Chapter One
Contextualising BrAsian Women’s Writing

1. Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the historical, socio-political and economic contexts in which British Asian women’s writing was produced, especially the writing of women of Indian origin. The chapter begins with an examination of the concept of the diaspora. The first three sections offer a close look at three phases of the history of South Asian presence in Britain. The three phases have been identified in this chapter as follows: in the first phase, migration of Indians in the pre-Independence period, the period from around the 17th century to 1947, is discussed; the second phase examines migration from 1947 to the 1970s, when immigration to England began to be a noticeably common phenomenon; and the third phase, 1970s to the present, is when the Indian community in Britain was identifiably large and making its presence felt in public spaces and services. The fourth section traces the emergence of women writers in the 1980s, and describes their agenda and the need for representation felt by them. The fifth section discusses identity, hybridity, globalisation, transnationalism, multiculturalism and women’s role in nation-building in the present scenario. The sixth and concluding section discusses the emergence of novelists of the 1990s and after.

The writers discussed here belong to the last phase of South Asian migration to Britain. Ravinder Randhawa, Meera Syal and Nisha Minhas were born in the U.K. Some of the writers have undergone migration to England at different stages in their lives: Leena Dhingra, Atima Srivastava and Preethi Nair came to England in childhood, whereas Sunetra Gupta and Saumya Balsari settled in England some years after marriage. Dhingra, Gupta and Balsari had lived in many other countries, as children whose parents’ jobs involved international postings; as university students or later, after marriage, when their own families moved wherever their occupations took them. The writers of the Asian Women Writers’ Collective share similar backgrounds: some were second-generation emigrants, some sojourners, and others had arrived in England as children. The writing of all these authors bears the mark of their life stages, as most of their fiction is semi-autobiographical in nature. It is important to recognise the diversity of the backgrounds of these writers, as its impact on their writing is structured along their period of emigration, class, education, professional
interest, community linkages, both transnational and diasporic, language spoken at home etc. Thus, in every chapter, though there are some common observations and conclusions, care has been taken to analyse the unique position of the writer vis a vis characters, situations, societal norms and class and community loyalties.

In recognition of the heterogeneity of non-white populations in Britain it is essential that some choices of nomenclature be discussed at the outset of this thesis. The terminology used in this thesis to describe migrants and sojourners from India to Britain in the first phase is “Indian”, as originating from an undivided India before 1947. In the second phase, from 1947 to the 1970s, people of subcontinental origin were called “Asians”, and that is how they are described in this phase. For the presumably “second-generation”, which often stands for later immigrants who might not have been born in Britain but had arrived later, the term Asian would seem inadequate. This is because Asians could include other nationalities as well, like the Chinese or Arabs who were also now a part of the migrant population. Though the use of “Asian” to describe the former group is current in the UK, it is not so in the US, where this group is called South Asian. In the 1980s and 90s the term “Black” was often used in the third temporal phase to describe people of the Indian subcontinent, which they resisted, and preferred to be known as British Asians or South Asians in Britain.

Tariq Modood (1994) clearly enunciates in his essay, “Political Blackness and British Asians” seven reasons why he prefers not to use “Black” in place of “Asian” or “South Asian”. Broadly, he says, “the term black is not neutral amongst non-white ethnic groups. It has a historical and current meaning such that it is powerfully evocative of people of sub-Saharan origins, and all other groups, if evoked at all, are secondary” (1994: 863). Modood also adds that there are seven reasons for his preference: he finds the usage of “Black” restrictive because it reflects a certain misuse or doublespeak; a narrow concept of racial discrimination; a false essentialism; obfuscation of Asian needs; “a too politicised identity” (867); “Black” is not conducive to ethnic pride; and finally, there is too much of coercion from the advocates of “Black”. Modood points out how “the language and imagery of public identity is integrally linked with inequality, discrimination, and exclusion on the one hand, and with group pride, mobilization and liberation on the other hand” (864) and thus how the way a community gets named has a significant impact on its identity in a heterogeneous nation.
In 2006, a group of three British Asian sociologists from the universities of Leeds and Manchester Nasreen Ali, Virinder Kalra, and S. Sayyid made popular the term “BrAsian” in their book *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. This term describes such a group, which has emigrated from the Indian subcontinent after Indian independence and the creation of Pakistan and later Bangladesh (1971). The authors are all scholars situated in British Asian academic spaces, and have elucidated their own theoretical investment in the choice of such a name to denote the existence of the Asian community in Britain (2006: 8-9). Firstly, they prefer its confusion of Western and Eastern categories as opposed to the hackneyed dyadic terminology so far used. Secondly, they posit that the “intermediate terrain” occupied by this community is suggested by the name, which on the one hand disrupts the balance of power tilted towards the majority, since the majority is continuously being transformed by their presence, and signifies the inadmissibility of a hyphenated existence on the other. Thirdly, they admit to the temporary inadequacy of the term, as if it is “under erasure” in the Derridean sense, but in the absence of any alternative, the term ought to suggest that it is not yet a “fully formed name” that holds together the diverse experiential domains of the Asian settlers. The fourth dimension of their choice relates to the Tebbit Cricket test, by which Asians fail to be British when they support a “home” team from the subcontinent. In other words, they are never fully British in terms of citizenship: they will continue to be viewed through essentialised notions of race and inferiority of culture, despite being British citizens. Thus the name BrAsian has been found suitable in this thesis to denote the process of negotiating identity in British spaces, by second or third generations of South Asians living in the UK from the 1970s to the present.

**Conceptual framework of The Diaspora.**

Migration of populations from the economically disadvantaged South to the affluent, developed Northern countries has increased manifold after postcolonial national formations. Ironically, even after their nations have earned their freedom from colonisation, aspirations for better lives, financial and social status of the erstwhile masters have drawn subjects from ex-colonies to the metropolitan centres. The process of migration involves displacement, and this in turn reconfigures the migrant’s psyche and her identity: the migrant hopes one day to return and reconfirm ties with the homeland, and feels nostalgic and often alienated in the host nation. Identity construction of such migrant subjects have been performed through
historically marked political processes. Before taking a closer look at the way identity is negotiated in migrant Indian women’s fiction in Britain, it is important to identify what kind of migrants they are: whether they are economically motivated migrants or sojourners, or whether they are a diaspora.

The state of being away from home, in self-imposed or economically motivated exile, is often called diaspora. The term is also used to stand for a community or peoples who are immigrants or exiles or refugees. Thus it can be used in both senses, that is, both as an abstract noun and as an adjective functioning at the head of a noun phrase. The Old Testament and Jewish connotation of the term involved the sense of being forcefully dispersed, like seeds, hoping one day to return to native soil, as William Safran, (1991: 84) one of the foremost scholars of the diaspora suggest. But not all diasporas today are based on longing or nostalgia to return. As discussed above, diasporas are often communities which “re-turn”, to their homeland, which involves, according to Khachig Tololyan “a repeated turning to the concept and/or relation of the homeland and other diasporan kin” (1996: 14 cited in Desai 2003: 19). Participating in home politics, repeatedly turning the gaze of memory homewards, traveling back and forth, maintaining strong kinship ties, celebrating national or community rituals, and taking part in cultural production are some of the ways a diaspora re-turns home without physically relocating. Thus diaspora is no longer a feeling of nostalgia or exile away from home, but a site for a continuous revalidation of the ties between self and homeland, choice of residence vis a vis sense of being at home. The globalizing forces of media and migration offer a new mobility to people, who can now draw on a vast array of imaginative resources to make sense of their multiple identities and unconventional lifestyles. Observing this geopolitical formation of migration from different perspectives, scholars are still trying to unravel its many facets by theories of the diaspora, identity, nationhood and culture.

Edward Said (1978) examines diaspora as a state of being in exile, though that itself is the state of “being happy with the idea of unhappiness”. Paul Gilroy (1991) suggests the idea of diasporic flows and spaces across the Black Atlantic. Homi Bhabha (1994) engages with diaspora from a celebratory angle, claiming that it produces a hybrid counter aesthetic, finding a third space, with the “right” to express, to intervene in and to initiate cultural change. One of the foremost scholars of the diaspora, Stuart Hall (1996), relates it to empowerment of the black people as hybrids,
seeking cultural representation. By showing how diasporic public spheres created by
the global electronic mediation are “no longer small, marginal, or exceptional”, Arjun
Appadurai invests them with a new visibility and centrality, calling them the
to the double consciousness of the diasporic subject as central to any, or all
experience.

Feminist scholars of the world have offered their own readings of this
condition of modern human existence. Gayatri Spivak (1990; 1999) in her extensive
work theorized subalternity and transnationality in relation to the diasporas of the
contemporary postcolonial world. Spivak (1999) is highly critical of the diaspora
critic and academic in their failure to connect with the subaltern from the South. She
problematises the relationship of such critics with their homeland or those
underprivileged people they have left behind and now refuse to know. She speaks
about the West’s appropriation of the migrant Japanese designer Rei Kwakubo, as
opposed to Farida Akhter, a Bangladeshi activist, responsible for collectivising
indigenous producers of jamdani sarees, in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason (352-
361). By comparing these two non-Western producers of textile, she shows how the
methods of industrial capitalism are repeated by the present globalised, micro-
electronic capitalism in the geopolitical exploitation and erasure of the labour of the
third world women from the West’s imagination. Rey Chow (1993) understands the
phenomenon of the dispora from the point of view of the Chinese diaspora and
translatability. Pratibha Parmar (1989: 59) says that the concept of diaspora “is one
which allows success into the diversity of articulations around identity and cultural
expressions”, and “the essentialism of certain notions of blackness” which ignore
moments in history and politics as transitory, therefore open to change. Trinh Minh-ha
(1990: 65) insists that identity can never be a final closed statement, it is a forever
open-ended aspect of contemporary existence, a strategy for survival and resistance
specially for the third world immigrant woman. Avtar Brah locates the “diaspora
space” as one in which intersectionality of many kinds are “fully on board”, where
changing geopolitics can make for “appropriate forms of political strategies and
action”, and that “new political subjects and collective policies” can be created by
harnessing multiplicity in place of universalism in sociopolitical practices (1996:
248).

Kim D. Butler (2001) partly accepts what she calls the “ethnographic”
approach to diaspora, the one in which a particular group is studied to draw out its salient features, for a definition that cuts across disciplines and specific diapora histories. She refers to Safran (1991: 83-84) and Tololyan’s (1996: 12-15 cited in Butler) individual six-point definition of diaspora based on its characteristics, and offers a synthesis of three basic characteristics as a starting point to a more thorough theoretical understanding of the concept. She says that to be called a diaspora, a particular dispersed community must have at least two destinations, which would imply “scattering” as in the Hebrew word, and which makes possible interaction and linkages between such dispersed communities. Secondly, there must be a relationship with the homeland, real or imaginary, on which diasporan identity formation can be based. Thirdly, Butler insists on the consciousness of group identity, which “binds the dispersed peoples not only to the homeland but to each other as well” (Butler 192). To these three characteristics, Butler adds a fourth one: she posits that unless a diaspora exists in the host country for at least two generations, it can only be called an exilic community. Diasporas have to be multi-generational, they have to combine personal experiences with collective memories or histories of migration and “regenesis of communities abroad” (ibid). However, Butler could not fit the Roma, a people without a homeland, and Jamaicans, who have multiple histories of migration which defy sociopolitical categories. Thus, to free “diaspora” from ethnic labelling and limited application of usage, she suggests that it may be understood as a “specific process of community formation” (194) with a certain basic framework. She presents five dimensions of diaspora research, which she hopes will lead to the development of specific methodologies to study diaspora.

The formulations take into consideration the following: reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal; relationship with the homeland; relationship with the hostlands; interrelationships within communities of the diaspora and comparative studies of different diasporas.

In the light of these formulations, can the migrated South Asian communities be called a diaspora? Are the South Asians in Britain, part of this diapora? Even if the tentative four-point definition is considered, South Asian migrants are a diaspora, because of their many source areas of dispersal, viz British colonies in the Far East, the Pacific and the Caribbean islands in the first phase of migration (Mishra 1996); their active relationship with the homeland through language, ritual, dress, religion earlier and now through financial and ideological contribution (Kurlantzick 2002: 54-
their identification as South Asians evident from celebration of community events, marriage, allegiance to certain cultural phenomena like cricket or Bollywood (Pavri: 150-4); and their historical presence in the target countries which substantiate the passing of several generations of them, say in Fiji, or Uganda, or Britain.

If the five-point formulations are taken into account, this thesis attempts to incorporate all adequately, except the last category. Firstly, reasons for South Asian dispersal have been primarily economic, or, as Butler expands, based on “emigration”, or elective dispersal of the individual to a permanent, new locale (Butler 201). South Asian migrancy has always been an indirect effect of colonization, which allows for frequent passages to and from both the colonized locations and the coloniser’s homeland. The Indian diaspora, according to postcolonial historiography, has two distinct phases, the old diaspora dating from the 17th century, born out of colonial interaction in the past, and the new one, of post-war economic and political reconstruction and the brain-drain from east to west. The new diaspora of the twentieth century, is a postcolonial diaspora, which is based on “migration”, with possibilities of short-term stay and return to homeland, and again being sent abroad, as studied by Pandurang (2003). The colonizer, as in India, employed the bourgeois class: to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature, and to render them “by degrees fit for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population” (from Macaulay’s Minutes cited in Desai 2003: 11). It was this bourgeois class, as postcolonial studies scholars like Partha Chatterjee (1989) suggest, which became the national bourgeoisie, harboured longings to be located in the metropolitan centres, and became sometimes native informants of culture in the academia, or conduits for continuing generation and transfer of capital across the postimperial business empires. This thesis examines the work of several British Asian writers, some of whom are emigrants, and some can be identified as migrants as their stay in Britain, other countries in the west as well as in India, indicate. This community is also a part of the diaspora in contemporary South Asian communities overseas: they maintain intermittent contact with the homeland, have their own networks and coping mechanisms for rooting into the new soil of the host country.

Secondly, to understand a diaspora, it is important to consider its relationship with the homeland and vice versa, as Butler points out. Hugh Tinker (1977) records
the predicaments of South Asians overseas, and he reveals how, the distinctions maintained by them in religion, language and caste link them to the “Banyan Tree” that is South Asia. In any discussion of a diaspora, it is important to relate it to its place of origin, the homeland. The increasing distance of the new generations from the homeland due to infrequent travel backwards, lack of family network due to repeated migration etc may still enable the second-generation migrant to visualise an “imaginary homeland”, to use Benedict Anderson’s (1983) phrase, or “Indias of the mind” as Salman Rushdie (1992) calls this reconstruction. It takes a long time for migrant communities to dispel the myth of “return to the motherland” and decide to settle in the host country permanently. As a result of technological leaps in communicative devices, there is improved communication that reduces distances between nations and collapses boundaries or borders (Mishra 2001: 26). Migrants and emigrants carry their cultural apparatus with them, thus rituals or food habits might get modified to suit the receptivity of the host country, but very often the idea of nationhood or nationality does not dislodge itself from their psyche, mediated by channels of improved communication. In fact, though they continue to enjoy the privileges of the first nations, the diasporas of the third world continue to carry their cultural habitus and their political affiliations across time and space. Often this is encouraged by the first nations as a token of alliance with the immigrants’ sentiments, in other words, as a multicultural gesture, for example, there are Diwali and Eid celebrations in London on a noticeably large scale: the government, the media and the consumer industry express their competitive keenness to promote these events on a bigger scale from year to year. Thus, also, one finds transnational communities like the Khalistanis, Sri Lankan Tamils of the Eelam movement and the militant jihadis of Islam the world over, situated in the Western metropolitan centres, assisting domestic political movements by technology and funding culled from the west. In fact transnational affinities are now considered as possibly threatening and divisive: they may make for an apolitical subjecthood in the diaspora, which may undermine the diaspora’s political agency and contribution to the society undertaken by the diaspora (Radhakrishnan 2000; Chowdhury 2002). The fiction studied in this thesis allows a variety of positions on the homeland/diaspora relationship, and this is one of the interesting aspects of the study.

Thirdly, relationships with the hostland are also examined in this thesis, as Butler suggests, while suggesting the conceptual framework of the diaspora, and it is
found that this is the thrust area of the fictional representation of British Asian women writers. Tinker shows that whether segregated, well adapted or waiting to be integrated, South Asians always contribute to the economic, political, and cultural life of the host countries. In case of the BrAsians, in the 1960s and 70s the purpose of the migrants was to work hard, save money and return home to a better standard of life they would thus acquire. Cultural ties with the mainstream white society were taboo. Later, with the growing success of the community, the “myth of return” began to be dispelled, and the need and desire to grow roots were felt more keenly than ever (Ballard 1994; 2001). The second phase of the phenomenon of immigration in the 1980s is a direct result of the tremendous upsurge in human and financial mobility brought in by globalised capital. Despite the racialised policies of the 1980s Thatcherite regime, the Indian communities in Britain stayed on and displayed a tremendous amount of resilience in counteracting different forces threatening their existence abroad (Ballard 1994: viii-ix).

The crucial aspect of homeland/diaspora relationship that this thesis studies most rigorously is that of power, but power also includes other actors in BrAsian society, like rigid, doctrinaire or patriarchal representations of the community’s cultural code, sexual mores, economic disparity, cultural stereotypes. The thesis is not positioning the host and the diaspora in a binary of conflict, but it is attempting to show how other players are to be sometimes mutually negotiated, and how empowerment or agency can come only through self-assertion, drawing strength by remaining inscribed in the society, alongside fellow actors, rather than leave, relocate or surrender one’s cultural loyalty. The role of the transnational community, the “imaginary homeland” has also been studied in the following chapters, as a powerful force that inspires without resorting to romanticised longing which takes the focus away from the protagonist’s individual agency.

