Conclusion

It has been an effort, in this thesis, to trace the multiplicity of the ways in which identity is being repeatedly negotiated across intersections of race, class, religion, sexual orientation and many other factors, by both female protagonists and often male characters, in BrAsian fiction by women. Frank Schulze-Engler (2007) calls this kind of fiction “transcultural fiction”, and says that these renegotiations are expressions of “modern” forms of ethnicity “in that it contributes to the emergence of different modes of being modern in a world where modernity is increasingly experienced in transnational and transcultural contexts” (56).

Chapter One focuses on the framework of the diaspora to be used in the thesis, which has helped in contextualising the cultural representation by BrAsian women writers. It also examines the historical and socio-political and cultural background which has caused this kind of writing to emerge. The rationale behind the specialised use of the term hybridity, as a site of political resistance, is traced in this opening chapter, which positions the BrAsian women writers of the 1980s and after in a specific context of cultural responsibility. The analysis in the remaining chapters shows how the female protagonists see the diasporic space rather than the nation as the only possible, though not ideal “home”. They choose to chart out a path of existence which will enable them, through childhood, adolescence, youth and maturity to fulfil their homing desires. They might be seen as the new inheritors of a complex, multi-layered, transnational culture, but with the option to choose hybridity over paying lip-service to the ideology of the nation, to question the notion of home, self and community.

Chapter Two shows how in the public and private spaces, in these gendered geographies of power, they deal with transnational or traditional influences of the community, or the rigours of a racialised existence in modern, “multicultural” Britain. As Chapter Three analyses, the oppositional identity of the protagonists often emerges in adolescence, and they are faced with multiple negotiations at home and outside: they are faced with generational difference; response to transnational forces; their own sexuality; betrayal in love; class and cultural conflict, pressures of upward mobility etc. It is found while reading these texts, that there is an insistence on portraying initial resistance to the parent community, followed by a complete reversal of attitude: there is tolerance, respect and dependence on the family or community, just as there is a
sense of acceptance of the white British or other racial formations in the neighbourhood. The openness and the frank criticism of the limitations of both mainstream and immigrant communities are portrayed through nuanced discussions and authorial comment at relevant time-spaces. BrAsian fiction also includes sensitive portrayals of the lesbian and the gay male, which signifies the maturity of BrAsian fiction, which is slowly transforming BrAsian culture. The confidence shown by the young protagonists belie the essentialising and homogenizing allegations of their being confused hybrids in search of belonging.

In adulthood, as in adolescence, the protagonists face frequent disruptions in their career on their way to the high standard they have set for themselves, and the family and community expects of them: but this does not deter them from the pursuit of happiness and the fulfilment of their homing desires, as Chapter Four discusses. The texts offer possibilities of new theorisation on the family structure as well: they probe into the new forms of gendered geographies of power, which separate mothers from daughters. It is interesting to note how education and access to westernised modes of life, in other words modernity, give agency to daughters, who often exploit their mothers, but are also profoundly sympathetic to their mothers’ sufferings. The daughters, or the women of the second generation use their hybridity as a political site of resistance and continue to create new diasporic selves in their gendered geographies of power, while finding out fascinating aspects of their multiple, not binary selves.

The emphasis on homing desires is discussed in this thesis, in which Chapter Five offers a conceptual model of a prismatic structure which captures the intersectionality of these desires and the socio-cultural milieu. Questions of religion, caste, region, class and race configure these desires along with upward mobility. Through the creation of exemplary figures, the BrAsian writers are not only contesting stereotypes but reminding readers of the transformative power of cultural mediators. BrAsian women authors, far from adopting merely fashionable stances of “border-crossings” are trying to write their “narratives of a new belonging” (Bromley 2000), and even if they cross frontiers and borders, these are conceptual borders. In fact the disruptions caused by the presence of an American, or contact with America are often suggested, as pointed out in the chapters, but the protagonist finds fulfilment only after returning to the BrAsian or the larger British community. Even transnational affinities are questioned, and India appears as a space in the imaginary,
towards which the protagonist tends for solace, relief or succour, but not as the place for fulfilling their homing desires.

