Chapter Three

Being Young And BrAsian: Negotiating Areas Of Conflict

3. Introduction

In this chapter the focus is on the portrayal of the adolescence and early youth of the BrAsian women of Indian origin as depicted in the selected texts. The chapter begins with a discussion on the negotiation of identity as the basic premise of immigrant writing, and how the life stages defined in this chapter are the ones in which such phenomena are strongly observed and therefore vividly represented by the authors. The first section probes the ways in which BrAsian youth identity is apprehended by the mainstream society and popular imagination over three decades. Stereotyping of BrAsian males and females is described next, as it often has a bearing on how women’s subjectivities are configured. How the BrAsian feminine stereotypes are challenged by the authorial representation is briefly discussed in the third section. The fourth section is devoted to textual analysis and interpretation of authors’ representational strategies of the adolescent and young adult BrAsian in delineating the following: the notion of home, self and community; the emergence of oppositional identity; sexuality and betrayal; class and cultural conflict; generational difference; response to transnational forces as well as parental expectation. The final sections five and six contain the observations on reading the texts and the conclusions drawn from them about the portrayals of BrAsian adolescents.

Throughout the discussion the major effort is to challenge the homogenizing gaze of the British mainstream and other groups towards a more heterogeneous one while analyzing the lives of second generation BrAsian women of primarily Indian origin. The readings into the novels recognize the differential status of the young women in relation to their class, religious background or community in the broad racial segment denoted by the compound term “British Asian”. The chapter examines how mainstream construction of their identities affect or challenge BrAsian women’s subjectivities; how they act in order to cope with the stereotype, or the normative, or the community’s code of conduct; how their cultural performance constructs male migrants’ identities and vice versa; and how transnational connections affect BrAsian adolescent subjectivities.

The texts considered in this chapter are Anita and Me, Sumitra’s Story, A Wicked Old Woman, Hari-jan, Life Isn’t..., One Hundred Shades of White, and The
Cambridge Curry Club in chronological order of publication. The other texts referred to are The Red Box, Haven’t Stopped Dancing Yet, Brick Lane, and some stories from Right of Way and Flaming Spirit, the collections published by the AWWC, and the popular films Bhaji on the Beach (1992) and Bend It Like Beckham (2002).

3.1 Emerging Identities: Changing Perceptions of BrAsian Youth from the 70s till date.

The identity of the migrant is often her physical identity, hence she gets “seen” by herself and others as an essentialised version of her race, class, gender or nationality. “Personal identity is a constant negotiation between culture and individual consciousness – both in the way you see yourself and in the way others perceive you” (Crane and Mohanram 2000: xi). The concept of race is primarily based on the “assumption that bodies are place-specific, or autocthonous, springing out of the soil of specific nations” (ibid). Identity is never a given, it is constructed as soon as it is named: a migrant, a sojourner, tourist or a settler becomes encoded with a new signification in a new place because her body appears different in the context of that place, and is thus racialised. Such a racially constructed idea of the body determines the sense of personal identity that the subject acquires, in relation to the majority group, or the visibly racialised other.

To a young BrAsian girl, adolescence or early youth is the time of awareness of identity: she becomes conscious of her body, dress, attractiveness and individual preferences etc, and how society perceives her. Being BrAsian, she becomes aware of different ways of stereotyping, both by the British mainstream, and the BrAsian community. In adolescence she starts making choices, determining commitment to self and community on the one hand, and allegiance to mainstream culture and society on the other (Ballard and Ballard in Watson 1977: 21-56). There are many possibilities to negotiate a viable position: she may withdraw from the family or tradition-based community totally; or attempt to reject the mainstream influence by becoming more tradition bound (Ballard 1977); strike a balance as an alternative between the two positions (Ballard 1994); or even move from positions of marginality into the centre to “become” the mainstream (Korte 2004), as is becoming increasingly common among migrants in new multicultural social spaces. Rachel Dwyer, of the School of Oriental and African Studies commented during a personal interview “to be Asian is too mainstream today to retain any special tag of difference to it” (May
The following three sections show how scanning academic literature and popular images of BrAsians, certain broad patterns of identity construction emerge. Mainstream researchers of the 1970s had earlier written about the divided identity of BrAsian youth, and yet today they give credence to the fact that such a group of survivors and high achievers as the Asians are indeed remarkable among British immigrants. Some of the academic and media positions of the 1970s and 80s on British Asians are distinctly limited to the idea of their being “between two cultures” (Ballard 1976 cited in Alexander 2006; Watson 1977), and this trend of thought continues to exist in more muted forms. However public debates and prominent critiques of these have already been in place since the mid 80s, when the BrAsian youth was seen as “skilled cultural navigators” (Ballard 1994), till in the later 80s they began to be seen as embodiments of Asian kool rather than as members of a tradition-bound community. The 1990s and the early years of this century finds a distinct emphasis in the British public imagination on the way BrAsian youth is actively engaged in debunking tradition, and therefore in “generational conflict” (Werbner 2004) to bring about changes in their parents’ attitude towards a holistic integration.

“Confused” in the ‘70s.
Ziauddin Sardar (2004), noted writer on Islam, science and technology, culture, racism makes an interesting observation on the identity formation of British Muslims in the 1960s. He was always told by his parents that some suffering had to be endured as he was an immigrant, but that things will be better in future, and that even the Prophet Muhammad had to endure tribulations. Sardar feels that “This was our defence mechanism, a mechanism borne out of a certain inability to discover or define a role for ourselves in Britain” (9). However, such attitudes of compromise changed in the seventies, with the Thatcher and Enoch Powell inspired racist attacks on Asians and blacks.

A number of sociological and anthropological research documents, all published in the 70s, contain references to culture clashes between the mainstream and the Asian communities. They also speak about conflict between the two generations of Asian immigrants, who, as a whole, are also defined by “identity conflict” as they are caught between two absolutely different world orders, the Asian and the Western. It was believed by the mainstream policy makers that the Asian immigrants must assimilate, and if they did not substantially change their socio-
cultural practices, their future generations would always be rebellious and unhappy. This theory might have gained currency due to records of youth unrest in the 70s as a response to growing racism, but the academic and media perceptions of these deliberately mitigated the seriousness of the issue of racism, and deflected public attention to culture clashes between the traditional Asian, and permissive British societies. Claire Alexander cites names of books or articles having titles like “The Second Generation....Punjabi or English? (Thompson 1974); The Half-Way Generation (Taylor 1976); Culture Conflict and Young Asians, (Ballard 1976); In Search of Identity (Meadows 1976); Between Two Cultures (CRC 1970); Between Two Cultures (Watson 1977); Minority Families in Britain: Support and Stress (Ballard 1979)” (cited in Alexander 2006: 259) which reflect some or all of these mainstream perceptions. It is true that articles by Verity Saifullah Khan (Watson 1977) or the Ballards (ibid) are very detailed studies of individual Asian communities in Britain, but they do reflect an anthropological understanding of culture as discrete, belonging to a particular group at a particular time, to which all members necessarily subscribe. That is why these works often contain essays on individual communities and how they are torn by conflict between generations, and how their cultures are changing, e.g., “The Sikhs”, “The Pakistani” in Watson (1977). The writers often use terms like “divergent culture and orientation”, “Strange half-British, half-Asian behaviour” (Alexander 2006: 260) etc. to describe BrAsian youth.

The media contributed in its own way to buttress the image of BrAsian youth as torn between two cultures. Peter Sellers films, television programmes conducted by the BBC like Nayi Jindagi, Naya Jeevan, in the 1970s either portray stereotyped Asian characters, confused and comical, or vile and vindictive, or real men and women facing problems that can only be solved by the intelligent white mainstream. The already difficult and oppressive lives of both male and female BrAsian youngsters was made even more so, due to the visible presence of such ludicrous images in the public mind. The occasional black or Asian character in Coronation Street (Granada: 1960 till date) or The Detective would be dubious, turning against their own community, performing illegal activities. The Mind Your Language series (BBC: 1977-79) presented squabbling Muslim and Sikh men and women, among other stereotypes from Europe and Asia. Wikipedia describes the series as “a light-hearted take on multiculturalism”, which gave “a television presence to unrepresented minorities”, but also accounts for its withdrawal by the Deputy Controller of BBC in
1979 for offensive stereotyping. Hanif Kureishi (1986) remembers how he was addressed by one of his teachers in a “Peter Sellers” Indian accent, another called him “Pakistani Pete”, and his best friend almost turned a future neo-Nazi and “Paki-basher” (1986: 9-11). The novels discussed in this chapter contain numerous similar anecdotes retrieved from the authors’ personal memory, conflated on the collective memory of the community which was seething under the mass of stereotypes. Against such a troubled image of “culture clash” in the popular imagination, acts of racism perpetrated on BrAsians by the police or the public were also interpreted as the result of conflicting cultures of rebellious Asians of the second-generation on the one hand, and the British mainstream on the other (Brah 2006; Alexander 2006).

Avtar Brah (1996) offers multiple reasons why such a notion of culture clash is unacceptable: she argues that there is not one British or one Asian culture, and that intersectionality of class, gender, region, religion is also important. Cultural change need not be a one-way process, the British have also been affected by Asian culture during and after colonialism, she argues, and thus the focus on Asian assimilation is erroneous and biased. Brah shows how, by making out the Asian young person as torn by conflict, this attitude focuses on a limited aspect of his/her identity, i.e. ethnicity over other factors, and presents a one-dimensional aspect of the interrelationships of a whole community. Nirmal Puwar (2002) discusses the ways in which commodification of Asian culture in the 1980s and 90s elicits rage in BrAsian women, as they remember the violent rejection of Asian ways of dressing in public spaces in the 1960s and 70s, the bullying, teasing and physical violence put up by children and women in saris, turbans, salwar kameez (75-77). In order to cope with harassment, modes of dressing started changing from the traditional to the modern. Puwar writes how “in the 1970s, for instance, South Asian diasporic dress included, bell-bottoms embroidered with peacocks on the sides and curved hippie sleeves with sequins” (75).

Brah speaks about new and changing identities of British Asian youth, as proactive political entities, prepared to offer resistance to discrimination. After the murder of a young Asian student in Southall (June 1976), the political identity of the British Asian youth was stronger than ever. They formed the SYM or Southall Youth Movement, and this and many other groups like the Southall Black Sisters (see Chapter One section 1.3) gradually formed after the Southall “riots” in 1979, in Bradford, Manchester and Leicester.
The historical impact of these riots on the psyche of adolescent BrAsians is effectively captured by Meera Syal’s words on the Southall Riots in an interview on influences on her writing:

What event in your lifetime has had the greatest effect on your political beliefs?
Undoubtedly the Southall uprising in 1979, in which Asian families took to the streets to prevent a National Front march. The end of our image as victims, the beginning of a new pride in ourselves. (Syal 1996)

“Kool” in the ‘80s.

In the 1980s, some of the stereotyped attitudes become slightly modified, with scholars like Ballard and Errol Lawrence (1982) admitting to racism being one of the major causes for identity crisis. Roger Ballard (1994) writes:

Britain’s South Asian settlers have been neither cowed nor overwhelmed by these experiences (of racism). 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: ix)

Ballard comments on the “strong sense of personal and social confidence” of the South Asian settlers which enables them not just to survive but to prosper in the hostile host society by resisting such exclusions. He calls the young people of this generation “skilled cultural navigators” (1994: 31) between two worlds, the sphere of their private lives at home or in the community and the public sphere of mainstream society.

