the Asian or British communities, which they examine from close quarters. The narrative strategies and authorial representation continue to “undermine received notions of ethnic or cultural stability and negotiate new modes of sociocultural self-understanding” (Schulze-Engler 2007: 53).