As discussed in the introduction to the thesis, the emphasis of this thesis has been primarily to locate sociocultural exchanges between self and community (ies) of the BrAsian woman, and thus stylistic analysis has been of interest from this point of view. Certain similarities of style have been located, but the uniqueness of the author's styles resists homogenisation of any kind. Aesthetic principles are used, as the aims of the AWWC writers suggest, in the 1980s and 90s, to represent BrAsianness, which has its unique bearings on literary representation. Thus the inner logic of the piece, the logic of compulsive telling, of needing an audience to hear the woman in search of a place in the diaspora becomes more relevant than western aesthetic principles. It is befitting to evaluate these works by reference to common strategies used to redefine relevant aesthetic patterns in order to represent the cross-currents of existence in the diaspora.

Some aesthetic devices become significant in reading BrAsian fiction, though they are not uniformly or repetitively produced by authors. Images and metaphors convey the variety of emotional journeys made by the protagonists of these texts: Sumitra (SS) is tossed like a leaf from culture to culture, Kulwant (AWOW) wears a shabby coat and make-up and walks all over London. The use of personal symbols conveys the innermost longings of the female protagonists. Raisa's (RB) mother's secrets are locked in the beautiful but ominously coloured red box; Evita's gypsy (GM), Angie's mamaji's stories (T), are all symbols of longing, premonitions of transformations about to overtake the BrAsian protagonist's smooth lives. The use of dream and reverie reflect the author's intention to correlate incidents and the protagonists' psyche. Sumitra's fearful dreams, Quaiser's dream of her father's ugly hand and the viaduct (FS) prove to be prophetic, they are like premonitions of disaster. They invariably deal with subconscious urges or fears related to issues of race and colour, longing for sociocultural acceptance or "rooting" in the soil that very slowly responds to their homing desires. It is invariably found that metaphors, symbols and references to dreams are usually found when the longing for 'home' is greatest, that is in late adolescence or early youth, and crucially linked to the period of change or development of career, as the discussions on the individual texts suggest.

The distinctive feature which shows the BrAsian writers as unique to the diaspora is their ability and willingness to engage with language as it is spoken or used
in Britain. Notable among them are Atima Srivastava, Meera Syal and Sunetra Gupta who engage with language uniquely. Angie and Rax (T), for example, speak in totally different registers between themselves and among their family members: Rax, Rakesh to his parents, calls her “Jelly”, uses slang like “Chaaa, man”, and “Ma’s vex up with you, Jelly” (46). Angie’s mother and uncle have a wonderful sense of mockery when using English: they mock BrAsian accents, saying “Southhole Fraudway” (53), “Tooforwon” (257) deals at Tesco, which Rax calls “pakistores”. Like these North London siblings, the East London trio, Tania, Chila and Sunita (LI) also use code-switching with panache. They do not flinch while using “silly cow”, “t’riffic”, and the ultimate Eastend slang, “innit?”, which is a combination of the original tag “isn’t it?” and an extended application as all question tags, like “don’t we?”, “can’t I”, “won’t it?” as in “hai na?” in Hindi. Similarly, they use Punjabi or Hindi without translation, e.g. “Nazar nahi lagthe” (242), as the elders use do in their private, community or family get togethers. Set against these, Meera Syal’s use of “OAP” for Old Age Pensioners, and “snog”, a British slang for a kiss and cuddle, shows how BrAsian youngsters are involved in living their two worlds with ease and familiarity.

Sunetra Gupta’s protagonists are equally adept at finding equivalents for their feelings from Tagore as from Eliot, or Keats, Shelley, Browning, or even sufi poetry, nursery rhymes, ballads and Brecht’s plays. Their range of references reflect their restlessness, their ability to traverse vast time-spaces in search of a new home: her long sentences, with several parenthetical clauses embedded in them, seem to let the reader lose herself in search for meaning. This is precisely Gupta’s intention: to deconstruct western notions of syntax and diction, to let meaning ooze out. The rambling of words is nonsequential, but the random order is only a matter of appearance. As soon as the reader loses a link, she needs to repeat her meanderings in search for meaning, symbolising the rootlessness in human existence itself, where spaces, time-zones, meanings, processes are constantly dislodged from their significance.

Sam Naidu (2007 forthcoming), in her unpublished article on transnational feminist aesthetics of women writers of the South Asian diaspora suggests six major aesthetic elements. This thesis proposes some departures from these and offers additions, as discussed earlier. Naidu suggests that autobiography and memory form a first point of commonality between women writers of the South Asian diaspora, and this thesis analyses this aspect of common narrative strategy in Chapter Two. Naidu
also suggests how food, “titillating tastes” and “domestic heroism” form the second major element of these shared characteristics. In the BrAsian novel, food production is intimately linked with the politics of food consumption: for Angie (T), Hari-jan (Hj), Maya (OHSW) or Nina (Bl) and Sumitra (SS) the kitchen is a place of enforced domestication, and the aspect of titillation by food gets subsumed under the politics of desire for either hybrid or authentic food and the emotional satisfaction the consumption of both generates.