The new face of Asian youth created new targets, they were gradually taking the place of African or Afro-Carribean groups as the new “black”, with two basic problems: cultural difference, and their ethnicity. This made them seem either pathologically conditioned to form gangs or potentially threatening groups, or struggling to be represented through new, divisive, hybrid cultural expression, which seemed novel and attractive as the symbol of the Other. Stuart Hall (1990; 1992; 1996) and Paul Gilroy (1991; 1992) have tried to bring in this notion of the power of the new ethnicities into academic debates on black and Asian cultures, stressing on “becoming” rather than “being” something proscribed or pre-inscribed, something in process, multiple and complex, not unitary and whole, not easily understood or consumed. Transformation is the key to such identities, across gender, class, caste, religion, sexual preference, age, place of origin etc.
Publications like *Eastern Eye*, dedicated channels like Channel four, the Black and Asian film workshop movement led by Sankofa, in which Horace Ove, John Akomfrah, Ahmed Jamal, Hanif Kureishi and others participated (Bhattacharyya 1994: 55-56; Korte 2004), created a new interest in BrAsian creativity. The agents of this creativity were primarily young BrAsian artists and filmmakers, some of whom later formed an Asian film company called Retake who produced films on subjects related to identity and culture-conflict. For the first time, Asians had a hand in producing, scripting or directing feature films like *My Beautiful Launderette* (Stephen Frears 1985) and *Sammy and Rosie get Laid* (Frears 1987) both scripted by Hanif Kureishi. Pratibha Parmar’s documentary *Sari-red* (1988) tells the stark story of a young BrAsian Nalbinder Kaur run over and killed by neo-Nazis at a bus-stop, and Gurinder Chadha’s *I’m British But...* (1989) is a comment on Bhangra and its role in BrAsian’s lives and their cultural identity. As Retake's Ahmed Jamal explains, Asian filmmakers were “in a position of reacting, of feeling strongly about depicting the reality of our experiences and resisting what has been imposed on us” (cited in Cary Rajinder Sawhney: BFI’s *screenonline*). These films were shown at mainstream theatres, festivals, film workshops and international film events.

This sudden visibility to mainstream film audiences coincided with a number of teleseries featuring BrAsians in a more visible manner, and not only in negative or minimalistic roles as before. Farrukh Dhondy, Hanif Kureishi, Zia Mohyeddin, Sayeed Jaffrey, Madhur Jaffrey, Shyama Perera, Pratibha Parmar, Meera Syal, Gurinder Chadha brought a new visibility for the BrAsian in the media as no longer “in-between cultures” but ready to take on their role as agents of a hybrid cultural phenomenon very seriously. Farrukh Dhondy’s *No Problem* (1983) was about a Jamaican family in Britain, but his next sitcom *Tandoori Nights* (1985; 1987) hilariously narrated competition in BrAsian restaurant business with a nearly total Asian cast. *Brookside* (1982-2003) also featured BrAsians from time to time, as did, or still does *Eastenders* (1985-), with its stock BrAsians Sanjay and Geeta Kapoor and their family-run garment store.

In music, however, ’80s BrAsian musical experiments continued to be underground, with Bhangra bands like Heera and Alaap, and single Djs performing on weddings and private functions of BrAsians (Sharma 2006). The Djs and Talvin Singh’s *Anokha* brought Bhangra into the club scene (Krishnaswami 1999: 89-90; Kaushik Banerjea 2000: 64-79; Sharma 2006: 322; Rupa Huq 2006: 17), with their
use of electronics and the dhol, but for the BrAsian youth to come into the mainstream with their musical preferences took a while, as Bhangra stood for traditional, community song and dance, though very vigorous or spirited in terms of performance. By opting for Bhangra the BrAsian youth was speaking to the so-called multicultural mainstream consciousness, “the overground” (Banerjea 2000: 64) which rendered them invisible musically, culturally.

Except for the success of Sheila Chandra’s *Ever so Lonely* in the ’80s, it was only in the early 1990s that BrAsian music entered the mainstream. Thus the 1980s can be described as the beginning of the celebration of BrAsian youth as culturally productive, visibly talented in the arts, music and the world of the media, though few in number. The construction of such an identity of the potentially successful BrAsian youngster through cultural focus and mediation offered a psychological filip to her.

Dress and fashion were now becoming important to the BrAsian, though most of the designing was done locally, or imported from India or Pakistan. Gradually, the *salwaar kameez* “suit” became modified, new cuts, shapes and decorations began to be incorporated according to the latest fashion imported from Bollywood and the imported Indian fashion magazines. On the other hand, long plaited hair and turbaned head were easily burnt, as the racists found out when they attacked young boys and girls, and the *bindi*-wearing forehead was the place to hit and let bleed. Despite these attacks, the mothers of the second-generation daughters “kept suit-wearing alive” because they maintained their “cultural and sartorial confidence” and “socialised their British-born and British-raised daughters into wearing the suit” (Bhachu 2003: 143).

**“Troublemakers” in the 1990s.**

In the mid-nineties, it was fashionable for the mainstream sociologists and the media to “understand” ethnic difference and point out the “continuity and change”, the “old and the new” Asian subjectivity to the mainstream. It was also popularly found that diversity within the broad category “Asian” needed to be specified, as “Muslim young people are thus seen as having a stronger behavioural identity than their Sikh or Hindu counterparts” (Alexander 2006: 265).

Pathologising cultural difference has only led to further stagnation and stratification of the community economically, so the so-called success of Asian communities has only been found in clearly demarcated service sectors, not in mainstream decision-making or political or academic positions. Post Rushdie and Satanic verses, as well as the Iraq war, the media more aggressively propagated this
cultural difference and self-segregation of British Asian mainly Muslim youth. The media coverage of the summer riots of 2001 in Oldham, Bradford, Leeds and other places was minimalistic from this angle of cultural difference (Amin 2002 and Kundnani 2001, cited in Alexander). Poverty and racism were subsumed under the thought that the Asian gangs are only about drugs, violence, illegal money and fundamentalism: the focus had changed from cultural difference and hybridity to demonising the Asian, especially the young Asian person. Earlier it had been the women or girls of the communities, struggling against stereotypes as “backward” “oppressed” women needing rescue, now it was the male who was more often targeted as a “problem” of the Asian underclass.

The World Trade Centre bombings on September 11, 2001 finally sealed the label of terrorism on Asian youth. As Sardar (2004) writes, “... the atrocities of 11 September 2001 introduced a new dimension: Muslims now came to be widely seen as the danger within. So my Muslim identity not only carries this historical baggage, it is also framed by global events” (14). The young men’s Muslim groups began to be seen as threatening gangs, ready to strike terror at their own adopted homeland. Not only are the gangs often innocent of such threat, but also their visibly male aggression distracts the media and public gaze from women’s struggles as well as from the ongoing racism and the politics of economic disadvantage in the public spheres that keep Asian youth out of the public domain (Brah 2006; Alexander 2006). Even the police collude with the rest of the mainstream, accounts of which abound in available reports on racism, which combine interviews with Asian youth, and sociological research like those by the Runnymede Trust or the Commission for Racial Enquiry. As Claire Alexander comments, “It is not accidental that as BrAsian youth become more active and more visible in the anti-racist struggle they also become a target of state and media control” (2006: 263). In Monica Ali’s Brick Lane (2004) there are portrayals of disaffected Bangladeshi youth, always at a loose end, hanging around the Tower Hamlets area after the Oldham riots and before the 9/11 bombings, getting into political activity, forming the Bengal Tigers out of sheer hopelessness and boredom as Nazneen, the heroine, finds out. Even Nazneen’s gaze reflects deep distaste and an unsympathetic attitude towards these young kurta-and-jeans clad, skull-cap wearing boys: Nazneen watches them: “the groups of boys who drove endlessly around the estate”, “got out of their cars and approached other cars”, “formed in fours and fives” and “carried an air of violence with them” (364).
During and after the 7/7 London Underground bombings (2004) and the revelations of the possible air-attack (July 2006), the number of arrests of innocent young Muslim youth from suburban London is staggeringly huge, and most them have been released after questioning. The murder of the young Brazilian after the 7/7 underground blasts, as he looked suspectingly Muslim, is a case in point, and the policemen involved have yet to be punished. The veil issue of British Muslim women has also resurfaced as controversial, finally settled by Muslim imams and the CRE, as a matter of individual choice in January 2007. The version of the identity or image of the Asian youth is generally divided between Hindu and Muslim, male and female, discrete in most ways but homogeneous in their problematic cultural heritage. The appearance of terrorists from South Asia, trained and ingrained into cults in their Western universities, like Kafeel Ahmed from Bangalore-Belfast-Cambridge, creates further problems for the ordinary BrAsian. If they keep to themselves, they are problematic because they are seen as exclusivist, if they step out then they are problematic because they are perceived to be suffering from identity crisis. Till atrocities on innocent victims through terror attacks cease, and theoretical multiculturalism does not translate into everyday practice, this divided image of the Asian youth will stay in the public imagination.

In the early nineties, BrAsian inroads into popular culture were many, and had similar aims and themes, but unique styles of presentation. Some common themes were inter-racial relationships, problems of illegal immigrants, enforcing religious practices on unwilling family members, gendered oppression and release of women, and a nostalgia for the sixties etc. The common agenda was: to seek visibility in the mainstream, even if that meant using stereotypes only to debunk them; to include elements from Bollywood films like dance and music; to use comedy as a viable method to turn colonial stereotypes on their head; to laugh both at and with the audience, both British and BrAsian (Tara arts online; Screenonline; Desai 2003). Bhaji on the Beach (Gurinder Chaddha 1992), Wild West (Harwant Bains 1992), Brothers in Trouble (1995), East is East (Damien O’Donnell 1999) which was scripted by Ayub Khan Din, My Son the Fanatic (Stephen Frears 1997) scripted by Hanif Kureishi, The Sixth Happiness (Firdaus Kanga 1997), Anita and Me (Metin Hoseyin 2002), scripted by Meera Syal, Bend it Like Beckham (2002) and Bride and Prejudice (2004) both by Gurinder Chadha, Pratibha Parmear’s feature film Nina’s Heavenly Delights (2006) have made a gradual but strong statement to the British
mainstream about the BrAsian presence in the entertainment industry. A number of
documentaries also record the gradual changes, as the *Stories R Us* (2003) exhibition
of short films promoted by the British Council in India testify. Films like *Sari and
Trainers* (Jeremy Woodings 1999) to be made into a feature called *Bollywood Queen;
Jump, Boy!* (1998), *Second Generation* (Jon Sen 2003) etc show how BrAsians dealt
with racial stereotyping by the mainstream, and how they resist their own
communities’ pressures of gendered, class and religious oppression.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, what the British public was being exposed
to at home, in front of their television, was a whole gamut of BrAsian comedy,
corresponding to the same period, having more pronounced themes and strategies to
and *The Kumars At No. 42* (2001-2006) employed self-deprecating humour as well as
sharp comments both on British society and politics and the inadequacies of the
outlook of the older BrAsian generation. Both serials employed the Sanjeev Bhaskar-
Meera Syal team with many changes in the later show, but the phenomenal success of
the first series was acknowledged by the British public (Kaur and Terracciano 2006:
356). There were special events, contests, discussions, mimicry, mainstream
references to Punjabi jibes and trivia gleaned from the show, as well as
commemorative series and video releases of the shows. The clever quips of the team-
members, Syal, Bhaskar, Nina Wadia, Vincent Ebrahim and others surprised
BrAsians and the mainstream alike. These shows, along with other stand-up comedy
performers like Sody (Kahlon) Punjabi, the *Secret Asians* and Shazia Mirza, who also
participated in comic theatre occasionally, unsettled assumptions about the BrAsian
youth as either hard-nosed pen-pushers, bookworms or over-achievers; or frustrated
gang-members and potential fundamentalists. Thus BrAsian comedy pulled the carpet
from right under the feet of the British mainstream viewer, so used to laughing at
“Asian woodentops in *Eastenders*, exotica in *The Far Pavilions*, Asians as barbarians
or savages in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, Asians as silly ‘Pakis’ in *Mind
Your Language* etc” (Manick Govinda, *Bazaar*, Spring 1988, cited in Kaur 2006:
354). Not only did *Goodness Gracious Me!* reappropriate Peter Sellers’ favourite
exclamation in an Indian accent in its title, its title song parodied Sophia Loren and
Sellers’ rendition of a similar song for a stage show.