This thesis also examines one of the areas of the British Asian diaspora which emerges as largely a negative aspect of socialisation: their relative insularity from other diaspora communities despite strong own-community bonds, for example, their dissociation from the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in Britain (see Chapter Five Section 5.5). The ways in which the friendly Irish community appears in the diaspora imaginary in the writing of the BrAsian women, is not the same in which the Afro-Caribbeans are delineated. What must be said strongly though, is that despite the paucity of portrayals of inter-racial friendship or other ties, there is an awareness of
such absence or racialisation of the black person as Other, in some of the novelists’ representational scheme. It is important to remember how positively the Black cinema movement affected the South Asian diaspora in Britain, (Chapter Three Section 3.1) and that it is thus important for the survival and success of the diaspora to have positive and friendly relationships between other diaspora communities in the hostland.

Fourthly, to define a diaspora, its relationships with their fellow communities in the diaspora must be taken into account, as Butler suggests (207). This is particularly relevant to the BrAsian diaspora, as its networks with its counterparts in America, the Caribbean and Canada, especially of the Gujarati, Sindhi and the Sikh communities, are very strong, as Ram Gidoomal (1997) shows in his study of the BrAsian diaspora. Some of the novels study the shared histories in families across migrations in different continents, and this transnational contact or networking, especially with fellow South Asians in East Africa and America has some impact on the protagonists’ lives, as found in the work of Ravinder Randhawa, Nisha Minhas and Meera Syal.

Finally, Butler suggests that comparison with other diasporas may be undertaken to study the phenomenon. Though this thesis focuses on BrAsian writers, there are occasional comparisons with South Asian women writers in America. The comparatist approach is not used as that would diffuse the focus on BrAsian writing, which has to be worked upon rather more rigorously than other diaspora writing by South Asian women in locations of privilege, in terms of visibility and publishing success.

Thus, accepting a conceptual framework of the kind suggested by Butler, this thesis looks at BrAsian women’s writing as a writing of the diaspora, which negotiates the presence of the real or imaginary homeland, the hostland, the “trans”-nation, other communities and other diasporas, through “gendered geographies of power” (Pessar and Mahler 2001) as mentioned in the introduction.

1.1 The British Asian Diaspora: Documentary Evidence Of Early Indian Immigrants In Britain In The 20th Century.

Britain has faced waves of migration, and the groups assimilated into the mainstream slowly largely because they were mostly white Europeans. Colour, religion, culture mark these communities as separate, yet they claim their share of
Britishness, work hard and contribute to enrich British culture. But a large number of the more recent immigrants are Afro-Caribbeans and Asians, who are visibly different, have kept up a live contact with their homelands and their culture, and refuse to assimilate and transform their identity. The improved and inexpensive communication systems, the presence of the internet and email help these communities to thrive in virtual exclusion of the white majority. Britain thus has a tremendously vibrant society with several communities who have kept their multiple identities intact.

The Asian presence in the UK has been significant in the earlier two centuries, and documentation on their sociocultural lives are still being uncovered. These documents throw light on the cultural interaction between the races, across class and gender. To learn about the variety of Indian presence in Britain in the period between 1700 to the early 1900s, three texts by three women writers are indispensable, viz. Rozina Visram, Shompa Lahiri, and Antoinette Burton. Harihar Das, Michael Fisher, Makarand Paranjape and Chandani Lokuge also attest to the lives of well-known personalities from India in Britain from the earliest times to the early 20th century. Rozina Visram (1986), Michael H. Fisher (1996), Antoinette Burton (2003) and Shompa Lahiri (2000) have offered some useful insights while recording this period of Indian immigrant history in each of the books they have written. Other notable accounts of Asian and Black presence in Britain are by Peter Fryer (1984), Kusoom Vadgama (1984; 1997), James Walvin (1971), Ron Ramdin (1987) and A. Sivanandan (1969) (as cited in Alibhai-Brown 2000). It may be useful to study the Asian presence in Britain in the early times as questions of class and gender interpellate with migration in these time-spaces as well, like they do in contemporary Britain.

For the purpose of this study, the impact of immigration on Asian women and how they record it in any form of writing in the early waves of migration or short stay becomes more important than male writing, most of which is already accessible. The early writing by Indian women in Britain in the form of memoirs, letters or diaries can provide insights about the colonial encounter of Indian women as well as the beginnings of their postcolonial resistance, as some of them already begin to question discriminatory practices as Janaki Majumdar and her mother Hemangini Bonerjee did. There were also young women like Sorabji, Naidu and Sophia Duleep Singh who questioned the authority of hegemonic institutions which theorise liberalality but do not
practise it in their daily discharge of largesse on the imperial subjects from the colonies, the living reminders of domination in the imperial centre.

Visram’s research in Ayahs, Lascars and Princes (1986) reveals a strong Indian presence in the underbelly of English life in the period between 1700-1947. These Indians were often travelers, wealthy merchants, barristers, students, princes and even servants, cooks, nurses or ayahs, dancers and performers or gentoos, magicians, masseurs and quacks who gained quite a notoriety in the upper-classes with their secret remedies for hidden ailments like the “shampoo doctor” Sake Dean Mohamed discussed shortly. Negotiating between both the ruling class, their masters, and the members of the working class who were closest to them in status, these early migrants often stayed long enough to earn fame, good money, and their employers’ trust, or the respect of their companions if they were from the princely classes. Visram refers to advertisements, documents like certificates and diaries which refer to these sojourners, princes, sailors, ship hands or servants, who were at a time highly valued as nurses or ayahs for the British children at home or abroad, much before the colonial encounter of the nineteenth century. Thus, there has been a historical presence of the Asian community in Britain, though fewer in number, and relegated mostly to the periphery of society at its extreme ends, and the levels of complexities in their relationships are still being uncovered by reclaiming artefacts from history.

The life of Sake Dean Mohamed is an example of how race marks the admittance of an early British Asian into mainstream politics, despite proven entrepreneurial acumen. Fisher (1996) writes in The First Indian Author in English, about a subaltern in the Bengal Army, Dean Mohamed who migrated in 1784 to Ireland, married an Irish woman and had several children. They later settled in London and then in Bristol, where he popularized the art of “shampooing” or massaging and steam bath among British men and women of all classes. He is credited to be the first English author from India and his book The travels of Dean Mohamed was published in 1794. Michael H. Fisher’s edited and annotated version of this text reveals interesting facts of the reception of such a man in England and of women in similar and even more lowly positions. Though Fisher writes “... at the height of his career, Dean Mohamed had inserted “shampooing”, and, to an extent himself, into English popular culture as exotically attractive” (1996: 234), especially to the new rich and the upper classes, he later qualifies this statement with detailed documents. He shows how the “shampoo surgeon” remained ignored and
marginalized by British mainstream society in Bristol, which benefited largely from the excellent commercial success of his “art”, and yet gave him no place in the city offices, though he was a law-abiding and decent citizen as well. Fisher records how very little information is available on Mohamed’s Irish wife Jane, and how spouses and children of Indo-British marriages were the butt of ridicule and contempt in British society then. He writes: “While English society admired the wealth so prominently displayed by these nabobs, and their children of mixed ancestry, it also often marginalized them as of low birth” (250).

Moreover, there were women who accompanied their mistresses as servants and slaves from India to Britain, but one hears of them only as being good at their jobs, not much else. They were much in demand as advertisements in the newspapers show, but no account of them is considered in Fisher’s research. In fact women masseurs in India were really lowly, next only to prostitutes, though very much in demand both by men and women in both countries (255). Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2001) recounts how Queen Victoria’s favourite servant was an Indian Muslim, Abdul Kareem, whom she honoured with rank and prestige, and is believed to have an uncommon attachment for, though their correspondence was destroyed after his death. Many of these early Indian immigrants had married white women, but continued to practice their own religion, and culinary tastes. The middle and lower-class Indian men and White British women actually assimilated well, by and large, because class affinities were perhaps stronger than cultural ones, and because they were perceived as good husbands, if they married, or very good, kind and loving partners if lovers, and both Alibhai-Brown (2000) and Rozina Visram (1986) attest to this in their discussions on the subject. Thus even in the early encounters between the British and Asians in Britain, there are strong reasons to believe that racism had a major role to play, though the Asian presence was scattered, and largely in the under-class.

Some of the precursors of the BrAsian scholars and residents of Oxford and Cambridge to be found in the texts, have been traced by Shompa Lahiri (2000). Lahiri (66) discusses how many Indian students were sent to England to study law with the help of scholarships offered by Mr. Rustomji Jamshetji Jeejibhai of Bombay in 1864. From Lahiri’s account it becomes clear how these sojourner students, and others who studied medicine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century continued to participate in Indian politics from England. This was possible because not only were they extremely talented, articulate, impressive speakers but also
because they knew from very close quarters the Indian collaborators of British rule: they were often sons or relatives of upper class Indian allies of the British. One fact of their lives was common: they felt a greater sense of patriotism for India as migrant students than they ever felt at home, as discussed later in the chapter. Just like young Indian males, young women also traveled there with their husbands, or families, like Hemangini Bonerjee and her daughters, and Toru Dutt, or very rarely, as students themselves, like Cornelia Sorabji and Sarojini Naidu. It is interesting to note how life in Britain affected the mindset of such women.

Some upper class families emigrated to Britain, in order to be able to fully imbibe Western influence. Homi Bhabha has called this kind of emulation as the stage of “mimicry”, in the colonial encounter. The upper class Indian gentry wanted their families to be free of the shackles of “backwardness” back in India, and to be able to lead an active social life like the families of the white colonizers they had befriended or benefited from in some ways. However, most of them returned to India at a later date, which makes them sojourners, migrants in a temporary sense, but whose lives, and the lives of whose families, changed vastly due to the extended contact with the white British. A classic example is that of the family of Govin Chunder Dutt, whose daughter Toru Dutt later became a fine poet and translator, novelist and essayist in English and French. Harihar Das writes in a biography of Toru Dutt (1921: 19) that the Dutt sisters were the first Bengali ladies to visit Europe, France at first, followed by England where they stayed for about three years, from 1870 to 1873. In fact, they published *The Dutt Family Album* in 1870, which contained poems written in English by Toru, Aru, Omesh, Romesh, Govin Chunder (22). The preface to this book says, “As foreigners educated out of England, they solicit the indulgence of British critics to poems which on these grounds alone may, it is hoped, have some title to their attention” (23). Das’ biography is very important to this thesis as it examines closely, the formation of the diasporic female subjectivity in Toru, and its impact on the creativity of the young woman writer, a precursor of the contemporary British Writers of Indian origin.

The Dutts made many British friends during their stay, namely, the Freres, the Macfarrens, Sir Edward Ryan, Lord Lawrence, some of whom occupied, or were going to take up important positions in the colonial Government in India. As Das records, and Toru herself notes in her letters to her Indian cousins, the Dutt sisters spent their time learning the piano, reading the Bible (as they were devout Christians,
their father having converted) studying, taking walks like proper British ladies, learning music and reading English newspapers. The girls were very popular especially because of their striking appearance, wide reading and smart conversation. They made lasting friendships, notably Toru, with Miss Martin to whom she wrote 54 letters from India in four years until her death in 1877. These well turned-out Indian girls of the late 19th century made a great impact both in London and in Cambridge (1871) where they later stayed for two years in order to attend Higher Lectures for Women. When they went to visit Sir Edward Ryan (later Chief Justice, Supreme Court, Calcutta) at Holland House and discussed the kinds of books they read and their preferences, Sir Ryan was indeed impressed. Sir Ryan later remarked to Mr. Dutt that he had brought such evidence of social progress with himself, that it was a matter of great credit (28). The girls watched plays, read avidly and their lives were steeped with literary, religious and artistic concerns. At Cambridge they enjoyed great popularity with their neighbours and colleagues who regarded them with some amount of admiration because of their erudition, pious upbringing and polite demeanour, as the poet and her biographer both attest, and as letters and conversations recorded in the memoir show.

In her letters to India at this time, Toru wrote about her experiences, notably all of happiness and enjoyment, in Britain. She describes her first encounter with snow vividly to her cousin, as she does the sound of robins singing on the bare branches in October. She does not appear to miss India except for the sight of her dear cousins whom she is very fond of. However, Toru’s engagement with nature as a poet becomes more intense in India where she does not have too many friends nor an active social and cultural life. One little detail in her letter suggests that the appearance of an occasional Indian dish made from British ingredients on the table made her quite happy. This assertion of her hybridity records the cultural nostalgia she must have felt, which is consistently undermined by her biographer Das, who is firmly convinced of her complete assimilation into the British cultural matrix. She describes the dishes that they trained the English cook to make in detail, saying, “Isabella cooks cabbage churchuree or ambole of eel, hot kochuree along with mutton cutlets and roly-poly. Isn’t that nice?” (35). Toru’s hybrid tastes extended to food, a very important aspect of culture which lends itself to hybridisation, and later translated itself into her creative writing, which was a mix of French, English, Sanskrit, Bengali folk traditions, forms, images, themes (see Chandani Lokuge 2006
for detailed discussion of her extraordinary creative output). On the whole, Toru was indeed very contented and enthusiastic to learn all that she could, imbibe all that was physically and intellectually possible during her stay in England. One may say that the mimic stage of the lives of the Dutt children was complete: they had become "memsahibs" as their counterparts in India would call them. It is only when she returned to India that she begins to note with displeasure the treatment meted out to Indians by the British, and perhaps becomes troubled by these experiences, withdrawing into her family and immediate circle of friends rather than befriend the British in India, and her new life in India becomes marked with the development of "postcolonial anxieties" (Lokuge 2006 xiv).

As her father was needed to take charge of the family business and property, the Dutt sisters had to return to India in 1873, their brief sojourn in England complete. Once back in India, Toru and Aru both become ill, a trifle sad and more eager to go back to England than continue staying in India. In her letters to Miss Martin Toru confesses her nostalgia for the English countryside she so loved and her dislike of their house in North Calcutta, which was already congested and polluted. These letters are worth mentioning because they reinforce the idea of how well adapted Toru was to the English way of life, how much she longed to go back there and live there forever. She writes: "We hope to go to England ... this time Papa says he will sell all we have here and go to England and settle there for good" (60), and adds later "We all want so much to return to England. We miss the free life we led there; here we can hardly go out of the limits of our own garden ... if we can fulfill our wish and go to England, I think we shall most probably settle in some quiet country place. The English villages are so pretty" (75). As she sees ships at the Outram Ghat she writes: "I had a great mind to tell the coachman to stop and get up in one of these homeward bound steamers" (77). Toru's passionate longing for England reflects her feeling of alienation in her own homeland: this was a diasporic longing for the adopted "home" left behind, though this time the diaspora subjectivity forms because of the aspirational temporary location at the centre and compulsive relocation to the periphery. This feeling of diaspora in the homeland is a unique feature of Dutt's life, which was marked by the cultural compulsions of the colonial encounter experienced by the upper class respectable woman.

Her unfortunate death in 1877 did not allow her the pleasure of returning to Europe. Toru Dutt's literary career was short but she had a prodigious talent in the use
of both French and English language, unusual among Indian women in those times, and hailed as remarkable pieces after their posthumous publication in England. This was one of the most important impacts of her brief European sojourn. Her longing for Britain could have hastened her death, as her sister had died earlier, suffering from similar physical and emotional pain at being back to a congested part of Calcutta with hardly a garden for them to walk. Her linguistic skills, her love for Western classical music, her French writing, translation and her nostalgic correspondence with British and French friends show how deeply she had internalized European cultural influence. She also used her knowledge and acquired skill in the Indian languages, Sanskrit classics, epics and folklore, to produce tales of an Indian flavour.

As Das (1921) repeatedly suggests, their conversion to Christianity bought the Dutts much closer to the British people of town and country and the text thus does not record instances of racist bias at Cambridge or elsewhere in the letters carefully reprinted by Das. Though apparently liberated, their position as young, dependent women in wealthy families did not still allow the Dutt sisters to express their preference to lead their lives in their own way: their destinies were shaped both by patriarchal control and by the perceptible influence of colonial forces in operation in imperial India. However, Toru’s prodigious talent in translating 166 French poems into English, her collection of English poems, and her incomplete English romance, all written before the age of 22, was no less aided by hard labour and a fierce commitment to European culture, which was finally rewarded posthumously, when her books were published in Paris by her father. In fact her death might have been hastened by her hard intellectual labour, as Das suggests, and this could also be seen as a sign of resistance to the control of her poetic spirit, which yearned to be in the metropolitan centre, not in peripheral Calcutta, the pulsating heart of the colonial encounter. Chandani Lokuge (2006) shows how Dutt’s life and writing illuminate the emergence of an imperial and late postcolonial modernity, and positions her writing in the contemporary global context. Toru Dutt, the rebellious spirit, is also a prefiguration of the woman writer in the twentieth century diaspora, and her extraordinary commitment to literary creation, her continuous and extraordinarily hard intellectual labour that undermined her physical strength, shine across the centuries as examples of a talented Asian woman, deeply influenced by the cultural traditions at home and abroad producing creative literature in adversity. Her last sonnet in *Shieff Gleaned in French Fields* written in 1875, was not a translation but an
original poem, and contains hints of her restless spirit, tossed as she was between several “pulls” and “pushes” of cultures, Indian classical and folk traditions, French and English cultures. She writes quite ambiguously using vegetative metaphors so appropriate to the diaspora, about “native soil”, “kindred branches” and “colours” laid by “nature”, and being “bound in garlands”:

The flowers look loveliest in their native soil
Amid their kindred branches; plucked, they fade
And lose their colours nature on them laid,
Though bound in garlands with assiduous toil. (Ahuja 2006: 36)

Antoinette Burton (2003) describes Sir W.C. Bonerjee’s (1844-1906) family caught in a similar situation. Bonerjee was one of the foremost legal practitioners trained in Britain, and the first President of the Indian National Congress. Bonerjee had imbibed British culture so deeply that his patriotism seemed commendable. In order to live like an English gentleman Bonerjee realized that he had to help his wife come out of the pardah or compulsory exclusion and seclusion of women from public life. He left India after his repeated attempts to have his wife participate in public life failed. He immigrated with his family to Britain in 1874 but left them there for a long time while he continued to practice law and participate in the Nationalist project back in India. The members of his family had many troubles. The community rejected them as Bonerjee had crossed the kala pani or the black waters to sail to Britain (2003: xvi). They selectively converted to Christianity, to complement their otherised identity in their native community, adopted British names, dress and food habits, and even married British partners.