The role of female relatives is assessed by Naidu, next, and adjudged as the third most commonly observed aesthetic element in South Asian diaspora writing by women. But there is an important distinction in the way this device is used by the BrAsian writers: the female exemplar is often not a relative, and not even British Asian. She may be white British woman like Mrs. Worall (AM) or Maggie (OHSW). In fact, the influence of role models outside the family or community makes space for a re-examination of exclusivist attitudes of BrAsians towards the white British.

Naidu’s fourth category is that of intertextuality and cultural translation, and this is one element of aesthetic choice that the BrAsian writer shares with her other international counterparts. Many of the texts share a certain amount of intercultural and textual reference, through references to Hindi film, music, dance, food, festivals, religious references, for example deities like Lakshmi, or Kali. Naidu mentions the use of sex, the female body and marriage as the fifth strongly observed aesthetic element of this literature, and this is also a shared attribute of BrAsian writers of fiction. Both in the short stories and the novels, the depiction of sex, marriage and the female body occur as crucial aspects of the fulfilment of homing desires, and references to these have been made in Chapter Five. The paradox of “continuity and change”, the sixth and final aesthetic element as suggested by Naidu, does inform BrAsian fiction by women, as they do writing by other South Asian diaspora’s women authors. This has been shown by previous analysis. This thesis recognises the BrAsian’s “ability to adapt, assimilate, blend cultural influences, defy stereotypes and find fulfilment” as Naidu finds typical to South Asian women in diaspora.

Thus the future of this kind of writing shines bright, with bolder writers experimenting with genres, styles and engagements with social issues, returning the investment the country of their adoption has made in them, by enriching its literature beyond borders of nationality and belonging. Future research may examine the relevance of this work to the body of diaspora writing as a whole, comparing and
contrasting it with writings from Canada, Australia, America and other centres of sizeable Indian migration. Use of linguistic devices, portrayal of individual groups like the Bangladeshi, Punjabi, Malayali or Bengali community may be of specific interest. The motif of clothes, dressing and fashion anxiety, the cultural experiments related to food, music and language, may be taken up as specialised focus of interest by future studies. The changing nature of occupations of women, their contribution to the notion of success of the community in general, their roles in academia or the media may also be studied with reference to these texts.

What is perhaps also a matter of academic interest is the politics of publication. Why is it that despite the strength of narrative and stylistic competence and sincere portrayals of BrAsian life, these novels suffer in terms of visibility and access? Is it a question of an indifferent cultural bias of the host country, which loves its Asian *kool*, but refuses to take the Asian author seriously? Or is it that American literary property, even if it is South Asian American, is more viable than any other? Does it have to with the materialistic culture, an extension of transnational, sub-continental preoccupation with late modernism, that portrays the protagonists in a certain predominantly "Modern Indian Woman" role that the reader wishes to reject? Keeping in mind that ‘freedom’ is a highly elusive term, is that the reason why the BrAsian women characters appear assertive, but choose to remain less ‘free’ to transcend community borders while fulfilling personal aspirations towards modernity? Are they therefore unattractive, unlike the rebellious, exotic South Asian American women who cross frontiers of the wild West in a South Asian American novel of the same period? These are questions to be answered by further research, using a comparatist approach to the two bodies of diaspora writing.

It is time however, to move beyond the paradigm of diaspora, and to think of the fluid identity of BrAsians with the influence of a refurbished transnational culture beamed via satellite television, Hindi film, music, and Indian literature in English in the past two decades, which makes India more attractive to the diaspora than it was before. The community of BrAsians and their transnational investment grows by leaps and bounds, with NDTV holding Scholar Hunt in India for full scholarships to UK universities, Hindi films about BrAsians like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1993), *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001), *Yaadein* (2001) *Cheeni Kum* (2007), *Namastey London* (2007), just as *Bombay Dreams* (2001) and *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) are made in Bollywood style largely by BrAsians in London. Besides the popular and
mainstream media there are new collaborations in sports, sciences, music, art, dance and theatre, which create an ongoing exchange between the two countries, that bring the diaspora home. Hopefully, one day new margins of erasure will obliterate the division between cultural formations like the BrAsian diaspora, and studies like these will be useful as historical accounts of societies in transformation.