Theatre in original languages had been performed since the 1960s, but the
*Tara Arts group* (1976) led the way for political theatre in English and some major
Indian languages, later experimenting with fusion of many forms under the guidance of Anuradha Kapur from New Delhi. BrAsian theatre has mostly white audiences who prefer to watch experiments with Asian Kool on stage (Kaur 2006), as happen in the Waterman Arts Theatre, Middlesex, and productions like Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Bombay Dreams (2004).

BrAsians could learn traditional dance from Nahid Siddiqui (kathak) and at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (1972), which also offered music, languages and yoga lessons from experts. Later, the Akademi was founded in 1979 followed by SAMPAD, AdiTi (1989), Kadam (1990), but all of them continued to be marginalised and exoticised as the other, as strange and exotic South Asian art, like South Asian cuisine, fashion, yoga (Kaur and Terracciano 2006: 346). It was only with Shobhana Jeyasingh (SALIDAA archives) that a truly experimental dance form emerged, “combining Bharatiya (sic) Natyam with other dance repertoires to make for a dynamic, invigorating hybrid between various cultural references” (Kaur and Terracciano 2006: 347).

Musicians like Bally Sagoo and Apache Indian (early 1990s) had initial success, but Talvin Singh’s Anokha (1997) produced a sensation as he pushed his Asianness to the limit by his dress, Asian lyrics and drum and bass guitar beats which appealed to the Western dancers at clubs and parties (Krishnaswami 1999: 84). The late Nusrat Fateh Ali’s influence on artists like Bally Sagoo, Cornershop, Nitin Sawhney, Bhangra and fusion group artists like the Safri Brothers, Asian Dub, Funda-Mental must be acknowledged. Some of these groups participate in political activity through their music: it is like their response to a hybrid existence, their sounds or lyrics reflect their commitment to BrAsian socio-cultural reality (Banerjea 2000: 73; Huq 2006: 23-24). More recently in the first few years of the 2000s, Panjabi MC, Rishi Rich, Jay Sean, Raghav, Bombay Rockers, Jinx and a host of others are bringing linkages between South Asian technicians, percussion artists, and powerful sounds or vocals to cross regional and national limits, more for commercial success than political impact.

Madonna’s embracing of the exotica of Asian culture, the tattoos, mehndi, bangles, bindi worn with lycra or jeans and tank tops, brought unprecedented popularity to Asian Kool not only to Britain but to the international culture scene. With this “South Asian culture ostensibly took centre stage in the Western imagination” (Sharma 2006: 322). However, as Bhachu (2003), Puwar (2002) and
others analyse, such superficial allegiances to fashion cannot undo the damage done by earlier racialised responses to Asian culture. This is not to say that all British men/women respond as if hungry for “eating the other” (bell hooks 1996), or that South Asians themselves respond very nobly to commodified culture (Puwar 2002: 78). The proliferation of countless Asian shops at Wembley, “Soho Road in Birmingham, The Broadway in Southall or Melton Road in Leicester” (ibid) are ways of asserting BrAsian ethnicity: they run a parallel economy, satisfy BrAsian women’s urges to buy, dress and pamper themselves without being told not to touch the clothes they buy (ibid); they provide a conducive environment for socialiation among BrAsian women by creating a “third space”. In short, a healthy interest in community life and identity develops among BrAsians in these “fashion” markets, as in the traditional societies in South Asia (Puwar 2002: 79-80). What Bakirathi Mani (2003: 117-135) writes about the South Asian diaspora’s “problem of what to wear” (Tarlo 1996 cited in Mani) and their “coming out” as South Asian, applies to BrAsian street fashion as well. The increasing obsession with henna and bindi “in the face of white youth who mark their bodies with reference to a brown Orient” compels the South Asian to wear “ethnic” garb to show “cultural competence” (Johanna Schoss 1996: 161, cited in Mani). As Mani comments on the South Asian American scenario:

For those women who are allowed to choose their clothing, coming out as ‘South Asian’ troubles not so much the stability of American multiculturalism, but rather the nostalgic ambitions of patriarchal diasporic communities to cling on to ‘authentic’ replicas of their cultural heritage. (125)

Bhachu (2003), however shows how in the 1960s and 1970s, women found wearing salwaar suits as a gesture of defiance against aspersions on their “Pakihood”, of respect to their ethnicity and personal choice rather than mere replication of patriarchal expectation. Today’s BrAsians are much more experimental, and have the personal freedom to dress suitably, especially Muslim women. Availability of appropriate clothes for the not-so-experimental also combine pleasure and convenience in dressing. The combination of scarves, belled chappals, mojris with jeans or long skirts, trainers with salwaar suits (as Hari-jan wears), and skin tight slacks for women and girls, woollen scarves and embroidered long coats for men, jacket and skull cap/ rasta beanie/ skullies, or parka and hood worn over the jibba for young boys, these are some ways in which BrAsians often prefer to dress (see Angela Saini and Gavin Fernandes in bbc.co.uk on BrAsian street-fashion).
Thus we find that in all the performing arts, film and television, and fashion there is this need for the BrAsians to gain visibility by giving expression to their original creative impulse, which often gets commodified and appropriated as the exotic Other by the mainstream, though there is noticeable defiance and resistance by constant research and upgradation. Critics like Sharma, Hutnyk and Sharma (1996) argue that this new obsession with Asian Kool ignores the continuing racism, dominance and violence that “constrain identity formation”, and is only an extension of the consumerist knowledge production, that so characterizes western “interest” in the other. Sardar (2004) writes how multiculturalism suddenly made otherness something celebratory. He says that “otherness was now sought for its exchange value, its exoticism and the pleasures, thrills and adventures it could offer”, but, he adds, “in all cases, the racial dichotomies of Self and Other are retained, along with power relationships of domination and inequality”(10). Jatinder Verma, while speaking about Asian presence in British media says:

This same media, 30 years ago, offered visions of ourselves as either (a) non-English speakers - remember Nai Zindagi Naya Jeevan? (b) non-English speakers who stumbled over the most basic English - recall Mind Your Language; (c) immigrants who operated illegal rackets aimed at fellow immigrants - remember The Detective? Still by far the best TV drama involving Asians. (Verma: 1997)

In February-March 2006 there was international furore over Shilpa Shetty’s participation in Big Brother, a reality show on Channel 4, and how another inmate, Jade Goody, bullied the Indian actor in a racist manner. This time, an Indian face was on the TV, on every tabloid, and invited to the House of Commons, felicitated by the Queen and the Prime Minister in an upsurge of the biggest public wave of anti-racist apology in British history. After she came out of the Big Brother house, Shekhar Gupta, the editor of the daily The Indian Express, interviewed Shetty. She expressed shock at her popularity and public recognition, saying that it was “a new level”, and “a huge compliment.” She confessed that the issue of racism “is a hundred-fold more inflated than the Hindu-Muslim issue in our country” (Monday, Feb 19, 2007, 9). There has been strong negative reactions against Shetty’s seemingly calculated lack of response, among BrAsians, who feel that she is really an outsider, who has never experienced racism in the form they do, in their daily lives, and therefore has no right to represent “Indian” culture in Big Brother or prominent British public institutions. Thus the early years of televisual oblivion are over for the BrAsian, but trivial shows
like *Big Brother* replace the punch offered by the earlier comic serials like *The Kumars At No 42*, which have been stalled since August 2006 (www.wikipedia.org).

**3.2 BrAsian Youth Stereotyped.**

As the above discussion shows, the identity of the BrAsian, both male and female, gets constructed as per the change in political thought and media projection of them, and vice versa. The BrAsian teenagers are seen as if victims of a controlling culture: in severe generational conflict with their own restrictive community, though allied with the sympathetic, appreciative mainstream which encourages individualism; facing gender role differentiation as opposed to gender equality in British society; and forced into religious commitment unlike their white peers who have an allegedly “secular outlook” (Ghuman 1999: 1). From the 1970s till date, both male and female BrAsian teenagers were seen as shy, diffident, under-achieving and under-performing at school (Bhopal 1997; Shain 2006; David B. 2005). Society outside school sees them as struggling with personal aspiration and community control, crippled with religious strictures and orthodox cultural customs (Ballard 1994; Brah 1996; Ghuman 1999; Alexander 2006). Working class Hindu, Muslim or Sikh boys are singled out since the 1980s for preferring gangs or groups of their own kind, violent, destructive and potentially suspect in troublemaking (Kalra 2006; Alexander 2006). They are found suitable for menial labour, part-time waged work or employment in family business, and a low social standing commensurate with their income (Thandi 2006; Anwar 1998; Stopes-Roe and Cochrane 1990). In the past few years, from 2001, they are, especially Bangladeshi boys, suspect for drug-dealing and substance abuse (Sheikh-latif 2006), while Pakistani, Bangladeshi and all young Muslims are invariably linked to terrorism. Monica Ali’s novel (*BL* 2004) shows a working-class teenager Razak, drawn into drugs, stealing, going into rehabilitation, and other Muslim boys like Karim leading the way to the international network of fundamentalism.

BrAsian girls, always seen as victims of orthodox socio-religious practices, have had their identities constructed by the mainstream since the 1970s against the concept of arranged marriage, heavy domestic work, meekness and inability to acquire agency independently of mainstream mediation (Ahmad 2003, 2006; Thandi 2006). The 1980s gradually saw them at school as eager but low-achieving students
not worth time or investment, often depressed, suicidal, drop-outs who leave school and their homes (Ghuman 1999: 5-6); docile, capable but not meek workers, quick to take up activism; but controlled by the community for the marriage market, therefore not contributing to the labour sector wholeheartedly (Anwar 1998; Watson 2007). The 1990s generates images of more hybrid second generation teenage girls combining sari and trainers, bindi, long hair and trousers or skirts, ethnically marked as sexual objects for consumption, at loggerheads with their male counterparts, but allied to the mainstream. Girls’ achievements in school began to be better than boys in the present century (David B 2005; CRE Education Statistics 2005), and they are seen as equal, if not better contributors to the labour and market centre, to academics and social sciences and the professional careers than their male counterparts, both white and BrAsian (EOC 2007). The Parekh Report (2000) says:

Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils achieve below the national average, although the gap tends to narrow in the course of their education. The national average for entrance to university is exceeded by Indian and Pakistani men and women and Bangladeshi men but not Bangladeshi women. (Lahiri 2006)

The Asian names in some of the citations should not deflect attention towards the authenticity of these findings; many of the BrAsian scholars, like their mainstream white counterparts are repeatedly entrusted with presenting reports to the CRE etc, but they are often provided data or asked to use norms or conceptual models which are either outmoded or skewed to favour the image of the majority community, and show the BrAsian girl in a victim position. These sometimes divergent attitudes to BrAsian identities are not unchallenged by BrAsian women writers’ representations of them, though some of them do sometimes fall into the trap of re-essentialising what always already exists in mainstream sociological currency.