In fact, the Indian males of the upper classes enjoyed greater favour within the dominant group, obviously because of the colonial exchange, as some of these aristocrats were collaborators in entrenching British rule. As early as the 1860s, Indian students studied law in Britain with the help of generous scholarships instituted by wealthy Indians as Shompa Lahiri notes. W.C. Bonerjee was one of them who adopted British ways to give a different identity to himself, his wife and his children. His daughter Janaki Majumdar writes:

My father made many friends in England and was deeply impressed by English freedom. He liked the English manner of living, and became a keen politician and an ardent feminist, and resolved never to go back to Hindu ways, but to bring his wife out of purdah, and if he had children, to give them all education on English lines, and in England if he could ever afford it. (Majumdar 2003: 45)
These statements suggest the impact of British ways on the young student, which changed his life permanently. Bonerjee’s kind of interaction with British culture, politics and knowledge of western thought spurred the formation of the future Indian nation, but his family, though largely happy in Britain, occasionally bore the brunt of migration. Sent to Britain to study and become liberated, Janaki, her siblings and her mother were more than sojourners: they settled in Britain, their identities changed into hybridised forms, they married British partners, and even on return to India, they socialised with the British or Anglicised Indians only. Thus studying the lives of these young Indians in Britain is a helpful indicator of the extent of colonial cultural influence and cooption of natives into anglicised ways, into hybridised versions of their identities.

Janaki Majumdar also writes about the way their mother was treated by their landlords and caretakers, the Woods, and the moving account added by her sister Nellie bears quotation:

Col. and Mrs. Wood were fairly decent, but the children’s behaviour was deplorable. They despised her for being an Indian, for not knowing the language well etc., and she never retaliated. They were decent to my father because he held the purse strings ... I know it was always impressed upon us that we being Indians were inferior ... that our hands could not be clean being dark-skinned, etc.etc. They thought that their parents being Army and Official people were humiliated by having to take “natives” into their house. (52-53)

Even Mrs. Bonejee’s conversion to Christianity was a question of ridicule because she associated with low class people who loved her, and she worshipped in the meetings of the Plymouth Brethren rather than in the mainstream Church of England. Though her children adapted more readily to the new cultural mores, Mrs. Hemangini Bonerjee had to undergo many privations in the alien land, and even her own older children mimicked the dominant group in undermining her on account of her lack of Western education (72). Though Nellie, older than Janaki, writes very sympathetically about her mother here, Janaki, younger but more humane, records the several humiliations her mother had to undergo for not knowing English well, and not adapting to the ways of the upper class British gentry readily, when she frequently writes how unhappy her mother must have been (48-49; 52; 72; 81). Thus race, class, religious affiliation, language barrier and cultural hesitation defined Mrs. Bonejee’s position in British society: she was marginalised on all accounts, and relegated to its
fringes, though back in India she would not only have been considered a respectable woman, but would have enjoyed prestige if her husband had not crossed the *kala pani*.

Other interactions of the family, with nurses, tutors, friends and colleagues of the dominant community were certainly more friendly, and they stayed on in Britain intermittently, until they took up permanent residence at Croydon in 1888 and lived there for 20 years. Two of the older children married Britons, and lived in India and in Britain from time to time, enjoying reasonably long and happy married lives. Janaki’s and her sister’s writing reflect the conflicts between two ways of life that deeply affected the two generations of women in their family, their mother and themselves, and stands as an example before contemporary BrAsian women writers of the second-generation. For the mother, there was a lot of pain initially, but for the second-generation, class, religion, and education being equal, or of the same level, colour of skin did not seem to come in the way of friendship, even love and marriage. Records like this are reminders of the continuity and change in the relationships between British and Asians in two subsequent centuries, as studied in the chapters of this thesis.

Thus the relationship between the two communities of British and Indians in the mid-19th century was fraught with inequalities and yet strong affinities tied them both into new and undefined varieties of bonds. Another curious document is the biography and letters of Cornelia Sorabji edited by Chandani Lokuge. The accounts of Sorabji herself deal with issues of identity and hybridity due to the complex racial and religious background of Sorabji, a Parsee Christian convert, a rarity not only in those days but even now. Lokuge’s introduction provides a commentary on Sorabji’s attitude to imperialism, women’s rights, and the complicated relationships between Hindu and Christian societies at different places in India and abroad. In her account of her life at Oxford, Sorabji says she does not wish to write in detail (2001: 25), but adds quite a few interesting pictures of her tutors, friends and benefactors, most of whom seem to be overwhelmingly “kind”, “special”, “beloved” (xvii), perhaps a trifle condescending, to an Indian native like her, however hard she tried to appear westernized. She met Florence Nightingale, Max Mueller, G.B. Shaw, the Tennysons, Walter Pater and many others from the field of literature. She was presented before the queen as a worthy subject, as was the custom with many young Parsee ladies in those days. Of her professional training and the struggle in which she was involved as the first woman attempting to become a barrister, she writes in detail, with wry
humour as to the repeated attempts made by males to thwart her efforts, and her final victory to work on “behalf” of the Indian *pardanashin* back in India. She had decided to fight legal battles for women who were kept in seclusion in some cultures in India, both rich and poor women, of all religious backgrounds.

But most of all her description of life in Britain accounts for the glory of the British Empire at the height of imperialistic success. She herself was drawn to this heady sensation of prosperity and glory, and maintained a lifelong fascination for Oxford and its “rose-scented memory” (xvii) as well as English literature and administrative policy etc. She records how she was immersed in British culture so that she could “breathe in what was of infinite value” and get England into [her] bones” (ibid). Moreover, what was of abiding interest to her throughout her life was the way in which Britain was showing “the growing recognition of the rights of women” (ibid), though she herself had to fight discrimination very soon in her life. Chandani Lokuge, however, mentions a number of her letters preserved at the India Office which make no bones of criticizing some aspects of British administration in India, the attitudes of some of her supercilious British “friends”, “particularly if their ambitions for her did not coincide with her own” (2001: xvii-xviii).

Cornelia Sorabji’s biography peculiarly counter plays different attitudes to women in her times. In India, Cornelia was something of an oddity, being twice removed from the mainstream, as a Parsee convert to Christianity, the religion of the ruling class, and an educated woman with ambition to enter the male bastion. Though she was more English in her upbringing and attitudes, once she was in England she was still regarded as something exotic, a curious mixture of Oriental mystery and European sensibility, unwilling to assimilate totally, as she always wore a saree, and heard many strange comments for that (1996: 44). Yet she possessed rare gifts of culture and intellect in the best of British tradition. Her being a woman with firm ideas on herself and her beliefs made things more difficult for her, but she was pragmatic enough never to show her true responses to her “friends” and yet maintain a good relationship. She herself played the role of the imperialist with a missionary zeal when she tried to bring justice to the *pardanashin* Hindu woman of the upper and lower castes and classes in remote Indian towns and villages. Though her desire to reform the quality of life of the women in seclusion was something that predates her education abroad, as she writes in her biography, it is true that her interventionary attitude was shaped largely during her stay abroad. Visram (2002) says that Sorabji
should be remembered as a woman who “challenged another male preserve, the law” by getting herself permitted to sit for the law examination separately; having passed the BCL examination in 1892, and then legalizing women’s entry into the Bar by being conferred the degree of BCL in 1923 (359). She adds that “Her challenge to this ruling was successful, a pioneering step towards opening up the bar to women in Britain” (ibid). Sorabji is one of the pioneers among Asian women in Britain, who, while studying in Britain, actively resisted inequality and prejudice, as Sophia Duleep Singh, another mixed-race Asian did, and as many BrAsian women in the last three decades of the twentieth century did, and are continuing to do so, for example, the Southall Black Sisters and women like Kiranjeet Ahluwalia (see 1.4).

Rozina Visram (2002) describes the political activism of Sophia Duleep Singh (1876-1948), an Asian woman in Britain, who was a Suffragette, played hockey, and was a good musician, having played at concerts on occasion. She was the daughter of the deposed Maharaja Duleep Singh of Lahore, the famous owner of the Kohinoor diamond, who was adopted by Queen Victoria, converted to Christianity and married to Bamba Muller, who reconverted to Sikhism and continued to campaign for regaining his kingdom. The children, though Christians, revered Sikhism, visited Amritsar and other sights of Sikh pilgrimage, when older (Bains 2004). Sophia was an active member of the WSPU, Women’s tax Resistance and Women’s War Work movements led by Emmeline Pankhurst and others. She regularly joined protest marches, picketed, sold the magazine “The Suffragetter”, and much later, after Pankhurst’s death, became President of the Committee responsible for providing flowers for Emmeline Pankhurst’s statue, a mark of great honour among Suffragettes. While resisting British policy against women’s representation in the electorate, she refused to pay taxes, for which she paid fines several times, was summoned to court and had to have many of her ornaments auctioned. She declared in Court:

I am unable conscientiously to pay money to the State, as I am not allowed to exercise any control over its expenditure; neither am I allowed any voice in the choosing of MPs, whose salaries I have to help to pay. This is very unjust. I would pay my share willingly when women in England are enfranchised. (167-168)

Thus the young Indian woman was indeed courageous, committed and sensitive enough to political issues in Britain, which was her home, and was willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of British women. She died in 1948, little known or celebrated as a pioneer in women’s emancipation. Her words in court in December
1913 “If I am not a fit person for the purpose of representation, why should I be fit person for taxation?” (168), stand out as courageous responses to injustice and discrimination coming from second-generation woman of Asian descent. Her life becomes significant to the body of feminist movement in Britain especially when seen from the intersectionality of the parameters of race, gender and religion, and her selfless commitment to women’s emancipation is like a beacon for contemporary BrAsian feminists.

In her account of Asians in Britain, Visram (2002) also speaks about a Parsee gentleman called Behramji Malabari, who visited England in 1890, and was very vocal on discrimination against white British women in Victorian England, and later fought for women’s reform in India. He criticised both the Church and the State in making “man-made laws” that treated women as “inferior beings”, “as toys, as things to be played with and thrown away: or merely as breeders of the race”, whereas the guiding rule of the future was to be “sex-equality before public morality” (120).

Sarojini Naidu, like Sorabji, went to England in 1895 to study. Later, she became a poet, a stateswoman and a freedom fighter, but unlike her, Naidu often felt nostalgic and lonely. In his preface to the Selected letters of Sarojini Naidu, Makarand Paranjape (1996) writes about the sixteen year old girl’s “bewildered but brave efforts to make sensed of and survive in Imperial England; in London, the greatest city on earth. The recurrent note is of loneliness and longing for her lover. Tired, often sick, Sarojini is uncomfortable in a foreign country” (xiv-xv).

Though she is impressed by London, she wishes to go back home, not only missing her lover Govindrajulu, but a trifle impatient with the weather of England, which can be “warm and sunny” or “foggy and gray … --- and ever and anon, the rain comes pattering — such changeable, fickle weather!” (2) Moreover, she treasures the acquaintance of Edmond Gosse, her mentor, and although she meets several poets and men of letters she often complains of their extravagant and audacious styles.

A curious fact of Sarojini’s student life is that she was never really happy with the curriculum of Girton College, Cambridge, which seemed to be for “people who are gifted with strong and distinct brain and muscle power; for a girl must either be clever or athletic, very often both to be a true Girtonian, or to really enjoy Girton life … ” (32). Sarojini writes in her letters to her lover in India, about her experience of being forced to like Girton College, initially, and maintains in 1896 that “there’s a difference between liking a thing and loving it — it will cramp my development in
some ways, it will strengthen [it] in others — I don’t care what happens” (30).

More striking is the way Sarojini is already aware of the effect she produces on her fellow students as a young Indian girl, so strange to find in Cambridge or London, alone, bright and articulate. She writes, “Everybody, of course, here as elsewhere tho’ I have been only a few hours here, makes a pet of me — you see I am far the youngest and a curiosity — so I shan’t be left long to myself!” (ibid) Yet later she writes of the difficulty of continuing in Girton, and how she “shall be lonelier here than I have ever been”, and how she must “rebel against the groove all must get into — the narrowly broad, the crampedly independent existence” (ibid).

Thus for all its attraction, for young Sarojini education abroad signified alienation, a sense of being suppressed and constricted, and yet having to live the life of an exotic Oriental creature in a cage. Her reflections prefigure those of the BrAsian women writers and their protagonists who often express similar anxieties in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1890s, Sarojini was already a victim of notions of racialised difference, both because of the “exotic” appeal of her personality, and the demands of the curriculum, which denied her the care for “deep thought and keen emotions” the “vivid and vital things of life” (32) so cherished by her Indian sensibility, influenced in turn, by English Romanticism. In a characteristically passionate outburst, Naidu captures the essence of the painful experience of undergoing a “soulless and uninteresting pattern” of education. She urges, “Save me from education!” and analyses how she was leading “two separate lives that are essentially at war with each other” (ibid), one her soul, the other an existence, in the accents of an alienated diasporan subjectivity confronting two contradictory socio-cultural lives. Sarojini went on to become the finest young Indian poet in English soon after, but her rebellious attitude to English education may be seen as one of the early expressions of rebellion against England’s imperial policies and practice in India.

It was often the women or children who had actually intimate social contact with the entire British society of the upper intelligentsia, the seamstresses, tailors, builders and suppliers of the middle classes and the lower classes consisting of the servants and attendants needed to maintain gentle life in England then (as indeed even now, which will be borne out by textual analysis in the later chapters). It is therefore some of the written records or memories which are gradually being recovered by historians, which give us a more balanced inner eye view of what it was like to be a “native” and live in the heart of white British society. Many male migrant writers of
those times have recorded some such experiences but have either omitted or totally marginalized the portraiture of Indian women in Britain, either of their own family accompanying them or others they might have met. The negative aspect of their British encounter is selectively recorded by male migrants or sojourners, however, later research based on school or college records and personal correspondence finds indirect evidence of problems faced by young Indian students.

Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* (1983) recounts how the Indian aristocracy often sent their scions to become *pucca sahibs*, and the impact of one such encounter on someone who later became a philosopher and ardent patriot, Sri Aurobindo. Nandy offers psychological explanations of Ghosh’s transformation from an anglicized gentleman into an ardent patriot during his stay in Britain (1983: 87-90). He notes how Aurobindo deliberately failed his riding examination as a gesture of rebellion. The seed of nationalism sown while in diaspora bore rich fruit in the motherland on his return, and he became truly committed to learning the Indian languages and culture on his return. Similar experiences of other young Indian upper-class men who later became nationalists are recorded in their biographies, diaries or letters.

Pandurang and Lange (2003) point out that a large number of students began to travel to England to acquire an English degree that would allow them to enter into the Indian civil service, or qualify for legal and medical professions. “There were 7000 Indians already settled in England and Wales when the 1931 census was taken” (191). They name several Indian nationalists who went abroad in their early youth for English education and yet became instrumental in producing the first few seditious pieces of literature and could inspire their fellow Indians more thoroughly than they would have had they remained back in India. Along with Aurobindo Ghosh, she mentions Dadabhai Naoroji, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bhimrao Ambedkar, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Subhash Chandra Bose who contributed to the growth of Indian nationalism mostly after acquiring British education. Pandurang and Lange write:

> Western education also allowed for an awareness of certain world ideologies without which it would have been difficult to formulate theories of nationalism. Ironically, the English language proved to be the undoing of the Empire as it enabled communication in a common language across various linguistic groups, and this strengthened an emerging Indian nationalism. (190)
Ironically then, some of the student migrants actually became more thoroughly Indian than their parents had ever wanted them to be, and this was one of the ways in which Indian nationalism grew, fonder by absence than proximity. This trend of sending upper-class young men, and rarely women, to study in British universities continued well into the early 20th century, almost until the 1940s, and these students formed the major group of Indian migrants abroad, along with upper class businessmen, professionals, soldiers, sailors and the loosely knit service class (Visram: 1986; 2002). The complicated relationship of these young students, viz. their admiration for English culture and disillusionment with the education system is evident from both Aurobindo’s life and Sarojini Naidu’s letters.