The questions arising out of such a scenario are many: Do the BrAsian youngsters see their identities reflected as only these? Do they themselves resist, or do they sometimes reappropriate these identities? Do they themselves participate in representing Asian Kool? Are the ways in which male identities constructed related to the ways young women are seen by the mainstream? Do these constructions mutually intercut, and how do they affect the identity of the community? What are the intergenerational differences the community members daily negotiate? How do transnational images, media, social practices affect the young BrAsians? Stuart Hall
(1990; 1996), Ram Gidoomal (1997), Bhikhu Parekh (2000), Yasmin Alibhai Brown (2000), Tariq Modood (2001), Puwar and Raghuram (2003), Ali, Sayyid and Kalra (2006) have, in their books and anthologies, have reiterated the need to stop stereotyping or exoticising, to start formulating fresh approaches to deal with multicultural practices among migrant youth, rather they too have tried to approach these questions with an open mind in their theoretical engagement. Through their creative output, BrAsian writers do bring these questions within proximity of being fully answered, but further theorisation of the intricacies of these relationships is needed to understand the interrelated dynamics of their representation.

3.3 Female Stereotypes Reexamined.

These texts offer insights into the ways in which British Asian subjectivities are formed among the youth, both male and especially female, who sometimes emerge as self-assertive agents of change. Mark Stein refers to this kind of self-assertion found in the upsurge of the Black British Bildungsroman and theorises that it performs not only a transformatory function but produces new subject positions, reimagines and redresses the images of Britain all the while. The new images this genre accommodates are those of “transgression of national boundaries, the depiction of racism, and, most importantly, the representation, exertion and normalization of black British cultural power” (1998: 101).

The intergenerational difference portrayed in these novels is not the only focus of the novelist, or the writer of short fiction, nor are the young generations totally opposed to or unsympathetic to the older generation, unlike what the mainstream critics and scholars uphold (Werbner 2004), from their readings of non-serious, popular novels of the kitschy variety (see Chapter One section 1.4). There is no homogenized version of the generation gap; there are differential responses to the problems between the first and the second generations. Of course it must be admitted here that among Asian communities, mothers or women relatives often perpetrate patriarchal oppression on their daughters or younger, dependant women, whether in South Asia or in Britain. The ways in which mother daughter relationships are structured in these communities are definitely different from their western counterparts.

Claire Chow (1998) writes, about mother child relationships in the Chinese
American context:

Within Western families, it is considered desirable for the parent-child relationship to evolve over time, to reach a point where a mother and daughter can relate to each other as two adults. But many Asian American women see no such progression (1998: 54).

Elsewhere, Chow adds to this: “But in Chinese culture, there is far less emphasis on transforming the parent-child relationship. It is ok to remain “dependent” on one’s child for a lifetime” (21). She also articulates how “My mother also made it clear that she had a right, even a duty, to help me live out her vision for my life” (38).

There is a remarkable similarity between these two communities, but the second generation BrAsian portrayed in the novels of the sample often refuses to acknowledge the claims on her independence, though not on her loyalty and emotions. The expectations of the mother or the older generation do torment her in ways similar to the ones found in Asian American communities, but the second generation BrAsian woman is found to have a clearly oppositional identity even in adolescence, as Chow herself admits to have assumed later, in her own life. Close textual analysis in the following section will reveal the different nuances of the relationships between the younger women and their elders.

3.4 Placed In Gendered Geographies Of Power: BrAsian Adolescent And Youth Identities.

When considered as a body of work produced in a chronological sequence, the texts published from the 1980s to the first few years in the 21st century offer progressively bolder assertions of selfhood in the younger, second generation of protagonists, and an unlimited vitality in the cultural choices made by them in opposition to their older generation, sometimes their peers or their community, transnationally mediated notions of South Asian womanhood, and definitely the mainstream stereotypes. Gendered geographies of power (Pessar and Mahler: 2004) structure their lives both in their private spaces and the public spaces, which they inhabit more and more. As seen in chapter two, these young womens’ bodies, their families, their community and their sending nation are all implicated in these power structures, which are linked to the social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion and influence from or resistance to the mainstream. It is most interesting and valuable to gain sociological insight as to how they acquire cognitive and corporal agency within these spaces and social formations, and how the authors use language, image, memory
and metaphor to represent their negotiations with identity. The texts actually reveal what being Asian in Britain entails since the last three decades.

**Emerging Sexuality: Clash Of Cultures (AM).**

Many of these texts become political in the very act of writing, they describe how taking individual or group action, whether concerted or sporadic, becomes meaningful to the persons involved. Some of the early stories or novels by the women writers considered here, contain one or two singularly violent episodes or incidents from day to day living that the writers have given due importance. They may represent a stage of growing up, or confronting hitherto unchallenged realities in terms of clash of cultures. *Anita and Me* (1998) by Meera Syal is one such novel, which marks with violence, the interlocked presence of the two racial groups, also separated by age, gender, social class, and cultural norms. The novel depicts the gradual change in British attitude to Asians in the late 60s and early 70s, when the Asian presence was still a growing phenomenon. Thus it is dealt with first in this chapter, overlooking chronology of publication. The innocence of the child Meena Kumar is pitted against her occasional burst of sagacity during her preteens. Meena’s growing up is measured against her relationship with her mother and father; the BrAsian community; her white neighbours; her friends Anita and others; her desire to be white through mediated images; her first experience of romance; and her brush with sexuality.

Meena grows into awareness of the importance of bonding within the family and community after Nanima arrives, but she is pulled towards the attractions of the mainstream culture from time to time. When her father lines Meena, her mother and her grandmother up for a photograph, Meena feels the line of continuity between the three generations of women in the family, and realizes that they are “linked like Russian dolls” (*AM* 202). Meena, precocious that she is, vows never to leave her mother, “this wrenching of daughter from mother would never happen again” (ibid). She says this loyally and idealistically, but throughout the text she lives her dream of some ideal white boy who would admire her for who she is, and love her and she would of course be with him rather than her mother! It is Meena’s exaggerated speech, her fierce loyalty alternating with temporary betrayals, which endear her to her readers, and make her negotiation of her BrAsian identity believable.

Moreover, she sides with her father most of the times, especially if she stands to gain, and refuses to comply with her mother’s somewhat more conservative
approach to social interaction, for example when she calls Anita to their house for dinner (see Chapter 2) or when they have a boisterous garden party in full view of their curious white neighbours. Meena’s parents’ only religion is their conscience, and they instill this belief in it in Meena as well (94). Meena loves fish and chips over samosas, and her white British friends over the make-believe cousins Pinky and Baby, and as quoted in the previous chapter, she longs to be white, and older, freer. Thus, though Meena loves her family deeply, she wishes they were all white and not strange in the small Midlands town. Victor Ramraj writes, “Diasporic writings are invariably concerned with the individual’s or community’s attachment to the centrifugal homeland. But this attachment is countered by a yearning for a sense of belonging to the current place of abode” (1996: 216).

Syal negotiates the paradoxes of class deftly. It is their transnationally carried class values which render the Kumars superior in the community rather than their social status. Meena’s “Mama and papa charmed people...they did not ask for approval or acceptance but it came to them nevertheless” (AM 216). Though this elides the ethnic prejudice Meena will later discover-- they only invite their BrAsian peers of the same social class, not the working class British neighbours-- it does take note of an interesting distinction: Anita's mother, Deirdre, “with her scarlet gash of a mouth and her backhanded conversation...was frightened of us...” (215). It is more likely that Deirdre is bewildered. As Meena says, “We were not one of those faceless hordes depicted in the television news, arriving at airports with baggage and children, lost and already defeated, begging for sanctuary” (216). Working-class Deirdre, considered sexually wanton all around town, “had been seeking approval all her life in this village, her village, and I suppose she wanted to know why life was so bloody unfair” (ibid). Rosellen Brown analyses this in her review of the text:

Mama the newcomer, the supposed outcast, is gracious to her; she is a "bounty giver." She can afford to be. There are many such ironies in their situation, and because the first three quarters of Meena's adventures are slightly antic, Syal manages them with an admirable lightness of touch. (1997: 7)

Meena’s mother, and herself, are always already empowered in the text by virtue of their privileged class origin, their cultured manner, polite, unaccented speech, avoidance of slang, dialect and their independent, self-contained attitude. Thus, their social space engenders their agency in the circles of power, later referred to by Sam Lowbridge.
In order to retrench her power, to belong firmly to the working class Tollington crowd, Meena also wants to confirm her oneness with her mates by a kind of televisual identification, as we find early on in the novel. As Bernard Sharrat (2001) writes,

Her ambition of assimilation is defined as being allowed to eat fish and chips and to watch television soaps, both pleasures deeply frowned upon by her respectable immigrant parents. Yet though watching TV does indeed provide the most widely shared cultural framework for most people in Britain, including television adaptations of those sprawling nineteenth-century novels, and soaps in particular more successfully portray a composite multicultural society than most novels, it is rare for a novelist actually to acknowledge that centrality (313).

Many critics and readers have commented upon Syal’s authenticity in portraying “Brummy life” and life in the seventies, but it is this detailing that actually deserves comment. Television profoundly affects Meena, as do Jackie magazines and the text is dotted with contemporary references from both. The figures of lone Asians on television or film evinces encouraging reactions from the BrAsian community as is carefully noted by Syal in this thinly disguised self-portrait:

If a brown or a black face ever did appear on TV, it stopped us all in our tracks... we would crowd around and coo over... some long-suffering actor in a gaudy costume with a goodness-gracious-me accent... and welcome him into our home like a long-lost relative. But these occasional minor celebrities never struck me as real; they were someone else’s version of Indian, far too exaggerated and exotic to be believable. (AM 165)

The nearest to the fulfillment of Meena’s desire to see herself or India on television was when Reita Faria, a doctor, became Miss World. Meena felt vindicated; proud enough to feel that she could trot down “the main street in Tollington” with Reita, both in saris, and the necessary symbol of Reita’s grand identity, the stethoscope, round “her long brown neck” (166). But her favourite programmes are Opportunity Knocks and Top of the Pops. Syal seems to speak out for most second-generation children who passively imbibed Hindi film, music and family lore along with the more active appeal of British television, all in the drawing rooms of their homes. It is the same generation, Syal being the major force, which is later asked to perform a prolonged self-deprecating comic banter with the majority community on highly popular mainstream television shows like Goodness Gracious Me and The Kumars at No.42. For BrAsian adolescents of the 1970s, the television was the strongest mode of virtual interaction with the majority group at home, in the
authoritarian presence of their parents, who often challenged or controlled their televisual identification (Gillespie 1989). It is this talented generation that produces the fruits of active consumption of television images in their adolescence into "expressive activity" as Gillespie suggests, of producing satirised versions of themselves, their families, and the white British in comedy series in their adulthood, as discussed before.

Meena’s stepping into adolescence is signaled by two incidents, one involving Robert, her mate at the hospital, and the other related to Sam Lowbridge: the first a sanitized romance, the other a violent initiation into the dark world of sexuality. Meena’s longing for good looks makes her write to the agony aunt in Jackie magazine, and she replies rather positively, encouraging the poor little Asian girl to "B E Y O U R S E L F" (146), though she is already a victim of racial hatred. She is still quite a child when Anita and others start comparing bust sizes and bras, but mentally Meena is alert, stable and wise beyond her years.

In the case of Robert it is like a dream come true, because all Meena ever wanted was a white boyfriend who would be clean-shaven, tall and yet insubstantial, exactly like the cartoon heroes in the romantic comic strips in Jackie.

They were car mechanics that wrote novels, racing car drivers who loved animals, surgeons who sculpted in their spare time; they invariably spotted me across a crowded room and fell instantly, and I always resisted them until the last moment when I would swoon into their arms reluctantly. We kissed a lot and never spoke except in greeting card clichés... (286)

So it was ironical that her "first and most intense relationship with a boy" was only "a true hospital love, sanitized and inevitably temporary" (285-286), where touching or hearing, swooning or kissing was not possible, only understanding united them.

The culmination of their love is cut short by Robert’s tragic death, but, before that, she is bewildered when he holds her hand and quietly says yes, he does have a girlfriend, when she asks him (292). She knows that he means her, but is too shy to express himself directly: this is the kind of reticent lover she had known all her life; her parents had shown her the value of subtlety in romance, as opposed to their white neighbours’ extravagant amorous displays. So, despite her broken leg and crutches Meena feels for the first time "gloriously complete". This is part of her new equipage, her new self, which is always in a state of flux, trying to find shades of skin, colour of
hair, language and gestures to match her idol Anita’s, sometimes falling short, at
others soaring way above the white teenager’s ken.

Meena’s obsession with a white boyfriend is born out of the same need for
acceptance felt by Kulwant (AWOW) or Asian girls of the period who were fewer in
number, in the initial stages of social acceptance, and thought that integration was
best possible by trying to be as “white” as possible. Their rejection of BrAsian boys is
because of their stereotyped images as undesirable or unsuccessful young men,
confined to ghettos of their own making. But Meena learns slowly of the
impossibility of being in love with white boys when Sam confronts her with his
misplaced passion. She is already aware of the “brazenness of their behaviour, an
absence of sentiment and a boldness of self” of the older white couples, which is
absent from her parents’ undemonstrative but “almost claustrophobic connection”
(AM 86). She knows that the Hindi film songs, ghazals and romantic whispers and
nudges that their parents indulge in reflect a refined, polished attitude to an intense
and continued commitment to each other. Even then, once Meena uses her recently
acquired slang in one of the singing sessions with the uncles and aunties: she said she
liked a song so much she would love to “shag the arse off it” (115) to general
consternation.

Her initiation into the violent adult ways of Anita and Sam is as shocking to
her as discovering that Tracey was abused by her mother, or that Anita was the real
inspiration behind Sam, and that after their terrible bout of Paki-bashing, after which
“they kissed and kissed and kissed, with tongues and all…” (278). Later, when Sam
confronts Meena about her changed attitude towards him, by the dreadful pool, he
feels that she is going to succeed like all the other Asians he has seen around, but
before she leaves the vicinity he would like to impose this tongue-in-the-mouth adult
kiss to the eleven-year-old girl, perhaps to prove his machismo, or impose a
compulsory desirability for himself, the local hero, from her. Though he says that she
was “the best wench in Tollington,” he is actually peeved that “yow wos never gonna
look at me, yow won’t be stayin will ya? You can move on. How come? How come I
can’t” (314)? Though his kiss lasted five seconds, interrupted by the violent splash of
Tracey falling into the stagnant pool, Meena felt “mighty and huge”, and realized that
he would always be reminded of this and feel totally powerless when he saw another
Asian girl on a street corner (ibid).

Despite her young age, Meena’s response is very mature and invites analysis.
She finally realizes that she has much more in her puny body compared to Anita’s vigourous sexual appetite, she knows she has Sam Lowbridge in her power, and she sheds him off like she grows out of her second skin, Anita. She creates her new identity by moulting, splitting, as Stuart Hall suggests, “identity is always constructed through splitting” (1991: 47 cited in Bromley 154). By rejecting Sam and Anita, Meena confirms her own apprehension of cultural superiority over her white peers and seniors; by responding to Robert, ill and dying, she attests to her preference for the romantic, the sensitive over the profligate, the licentious.

Ultimately the Kumars do leave Tollington by choice and with the help of the connection from the homeland, Harinder (Harry) Singh. In her narrative Meena had always demonized Harry Singh, but it is in her maturity that she realizes that it is the fellow Indian, the homegrown demon, who helps them sell their property to relocate. As Makarand Paranjape writes about diaspora texts, “The texts themselves are journeys between source cultures and target cultures, between homelands and Diasporas, until the two overlap, change places, or merge” (2001: 163). In this text this is exactly what happens, the overlapping terrain of home and away, demon and angel, friend and foe, health and sickness, violence and conviviality unsettle little Meena and the reader alike, whether Asian or British or of any other country of origin.

**Home And Away: Individuation Vs. Control (SS).**

One of the earliest published texts is *Sumitra’s Story* (1985), which refers to the Patel family’s struggling post-immigration years in the 60s, deserves a detailed reading on many levels. The emphasis of the author’s gaze is on their eldest child, Sumitra’s quiet rebellion against the family’s stranglehold over her freedom, but there are a lot of other issues evoked through the girl’s mindscape, like parent child relationships, gender inequality, racism and exploitation of the native Ugandans in Africa, mediated images of British life and romance, and to some extent, racism in Britain. But the portraiture of Sumitra and her family is extremely stereotyped, fulfilling expectations of the mainstream reader about the ways in which Asian identities are constructed.

Though the protagonist, Sumitra, a young girl, hates her mother’s willing exhibition of subservience to the existing power structure viz. husband, in-laws or family, employer or children, she herself does not actively help her to relocate culturally. Her mother seemed always anxious to please the husband who would still
behave as if “We’re all Bap’s servants,” (88) as Sumitra says. Sumitra supports her mother through these difficult times, but it is not always that Sumitra maintains her active sympathy for her. She is often angry with her for her complaining attitude, her inability to stand up for herself against her husband, and her general inability to handle domestic work, used as she was to servants like Cooky and Yusuf (20).

In her brief account of East African Asians, Brah discusses the collaborative position played by Asians, even the shopkeepers and petty businessmen, in postcolonial, pre-independence Uganda of the 60s (Brah 2006, 43-49). Hugh Tinker also refers to their role in colonial times with detailed documentation in his pioneering work on the Asian diaspora (Tinker 1977: 119-35; 152-160). Gender inequality, here expressed through compulsory domestic workload, thus becomes one of the primary reasons for Sumitra’s rebellious attitude. She resented visitors who meant additional cooking and mushy nostalgia about life in Uganda where they had been at the receiving end of exploitation, and her idea of racism falls into place, as quoted in the previous chapter. She sees herself as a victim whereas she, rather her family, had been in a position to inflict victimhood to Ugandans earlier. Sumitra’s consciousness about women’s exploitation is added to this racial snobbery of Asians in Uganda, and she supports Sandya in her angry diatribe against Asian women’s burden of cooking, adding that it had been the same among the English, as Maria told her, “only the laws have changed” (SS 88). However, Sumitra does not write to Birungi, nor Cooky or Yusuf as she had earlier decided: she, like her family, had used them to have tasty food, their service and to have fun, with no further loyalty attached.

However, the author is not really concerned with Sumitra’s own collaboration in the project of exploitation of Africans: she is more careful to record how Sumitra’s oppositional identity grows along with her exposure to Western culture. This happens slowly and meaningfully both in school, with her reading and peer influence which broaden her outlook on life, as seen in the previous chapter, and at home, through television and friendly neighbours like Maria and Mark. It is Maria, who suggests the way out of domestic drudgery for her mother and the girls by outlining the usefulness of bread, the handy equivalent of labourious, though delicious, hot chapattis. Sumitra’s questioning of the status quo finds articulation through her white friend, but “Mr.Patel he no like” (91) is the stock reply from her mother, which underlines the irrefutability of compulsion over choice. Sumitra also feels, along with Sandya, her younger sister, that the “workings of power” in the Indian domestic circuit was

157
inequitable. Though “Everyone seemed happy with the arrangement” of women making identical samosas for days together, “To Sumitra and Sandya, however, it seemed incredibly unfair” (89).

Television is another weapon in her arsenal, adding grist to her mill, showing her the brighter side of things, urging her to be a part of the culture out there, in mainstream British life, through both serious and popular programmes:

It was her household god, comforting, informing, soothing, entertaining. It was her personal guru which she could turn on or off at will. It seemed to her that she was a part of the mass culture churned out each night. There were slots for certain programmes... It was possible to predict what any particular programme would present. Almost every programme was a repetition of the formula necessary for its type. And she felt as if her life, like the life of the heroines on the screen, was a repeat performance prescribed long before her birth. (81)

The novel thus shows how television can influence a young mind, regardless of cultural background. It seems to confer an agency on her that reality denies, and it is perhaps the first step towards her initial identity formation. In fact research shows how effective mainstream television had been to expedite cultural assimilation in those early days when the Asian cultural apparatus, Bollywood, videos and music had not been so proliferated (Gillespie 1989; Sharrat 2001), and Nayi Zindagi, Naya Jeevan was all that the BrAsian could find on TV that related to her. Gillespie (1989) shows how the acceleration of and the associated time-space compression, have radically affected the transmission of social values, meanings and identities. More than class, the “activities of consumption” (12), television-viewing being one of them, affect peoples identities in contemporary late capitalist societies. As is evident from Sumitra’s case, Gillespie also affirms how “Our perceptions of self and other have been changed by the consumer lifestyle, by the constant stream of TV image, by the media’s power to seduce us into a ‘hyper-reality’” (13). The effect of television on Sumitra is shown by Rukshana Smith, to be exactly as Gillespie tries to show in her article, that “consumption is not a passive process” but an “expressive and productive activity’ (13). Television empowers Sumitra, acts like her “guru”, her guide as the text tells her, and this is one of the major forces which ultimately leads to her location of her own “agency” within her gendered geography, as discussed shortly.

Sumitra is more open to western cultural influences in music, poetry, fiction, and the author, herself an East-European immigrant, reasons that these are liberating influences as opposed to Sumitra’s “restrictive” lifestyle. Whether freedom from the
family environment binds Sumitra into new relationships of bondage is not shown in the text: only the salubriating effects of leaving home are foreshadowed.

Sumitra reads Macbeth, learns Russian and reads Pushkin’s romantic poetry, and all of this influences her like the typical colonial subject, to aspire towards a state of free enterprise, unfettered, successful, controller of her own destiny. She becomes actually compelled to live differently from the society to which she was born, to lead a double existence, losing affection and feeling guilty of betraying her family in the end. The immense pressure she has to deal with, to find the “real” Sumitra, should not be overlooked, especially when she temporarily breaks down and has to seek medical support for her psychosomatic disorder from the hakim. Her mental peace was disturbed as “In the street she felt Indian, at home she felt English. Nowhere, nowhere did she feel like the real Sumitra. But who was Sumitra, and what should she feel like” (SS 86)? The text does not provide any answer to this existential doubt, though it answers to the stereotypical portraiture of a distressed BrAsian girl (Ghuman 1999). One is not sure; whether, finding a job and a place to live away from home will answer her question or guarantee true freedom for Sumitra, as the threat of loneliness and insecurity keep hovering in her mind, despite her firm decision to leave the comfort of family life.

It is surprising that Sumitra herself does not come across any racist attack herself, though the whole of the rest of her family does, and she watches National Front efforts to garner support in school (SS 67). If anything, she gets admiration for her good looks, and respect for her intelligence wherever she goes, which makes the text often seem too good to be true. But it is true that in the early period, a girl like Sumitra had a better chance of survival if she stayed on the right side of the line, which she did. Some other early texts do support this fact that initially, in the 60s and early 70s Asians were regarded as something of a curiosity, and friends were many, some of whom “adopted” the native, third-world, genius into the fold for proper indoctrination into a Western lifestyle as an “apprentice” in a Bildungsroman (Caroline in AWOw, Anita and Uncle Alan, in AM). It is true that all young BrAsian women might not have had a similar experience. However, women from the Afro-Carribean communities were treated particularly badly by the white mainstream as Evaristo shows in Lara (Evaristo 1997: 68).