Humayun Ansari (2006: 142-156) presents a detailed picture of Asians in Britain from 1857-1947, and his discussion of the later phase of the Asian presence in Britain shows how there were many Asians who were politicised and led an active part, both in the anti-colonial nationalist movement and movements against discrimination in the host country. He mentions Dadabhai Naoroji’s election as Member of Parliament in 1892, Syed Amir Ali’s founding of the All-India Muslim League’s London branch in 1908, and his subsequent nomination to the Privy Council, the formation of India House by Krishnavarma in 1905, and the assassination of Lord Wyllie by Madan Lal Dhingra in 1909, (148-149) as a few notable instances of the politicisation of the Asians in Britain in this period. Hutnyk (2006) emphasises the roles played by Shahpurji Saklatvala, Rajani Palme-Dutt, M.K. Krishna Menon, Udham Singh, A. Sivanandan and many others who founded the Communist movement of Asians in Britain, which continued after the migrant workers of the future started to settle down and unionise. To sum up, Ansari’s words appear appropriate:

Of particular significance was the work these “pioneering” settlers conducted in forging the primary links in the chain that would connect these earlier settlers with their later counterparts, while at the same time laying the foundation of the kaleidoscopic BrAsian community. (2006: 156)

1.2 Second Phase: Political and Cultural Background, 1947-1970s.

The second phase of migration to England continued after Indian independence in 1947, when many Asians emigrated to the U.K. in the 1950s and 60s for academic and professional reasons, as well as to work in British factories and the
service sector in menial jobs, which were rejected by the post-war youth. In the ‘70s migration built up due to transnational contact, primarily in the labour sector and in small businesses. This is when the families of the first generation writers and the parents of the second-generation authors selected in this project as primary texts migrated to the U.K. In each of the subsequent chapters, British immigration policy will be discussed at relevant junctures, locating their impact on the negotiation of identity in female, and often male, spaces and bodies. Here, an overview is charted for a broader understanding of the position of the Asian immigrant in relation to mainstream politics and policies of exclusion and cooption as per the sociopolitical weather.

In the post-war reconstruction of England in the 1950s, cheap labour from the colonies was invited, and from the ex-colonies, came many recently uprooted victims of partition, relocation and systematically impoverished members of the landowning peasantry or members of the urban poor, especially from the Caribbean and Asia. Initially these labourers worked such long hours that they were not seen to socialise, they kept to themselves, used shared accommodation in inner-city areas, exposed only to the already impoverished mainstream working class (Brah 2006: 37). But when the sojourners chose to stay on and bring their families from the West Indies or the Indian subcontinent, they became visible by their skin colour, and the British society found itself in the 1960s becoming a conglomerate of colours and races, rather than pure, uncontaminated white. Earlier, in the previous centuries, lascars and slaves had been there, in scattered numbers, in port towns or the periphery of cities like London. But now they were present in large numbers in public places, and the white British majority could do little except wish them away. Debates on how to resolve growing tensions between the mainstream and the indigenous peoples from abroad were beginning to take place, bringing about political and social changes, as the following sections show. The rising xenophobia among the white British working class was making it very difficult for the government to control, but even the government felt threatened by the placement of a large “coloured” population in British society. Moreover, non-white migrant workers were beginning to form associations, religious, political and community support groups, unions, and demanded full benefits as British citizens. The welfare economy, subsidised by the erstwhile empire, was already reeling from the war, and its political support to many countries resisting Communism after the war made supporting migrant labour who ultimately settled with families,
The immigration policy of the British government in the mid-40s was officially friendly towards immigrants, though an undercurrent of racist resistance was felt since the 1950s after the British Nationality act of 1948 in distinct ways: against disallowing a Sikh from wearing a turban at work, or in the Parliamentary campaigns to resist black immigration. Watson (2002: 93-94) shows how negative stereotypes of Asians in the popular imagination lead to “a sedimented contempt for the non-European”. He also shows how “negative representation of nationalist politicians” of the erstwhile colonies, and “disturbing references to acts of barbarism and violence” create images of the savage in need of “Western enlightenment” (ibid). Both earlier literature of the colonial period, like Kipling, Conrad and Rider Haggard’s novels, and the anecdotes of now retired English officers demonized or ridiculed the non-European Other, as Watson says, and this led to further rejection of the non-European from public spaces, unless strictly in the service sector. Moreover, recent writers try to rectify the notion that liberal political governments were pressurised by the British public to become more stringent in immigrating “coloured” people. Kathleen Paul (1997), tries to correct the popular notion that the British public compelled anti-immigrant legislation: Paul (cited in Behar 1998) shows how the historically tolerant British public was fuelled into racism by anti-immigrant rhetoric of the government which had, just a few years ago, imported cheap labour from the colonies, and yet issued the Nationality Act in 1948. Successive British governments wished to control the cheap labour market of the dominions, but were not prepared to accommodate the “coloured” person into public policy. They differentiated between communities of Britishness based on skin colour, legitimised terms like “black immigrants”, “the migration problem”, and raised issues of “nationality “ and “Britishness” before the public, specially the working class, which quickly responded by perpetrating sporadic racist attacks, which culminated in the the attacks on and retaliation by black British people in Notting Hill primarily involving West Indian migrants and the unwilling hosts in 1958 (Ali et al 2006).

Parliamentarians like Cyril Osborne, Norman Pannel, Martin Lindsey ultimately succeeded in pressurizing the issues of coloured peoples' immigration, leading to the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962. Some more racist practices emerged, for example, even education policies felt the impact. The education Minister Sir Edward Boyle was pressurised to start the system of “bussing” black and Asian
children to distant schools to activate a policy of dispersing them from densely immigrant areas to remote areas out of town. The immigrants realized that reluctant host was trying to officially integrate them and simultaneously refuse to accept them culturally (Brah 2006: 39). Roy Jenkins, the Home Secretary argued for a policy of integration rather than assimilation, based on cultural difference to be overcome by the immigrant (Watson 2002).

Added to the sizeable number of coloured immigrants were the East African Asians, comparatively wealthier evacuees from Kenya and Uganda, who arrived in planes by the thousands: in a decade, nearly one hundred thousand east African Asians had arrived in the U.K. By then, it was evident that the Asians, now a mixed lot, were going to make a visible difference to the idea of “British nationality” which was predominantly white. The Immigration act of 1971 introduced the work permit system for a Commonwealth citizen not born in Britain to enter the country, and extended the power of deportation as well. The decade was really one of the most turbulent in terms of black and Asian immigrant life: the media, the police, the educational system all colluded, mostly unofficially, to practices of racism in everyday life like throwing abuses, petrol bombs, hate mail, abusive posters, as most of the films and literature discussed later record. The meteoric rise of Enoch Powell in the Thatcher regime, and the rise of the National Front encouraged more of “Paki-bashing” a term for racist attacks, than ever before. Ziauddin Sardar (2004), noted BrAsian writer on Islam, science and culture, and Commissioner, Commission for Human Rights and Equality, in 2006, poignantly expresses the anxiety he felt in his childhood, when his mother would ask him to just look down and come as fast home as possible on his way back from the school, or after shopping, as if to ward off the possibility of racist attacks by evasion (12-14). Thus, from the 1960s to the 70s, growing intolerance in public places and policy gave rise to innumerable attacks on innocent Asians, which were either overlooked by the mainstream, or suppressed by the police.

**Early Settlers In The 1960s And 70s: Some Accounts.**

However, the Asian community had decided to stay: the families had started arriving since the 60s, the women started to work, they invested in housing, children started working, going to college and marrying, kinship expanded, more and more communities and workers’ associations were formed (Chandan 1986; Ballard 1994; Brah 2006). Recent work on the early years of Asian settlement in England in the
previous century, to which references will be made through the remaining chapters, has been thorough and systematic, though few in number, viz Saifullah Khan, Anwar, Chandan, Ballard, Brah. Verity Saifullah Khan (1977) has been one of the early writers who has tried to understand how the migrants from Mirpur in Pakistan dealt with culture-conflict in Bradford, UK. In a later work, Saifullah Khan points to the differential participation by British-born Mirpuris and their parents “in three distinct social arenas: the homeland, the Muslim communities in Bradford and the majority society” (1979, cited in Ballard 1994: 83). Ballard also points out, like Anwar, Brah and others, that these worlds are not as mutually exclusive as Saifullah Khan claims, and that movements across these social formations may be easier than supposed. Amrit Wilson (1978) records the untold first hand accounts of the female migrants’, the wives, mothers and daughters, of the recently arrived migrants in Britain. In her later work (2006) she records the ways in which marriage and career, domestic life and aspirations of these women have changed over the years, and how many shelters and organisations for Asian women have emerged out of the constant need for support and intervention in the sometimes violent, and/or tragic lives of these women suffering in an alien land.

Muhammad Anwar has been a leading native informant, a scholar who has tried to provide the insider’s view to the political and social analysts formulating policies for the Government. He has since 1973, studied the participation of Asians in election, and written in 1980 and 1984 for the Commission for Racial Equality, on elections. His other publications are on socio-political issues affecting Asian youth. Amarjit Chandan (1986) has documented the situation for the Indians back home, and his account carefully records the travails of the early immigrants, mostly of working class, in this important document. Roger Ballard’s (1994) anthology paints a more theoretical and academic document from largely an anthropological standpoint in his collection on the different castes and regional communities of Asians in the UK. Avtar Brah (1996, 2006), an eminent BrAsian sociologist, has written many books and articles since 1978 on BrAsians, especially teenagers and their parents, women, the labour market among other issues. Her most important engagement has been on the need to theorise the BrAsian diaspora anew, in the light of the government’s professed multiculturalism and institutional racism despite it. Brah mentions a number of Race Relations organisations which were also formed in the 70s, in response to the liberal sentiment which pointed to assimilation and integration of the alien black and
Asian subjects in future (2006: 40). Nicknamed “the race relations industry” by Sardar (2004), this kind of enterprise marked a new phase in studying black and Asian identities by both mainstream scholars and native informants situated in the academia, as mentioned in 1.1 above. It is true that such research made gradual changes in British policy, but stereotypes were still hard to demolish, survival was still as hard for the black or Asian on the street, school or factory as ever. The arrival and networked capital investment by East African Asians also added to the feisty, aggressive spirit of the survivalist Asian immigrant.

Creative Writers:

As we find from such evidence, the early migrants often produced seditious or nationalist writing from several locations in Britain, however not much of creative writing is evident before the middle of the century, around the time of the Indian independence. One of the early migrant creative writers based in England was G.V. Desani (1909-2001). He had interacted frequently with academia in England, and has written a novel *All About Mr H. Hatterr* (1948) and *Hali*, a playlet in 1950 along with occasional papers and articles on a variety of issues.

More extensive and serious creative writing from Indians in the U.K. came historically much later, in the late 1950s with the arrival of Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897-1999) and others on the literary scene in England. Chaudhuri visited England once in 1958, and then stayed in Oxford from 1970 to his death. Indians regard him as somewhat of an oddity, and his emulation of English lifestyle bears out “the prediction of British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge that the last English gentleman would be an Indian” (Datta Ray 1997: 3). He admired the imperial English way of life more than anything else, though he did not spare English politicians and literary critics either. Sunanda K. Datta Ray (1997) describes him as “an elitist, though never a part of an elite”, a renaissance man “born after and outside the synthesis of British and Indian cultures, the Bengal renaissance” (2). Niradabubu, though an extreme case, can be seen as the prefiguration of many a diasporic Indian who critique India after they or their family have left it by choice.

Though V.S. Naipaul (1932-) is a West Indian who emigrated to England from Trinidad in the 1950s his troubled relationship with India continues till date. His writing is of interest to this project because he represents the quintessential man of the old diaspora, like Nirad C. Chaudhuri, critiquing whatever he sees in close proximity, and desiring to understand what he has historically lost. The anguish of living in a
hostile environment is captured in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), written after much pondering. He had arrived in England in the post-war rebuilding phase, which was when immigrant labour was invited, “For men are needed to replace the fallen dead” as Bernardine Evaristo describes in *Lara* (1997: 6). What disturbed Naipaul more than the impact of Western materialism and the failure of the Empire is his relationship with India to which he has never really belonged. In his travelogues he painstakingly records his changing relationship, a combination of love, hatred and longing for a country he mentally and spiritually carried with himself. Now, Naipaul has been reassessing his kind of Hinduism and that practiced by the right wing Hindu fundamentalists, thus his ideas seem even more precariously balanced between Western notions of all-embracing spirituality and contemporary Eastern intolerance.

Sashti Brata (1939-) was another writer who examined the impact of the Empire and Westernisation on young, urban Indians educated in English in the 1960s and early 70s. After migrating to England, he had written an autobiography, *My God Died Young* (1967), and three novels, *Confessions of an Indian Woman Eater* (1971), *She & he* (1965), *A Search for Home* (1975) and *The Sensuous Guru* (1980), now made into a film, *The Guru*. Though Brata dealt with themes of exile and quest for identity and belonging, he appeared as a new writer who dealt with sex and exposing the hypocrisy of traditional Indians with a scathing honesty, but the literary merits of his novels may at best be regarded as questionable. Sastibrata shows women both as objects of lust and active agents of sexual encounters, with little engagements in other spheres of life.

Some of the women who lived in England in the 1970s started publishing their literary work during this period. Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya, have been the first few women writers who have written from England as their base, but not always about Indo-British exchanges in England. Attia Hossain (1913-1998) was a part of mainstream media, and wrote a novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1989) and a collection of short stories called *Phoenix Fled* (1988). These writings record Hossain’s memories of the height of Muslim culture in Lucknow, India, its seat and home and its gradual disintegration during partition. Though she has hardly produced any writing once in England, her life as a British Asian is important from an interesting aspect: she was one of the first Asian faces on British radio and television.

Anita Desai’s (1937-) novels deal with primarily Indian subjects, and she has been living in India, the UK and US intermittently. Her third novel, *Bye Bye
Blackbird (1971), is of interest at this point as it deals with the post-migrational experiences of a young Bengali man to the UK. Interestingly, Desai counterpoints the attitudes of male and female, white and non-white, assimilated and alienated characters. Dev, a recent entrant into London is enamoured of the land of Keats and decides to stay on despite feelings of nostalgia and alienation, and notable instances of racism. Adit, who has married Sarah, an Englishwoman, cannot yet assimilate and decides to return to Calcutta with Sarah. The novel ends at the point where Sara begins to have trepidations about going to the strange land whose culture she has painstakingly tried to imbibe and for which she has already been alienated from her own community, thus offering a glimpse into another possible tale of exile and “unbelonging”.

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) has often written novels about the experiences of British men and women in India, looking back at the colonial and postcolonial realities over the ages. Her perspective on her own identity can be best understood as a secure bonding with her roots, which no talk of alienation can disturb. Married to an Englishman, and settled in Britain, where she died, she neither glorifies nor mystifies the Indian encounter of the West, and maintains an objective distance from her subjects though she portrays them sensitively. She was not very well received by postcolonial readers and critics for being part of the cultural corporation of the West which does not give up its position of privilege and thrives on creative contact with the homeland left behind. Occasional critiques of racism and the empire are read as self-inflicted punishments for being some sort of a collaborator. Her novel The Nowhere Man (1972) describes the plight of an Indian family in London. The conflict is not only between the majority community and the Indians but the older and younger generations as well. The older generation dies, friendless, though there is some affinity with them and some of the lower class Londoners. But most of the white British are impossibly negatively disposed to the Indians, and the novel admits a very pessimistic view of race relations, dwelling on disharmony rather than harmony. In the SAWNET version of Markandaya’s biography Uma Parameswaran (www.sawnet.org) observes: “The Nowhere Man resonates for me because it speaks insightfully of diasporic situations twenty years before others spoke of it. Markandaya’s novel, set in 1968, talks not only about the violence of racism but also about other diasporic realities --- educational degrees that are not given accreditation,
the resistance of immigrants to the expectations of the “host” culture, chasms of communication between generations, cultural values and needless cultural baggage...”. She adds that in the novel, Srinivas, “after thirty years in England and having sacrificed a son to England’s war, is told by racists to “go back to your country.” The bewildered Srinivas says, “But this is my country.” Parameswaran, herself a diaspora intellectual confesses, “No matter what we ourselves may feel about our present homeland, too many see us only as aliens who belong elsewhere, not here.” Thus the novel, though pessimistic, is a realistic take on the third and final phase of migration in the twentieth century.

1.3 1980s and 90s: Thatcher, Powell, Racism and BrAsian Culture.

The early 80s saw a further fracture in the policy and attitude of the British majority towards the BrAsian in their main street, firstly on account of a deepening recession, and secondly due to their apparent financial well-being (Gidoomal 1997). The new immigration laws of 1980 and the British Nationality Act of 1981 tried to put an end to the arrival of Asian women and men for arranged marriages, and dependents from arriving in Britain. Many instances of harassment of Asians in the late 70s and early 80s are noted by Brah (2006: 51-52; 56-58) in her detailed socio-historical account of Asians in Britain: there were “virginity” and “age” tests, “open” warrants abused by the police to track down illegal immigrants from homes and factories, deportation and separation of families, discrimination at work, racist hate crimes leading to the Southall riots and the Bradford uprising of 1981. The sharper expression of anti-racist questioning is an obvious response to changing British policy on racism. Paul Gilroy (1991) analyses the astute policies of Enoch Powell in bringing West Indian and other immigrants for cheap labour to rebuild Britain, and then pushing them to the periphery, wishing they were invisible. Though from Churchill’s times in 1955, “Keep Britain White” was an election slogan, it was between 1964 and 1970 that the racist policies were actually formulated by clever use of language and covert means. The Kenyan Asians were given refuge in the U.K., as were the Ugandan Asians, though the favourable treatment given to white refugees from these countries was quite different from that meted out to the non-white Asians. Vijay Mishra (1996) also analyses Thatcher’s subtle, apparently non-racist rhetoric while proposing the “one nation” theory.
The idea of white Britain as a nation was promoted by Thatcher’s clever prose, especially during the Falklands war and during election time. Powell’s “rivers of blood” (Kureishi 1986) speech found itself changed into one evoking white nationhood, of “one nation” which is white and which is “confident in the rediscovery” of itself and its “self-respect”, during a battle fought 8000 miles away. Writers like Peregrine Worsthorne (Gilroy 1991: 251) added to the spirit of white supremacy and exclusion of blacks by writing articles on the irreconcilable differences between the different communities, their skins, accents or Gods. It is during these regimes that Paki-bashing started, with racist groups openly assaulting their neighbours, followed by occasional retaliation from black or Asian groups. No one was spared these insults, and women and children were naturally the softer targets, especially in the lower classes, while in the upper classes racism took a subtler form, like denial of employment, growth or opportunity for both genders. However, after the Black arts and cinema workshops in the mid-1980s, like Black Audio Film and Sankofa Film and Video Collective, Ceddo, and Asian Retake (Korte 2004: 39) the mainstream intelligentsia and the popular media started taking note of many creative interventions of BrAsians in producing public culture (Kureishi 1986; Bhattacharyya 1998; Korte 2004; Desai 2003). Asian faces appeared on television, music, and film (see Chapter Two section 3.1) there was a sense of inquisitive, although cautious acceptance of Asian culture at arms length. This dual face of Asian identity in Britain appears curious to the uninitiated: on the one hand the stage was being set for Madonna and Asian “kool”, on the other hand there were unprovoked racist attacks in broad daylight. The 90s saw an extension of such privileging of cultural artefacts as practices of henna, bindi, bhangra and chicken tikka masala, and on the other hand, the continued persecution of resident aliens, Muslims and Hindus, men, women and children (Sardar 2004).