Sumitra’s dreams, discussed in the previous chapter, are always predictably to do with racism, they are narrated at expected intervals when she is particularly
disturbed, and they seem, again, uncannily pat and predictable, too real to be dreams
and they ring false, being exaggerated in terms of metaphor and genuine
circumstance. Her dreams are of corpses, dwarfs and angry or violent people, pushing,
screaming or attacking each other, invariably, white, Asian and black people.

The writer strains to show how Sumitra must abandon the stranglehold of the
Patel family life to get freedom, and that if she is a victim of anything in their
adoptive country, it is a combination of domestic pressure, cultural barriers of the
extended family, and her own desire for adopting the ways of the West, but not
racism. This effort on the part of the author to keep Sumitra free of racism seems as
though an effort to write a novel as per prescription to highlight negative stereotypes
of BrAsian males and females, and diminish racist oppression in such a girl’s life who
is thoroughly indoctrinated into Westernisation. The attempts by Jayant towards
“preserving the purity of the culture, of ensuring that the Indian community kept
together” took her to the temple to attend lectures, a common phenomenon among
self-help groups to reinforce a positive Asian identity (Brah 2006: 45), but that too
proved ineffective.

It is quite an achievement for Sumitra to leave her family and start life on her
own, but one cannot help feel that she is running away from problems like an
opportunist rather than standing up for her mother and sisters against their double
oppression in England, as women in a male-dominated Asian family, and as Asians in
a racialised lower middle-class society. Sumitra is upwardly mobile and self-centred
to a very large extent; few other women in the selected novels aspire for freedom to
the same extent as her. She is fully indoctrinated into a consumerist culture, as a
BrAsian and as a part of the diasporic Asian community, addicted to being “modern”
through the possession of material things rather than liberated attitudes. Sumitra
actually decides to sever contact with her family which seems loving, kind and caring
enough: they even postpone sending her away to relatives elsewhere, they do not
threaten to marry her off to a stranger, though such things are suggested by the
extended family.

The novel was recommended as a text for young learners at school in the early
1990s, for GCSE forms 4-6 as shown earlier. It was published in a Macmillan
Education series for the same reason. The author reiterates many of the cultural
stereotypes used in the 1970s and 80s to describe BrAsian girls. Sumitra’s huge
aspirations and capability to create a space for herself in mainstream society are two
such examples of how a working class, traditional Hindu background is not a
deterrent to her ambition to attain "selfhood" in constricting circumstances, if she
allies herself to the white majority. Perhaps there is haste or presumptuousness in
Sumitra’s action, prompted by her fears of isolation and the freedom her workmates
enjoyed. If one reads the text carefully, one finds that the tendency to berate Asian life
is far too strong as compared to mainstream life; the mainstream characters are all
positive, the author justifies even Jean’s rude behaviour. In a way, the writer cannot
write herself into the BrAsian community: she betrays it, by belittling the
impoverished and uneducated Asian immigrants from Uganda, who survived only
because of self-help rendered by the community, the government or the host society
not always as generous as the fictional portrayal (Brah 2006: 47-48). Smith seems to
continue the Orientalist project, as according to Edward Said:

> Every one of them [orientalists] kept intact the separateness of the
> Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its
> feminine penetrability, its supine malleability.... saw the Orient as a
> locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption.
> .... the Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society
> (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an
> identity best described as alien (1978: 206-7).

Some incidents in the next few texts show how dangerous it was, for a girl like
Sumitra, to leave home and stay alone, thus proving the limitations of considering
Sumitra as a model for BrAsian adolescent girls.

**Self And Community: Negotiation Of Identity (AWOW).**

_A Wicked Old Woman_, published in 1987, is another novel which describes
the early immigration period of the 1960s, as it unravels the adolescence of not only
Kulwant, but Shazia, Rani/Rosalind, and some young boys in England. Kulwant, the
elderly heroine, who arrived in England as a child, can be described as the “second-
generation” as her personal attributes and attitudes tend to be in opposition to those of
her parents, the first generation of immigrants in their family. Later in the novel, the
ageing heroine tries to relocate her identity by adopting disguise, and actually finds
the community and friends she had abandoned to be quite supportive, caring and
providing healing touches to those in need of affection, and dignity to live in peace.
The novel delineates the changes in the lifestyles of the first-generation of Asian
migrants, and their progenitors, the second, the third and fourth generation, Kulwant’s
children and grandchildren as well. Her father brought Kulwant and her siblings to
England against the wishes of the extended family back home, who disapproved of
the ideas of women and children accompanying the breadwinner abroad. The text thus
shows how transnational cultural mores controlled migration in its early phase, and
how their influence waned under the influence of material success (Ballard 2001: 22-
26). Kulwant’s father’s dilemma is reported by the author thus:

What necessity when the money he sent back could keep them
comfortable? And who knows what would happen to women and
children under the English influence? Her father countered by asking
what they would achieve with their money after having paid for the
family expenses? Very little, for there was little left over. (AWOW 7)

From Kulwant’s father’s Third world background, Western education was the
cornerstone of material success, and instead of material well-being he wanted to “give
them something much more important, a good education and with that the chance of a
life better than he had ever had” (ibid). But it was not easy for men like him father to
allow girls to be like their British friends. As the days went by, and the numbers of
Asians increased, many parents started campaigning against their daughters
participating in certain socio-cultural practices in school like wearing skirts, playing
certain field games, saying Christian prayers or travelling far with boys in buses to
distant schools meant to segregate Asians from the mainstream (Brah 2006: 39).

Moreover, as the creative writer can only offer such an insight which often
sociologists are not able to, Randhawa, like many other writers read in this thesis, tells
us that the collective community acted as the parents, as far as reporting misconduct
or failure to stay within limits of good behaviour were concerned (AWOW 7). This
was specially enforced in the case of girls, who, as in every society, more so in
traditional societies, are supposed to ensure the purity of the community by staying
virtuous. There were self-appointed observers who would not wait to report to parents
but chastise the errant girl in public, as Jayant did with Sumitra (SS).

Though Kulwant’s mother was very loving and they all laughed and joked
together when the father was not at home, they had to follow her father’s strictness as
a matter of principle. Even if she was visiting English friends, who were really fond
of her, Kulwant had to dress in salwar kameez of the right length, have her well-oiled
hair tied into two plaits, go to parties only after strict investigation of the girl friend’s
antecedents, be escorted home and study hard. Despite that, she tried to snatch away
freedom and was applauded by her white friends for “defying her backward and
traditional society” (AWOW 7). Though she felt later that “this was treachery” (ibid),
initially she had reveled in the fact that much was made of her exotic nature as a smart and good-looking Indian girl, “the only Asian among a sea of whites” (6).

In the mimic stage (Bhabha 1994) of her recently colonized self-hood, Kulwant believed that “to be free was to imitate an Englishness” (AWOW 6). Her English boyfriend Michael, the most coveted boy among her school friends, also felt special, having her as his “Indian Princess”, “the mysterious oriental woman”, “the Mata Hari of his heart” (ibid). Cringing at the exoticisation of her identity, Kuli rejected Michael’s proposal for marriage, and electively chose arranged marriage. Kuli hated her inability to be both Indian and English at the same time, and with a vengeance she decided to stop trying to be what the mainstream wanted her to be. The strain of fighting against stereotypes, making her life full of deceit and treachery for the sake of “freedom” proved too much for her. She sees herself as deeply gendered, her identity fraught with notions of race, class and community, not only “cultural clash” as the mainstream suggests.

Kurshid, Kulwant’s husband’s mistress, came from a broken home: her Ammi had to deal with her husband’s white mistress, her Big Sister never married, Kurshid lived in so-called disgrace, whereas her teenage sister Shazia lived a balanced life. Shazia went to school, had white, BrAsian and black friends, liked to study, was ambitious, enjoyed herself with friends, music and dancing, and yet participated in political activity intensely, wanting to become a journalist (74-76). Shazia seems to be one of the most balanced and sane youngsters in actual narrative time in the novel, not allowing herself to be swamped by Big Sister’s strict rules, nor following Kurshid’s dubious social position. Shazia is of the generation of metropolitans, to whom identity is associated with the city one is born in, the neighbourhood and local culture, rather than the native community one is supposed to belong to (Vertovec 2001). Shazia acquires cognitive and corporal agency by keeping her mind open: she is the truly empowered one, though youngest and under hegemonies of control.

In another family, Shanti’s teenage daughter Rani ran away from home, never to return. Fighting traditionalism at home, she went out with two of her white friends Tessa and Sarah, and disappeared from an underground station without telling them where she was headed (40). The novelist shows how she adopted the white name Rosalind, lived on the road for eight years, sometimes managing to earn a decent living, and sometimes drifting, never disclosing her Asian identity. She fell in with a gang of drug-pushers and wastrels for some time, and killed one of them, Rosco, in a
fit of rage (85-86). Badly hurt and neurotic, her life was in limbo till the politically active group led by Big Sister reached her, found her a lawyer, a doctor, a tongue and a new life. In fact, as the women start sitting with her, telling them stories about the immigrant experiences of other women, she starts to respond, and is healed by the collective memories of these untold tales of mothers and grandmothers. Martina Michel (1998) says:

In the description of this healing process Rani/Rosalind’s body acquires a metonymic function ... The “third space” created by these women is a female space because it has grown out of the experiences of female immigrants, which as the novel demonstrates differ from those of male immigrants, and because it forms the basis for a solidarity between these women which enables them to work against the discrimination of women (155).

Rani, while leaving home, had known corporal agency, but she is unable to support her agency cognitively; she falls into bad company, puts up an aggressive front wherever she goes, and that inhibits her further empowerment.

There are boys too, like Kulwant’s son Arvind, who likes to be called Arnold, or Parminder who prefers being called Pauli, but this is not to say that they all want to reject their Asianness. As Martina Michel puts it, “they are not so much torn between two cultures as concerned with assuming an identity that enables them to feel at home in Britain” (149). The text thus looks at adolescent young girls of nearly three generations, from across Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious backgrounds and shows what kind of changes have come about in the lives of BrAsian families over twenty years of living in British society. The writer shows how BrAsian girls can be confused and unhappy like Kuli, and how the community can help them; how social activism and open-mindedness can be empowering for even Muslim girls like Shazia who are stereotyped as victims and how dangerous it is for an Asian adolescent girl with a traditional upbringing like Rani to live on her own with neither income nor social status. Thus though she is financially independent, the earlier protagonist Sumitra’s (SS) running away from home carried real threats, as the story of Rani reflects. Living a life to fulfil mainstream expectations or merely offering lip service to the community’s strictures are both shown to be ultimately nullifying: in order to live fully, it is certainly necessary to resolve the two dimensions of BrAsianness into one.

It is not a mere narrative coincidence that the motif of leaving home is a recurrent one in the earlier texts. Home is the place where gendered geographies of
power are mapped, before the outside space claims its share. But, does the British Asian teenager truly have a home? What is that space he/she wishes to call home? The texts seem to ask these questions. Here, by focusing on Rani’s story as symptomatic of all the other Asian women who are homeless by choice, like Kuli and Rani; or by circumstance, like Ammi, Randhawa circumscribes her immigrant characters around the central issue of belonging and nationhood. There are many other homeless people in the text as well, both white and non-white, Asian and European, and this kind of theme is repeated in some later texts as well. Susheila Nasta’s (1999) comments on South Asian writing in her article “Homes without Walls” are worth quoting here:

This kind of writing is as much about exploring a sensibility - a poetics of home linking several writers who are all constructing different rooms of language and fiction within their individual texts – as about place. Sometimes imaginary homelands are made up of partially representational fragments, but often the worlds figured are symbolic of what Chelva Kanaganayakam has described as a condition of loss where “imagined worlds” may resemble home but are “transformed by the experience of exile”. (23)

**Politics At Home: Oppositional Identity In The AWWC Stories.**

Some of the stories in *Right of Way* also illustrate this phenomenon of teenagers exploring the home as a fragmented place, and the writers projecting self as constantly moulting, casting off and putting on different skins on the same body. Rahila Gupta, one of the early activists of AWWC who continues to be associated with many arts projects, writes plays, stories etc, has written a story titled appropriately as “Leaving Home” in this collection. It has the picture of a BrAsian Muslim teenager, the girl Zara who leads a clearly double life, with skin-tight shining trousers and a loose top acting as a churidar kamiz at home, and a skull-cap covering a spiky hairdo. *Paan* hides cigarette smoke and “Only the incongruity of black lace-up boots, which had always jarred on her mother’s sense of femininity, hinted at what had been” (*RW* 33). Like the teenagers in the earlier novels of this period, Zara too wanted freedom from home; her double-dressing is a metaphor of her desire to be free from a culture she cannot openly reject. Roger Ballard (1994) ascribes situations like hers to an existential dilemma. He says: “Because most aspects of their domestic lifestyles are viewed so negatively by the native English, most young Asians find themselves under constant pressure to distance themselves from their parents’ and their communities’ linguistic, religious and cultural conventions” (32). Ballard then
discusses how this presents problems for the young person, as it is “always in a sense a living lie” (ibid), a denial of self and community influence, and also how skin colour always prescribes limited acceptance. Though this particular text does not deal with the interaction between the mainstream and the BrAsian girl, she cannot totally reject her community or fellow BrAsians when she needs help to survive. Zara somehow arranged for a typical “marriage of convenience”, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, was finally betrayed by her allies and needed help from her parents to lead a normal life back again. A community centre similar to the Southall Black Sisters helped her to be free of the fake marriage, and Zara is poised to return to her parents who are willing to forgive her at the end.

“The Traveller” by Meera Syal embodies ideas about postcolonial self and identity in a Suniti Namjoshi-like feminist mythical fable, in which traveling bird-women come to inspire and transform the lives of the wingless all over the world. In this story one particular young traveller sets out on her journey and comes to England, apparently, to a “grey sprawling mass of town in that particular rainy land”, which had “rows of small, squat-faced houses, many of them run-down and shabby, sharing a bleak uniformity only broken by lone, wistful splashes of colour here and there, a red door, a lurid ornament in a front garden” (RW 102). The depressing background highlights the aspiration of one tall, adolescent girl from one of the houses, whose eyes reflected “the will to fly and the knowledge to do it” (ibid). It seems that the girl had always longed to fly, but had kept her desires repressed because “her mother had been frightened by her talk of travel,” and “her father and brothers would punish her if these ideas were to become public” (103). Fighting internal battles, the girl grew wings, learned to fly, and yet was married to a sixty year old tailor to contain her aspirations. Though she cooked, washed and bore children, she remembered the traveller and continued to fly by night, to spread the word and the desire to travel among those who aspired, hiding in a forest by the day. One cannot but recall the lesbian fabulist par excellence, Suniti Namjoshi and her extremely dense style here, even though this story has a very subdued lesbian theme, morphed into female bonding. Shalmalee Palekar in her paper on Suniti Namjoshi shows:

how Namjoshi’s dense and multi-layered texts raise questions of existentialism – and explore in depth, both, the implications of being and doing. Issues of community and solidarity and their implications for minority groups (in terms of political acts of agency) are closely examined. ... She emphatically reiterates that finding ways of
belonging is indeed different from “fitting in” or being made to “fit in”. (2004)

Somehow the story of this girl reminds one of Kulwant (AWOW), donning the garb of an old woman, hiding from public eye, observing lives and intervening to provide courage whenever necessary. Like Namjoshi, Syal’s occasional ironic touches enliven the story, and yet the tragic, romantic spirit is suitably evoked at the right places e.g. at the end: “In one single, fluid leap she was up and gone; the last I saw of her were the black sails of her glorious wings as she crossed the impassive face of the moon” (105). Flying is used as a dense metaphor, almost allegorical in its multiplicity of signification: does it imply an elective homelessness, flying from the restrictions of home, or of a repressive society in general; is the traveller flying away from patriarchy; is her offer of agency towards changing lives of unfortunate women an allegory for the interventions of socio-political activists; or is she a mythical recasting of the spirit of Shakti in women (Ramu 1989: 99-100), which South Asian tradition both upholds and mutilates? Syal has used the fabular structure to formulate the notion of a proactive, resistant community of marginalised women in the context of migration and identity.

The nameless BrAsian heroine of “Games” by Ravinder Randhawa is a drifter like Rani/Rosalind (AWOW). The daughter of victims of racist attack, she was brought up in a children’s home and becomes, since her schooldays, a part of a two-member gang, snatching money, chains and anything else from passing fellow students and later pedestrians. Her white friend and accomplice Margaret took the blame of being the bad one, but the Asian girl was, belying stereotyped of docility, really the mastermind, the “brain that directed the brawn” (RW 120). She would pull a frightened expression on her face, and her diminutive height and terrified expression fooled everyone.

This “gangster” identity of the girl finally changes, when she begins a “recovery” of the past, as Stuart Hall refers in his writing, to the search for the past to uncover sources of one’s identity. He says that “... as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’” (1990: 225). Coming face to face with her parents’ racist killers, she decides to leave aside her dependence on Maggie and Pandoro, the ringleader and one of the killers. She ultimately has to give up her friendship with Margaret or Maggie to a white boy Reggie, and starts on her own life, unafraid,
willing to take her own share of troubles and joys herself, and probably changing her
lifestyle. Homelessness becomes her identity, as she had been rendered homeless by
the very society she had known as her home, with no other place to call by that name,
as she was a migrant child. She is really poised for assuming an identity “which lives
with and through, not despite, difference; [an identity which is defined] by hybridity”
(Hall 1990: 235). The term hybridity is used here in its dense form of a disruptive and
subversive, strategically potent tool for survival in metropolitan centres.

Randhawa’s story “War of the Worlds” deals with teenagers again, this time
young Sikh girl twins, loved by their parents despite their really naughty ways. This is
the first story, which gives a serious look at BrAsian-mainstream relationships among
teenagers, and also the role of the community in their lives. The twins relate not their
difficulty to navigate through two different cultures, but they critique their own
Punjabi community from within, trying to transform it, reclaim their own territory.
Suki and her terrible twin are always in trouble because of their bold ways, “running
round town like we were urban guerillas of the Asian kind” (RW 155). Though what
they really did is not specified as early in the text, but “Dad would rave and rant at us,
tell us we were shameless, not fit to live in civilized society and did we know what
happened to women like us” (ibid.)? After their father’s death, unable to cope with
their unruly behaviour, their mother asks them to leave home, which actually is an
answer to their dreams, but for the rest of the story, they narrate events and reexamine
their own attitudes to such freedom away from home. When their father had been
alive the girls had one day shocked their community by lecturing to all present at the
Gurudwara about women’s rights. Their talk about the urgent need to lend support to
battered and homeless women who were trying to liberate themselves like the
freedom fighters against the British Raj, punishment to men who beat their wives or
left them pregnant or took dowry raised eyebrows. Their suggestion to have cooking
classes for men to teach them respect for such work; severe punishment to men who
ran prostitution rackets or committed incest with their daughters exploded the smug
bubble of piety, which encased some of the men-folk who attended the Gurudwara.
Encouraged by some of the bolder women, they went on demolishing stereotypes and
advocating drastic changes in outlook. The father of the girls remained silent,
indicating tacit support for his daughters, so that they felt that he was their champion,
and felt honoured for what they had done, rather than afraid or ashamed.

Standing at the threshold of their house on that summer evening, they find out
each other's attitudes to men and the world outside, and wonder whether they should
leave home or not. When a young man drives past, stops and picks one of them up,
trying to promise "burning passion" to the unyielding girl, her twin introspects on
white and Asian men. They find most men "unimaginative and unintelligent", and yet
the men, white or Asian, thought they themselves were:

God’s special gift to Asian women. The white blokes wanted to
liberate us from our "primitive" traditions and customs: the Asian
blokes thought weren’t we lucky to be loved by them in spite of our
dubious reputations and bad style of life. Nothing guaranteed to make
us run faster and further than blokes imagining themselves to be in
“love” with us. We’d seen enough of the after-effects of “In Love” to
make us avoid it like the proverbial plague. (157)

The girls had seen both love marriages and arranged marriages collapse. They
are sure they will find the right person but they “will have to go looking for them”,
and if they would be white, “they would want us (them) to change to their ways”
(162). Staying back at home meant negotiating for their freedom with their mother,
who asks for obedience and good behaviour, going away did not mean total freedom
either, they would be subject to gendered geographies of power in either space. So
they reject the idea of having to leave home, to “reterritorialize”, to live in the
margins of the mainstream, and decide to stay back, “deteriorioralize”, to use Deleuze
and Guattari’s (1988: 291) terms, to recognize their BrAsianness, to fight for their
rights back in the primarily Asian society they live in. As Deleuze and Guattari say,
“One reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state;
but in a becoming, one is deterrioralized. Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said,
must become-Black” (ibid). The girls are in the first stage of becoming BrAsian:
really to be standing on the threshold of their lives, devoid of claims of territory,
deteriorionalized” as it were. It is this threshold space the twins claim, while they are
on their way to becoming whatever they wish to. In the text, their standing on the
threshold of their house, contemplating what to do is a metaphor for their dilemma:
should they leave home, “re territorialise”, or continue to critique the BrAsian society
that is their own by claiming it as such? In the end, they decide to rediscover their
selfhood, to “become” BrAsian, but not before turning “the gaze of the discriminated
back upon the eye of power”, (Bhabha 1994: 112) here represented by their mother,
whom they want to first pacify, buying mangoes for her from the Patel store nearby,
and later negotiate with.

A lot of space is devoted to portraying the socio-political attitudes of
teenagers especially in this collection, denoting ideological investment of the politically motivated authors who were actively involved in social reconstruction themselves. The attitude of the girls shows the way things might be changing in British Asian communities, with the adults being provoked into thinking for the betterment of society, and the children realizing that all cannot be achieved by rebellion, and that the system has to be fought from within, not outside.

These immigrant texts, (especially produced by and about the second generation) must reflect changes involving a deconstruction of the notion of home or neighbourhood, safe territories to own and belong to, and challenge this notional security by showing how to stay on and “leave” at the same time, allowing distance and space to develop critical thinking.

**Intersectionality Of Oppression: Politicis and Youth (RB).**

Though the next novel is written by Farhana Sheikh who is of Pakistani origin, it merits inclusion in the chronological order of publication as it is set partly in the early seventies and partly in the late eighties, and has several sociocultural similarities with the other texts considered. *The Red Box* published in 1991 show how the Muslim women in it, across age, class and social position, strive to sustain their efforts towards attaining self-hood. This text revolves around an extended interview of two young Muslim girls Tahira Rashid and Nasreen Ehsan, at school and at home, by an older social researcher, Raisa. It reveals interesting facets of teenage life among BrAsian Muslims, but also indirectly reflects the experiences of Hindu or Sikh teenagers of the time as well, whose lives are regulated by patriarchal practices at the cost of personal freedom or aspiration. Much has been written about cultural practices of maintaining family honour or *izzat*, and a servile docility or *sharam* (literally, shame) as being typically and exclusively Muslim. These dynamic and context specific terms are often misread by Asian and mainstream critics (Wilson 1978; Bhopal 1997) as applicable only to Muslim women: these are concepts related to sociocultural practice shared across South Asia. *Izzat* and *sharam* were, and still are, far more important to the patriarchal society many Asian women often belong to, than what their dignity means to themselves. But the kind of fiction read here, shows how even the Hindu Punjabi or Gujarati families, like the Patels (SS) or Kulwant’s parents (*AWOW*), share such an ideological view of women’s roles as upholder of the virtues and the honour of the whole community or *biraderi*, not even just the family. Thus,
studying this particular text by a writer of Pakistani origin is quite in order, especially
because of its chronological position, its depiction of BrAsian lives, and not because it
portrays the “inner lives” of Muslims written by a native informant. The text offers
new readings into the identity of a young British Asian teenager as rebel, as aware of
and struggling against demonisation, against “Pakihood” and class barriers above all.