Symptoms of cultural oppression like the headscarf affair for Muslim women, the “combing” operation for terrorists, following the 11th September World Trade Centre bombings, the 7th July London Underground bombings, the Heathrow bomb scare in 2006 respectively, the discriminatory drive against Asian doctors, the suicidal death of the Indian terrorist Kafeel Ahmed and the detention of his cousin the Indian doctor Haneef Ahmed in Australia after the Glasgow bomb attempt in July 2007, continue to plague the existence of the BrAsian till date. The cultural overdrive of Asian “kool” is thus mere eyewash for continuing hegemonic practices of the
establishment, which has institutionalized its political gaze. This neoimperialist gaze is a combination of colonial superiority and jealous denial of overdue sociopolitical privilege. Often, after years of inhospitable treatment, exposure to indifferent weather and long-ranging nostalgia for the India they had left behind, the immigrants of the first and early second wave envisaged a safe return home. They had to ultimately be dissuaded by friends and relatives back home to stay on for better economic opportunities, or by their children who were born in the host country for their own future interests (Ballard 1994; Chandan 1986). Images of a politically fraught subcontinent, still struggling against the effects of the Empire and after, partition and sectarian violence instigated and institutionalized as a parting gift of the British Government in undivided India were other demotivators. Instead of returning home, BrAsians often “re-turn” home, looking back at India through images in popular culture, music or even sports like cricket, and occasionally there emerges creative writing about the homeland, or the host country.

Stuart Hall has been arguing about the need for representation by the Black (and Asian) communities: in his body of his writing as a political and cultural activist, he says that they must represent themselves rather than be represented; their new ethnicities need to be told, as they break away from moulds, as they show how they contain both the self and other of the host, the majority community. In the creative writing by immigrants one finds that they sometimes privilege the hybrid, the migrant, the person who does not belong to any place but can call the world his home. But, one also finds that immigrant writers problematize the lived experience of the migrant subject in the host society, looking at the multiple intersections of gender, class, race, language, region of origin, religion, sexual orientation. Writings by women in diaspora often give voice to the subaltern, disenfranchised by patriarchy and nationalism, capitalism and power politics, and that is the way the term “diaspora” writing is used in this thesis. Often, the political writing that emerges from the diaspora is so strong that it can be seen as protest literature. There may also be a strong element of negotiation with hybridity in the authors’ treatment of the characters, plot and theme: they may represent the privileging of one culture over another, the push and pull between two cultures, the metropolitan versus the indigenous; the traditional versus the modern (Chowdhury 2002). New meanings of hybridity may emerge in writing of the diaspora, that moves way from the celebratory position of the hybrid, from a seamless merging or superimposition of identities to a
position of negotiation between multiple levels of existence (Radhakrishnan 2000; Takhar 2003: 220). Such writing can contain layers of experience, simultaneously validating all, not undermining or excluding one over the other. Thus though there may be negotiations of difference, recognition of experiences of dislocation or displacement or even transnational longings, but the essentialised “white”-“non-white”, or “traditional”-“modern” binaries give way for multiple experiential domains and multiple differences and disjunctures in new types of diaspora writing, like the BrAsian women’s writing.

The diaspora writers sometimes take a nostalgic look at the homeland, its culture, values, history for reiterating a sense of belonging. This is due to the interventions of the earlier generation who form a living presence in their social formations. Often the older members of the community experience diaspora and exclusion much more significantly than the second-generation writers or young immigrants who are more ready to transform their identity. They also express their own anguish to their families, or write about them. The names are used to describe such writing are often self-explanatory: “borderline writing”, writing from the “third space”, the “third scenario”, about “liminality”, “threshold-space”, writings by “hyphenated” writers, writings of a “post-national perspective”, “transnational writing” and writing in search of a “multi-locational imagination” etc.

The term multi-locational imagination used by Roger Bromley (2000) in the introduction to his book *Narratives of a New Belonging* has a special significance because it captures the ways in which these writings, especially BrAsian writing by Meera Syal, Atima Srivastava and Sunetra Gupta are nuanced. Such writing resonates with the memory of a homeland and the lived reality of the host country where these writers find themselves not necessarily by choice. These migrant writers, experiment with new forms of multi-culturality in the host country, and they see and think differently, and their narratives express an always emergent “becoming”. By breaking the post-1989 ‘ideological gridlock’, Bromley examines the third space, theorising from Stuart Hall’s idea of the third-scenario, and looks keenly at memory, silenced history, and transnational discursive border crossing in the works of hyphenated writers, Black/Asian-British, Chinese-American, Indo-Caribbean etc. In the case of the Black/Asian British narratives, Bromley recognises the need to remember and the urge to reclaim the past through *anamnesis* --- a process of fabulation events of the past, as in Syal’s or Kureishi’s writing. By remembering the past and living in the
present, the narrators give expression and subjecthood to their family or community, which is in need of such representation, on its way to fully “becoming” British, instead of being trapped in essentialist binaries of British-Asian, young-old, modern-traditional. In her review of Bromley’s book, Mala Pandurang links such narratives to the ideas of nationality and belonging. She writes:

A larger part of the analysis demonstrates how the narratives, as sites of a ‘multi-locational imagination’, allows us to think beyond nationality as a necessary locus for models of analyzing cultures under scrutiny. Narratives that explore identity in ways which are not necessarily bound to issues of nationality could suggest ‘a post-national model of belonging’. (2001b)

When Gail Low examines such writing by women authors, she finds that they “register a new confidence by which young Black British women negotiate different aspects of their identity and their rights as citizens of Britain” (1999: 30). More often than not, these texts record how the host community keeps migrants especially of other colours and races at arm’s length and how the older generation migrants themselves prefer exclusivity of social contact. This leads to a feeling of “unbelonging” in the migrant’s mind, and further to alienation and withdrawal from the host society, resulting in racism of another kind, in which the younger generation refuses to be caught despite recognition of discrimination and alienation. BrAsian women writers offer several reasons why this happens, which will be explored later in the chapters, but largely, racist behaviour emerges out of the fear of racial contamination or miscegenation, and unequal power structure. Thus there is a mutual essentialising among the host and migrant communities, which lead to separatism, based on yet more essentialist notions of purity and homogeneity, and the narratives of the younger generation women resist these notions. They realise that a history of mutual exclusionism keeps the communities apart and results in the hindrance of socio-economic growth based on equal participation of all communities.

For example, in the U.K., the Asian is usually a lower middle-class worker prepared to work for low wages and tough working conditions, or an upper middle-class businessman running a launderette, corner-shop, restaurant or garment factory and store, and often a doctor, software engineer or an academic anyway enjoying privileges that class and education together offer any citizen in the modern world. It is the first two types of Indians who bear the brunt of racism or perpetrate racism more than the last one. All the three categories of the Indian community prefer to
congregate together on social occasions (Gidoomal 1997; Alibhai-Brown 2000). Their participation in social causes or political issues had been minimal, that is of course unless they were themselves substantially affected (Chandan 1986; Ballard 1994; Brah 2004). The maintenance of exclusivity and distance from the hosts results in increasing isolation and intolerance, which further abets suspicion and fear of each other, and thus the younger generation strives to resist segregation and tries to assimilate by asserting a hybrid identity. Britain today is full of such exclusive communities, and those having a different body colour feel that they need to maintain this kind of exclusivity more than the white immigrants from Africa, or other European countries who are given preferential treatment, as Gurinder Chadha comments (Bhattacharyya 1994: 58). Changes in public policy and increased tolerance and demystification on the part of the host group, and increased level of participation in sociocultural and public life by Black and Asian communities can right the imbalance that currently exists, but of course these are easier theorised than practiced. The creative writing by British Asian women writers can be a meaningful first step towards this direction.

**Male Writers: Voices Of The “Second Generation”.**

On the whole, the concerns of the earlier group of women writers in the 1960s and 70s is not so much with racism as with the idea of displacement and inability to assimilate. Race and class were the major concerns of the three well-known male writers of the 1980s Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, and Farrukh Dhondy, and it is important to look at their work as one of the many ways that cultural self-assertion and representation was taking place by the “second generation”, often loosely called so, but effective to express a commonality of attitude: of rebellion against stereotypes, modernity of outlook, recognition of the fragmented nature of their identity and the need to “generate new cultural practices and new identities,” as Claire Alexander (2006: 271) suggests. This second generation may or may not be born in Britain, but is raised in Britain long enough to be conscious of the ongoing anti-racist struggle, resistance to bipolar attitudes in institutional policies, and the need to develop “new ethnicities” as a site for further resistance as successive generations negotiate the complications of a racialised existence in the diaspora. Earlier, the second generation was often stereotyped as torn between two conflicting cultures and world-views, but the younger BrAsians adopted the term as a signifier of “new ethnicities”. Their awareness of the multiple factors of gender, class, religion, sexuality, age, location
along with race, which define their “being” and “becoming” British, Asian or BrAsian distinguishes them from their earlier generation, which was still largely transnational, traditional and exclusive in terms of socio-cultural behaviour. The term “second generation” is often not technically correct, but stands for a continuum of resistant identities which refuse to be labelled in “either-or” terms, who, like Atima Srivastava says, do not want to be called British-Asian (Pandurang 2001a). As told to the audience during a talk in the Mumbai University (July 2005), Srivastava prefers to be called a British author. This claim on Srivastava’s part is supported by the concluding comments of Alexander in her article on BrAsian youth:

‘The second-generation’ is then being constantly imagined and re-imagined—from moment to moment, person to group, and from one ‘second generation’ to ‘the next (second) generation’. It is perhaps here that its conceptual power, as away of both marking and challenging difference, lies. (271)

In this thesis, the hyphenated word will be used only to describe British-born Asians who happen to be second-generation migrants, otherwise, the term “second generation”, without a hyphen will express this continuum of an imagined group intent on making a difference to a society known for its diversity. Rushdie, Kureishi and Dhondy could be said to represent such a second generation. They were visible and active writers and spokesmen of the Indian diaspora in England in the late 1970s and 80s who actually wrote about the impact of racism on the lives of their characters. As they were also active in the other arts, media and activism of Black artists or the community in general, they could secure a platform for speaking, so much so that Kureishi felt that he was treated something like an “exotic flower” spoken about later. The texts by these three male writers are the first visible signs of the migrant BrAsians of the second generation representing themselves as native informants to the mainstream.

The interventions of Salman Rushdie (1947-) come alive in his fiction, but his engagement with Asian life in Britain is recaptured best in his essays or interviews in Imaginary Homelands (1992) and Step Across This Line (2003). Rushdie explains his attitude to India, and asserts his right to intervene in correcting the image of India to the metropolitan reader. Timothy Brennan makes a useful observation on Rushdie’s double perspective of an alien and familiar, giving an insider’s view of the third world, though according to metropolitan tastes. Brennan holds that “cosmopolitan” writers interpret the “third world” to the “metropolitan/first world” reader. Kumkum
Sangari’s analysis critiques this kind of view of Rushdie, that he has no politics of his own, and that he is merely a postmodern writer (Nelson 1996: 376). Rushdie’s portrayal of women has also raised questions related to gender bias, as the women characters he portrays are forever sexually tainted, silly, and devious or scheming, regardless of their age or the period they belong to. However, his essays on migration and the condition of the Asian in Britain are useful for their vocal campaigns against poor housing, immigration policy, civil rights, representation of minorities in high places etc.

Hanif Kureishi (1954-) discusses his political position in an essay, *The Rainbow Sign* (Kureishi 1986). He tries to reconfigure the monoculturality of dominant British notions of identity: he says he wants to examine new ways of being British. The British whites have to learn that theirs is not the only possible Britishness, now being British meant that new elements have to be recognized which are transforming and shaping British culture. Being brought up in Bradford and Kent in the ‘60s into a mixed-race family meant that Kureishi got a close glimpse into Enoch Powell’s xenophobic programmes. The essay captures how he internalized racist abuses, felt inferior and finally angry and turned to protest through writing. Never really having been an Asian at heart or by family tradition, he always wanted to belong where he grew up, but racial discrimination made him feel closer to the Black Arts movements, the Black Panther and civil Rights activities of America. Kureishi distrusts attempts to assimilate Pakistanis, just as he critiques separatism of Muslim fundamentalists, because race as a category is unstable and indeterminate, and identities of mixed-race people are always mutable and ambivalent. Kureishi also interpellates politics with alternative sexual orientations of his protagonists. His portrayals of both men and women are predicated upon his concern with sexuality as a matter of political choice, and there are few portrayals of women as successful agents in his work. Thus Kureishi can be regarded as a pioneer among British authors who try to negotiate their hybrid identity through an openly political agenda. He is among those new British writers who are noted specially for trying new narrative modes and unorthodox subjects.

Farrukh Dhondy (1944-), on the other hand, sees himself “as a catalyst helping in assimilation of and understanding between divergent groups and traditions.” (Nelson 1993: 109) Having migrated to England to study in Cambridge, Dhondy stayed on like many of his Parsee forebears, and continued to write about the multi-
ethnic life of contemporary London. He occasionally transcends geographical limits, as they vanish fast in the jet-age, and his characters saddle many cultures and many languages in his world. This is particularly true of *Bombay Duck* (1999), his novel set in the U.K. and India, which depicts life in many other places as well. Novelist, playwright, television programme director, journalist and activist, Dhondy’s voice is one that can be heard at most of the forums related to multiracial and multicultural issues. It is important to have these kinds of interventions at proper places, so that homogenization can be resisted and yet shared problems can be addressed with understanding. Through his later work Dhondy addresses children and adolescents as much as adults. He creates a special brand of laconic humour while dealing with problems of contemporary racialism in Britain, and believes that good and evil can coexist regardless of community or religion. Dhondy’s tradition of writing explores the middle position, neither rejecting nor totally accepting status quo, but trying to make sense of a difficult though enjoyable life. His own position as a Parsee, the Iranian sect of followers of the prophet Zoroaster, which had already migrated from Persia to India, and then his own double migration to the U.K. makes his writing very interesting. His writing differs from Rushdie’s and Kureishi’s in that he is much closer to the working and poorer sections of BrAsian and black immigrants than they are, as Timothy Brennan says, he is one of the few writers “to look at the very different world of Southall streetlife and the working-class Asian youths of the housing estates” (1989: 150).

1.4 Emergence Of Women Writers In The 70s And 80s.

As it had happened with the earlier generation, the women of the second-generation migrant Indian communities bore much of the impact of the dominant groups’ prejudice in the closed British society, as well as the anger and frustration of their men folk who were themselves victims of racial hatred. Writing did not come readily to these women who were often uneducated, but their daughters were encouraged for higher studies, largely to make them self-sufficient in an indifferent economy, but often also for the sake of family prestige or the marriage market. It is these gifted daughters, sometimes of the first generation and often the second generation of immigrants, and occasionally sojourners who, like some of their male contemporaries, turned to serious writing after initial experiments in school or
college. To the second-generation female Indian immigrant, writing was one of the ways of reaching out to peers, both white and non-white. Writing provided means of creative satisfaction certainly, and was also a means of sharing some of their own anguishes with possibly the older generation of their community, as well as the mainstream that usually turned a blind eye to their predicament. Moreover, most of these writers had some academic connections, which gave them, although limited, some exposure to attend conferences or to publish collections of their works. The historical fact of some of these writers’ efforts to form a collective, twice, once in the 1980s and once in 2003 must be taken into cognizance.

Until the mid 1990s, writing by British Asian women had been a rather unexplored terrain of academic interest. This could perhaps be a result of infrequent publishing by the writers themselves, or a distinct male bias in the reception of Asian British texts. Martina Michel (1998) refers to this gap and the politics of institutionalization of Indian and Afro-Carribean literatures in her article on Ravinder Randhawa. She writes:

> it would, in my view, be worthwhile comparing the different roles of Indian and African/Caribbean intellectuals in the processes of the institutionalization of these various literatures in Britain as well as their perhaps controversial roles within anti-racist and other political movements. (143)

Michel also adds that “a large proportion of Asian British Art has been produced by women”, and they “areas yet comparatively unknown” (ibid), and though their male colleagues have also published few novels “they have become known widely and received the attention of literary critics more quickly than their female counterparts” (144). This shortcoming had perhaps been righted somewhat by the work of the Asian Women Writers’ Collective and by SALIDAA today as discussed subsequently.

**The AWWC: The Need For Cultural Representation Of Asian Women.**

The Asian Women Writers’ Collective was formed in 1983, published two anthologies or short fiction and poetry, but had to be disbanded due to lack of funds. The Greater London Council that originally funded it gradually withdrew the funds, till some of the original members and some others formed SALIDAA, or South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive in 2003 with finance from the lottery fund. This Collective evolved out of a workshop for Black women writers organized by Black Ink at Lambeth, in which Ravinder Randhawa, one of the foremost BrAsian women
writers, participated in the early 1980s, and was inspired to conduct similar workshops for women writers of Asian origin held for the first time in Britain. The formation of this organisation must be historicised alongside a few referents: the need for representation to articulate emerging identities of the Asian women; the urgent need to break away from stereotyping of Asians specially women and suggest possible subject positions which could extend the horizons of “being”; and to formulate Asian as opposed to Afro-Caribbean aesthetics of literary representation, in the light of the Black Arts movements in Britain.

The writers defined themselves in the introduction to Right of Way (1988) as “‘Asian’ (not ‘black’), as ‘women’ (not ‘feminists’)” (3-4). Ravinder Randhawa’s initiative in trying to bring Asian writers together must be mentioned here, as well as the reasons for this effort. There was no forum like this, and the workshop led writers to think that they wanted to be identified as women, as Asians and as a group of writers with the need to attain “visibility, credibility and access to institutions, publishers, and other groups in the community” (1). The material support of Black Ink and the Council has been acknowledged, as the writers had not been confident of getting published though committed to creative writing (Ghosh-Schellhorn 1999: 75).

Two members of the AWWC Jahanara Malique and Siu Won Ng are quoted by Ghosh-Schellhorn saying that the collective is not merely “a forum for women who do not only want to write but need a validation to their own reality”, and that “it is to the Collective’s credit [that] it attracts new generations of women who want to re-define themselves” (ibid). Moreover, the agenda of the AWWC states that it “has become a focus where women who identify themselves as Asian have found a space where there are opportunities for us to validate our own experiences” (ibid).

In the few other spaces available for articulation of the Asian woman’s voice, there were others with their own overwhelming problems, like black women’s groups, so it was necessary to create a new medium for Asian women’s creative expressions. The editors also write that they had debated a lot on naming themselves as they have, and their name has given them a more open approach to different types of Asian women, who may have a variety of politics. They say that the need to embark on such a venture was an enunciation of the political realities that normally excluded women like us. Consciousness developed through the workshop process of our need to write in a particular way, to take into account our own class position when writing and to recognize the way in which this distorted
our perceptions, and of our need for positive but realistic images of Asian women. (Introduction to Right of Way 1988: 4)

The writers candidly and carefully catalogue their problems, both ideological and material, in appearing as a group. Lack of funds, space, time away from family and work, subjects and a common language were some of the more immediate material blocks to be removed. Ideologically, many of the writers had divergent political commitments, creative capabilities or positions on themselves as writers, on writing as an art, on issues like illiteracy or affiliations to or rejection of Western or other types of feminism, on lesbianism, on their own privileged positions as writers in a social formation where illiteracy was rampant, on class and religious diversity, on whether to call themselves Black or join ranks with Afro-Carribean groups, to name only a few of the problems they shared.

However, the commitment to meaningful writing shows strongly in the attempt to showcase a number of talented writers dealing with their version of the lived experience of the British Asian, mostly. The common themes centre on betrayal, bonding across race or age, fulfillment in love or career, generational difference, desperate self-assertion etc. The occasional shifts into settings entirely located in the subcontinent are few and worth reading, and nowhere did the editors declare that this would be disallowed. The appearance of this collection had quite an impact in the literary establishment, though the white majority did question the literary standard of this collection, highlighting its political character more strongly (Ticktin 1996 cited in Schellhorn 1995: 39).

The next collection of AWWC appears six years later in 1994, showcasing a number of fresh writers with new approaches to style and subject matter. Flaming Spirit has had to go through the rigours of self-editing but under more rigorous supervision of the publishers, Virago, no longer The Women’s Press. They announce their success as group in the Foreword, (1994: vii) expressing happiness over the visibility and creative success of their earlier contributors, their linkages with media and a general national recognition that has come to some of them. They also highlight their desire to explore common Asian identities without homogenizing, but setting standards opposed to racism, sexism, communalism, homophobia or class or disability related oppression. The collection provides a wide range, keen experimentation and a clear involvement in their everyday experience of living in England. The stories nearly always deal with white and non-white relationships, not always portraying a
predictable exploration of inequality but dwelling on friendship, love, loneliness, the trauma of the aged, incest and rape, betrayal and loss involving both communities. One may conclude that the later collection then promises a richer variety of themes and opens out new areas of creative exploration and at the same time ventures to speak in the double-voice of the migrant and woman.

**BrAsian Women Academicians: Cultural Activists.**

The initiative to speak out in a double voice is found by other BrAsian women too, those who started political campaigns against domestic and racialised violence, forced marriage and harsh immigration laws, and called themselves Southall Black Sisters in 1979, during the Southall race riots. Supported by Afro-Carribean women as well, they opened refuges and shelters for women, started striking and picketing, fighting lawsuits (1991) and publishing books (in 1990; 1997; 2003) films (2006) and articles, addressing public gatherings over the years. Their founders Pragna Patel, Hanannah Siddiqui and others gradually secured funding, got legal training, and established themselves as the most visible BrAsian women’s political organization. Their founders got several social awards from the Government and other institutions, and they published plays, posters and other reading material to increase awareness of their presence, and the right of BrAsian women to complain against social injustice. Their campaigns against unjust immigration laws, laws protecting women from domestic violence, for balanced multicultural education bore fruit gradually, and thus their efforts to make a more just and equitable social system started to fall in place, though their activity has not reduced but increased today.

Several other interventions made by BrAsian women in academia must be mentioned here, as their work as activists runs as an integral part of their professional positions. Amrit Wilson, writer, has written books on BrAsian female subjectivities, *Finding a Voice* (1978) and *Dreams, questions and Struggles* (2006) in relation to domestic violence, mental health, labour and popular representation. Theatre and masculine subjectivities in relation to religion, especially fundamentalim, are her latest interests. Wilson has been criticized (Parmar 1982: 252 cited in Nirmal Puwar 2003: 27), for a negative portrayal of BrAsian women, using personal observations and empirical data and lacking in a theoretical approach. But in the concluding part of her latest book (2006), she says, “In this period, when women’s struggles are both denied and portrayed as deviant, these voices remind us that we must acknowledge our battles and use them to reflect on the world we want” (171). Kumkum Bhavnani
had been one of the prominent labour union and prison activists when she was in Britain in the 1980s: she has now moved to the US, but continues her engagements with the ecological, economic, health and cultural aspects of third world and Black women’s lives. Her documentaries Resist and Survive, and The Shape of Water (2006) reflect her commitment to depict the really behind the lives of exceptional women in adverse situations. Heidi Mirza, Professor of Equalities Study in Education, University of London, is also involved in race related policies in educational bodies. Her major interests are achievements of BrAsian women in higher learning, Islamophobia, multicultural education etc. Her book Black British Feminism: A Reader (1997) is the first of its kind to be published in the UK. Avtar Brah, MBE, is Professor of Sociology, Birkbeck College, and visiting professor in two American universities. She has written most thoroughly researched histories of the BrAsian peoples’ socio-political life in the 1970s till date, in many books, articles and monographs, like Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting identities (1996), Hybridity and its Discontents, Thinking Identities etc.

Parminder Bhachu, born in 1963 in Tanga, Tanzania, has been brought up in Britain, and now Professor, Department of Sociology, Clark University, in America. She has written extensively on BrAsian women entrepreneurs, production, consumption and control of BrAsian women’s clothes and fashion, consumerism and popular culture. Tanika Gupta, born in Chiswick in 1963, is an Oxford scholar of modern history, and she writes plays for the television, radio and stage. Pratibha Parmar’s contribution as filmmaker and one of the most vocal critics and lesbian activists must be mentioned. Her films Sari Red (1988) and Nina’s Heavenly Delights (2006) have been discussed in chapters three and five respectively. Lakshmi Holmstrom, translator, critic and freelance writer; Radhika Mohanram, Nirmal Puwar, Parvathy Raghuram, Kamila Zahno, Naila Kabeer, Fauzia Ahmad, Yasmin Hussain, are only a few of the many other women writers, activists and academics whose work articulates the BrAsin woman’ position vis a vis gender, class, religious and racial biases within British society.

Stuart Hall (1990) says, “diasporic identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference”. Paul Gilroy (1991) speaks of the Queen’s immigration policy and bureaucratic resistance to it, especially voiced by Enoch Powell and subsequently perpetrated by the racist policies of Thatcher. He finds that British notions of nationalism based on socialism are fast
being replaced by black cultural nationalism, and warns of the dangers of such a future. Even Roger Ballard (1994) predicts the reassertion of Punjabi, Gujrati, Jain, Bangladeshi culture through working class, religious, fundamentalist and women’s groups. The political organization of BrAsian women, and some of their novels and short stories illustrate these efforts and offer multiple perspectives to the production of cultural identity. What needs to be examined is what constitutes the migrant’s “double-vision” as Edward Said has described it. Can she create the “double-voice” also, as Bakhtin calls it, while describing “a hidden polemic”? Is it only a double, or a multiple voice that she speaks in, a multiple identity that the BrAsian woman negotiates?

**After The AWWC: Continuing The Search For Identity.**

Some of the writers of the Asian Women Writers’ Collective have begun their literary career through the two volumes of short stories, *Right of Way* (1988) and *Flaming Spirit* (1994). They are Leena Dhingra, Ravinder Randhawa, Meera Syal, Rukshana Ahmed, Rahila Gupta, and all have written novels or short stories since then. The political content of BrAsian women’s writing; its association with collectivism and the workshop movement in the 1980s; and its open conflict with essentialised portrayals of BrAsians as well as transnational culture places it in its early avatar as protest literature, up to the first few years into the 1990s, at least. In the mid-nineties, there is a strong element of negotiation with hybridity in the authors’ treatment of the characters, plot and theme. From the late 1990s to the present, there is a strong sense of locating new meanings of hybridity in the texts, not to see it as a celebration of mixed identities but as a position of negotiation, struggle and tussle between multiple levels of existence. From positions of negotiation, there comes a certain validation of the unique identity of the BrAsian woman’s ability to recognise different worlds of experience, in her profession, family, among friends and in mainstream society, which is increasingly the stamp of BrAsian women’s writing. This writing moves away from “alienation”, “border-crossing”, and other notions current in migration studies, by reframing the protagonists in their pre-existent domain, with their many-layered selfhood asserting different facets of their identity as per temporal, spatial and cultural location. Thus there is a negotiation of difference, there is an experience of dislocation or displacement, there are transnational longings, but the essentialised “white”-“Asian”, or “traditional”-“modern” dichotomies give way for multiple experiential domains and multiple differences and disjunctures.
Writers like these will continue to challenge predominant narrative modes and cultural expectations, as they negotiate their identity from their twin subjectivities of home and abroad. Mala Pandurang offers a useful insight when she writes, “The South Asian diasporic experience is fed by a complex system of representation and connection with religious and linguistic traditions” (Pandurang 2001: 23).

1.5 The Present Scenario: Identity, Hybridity, Nationalism, Globalisation, Transnationalism, Multiculturalism, Women And The Nation.

From the above discussion it is evident how one of the most crucial areas in which late capital has impacted upon individuals has been the much-contested site of cultural identity in the diaspora. Nations, and their peoples have been grappling with the sudden “opening out” of the world after globalization in the 1980s. Economic, political and ideological changes have thrown off-balance any essentialist idea of the self as an uncontaminated whole, a being with distinctive cultural traits, nationality and physical features. These traits that earlier helped to pin the individual down to a type, recognisably from a particular “nation”, are rendered insignificant in terms of both postmodernist theory and cultural reality. This section discusses how identities are becoming more fluid as the labour market of late capital allows geographical and cultural spaces to overflow. People now move in and out of countries, marking their own spaces in them by claiming them culturally. Immigrants, exiles, political refugees now jostle with settlers, erstwhile colonizers and indigenous tribes or natives, especially of the first world nations or the developed economic North. Postcolonial and postmodern theoretical and other discourses explore this changed circumstance from different perspectives, in which race, gender, class and sexual orientation are invariably included. In this section, the relation between BrAsian women’s identities to hybridity, nationhood, globalisation, transnationalism and multiculturalism is briefly examined before venturing into a discussion of the emergence of women writers with a distinctly political agenda.

Postcolonial scholars like Homi Bhabha seek to understand the dissimilar, disjunctive processes of transformations undergone by individuals and groups caught in the power play of nations that often results in migration. This power play is obviously of global control, consumption and cultural hegemony. Situated within academia, Homi Bhabha and his followers have been trying to articulate the anguish
of the hybrid subject, a product as much of colonialism as of the East-West encounter of late 20th century cultural imperialism. Following Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* Bhabha (1994: 44-45) places three conditions in the process of identification of the native in the eyes of the colonizer. First, there is always a sense of anticipation of reversal of roles in the gazes of the colonizer and the native; they want to BE the other, to possess the other’s place. Then, the native is encouraged to fantasize that he is “other” than the rest and therefore like the colonizer. Lastly, the identity of the native is always produced according to an image that involves the differential nature of the cultures of the native and the master.

Also, and very importantly, Bhabha, like Edward Said and Frantz Fanon before him, makes not only the subaltern speak but pushes the ideal of self-hood to a new crossroad where the hybrid controls the traffic. He says that the “non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures open up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiations of incommensurable differences create a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (Bhabha 1994: 218). He also says that hybridity “appears as a contesting, antagonistic agency” occupying the “space in-between the rules of engagement”. Bhabha also believes in the always transforming, transnational identity of the migrant, who is now located in the cities, the urban centre, “to change the history of the nation.” Bhabha and others ignore the deeply racial overtones of the nationalist policies which divest the subaltern, the woman, the lower class, the uneducated migrant who has no access to make any change possible in the cities in which he or she is often hiding, without papers, without a passport. The subaltern studies project, and feminist scholarships critique this aspect of the Bhabha school of thought, putting the question of identity through the sieve of gender, race, class, caste, sexual orientation. As some of these categories of experience are often simultaneous, there is the necessity to locate identity through the theories of intersectionality. Moreover, Marxist, poststructuralist and feminist scholarship also locate the nexus between the nationalist project and colonialism, but they differ from Bhabha as they theorise diasporas as actually elite formations and therefore allied with the project of nationalism.

The major part of this thesis examines the impact of the experience of migration on the BrAsian second generation in terms of its hybridity, in all its varieties and ramifications across age, class, sexual orientation and community bonding. In the British context, hybridity, celebrated for its cool new flavour, in the
1990s, created various syncretic arts and cultural products like *bhangra* pop and *chicken tikka masala*. But this did not create any new frameworks for a harmonious society working towards better goals: as discussed earlier, it only separated the BrAsians from the mainstream by exoticisation, while racist crimes continued as before. Thus the notion of hybridity, which contains the hyphenated ethnic identity, may at times shift into an essential category with the ethnic aspect overpowering the Western portion of the subject’s identity. Hybridity has thus both positively empowering, and negatively essentialising tendencies. R. Radhakrishnan (2000) points out the way in which “hybridity feels skin-deep and not profound”, something that masks “the reality of deeper issues and inequities that are the result of a world system of dominance” (par 2). He traces the possibilities of a richer implication of the notion of hybridity, a cultural politics that would overcome “radical indeterminacy” that threatens stabilisation, and make itself “accountable”, refuse to be commodified, meaninglessly celebrated, without historicising its origins (par 3). Radhakrishnan raises questions about the dual tendencies of the diaspora subject, representational bodies and criticism, that is the whole gamut of the diaspora studies industry, to either romanticise the diaspora subjectivity in its hybrid role of “homelessness”, or to dehistoricise it into accepting the status quo of mainstream assimilational discourses. He suggests that representations of diasporic hybridity have to both celebrate the richness of their multiple existence and “transform the body politic where it resides as ‘symptom’” (par 4). Kanishka Chowdhury (2002) analyses how the west privileges certain types of hybridity only to negate or appropriate hybrid cultures, like the “whitening” of rap in the US, or indi-pop bands in Britain (par 28) as the continuing project of western capitalist commodification of culture. He also points out the danger of the ways in which the west propagates theories regarding the alleged apolitical position of hybrid subjects, which closes the possibility of political participation, the formation of and sustaining meaningful political alliances. In other words, popular western ideas of hybridity are inimical on social, cultural and political grounds as they are anti-growth, stereotyped and essentialised notions meant to freeze the diaspora subject into inaction and sterility in the western world.

This thesis locates the hybrid subject in the stage of attaining clarity: assertion of hybridity is one of the stages in which the still-forming diaspora subjectivity becomes conscious of the status of “in-betweenness” as an enabling, transforming positionality. It is a stage before the attainment of selfhood in the diaspora, which is
actually possible through socio-cultural and political engagement with self and community, say both BrAsian and other British. Thus members communities of diasporans may at different time-spaces assert their hybridity, and realise its empowering attributes differentially. In this thesis it is envisaged that mainstream attempts at coercive assimilation cannot finally displace the chordal richness of multiplicity of existence that the diaspora subject enjoys at metropolitan centres, which is actually a resistance to taking binary positions that the west often offers.

Is it possible for British citizens, both migrants and patrials, to develop the concept of a homogeneous nation, in such a scenario? In fact, are the ideas of nationhood and nationalism at all relevant in these globalised times and spaces? Through mutually exclusive, non-interacting communities, a whole nation with a single national affiliation cannot emerge, each migrant community wishes to carry its own smaller version of the nation they have chosen to actually leave behind. When British policies on race have been repeatedly altered to suit political interests (as with migrant labour from 1948 to 1971), they have always kept the people of other races out of the pale of any real growth or positive change. Amin Malouf (2000) challenges “the notion that reduces identity to one single affiliation and encourages people to adopt an attitude that is partial, sectarian, intolerant, domineering …” Malouf adds that such thinking only goes to show that “their view of the world is biased and distorted” (29). A short review of the idea of nationhood may answer some of the questions raised here, as well as provoke new ones.

In the context of western, predominantly European societies, nationhood has several conflicting denotations. Ernest Renan (1882) argues that the biggest mistake one makes while defining a nation is to try to associate it with materialistic markers. According to him “A nation is a spiritual principle, the outcome of the profound complications of history; it is a spiritual family not a group determined by the shape of the earth.” He shows how the complications of race, language, material interest, religious affinities, geography and military necessity are all inadequate to supply a base on which the nation can be constituted. Bhabha (1993) himself in the anthology Nation and Narration, in which he published Renan’s article, (8-22) says that most contemporary readings of nation are restrictive; they are either utopian or predicated to state power. He draws attention to the recesses of the national culture harbouring groups with oppositional voices which actually articulate difference and point to historical change, the only certainty in this dynamic world, rather than a unified or
fixed idea of nation. Thus, following Bhabha’s position on nation, Britain is now no longer what it was two centuries ago, it is a nation of new people of different countries of origin who are also British, and they together make up the contemporary British nation.

Both Gayatri Spivak and Partha Chatterjee (1989) locate the linkages between the project of nationalism and the elite class, which is formed from the collaborators, who were once the bourgeois, and who have their own investment in the formation of the nation: they seek to rule, or to enjoy the privileges and power thus transferred from the colonialists. Writing from a first world colony like Australia, Simon During (1993: 138-153) suggests that though for European liberal thought nationalism is a word loaded with imperialist overtones, to subjects like himself the word nationalism is associated with freedom from rather than subjection to imperialism. Thus nationhood means different things to different thinkers, depending largely on their location. There are still more disturbing issues of home, identity, and a woman’s position in relation to these on which many thinkers have pondered, and which will be useful to address at this stage.

Ian Chambers (1994) says that the “migrant is always in transit”, “always subject to mutation” so much so that “the promise of a homecoming—completing the story, domesticating the detour—becomes an impossibility” (5). The contemporary concept of “home”, of being in the world, according to Ian Chambers, is the mode of “inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures” (ibid). Thus Appadurai (1997) speaks about the collapse of the nation-state, the birth of the postnation, and transnational identities in place of the nostalgia of the diaspora. He also postulates that the media regulates a large part of the modern migrants’ imagination, when he says that “both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space” (1997: 6). This idea is heavily contested by academicians of the non-west, who argue that nation and nationality are not flimsy political constructs, they go far deeper to be so easily obliterated, according to the convenience of the west. Kanishka Chowdhury (2002), an Indian academician in the diaspora, questions such an approach to nationalism, which does not take into account the fact that people are still willing to die for their nations, or that passports and visas are denied on the basis of nationanality. In the light of changing definitions of the nation, how do women in these migratory spaces relate to their own identity? How are
Indian women’s minds and bodies negotiated in national discourses and conversations about identity in recent Indian history? How do these negotiations configure the BrAsian woman’s identity? These questions are better answered once the combined effects of how the cultural logic of globalisation, transnationalism and multiculturalism impact upon third world and BrAsian women are considered.

Globalisation is looked at from very different positions in the first and the third worlds, but both attitudes are often critical. One of the main impacts of this universally transformative process is the deterritorialization of entire populations, funds and cultural apparatus along with it (Deleuze and Guattari; Appadurai). Certain thinkers have examined the impact of globalisation on economy, politics, labour, and culture, commenting on the narrowing of boundaries across countries and continents in a positive light, like Appadurai, and Ulf Hannerz. To put it simply, Appadurai’s idea seems to be that all nations are tending towards extinction, the state machinery is collapsing, and that there is one national conglomerate worth emulating or belonging to, that is the United States of America, because of its multicultural practices, and its status as the nation comprised of immigrants. These ideas are critiqued by some of the world’s more moderate approach to globalisation. Indian economists and social scientists continue to critically examine the flexibility or adaptability of globalisation (Heredia 1999; Acharya 2000; Chandoke 1999; Ambirajan 2000; Bhargava 2003; Thakur 2006 in www.epw.org.in), though the Indian government, like most other third world nations, has accepted it by adapting its own economic policies. By and large, Asian and third world scholars of the diaspora are critical of the celebratory approach to globalisation and ask questions about how race, gender, and class formations are negotiated by such an approach (Jenny Sharpe 1995; Aihwa Ong 1996; David Eng 1997; Lisa Lowe 1998 cited in Desai 2003). Moreover, western celebration of globalisation ignores, according to Kanishka Chowdhury (2002) “the nameless, the voiceless, the unrepresented” (par 14) which continue to be exploited by “seven wealthy nations” (par 17) or the G-seven nations. Yet others have not only rejected globalisation but responded to it by developing their extreme and often fundamentalist approaches, like some middle-eastern countries, or certain right wing political parties in India or other third world countries. These three basic responses alert us from celebrating globalisation as the new age enlightenment, by accommodating differing interpretations of this primarily economic phenomenon which has unassuagable cultural ramifications for the diaspora as much as the
indigenous population.

Transnationalism has amalgamated out of globalisation and migration in the late capitalist age, and many thinkers believe that it is quite possible that entire communities can monitor and control socio-political processes of erstwhile nations transnationally, and that nations and the national elite control or coopt these formations (Portes 1997; Pessar and Mahler 2001). Often the cash flow into the sending nations entrenches globalising influences originating from these centres, creating situations of domination and control over political parties or social institutions like marriage or even women’s domestic, reproductive and sexual labour (Pessar and Mahler 2001). If diasporas lead to hybrid subjects, exile, nostalgia, the “third space”, the transnational subject has the nation over its shoulder, so to say, with the physical entity in a space distinct and distant from the emotional, cultural and even political entity, which is embodied transnationally.

Thus, instead of negotiating only with the social, cultural or political territory of location, the transnational subject continues to locate himself in the “imaginary homeland” with more than imaginary investment. This does not lead to an alienation from either the adoptive country or the national space because of the highly vigorous mediation and possibility of frequent visits (Ballard 2001; Pessar and Mahler 2001). Thus, absorbing the pains of the diaspora, the transnational subject, say a Punjabi immigrant from a village in Jullunder, India, adopts both cultures, switching accents, wearing different sets of clothes, adopting dietary and cultural practices appropriate to “home” and “away” whenever applicable, but remaining primarily inscribed in the national imaginary. The village, the ancestral home, political and commercial interests of the village continue to be imbricated in his consciousness even in his adoptive country. (Appadurai 1996; Portes 1997). It is possible to have entire transnational communities residing in floating locations across time, like the Gujarati Patels from India who first moved to East Africa and then to England, who carry their Indian and East African identities very strongly, despite being BrAsians for over two generations now (Gidoomal 1997). That is why, Sumitra’s Story (1985), a novel about a Ugandan Asian girl, figures so prominently in the subsequent chapters. The Sylhetis from Bangladesh, Jullunduris from India, and Mirpuris from Pakistan are definitely large transnational communities, now straining with the gradual lack of allegiance to the homeland among their second and third generations (Ballard 2001: 43-46). This project posits that these second-generation writers emerging from some of these
transnational communities are really vestigially transnational at the present moment, and such migrant women try their best to resist transnationality (Spivak 1997: 252). They are hybrids, they form diasporas negotiating with citizenship goals and promises of achievement and success which are forever postponed in the land they had no choice but to adopt, with but a marginal and occasional, situation specific interest in the nation and national culture. Their hybridity is as much a product of their inheritance of transnational cultural matrices as their embroilment in the metropole and the multicultural *masala* it has to offer. Their position in the metroploitan centre often reaffirms their cultural affiliations with the sending nations. Pessar and Mahler (2001: 6) show, in the case of migrant women in the US, how “transnational actions, though often associated with the erosion of the nation-state, can indeed fortify it and in so doing also reaffirm asymmetrical gender relations.”

It is very important to draw distinctions between nationhood and identity in a background of predominantly racially segregated societies, which are now trying to adopt the label of multi-culturalist societies in a bid for political correctness. In the early nineties Stuart Hall introduced the idea of emerging ethnicities and the importance of recognising difference and sameness, as opposed to essentialist’, racialised ideas of “black” and “white”. Hall (1992) discusses difference and ethnicity and provides the notion of ethnicity with some meaningful and credible use, whilst recognising that it is a contested concept. He argues that we are all ethnically located and that our ethnic identities are crucial to our sense of self but that ethnicities cannot be hierarchically located. Contemporary Britain is engaging with the idea of a “multicultural” society since the 1990s, and today the term itself is the site of a debate with far-reaching implications. Bhikhu Parekh’s (2000) report on multiculturalism argues for a more balanced, open-minded approach to the current version of multiculturalism practiced in England. As discussed before, the impact of multiculturalism is mostly felt by BrAsians negatively, for example, when “balti”, “curry”, *bhangra* or *mehndi*, are consumed by the mainstream, but discrimination continues in education, employment, and the legal system (Sardar 2004; Brah 2006). Often, in the name of respect for culture, criminal or violent actions are allowed to continue unchecked by police or judicial intervention (Wilson 2006; Mama 1989). Thus, just as the celebration of hybridity produces reified communities in some cases, multiculturalism may be another name for ethnification of cultures, for creating ghetto communities constantly on show, commodified to display political and social
"tolerance" as well as a global consumerism (Morley and Robins 2001; Sardar 2004), but masking contempt and racial hatred which continues in its underbelly. Parekh calls for a more tolerant approach to the issue on a holistic level. He says:

What I might call a multicultural perspective is composed of the creative interplay of these three complementary insights, namely the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and the internal plurality of each culture. (2000: 338)

Parekh is fully aware of the daunting nature of such a task, in countries like USA, UK and France, but he is also conscious that a little effort may lead to "exciting" results, to avoid a "political nightmare" (344) in such societies. There should be ways to bring unity in diversity, without monocultural excesses, there should be a "common sense of belonging" (343) among citizens who share a common political identity and respect different cultural identities. Parekh speaks to culturally homogeneous approaches of governments, which are also tightly controlled, and thus inimical to the practice or success of multiculturalism, leading to "moral and emotional disorientation" among subjects wanting "recognition and equality" (344).

Watson (2002: 51-54) distinguishes between soft and critical multiculturalism while discussing British policy. He shows how education was the first area in which liberal thought inspired revision, based on the Swann Report (1985), of textbooks and teaching methods, towards greater inclusiveness. References to names, cultural practices like festivals drawn from minority communities, removal of negative references, a balanced mix of representation of both majority and less represented communities were some of these practices. Critics like Brah (1996: 227-234) offer different interpretations of the desired effect of inclusion: they feel that this token representation further stereotypes the non-European, exoticises them, and creates greater distance between the host and migrant, with negative biases against ethnic minorities. These critics argue for holistic transformation, depth of knowledge among teachers and students rather than mere curiosity, involvement of parents in education etc, as an answer to soft approaches to multiculturalism. Critical multiculturalism is yet another option: it sees educational reform as only a starting point, and looks to use diversity as a challenge to revise essentialising notions of both minority and majority communities, to invoke greater democracy in society (Watson 2002: 54).

How do the cultural, social and political formulations define women? Do women begin to be embodied by these formations, and especially how do the BrAsian
women negotiate these formations in their subjectivities? Women and the nation have always had troubled relationships, as their bodies are the reproductive sites for racial continuity, and a distinct territory for male domination and possession. As writers like Kumkum Sangari (1989) and Partha Chatterjee (1989) show, the project of nationalism invested the Indian woman with a troublesome double identity, as the preserver of spiritual and cultural values, and the begetter of progeny that will be valiant and capable of defending the nation. From Kali or Shakti, in the ancient times, to Sita or sati in the premodern era, the journey that the Indian woman traveled was always incumbent on her configuration as the spiritual counterpart of the male domains of social and political power. In their desire to achieve a non-Western model of Indian nationhood, the nationalists tried to configure an oppositional identity by centering spirituality, over materialism, the inner versus the outer world, and the home versus the world. The task of constructing the modern state was the purview of men, and though women were co-opted by Gandhi as equal sharers of the burden, they only added to the numbers by their participation. They seemed to be needed for providing the financial resources by selling their jewellery, and the spiritual wherewithal by encouraging the men to participate in the movement, but they were left out of the pale of governance during the early post-independence years. The domain of the modern Indian woman was the home, a pure, uncontaminated space of spiritual essences. Mehboob Khans’s Mother India (1957), a noted Hindi film, was the final image in the 1950s, of the modern Indian woman, an embodiment of sacrifice, illiterate and hardworking, who does not shirk to kill her errant son in the face of so-called moral turpitude. Thus the Indian woman who was promised her home in a free India found that she did have a home but one without freedom.

When the phenomenon of migration to the UK started to take place, the women were not the beneficiaries of this freedom of being independent initially, as they were not allowed to accompany their men, located as they were in joint families (Wilson 1978; Ballard 2001). When they joined their men in the late 60s and 70s, they thought they would be free at last, of domestic exploitation, live in better material conditions, have access to modern devices to ease housework; but even this was not easy, and they were co-opted into the workforce. With migration came the problems of language, cultural adjustment, and the burden of maintaining strict control over moral behaviour of the family (Wilson 1978, 2006; Ballard 2001). Thus, the woman struggled in her roles as nurturer, provider, and preserver of values and progenitor of
male heirs even in her new environment. Friendless, "speechless", confined to the four walls, the migrant Indian woman could hardly call Britain her home, nor did she belong physically to India, the home she had to leave behind. The promise of freedom, of her own home, her own space, was still denied to the migrant Indian woman of the first generation in Britain. Such a scenario still exists internationally, and not only among lower class migrants from the economic South, from any of the subcontinental or other Asian countries, for whom the promise of belonging, of claiming their own patch of the sun remains elusive. Feminists of colour, most often migrants as well, have theorised the ways in which home, the nation, patriarchy and global forces collude to deny agency to the migrant third world woman, who is often coerced into migration by false hopes of freedom and promise of a better life (Brah 1996; Spivak 1990; Mohanty 1991; Parmar 1997; Trinh-Minh-Ha 1989; Davis 1981; bell hooks 1992).

From the perspective of migrant women from the third world, such a promise is always postponed. Trinh Minh-ha (1990) posits that the notion of displacement is also a place of identity, and that there is no answer to the question ‘who am I’ but the questions ‘where, when and how am I’ are the ones that matter. Ian Chambers also quotes Keya Ganguly (1992) in this context, and her comments merit a careful consideration here. Ganguly says

It is impossible to “go home” again. This means to find oneself subject to even wider and more complex webs of cultural negotiation and interaction, where, for example, immigrant women are subject-ed by the double articulation of discourses of cultural difference and patriarchy. This makes their attempts to negotiate their selfhood in daily life both more interesting and perhaps more exemplary of the conditions within which subaltern experience is “represented and lived”. (cited in Chambers 1994: 74-75)

Such a theoretical standpoint is well borne out practically by the 1990s writers considered in this project, as the later chapters will unfold.

In the new millenium, writers and other creative artists are now addressing the question of the BrAsian woman’s multi-faceted identity as a site of keen interest. Other than the novelists in consideration here, there are filmmakers in the U.K., like Pratibha Parmar, theatre companies like Kali Theatre, photographers like Samena Rana who are all engaged in the portrayal of the migrant woman’s identity in the host society. Trinh Minh-ha says to Parmar (1990) that

Identity remains necessary as a political/personal strategy of survival
...there is no real me to return to, no whole self that synthesizes the woman, the woman of colour and the writer, there are instead, diverse recognitions of self through difference, and unfinished, contingent, arbitrary closures that make possible both politics and identity. (65)

The BrAsian woman, the key figure in this discussion, finds herself constantly strategizing for survival. However, it would be erroneous to assume that it is only a struggle against racism, patriarchy or economic exploitation that she has to participate in; she has to deal with the stereotype of the contemporary Indian woman, as circulated by the transnational media. She, as argued later in Chapter Five, is as much involved in the project of upward mobility as her community, her male affines or she herself desires. As Jigna Desai says, “According to Spivak, the diasporic woman is positioned by multiple nationalisms, contested citizenships, strained patriarchies, and the expansion of capital in the new nation-state” (2003: 27). She is as much a victim of British institutionalised racism as well as globalisation and transnational movements. She has to be seen to enjoy the privileges of modern existence, as the advertiser’s darling, the “marvelous me” who is a real “home” girl at heart, as Shoma Munshi argues (cited in Raghuram, 2003: 70), and also as the ultimate symbol of her male counterpart’s achievement or acquisitiveness. She has to continue to carry a transformed image of “Mother India” as the mother of sons, their nurturer, instilling Asian values, making them successful in their lives modeled on societal images of BrAsians, and earn money, take care of the house and its mortgage, look modern and fashionable without flaunting her physical attributes overtly.

As Hasmita Ramji, (2003: 227) notes, second-generation BrAsian career women would wear western clothes to work, eat sandwiches and speak only in English even when answering phone calls in Indian languages. All this changes when they go shopping at weekends, or are attending weddings or going to the temple, when, to attest to their family’s status, they must wear Indian clothes of contemporary fashion, or whatever is locally available. This kind of performative strategy is related to many aspects of their life: their choice of friends, their recreation habits, their food habits, and life choices as in career or marriage. At work, as an academic, or media person, or a creative artist, the BrAsian woman is expected to carry forward her investment in the ethnicity of her community, whether she is comfortable or willing to do so or not (Puwar and Raghuram: 2003). Critics like Pnina Werbner (2004: 895-911) believe that the BrAsian woman is poised to negotiate the modern world of the
media especially with her chic and exotic appeal, and that she looks and sounds very attractive to the audience. Werbner believes that such a modern BrAsian woman is controlled by her elders, forced into marriage, and thus rebels against elders and family by trying to shock them through satirical portraits of themselves in their film and fiction. Thus multiculturalism and hybridity together construct the BrAsian young women as an exotic breed, sexually promising, extremely docile and competent at work, homebound but rebellious.

Moreover, with the influence of the global, transnational media, their lives are often performed along the trajectory of late modernism: they are hailed as the modern consumers, the housewives or the young women, who watch television, listen to music, follow fashion, choose partners, marry and make homes that reassert their identity as modern BrAsian women. They are successful, career-conscious yet eager to balance both worlds, the home and the outside, the Indian and the Western, in their daily lives (Puwar and Raghuram: 2003). This thesis investigates the representation of such, and a variety of other negotiations in the evolution of women’s identities in the fictional output of the BrAsian woman writer.

1.6 Novelists Of The 80s 90s And After: Migrants Or Sojourners?

Among the writers who speak with the double-voice are young writers of the second and first generation migrants. They may be first generation of immigrants who followed their parents to England, like Leena Dhingra (1942-), Rukshana Smith (1948), Ravinder Randhawa (1952-), Atima Srivastava (1961), or were born in England after their parents migrated like Meera Syal (1963), Tanika Gupta (1963) and Nisha Minhas. Among the later entrants to the literary scenario there are some sojourners or migrants who have relocated in their adulthood. Sunetra Gupta (1965) has written novels since she has adopted England as her home: she researches in Biology and writes novels since she has settled down with her husband and child there. Preethi Nair, born in Kerala, is a new writer, settled in U.K. after higher education and a successful career. Saumya Balsari has been a journalist in Mumbai, in Europe and in London before she experimented with the novel form, and has written a “town and gown novel” to start with.

The lives of these writers are of course unique though they share their status as Indian immigrant women. Writers like Ravinder Randhawa, Rahila Gupta, Leena Dhirgra and Rukhsana Ahmad are associated with cultural activism, though not in
violently assertive way, but quietly and persuasively helping the Asian women writers to “redefine themselves” and to “validate their own experiences” as they declare in the Introduction to their collective publication, *Right of Way* (1988). Senior most among the writers is Leena Dhingra, whose novel *Amritvela* or *The First Light* was published by Rupa and Co. in India. In this novel she writes about the willing return to India of a young woman, and how she decides not to stay but to go back to Britain. Meera Syal, MBE, started as a playwright and actress, produced scripts and screenplays for films and TV serials, acted and then turned to writing novels, though she still continues working with the other media. Her novel *Anita and Me* describes the growing years of Meena, an Indian girl in the English Midlands during Enoch Powell’s regime. Her *Life isn’t all ha ha hee hee* portrays friendship and betrayal among three not very young Punjabi girls in middle-class London. Atima Srivastava deals with the problem of Aids and a British Asian television journalist’s unpredictable career in *Transmission*, and love and loss in the life of a bright young Indian student in Britain in *Looking for Maya*. Sunetra Gupta has faced a series of migrations, but her fictional world resonates with memories of Kolkata and London, Oxford and Princeton. A microbiologist by profession, she has written four novels while based in England. Preethi Nair candidly admits to writing for fame and success, and weaves a fantasy-myth into two interrelated stories about two generations of Indians abroad called *Gypsy Masala* and *One Hundred shades of white*. Her *Beyond Indigo* and *The Colour of Love* are also popular, and thinly disguised autobiographies. A curious fact about Nair is that she published her own novel, setting up a multinational publishing firm for which she even got a PPC Publisher of The Year award, after which she identified herself as her own publisher, responsible for the high visibility of the novel *Gypsy Masala*. Nisha Minhas chooses to write several popular romances, especially on the love and marriage theme among BrAsians, like *The Marriage Market*, *Sari and Sins*, *Bindis and Brides*, *Passion and Poppadums*, but only her first, *Chapatti or Chips?* is discussed in this thesis in Chapter Five. Both Nisha Minhas and Preethi Nair are now engaged in writing primarily about the concept of arranged marriage, and how the second-generation yuppie BrAsian woman resists it in favour of marriage with white British or other white men. Saumya Balsari wrote her first novel in 2004 called *The Cambridge Curry Club*, and is also a columnist. Rukshana Smith, originally Janna Eliot was born in Birmingham into a family of East-European and Roma origins. Her novel *Sumitra’s Story* is prescribed as
a textbook in Literature courses in the U.K. for G.C.S.E in 1992, and in Singapore and China as well, along with her other novels for teenagers Rainbows in the Gutter, Salt on the Snow, The Poet who Sold Time. Sumitra’s Story is studied in detail for an account of the first few years of the lives of BrAsian migrants from Uganda, as well as a novel offering some stereotypes of Asians according to British mainstream perceptions. Her novel is often included in this study for the way it renders the pains of the young second generation migrants in the early years of BrAsian settlement in the late 1960s and early 70s, and their fruitful interaction with the mainstream resulting in the development of an oppositional identity. The numerous short story writers in the two AWWC volumes have not yet published much of other work, and cannot be identified as a homogenous group; thus the variety in their approaches must be linked to these authors’ experiences as migrants.

Among this group of writers there are distinct markers of identity: some still maintain an active, transnational relationship with India, mediated through their station abroad, like Sunetra Gupta, Preethi Nair, Saumya Balsari, or Leena Dhingra, others have more pronounced identities as British Punjabi women, like Meera Syal, or Ravinder Randhawa. Sunetra Gupta, Saumya Balsari, and sometimes Atima Srivastava refer to University life, or the time they have spent as students or researchers often echoes in several references in their protagonists’ lives. Though Preethi Nair bases her first two novels in London, with references to Europe and America, a large part of the novels is set in India, like Dhingra’s or Gupta’s novels. This happens occasionally in some of the other writers as well, thus transnational linkages are frequently observed in this body of work, as further study will reveal. But most importantly, their class, educational background and gendered identity determine the ways in which their protagonists’ BrAsian identities are negotiated across similar parameters. Negotiations with racism are often found, with varying degrees of intensity, proportionate to the authors’ intention. Thus it would be useful to call this body of writing by BrAsian women as immigrant writing, though there may be occasional notes of the diasporic subject creeping in, or the strains of the transnational subjectivity urging for an audience.

Susheila Nasta’s (1999) seminal work on some of these writers provides valuable insights into their writing. She writes about the development of a new kind of Asian writing in Britain, which refuses to be typified, ghettoized or appropriated by academicians as was Rushdie, and says that the new writers, men and women, want
"to truly liberate the writing from the sometimes entrapping political ideologies that have come to surround it" (21) while white British writers ignore the presence of Asians in their lives, or caricature them or exoticise them, their contemporary non-white writers “emphasise the alienation and dislocation of characters attempting to inhabit a society where racism is on the increase ... and where people of South Asian origin ... suffer from alienation and disenchantment” (ibid).

It is very interesting to explore the reason why these writers are then not in the limelight, not known internationally, not even known widely in India. It is true that writers are not as much a recognizable or acknowledged force in contemporary society anyway, but even in academia, publishing circles, libraries and universities, these texts as good as do not exist. However, many women writers of Indian origin residing in the U.S. are celebrated as writers dealing with the experience of diaspora. On reading their novels, however, one finds a conscious display of their exotic status as transnational South Asian writers, steeped in the great artistic and cultural tradition that belongs to India, a remarkable facility with the language, and a near-total elision of what might be called the hallmark of the BrAsian writers, viz their day to day, lived struggle with political identity. It remains to be examined whether this is because of a more willing assimilation of South Asians in America, less rigid racist practices in American society in response to South Asians, or the power of financial and other resources accessible to these writers as citizens of the first among the first worlds. It may also be possible that the bold storytelling, rather devoid of artistic prettifying or exoticism, may not appeal to the expectations of the exotic that diaspora writing by South Asians, especially women writers offer. It is true that many of the later writers like Meera Syal or Sunetra Gupta experiment with style, but most of BrAsian women’s writing, including theirs, delves deeper into the ideological position of the female protagonist in the gendered geography of her “becoming”, and not merely “being” in the diaspora. As Sam Naidu writes: “Thus, when describing the transnational feminist aesthetic inscribed by women writers of the South Asian diaspora, analysis of literary stylistic devices, although obviously necessary, is somewhat overshadowed by an accompanying assessment of the political efficacy of the literature” (2007, forthcoming).

Parvati Raghuram and Nirmal Puwar (2003) have argued that there are many differences in the way that the academia in both the countries deals with the issue of race. What is interesting in their observation is that in both countries, the academia
continuously critiques and demands new proofs of scholarly competence and capability from South Asian women, scholars or writers, as well as typically ethnic traits. So, arguably, a South-Asian writer in Britain occupies the same status as a South Asian academic, both are less privileged, despite undergoing considerable agony and expressing their commitment in theoretical or creative discourse, both are sidelined by publishers, critics and prize-giving authorities or scholarship funds, both are expected to answer to stereotypes of the oppressed, victimised BrAsian woman, or exotic cultural chic.

Publishing strategies also suggest a similar story: the slogans, cover designs, book jackets of some BrAsian novels are colourful, slightly loud in their appearance, with ethnic markers clearly visible, like henna, bindi, costumes (CS), references to Hindi film (LI), or a very flattering photograph of the dusky, attractive writer, like Meera Syal, Preethi Nair, Nisha Minhas, or the writer and media person of Sri Lankan origin, Shyama Perera. It must be said that this was perhaps seen as a suitable strategy to attract readers due to a newly awakened interest in BrAsian women’s writing, so the authors agreed with the publishers on the appearance of their first or second novels, but with some authors like Minhas and Nair, popularity means a reaffirmation of their ethnicity, so they continue to have very similar, colourful, exotic appearances of their book-jackets and covers. Graham Huggan comments on how Arundhati Roy’s “incorrigibly photogenic” exotic face was flashed all over the media when she was nominated for the Booker, and soon afterwards, as if to confirm the exotic appeal of her writing, and how she was seen as “the goddess of small things” (Huggan 2001 xv-xvi, cited in Mita Banerjee 2007: 68). It is also possible that some publishers do prefer to carry photographs of writers on their covers as a matter of policy, so a later writer like Saumya Bulsari, and occasionally Sunetra Gupta might appear in the inside flap or back cover. Most of the later texts, like Sunetra Gupta’s books, Atima Srivastava’s Transmission, do avoid any markers of ethnicity on their design or exterior layout. Rarely, and appropriately, a photograph of an anonymous BrAsian girl or woman appears, as on Sumitra’s Story, Anita And Me, or Haven’t Stopped Dancing Yet. The accompanying list of authors whose references are frequently found in this project carries publication details with names of the publishers, which might indicate better accessibility or visibility in the 1990s when a large number of the novels appeared, often simultaneously. The list also shows how BrAsian women’s serious engagement with writing fiction appears to be going through a lull, in the first few years of the
new century, with the occasional well-packaged popular novel appearing intermittently, about one every year. So there are only six novels in the last six years which contain discussions relevant to this thesis, the others depicting the authors’ interest in arranged marriage and restrictive parental influence in BrAsian women’s lives, the very themes and portrayals that the western academia hypes and most often stereotypes as the BrAsian norm.

**After 2000: Political Upheaval And BrAsian Resilience.**

The new group of novelists of the 80s, 90s and after, united by a shared background or immigrant status, similar questions of identity, creative concerns, themes and style together reflect a positive attitude to their being BrAsians. In the light of the political upheaval after the World Trade Centre bombings of 9/11, the 7/7 bombings of the London Underground, the Oldham riots of 2001, changes, both positive and negative, were made in British policy. The resilience of the BrAsians in the face of policy change has already been referred to in earlier sections. In the changed scenario, fresh efforts are being made to unite South Asian artists by themselves, through organizations like SALIDAA, newspapers like *Asian Voice*, *Eastern Eye*, the *Indobrit* magazine and many efforts made by popular culture, viz dance, music, theatre, television comedy, film etc which deserve to be discussed before closing the chapter, suggesting a brighter future of multicultural Britain and South Asian writers.

SALIDAA or South Asian Diasporic Literature and Arts Archive is an organization recently framed to bring artists and writers together as a forum, to promote, publish and invite exchange on their creative performance in 2003. It is a digital archive, continually revising its contents, inviting comments and contributions, starting networks. Funded by Lottery Funds of UK, it also gets a lot of financial assistance from writers like Ravinder Randhawa who are Royal Literary Fellows and have been given handsome endowments for pursuing their creative interests. Writers and performance artists, past and present, male and female from all South Asian countries can be located and contacted through the archives, through their home pages or the SALIDAA contents and search. The digitization of this archive is the latest and newest avatar of the South Asian creative people’s network, and by its very appearance points out to a technologically assisted interaction among participants. It will certainly help in bridging the gap of time and distance, to involve readers or audience, critics and writers or artists towards a vibrant exchange of stimuli. It can be
one more step towards making BrAsian writers and creative artists more visible, and
connecting them to a larger body of work by their contemporaries in other fields
having similar experiences.

In 2003, a glitzy magazine “Indo-Brit” has been launched catering to upper
class metropolitan readers and socialites, art, fashion and media persons, based on the
premise that there is a viable readership hungry for the cultural exchange in the world
of popular entertainment, loosely described as ethnic chic. Its editor Farah Damji
writes after a year of its publication that:

Indobrit is about taking the best and the grittiest of the subcontinent
and creating a cohesive platform for all things Indo while
simultaneously reflecting the different faces of diaspora in the mirror
of multi-cultural society… Identity is not cast in stone: it has to be
fluid and changing. We Indobrits can be Asian, British, Indian all at
once or in parts, as necessary… Who we are cannot be wholly aligned
with South Asia, we are fragmented. (Damji 2004)

Though she shows flashes of genuine insight here, her agenda becomes clearer
when she writes about the contribution made by the white British critics and
contributors, about demands of in-depth writing from readers and how much “sexier”
and bolder Indobrit is going to become in future. What seemed a promise is just
another edition of how the mainstream press wants to see British Asians. In fact this
magazine confirms what Rahila Gupta and Rukhsana Ahmed write in their
introduction to Flaming Spirit:

When black writers win literary prizes or achieve unprecedented
publishers’ payments they preoccupy the literary establishment briefly,
but are usually seen as exotic flowers of the mainstream and no attempt
is made to contextualize them in any other tradition. (1994: xix)

By institutionalizing publications like these, the media ensures the
marketability of ethnic culture, which is a highly viable commodity, and elides any
notion of victimization or racial harassment felt by these ethnic groups in the not-so-
glamorous “real” life.

Newspapers like Asian Voice, Eastern Eye cater to a wider BrAsian
readership, with a mixed cultural background. There are columns on current news,
subcontinental news, notices and announcements about cultural and business
activities, crime reporting, vacancies, advertisements for matrimony, dating and
friendship, other BrAsian interests like Bollywood, cricket and entertainment, fashion,
astrology and alternative medicine. Bridal magazines like Asian Woman and Asian
Bride fulfil the needs of modern BrAsians who like their weddings to be stylized affairs, like other South Asians at home or abroad. From February 2004, The Prince of Wales will officially welcome and confer citizenship to Indians, (The Times Of India, 27 Feb 2004), Mriganka Chaterjee and his family being the first ones. But nothing can take away from the ambivalent relationships Indians have always faced and will probably continue to face, in Britain, and their documentation and creative intervention by writers will continue to challenge these overt gestures by the monarchy and the media. Monolithic representational practices of the socio-cultural mainstream will continue to be corrected and critiqued both from within the socio-cultural milieu, and by newer theoretical and disciplinary positions outside it.

Conclusions:

It is a mark of the strength of migrant Indian community that they are considered highly successful in their professional lives despite the pains of growing roots in an alien culture. As Roger Ballard writes:

Britain’s South Asian settlers have been neither cowed nor overwhelmed by these (racial) experiences. Rather, they have risen to the challenge and pressed forward despite the exclusionism they have encountered and in doing so have relied extensively on the strengths and resilience generated within their own self-created worlds.(1994: viii-ix)

How writers like Ravinder Randhawa, Atima Srivastava, Meera Syal have been trying to portray the growth of the spirit of the British woman of Indian origin is the task of the subsequent chapters to unfold.

As Pandurang (2001:22) warns, it would be a matter of oversimplification to try to homogenize the efforts of the group of British women writers of Indian origin who have appeared in the literary scene in the 80s and 90s. Though there is a concerted attempt by these writers to portray their own subjectivities through guarded self-portraits, they do write about different kinds of men and women who belong to or are outside the pale of the larger Indian presence in British society. They may be of different generations, gender, classes and sexual orientations. What can be felt as a common concern among these writers is that they wish to dispel any myth about their lives being any easier or a lot different from the life lived in any metropolitan centre. The process of their negotiation with the double bind of the nation and the metropolitan centre is what the rest of the chapters examine. How do they deal with transnational or traditional influences of the community, or the rigours of a racialised
existence in “multicultural” Britain, how do they fulfil their homing desires? These questions dominate the discussions in the following chapters. The second chapter focuses on childhood and the home, the third on adolescence and early youth with cultural interaction in focus, the fourth probes into BrAsian women’s participation in labour, and the fifth into love, marriage, and sexual relationships.