Sociological research supports this kind of documentation by a native
informant like Farhana Sheikh, who uses personal experience combined with
ethnographic research in her novel, which gains immensely for this kind of blend.
What socio-anthropological research cannot reach is the sensitivity of the young
educated girls with individualistic aspirations; the perpetration of cruelty to the
younger generation meted out by the elders, and the psychological torture due to
racism. Only an imaginative account can reveal, as Farhana Sheikh’s portrayal of the
sisters, Nasreen and Rehana Ehsan’s lives show, the frustration and anger, the desire
to be left free to rest or study rather than be overburdened with domestic and outwork.
When Raisa interviews the Ehsans, Rehana is really afraid to finish the mother’s
stitching work on time, though she might have written her physics essay, or studied
for good grades to enter the medical school during that time, which would perhaps
change their condition of living. Rehana almost cries as the work is not over, the light
has fused, and the parents will be back tired (RB 37). All the Rashids go to work, the
boys still help at home, and the mother, a widow, gives them a little more freedom
than the Ehsan children enjoy, as Raisa finds out.

The two families represent two different ways of being BrAsian, Muslim and
working class: the Rashids liberal and the Ehsans conservative and under patriarchal
control. In the same novel, the upper class social researcher Raisa herself is
discriminated against at her work place. She also found out her mother’s closely
guarded secret life at an exploitative factory, which ultimately killed her, to send
money to her family in Pakistan. Raisa’s family represents the successful face of the
educated, upper class BrAsian Muslim, with its own skeleton in the closet.

Set against increasing political awareness among the 80s youth, this novel
traces the growth of the girls’ political conscience in response to bullying and racism
in their school and the locality. After the expulsion of Jamshid, a fellow-student who
was falsely implicated in a fight while the white perpetrators were left free (77), the
BrAsian students got some outsiders involved to protest against the school authorities,
writing “PLO” on the walls, and chanting “South Park School is racist” (105). The
attitudes of Nasreen and Tahira are different here. Unable to express her hatred for what was happening, and because of her lack of political initiative, Nasreen suddenly starts screaming in the class one day, as she cannot stand the racist comments she overhears in the class. Tahira, on the other hand, actively participates in the protests against wrong racist attacks against Asian students. Thus the girls differ in their cognitive and corporal approaches to resist the existing power structure.

Another important aspect of the girls' lives is their growing awareness of sexuality. Couched in the euphemistic language of romance, Nasreen's first brush with exploring her own body, her emerging sexuality is appropriately recorded in the text. Imagining her art teacher Mr. Rodriguez in love with her, Nasreen marvels at her own beautiful body. But sexual fulfilment is specially reserved for the real moment in future, which she imagines to be a love marriage with a highly placed fictitious "Zahid". He would be handsome, respected, with tolerant white friends, a semi-detached, well-fitted house in a safe, decent, welcoming, white neighbourhood definitely somewhere abroad, where her parents could visit with her (36). Thus, Nasreen is caught in the trap of romantic aspiration of modernity, internalised through images of achievement in society, which is akin to sexual gratification at this stage of her life.

Tahira's brush with sexuality is more brutal: she had been adventurous and curious about sex, and had trusted her "boyfriend" Asif. But she is virtually forced upon by Asif in a sweaty car with shut windows, and he continues to blackmail her after that (97). Tahira really fears the repercussions, yet, later she gathers strength to confront Asif in keeping with her political experience. Her weapons of retaliation were "The shame of poverty, and the shame of the Paki. The very things, which she would fight against, she herself had just used. She felt shabby" (173). In her eyes, she had been transformed by this sexual exploitation by one of her own, into the reified Paki, a sexual object white boys in a car showed tongues at, in the same text. This episode reminds one of a poem quoted by Bhabha (1994: 46), by Meiling Jin, a British Chinese poet about the secret art of "Invisible-ness", where she mentions how her "eyes will remain to watch and haunt". Bhabha says

Most significantly, these partial eyes bear witness to a woman's writing of the postcolonial condition.... The gaze of the evil eye alienates both the narrational eye of the slave and the surveillant eye of the master.... the evil eye – like the missing person - is nothing in itself: and it is this structure of difference that produces the hybridity of
There are brief references to some of the other young boys of the community too, and how inscribed they are in their class and gender roles as breadwinners or responsible elder sons. Nasreen’s brother, Rezwan helps to clean up despite working hard outside; and Tahira’s brother Hussain, who helps at the Chaudery restaurant even on weekends, yet cooks tasty meals at home; and Ashraf, who works with a builder all day among grime and dust hardly has any free time to socialize with his white girlfriend. Jamshid, Jayesh, Suleiman and the other boys at school are not bad boys but angry and determined to set things right if no one else will. The boys’ struggles with their own identities affect the girls, who are sensitive to their pain, their need and the choking of their aspiration though they are supposed to be more independent agents. Hindu boys work alongside Muslims, West Indian and a few white anti-racist British, to fight against racism in and outside school. They support each other in their careers and help fight against injustice. Thus Farhana Sheikh places a lot of trust and confidence on the younger generation to carry forward struggles against race, class and gender discrimination in the novel.

The text then has significant relevance to this study, as it analyzes the roles of gender, class, community and racial intersectionality in the lives of young BrAsians in all its variety. It is becoming increasingly important to study power relations in any society through the prism of intersecting components. Avtar Brah writes:

> Recognition of the importance of intersectionality has impelled new ways of thinking about complexity and multiplicity in power relations as well as emotional investments ... As such, intersectionality fits with the disruption of modernist thinking produced by postcolonial and poststructuralist theoretical ideas. (2004: 82)

**Materialism And The Business Class: Romance And Culture (Hj).**

*Hari-yan,* (1992) contains glimpses of upper class Punjabi and other BrAsian women of both the generations who aspire to material success and a yet higher social status. This desire to survive and succeed is like a genetic hallmark of most of the Punjabi women portrayed in the novels, which again, does not come through in any sociological survey. Their persistence, their focused and goal-oriented approach is belied by their conviviality, their easygoing, effortless social behaviour. This survival instinct goes much beyond any stereotype; it is the strength of the “border” community, which has seen so many diasporas, so many uprootings by virtue of the position of the Punjab in India’s northwestern boundary.  

173
In the text, the use of bhangra as a Diwali event to bring students and their parents together possibly signifies the efforts towards the process of integration of the first and second-generation British Asians into the mainstream cultural fabric of British society. They do not want to hide their musical preferences by sitting in front of their television or video cassettes any more, they wish to come out in the open with the joyous vigour of this once-folk-dance. Christine Vogt-William writes in her article on Bhangra music:

An increasingly significant mode of self-identification, the direction taken by today’s British-Asian music evinces a more assertive stamp in the articulation of a vital hybrid identificatory process inherent among the younger generations of South-Asian British in their negotiations with their parents’ cultures and that of their current British home environment. (2007: 74)

Also, through the paradigm of a “beauty contest” organised in a college, the writer subverts its very notion. It is an unusual one: it gives opportunity to the young women of all races, by giving them money, jobs and housing, rather than exploit their bodies in the name of social causes, as ambassadors of world peace for example. Hari-jan, the older teenager, outcaste, the untouchable, as she imagines herself to be, but “God’s own one”, literally, comes out a winner on her own right as one of the organisers of the event. She goes right back into the folds of the traditional Punjabi British society she belongs to, but not before bringing about subtle changes, both in her own and other lives. Hari-jan and her tradition bound Muslim friend Ghazala, though from different class and family background, as well as Ghazala’s multi-cultural brigade of “Asians, Greeks, Afro-Carribean, English, Jewish” members (Hj 93), O’Driscoll’s Rainbow Coalition of religions” (112) collectively celebrate Diwali in an unprecedented harmony in troubled times. Their celebration evinces mutual respect among the racial groups and collective sharing of pleasure and pain.

Ghazala or Gazzy is a case in point, here. Determined to stay within the confines of religious dictates to do well in life and find “a lot of wisdom in the Koran and the Bible” (58), Ghazala willingly wears the Hijab and the Jubba, prays, studies and works hard, lives a life of austerity, even going so far as to almost marrying someone she does not love, to save the family from poverty and shame. Gazzy, though she solves problems in unconventional ways, gets temporarily trapped into stereotypical solutions to her own problems. Though Gazzy seems to be the one to be protected, paradoxically it is she who gives Hari-jan her confidence and strength. This new face of the educated, confidant, religious, yet “liberated” young Muslim working
class girl is carefully detailed by Randhawa.

Thus in this novel Randhawa shows young men and women of all races, classes and political and religious convictions, trying to subvert the seemingly innocuous beauty pageant by cleverly concealing political aims. The pageant becomes a metonymic site for contesting convictions: the working class women who want to make it good, the organizers who want to help them, the socio-cultural objection from opponents, even an angry husband brandishing a knife. Randhawa uses another extended metaphor, spaced throughout the end of the novel, that of falling, hurting physically, by accident or intent. Both Harjinder and Suresh fall or hurt themselves (151; 158), unconsciously or by design, and this seems to be a signification of their dependence on each other, egos bruised, unromantically shaken but focused on their romantic need for each other. It is as if fractures of the identity are needed, through posturing and learning new ways of walking into life which is full of impediments whatever colour, race or gender one is.

Though the major focus of the novel is the romance of Suresh Robinson and Harjinder Kaur, the other issues often render the romantic angle subservient. Harjinder wants to be proud of her Asianness and her Britishness as well. In fact she hates her American cousins maligning British things and ways of life. She claims the British controversially as “my racists” (161), and shows her awkward solidarity towards Britain despite the racism, which she has learned to accept. Coincidentally, by falling in love with Suresh who is part British, she seems to be strongly reasserting her identity as a product of two cultures existing without threat or competition. In her it seems “the personal is the political”.

Hari-jan discusses the influence of Hindi films and music on Asian youth in Britain, and also its percolations in the world of fashion, grooming and lifestyle, especially love and marriage. There are references to Hindi film, music, television serials and summers spent in India by the major characters, especially Suresh Robinson and Lakshmi, his mother. Suresh shares his experiences of watching Nukurdh, a popular soap in India in the late 1980s. He also records his Indian experiences on video film, and frequently borrows Hindi films from the local video library. The discussion of Hindi film like Pyaasa, a classic, and film music offers the necessary romantic background to the text, as it brings the protagonist closer to her future boyfriend. It seems that the mixed-race Suresh expresses greater transnational loyalties than Hari-jan. However, as quoted earlier, Hari-jan is possessive about
Britain in a strong way, and tries to be loyal to, love and respect both cultures and countries in her complex world of modernity. In fact Hari-jan is quite sure that finding a connection to the Hindi-film and music loving part of her was like finding herself, a "homecoming" of her several selves. The "Everyday Me", the "Workaday Me", with the "English Corporate Image", finally unite with the other "Me" (84) which she could not define but could locate after falling in love with Suresh, sharing films and his Indian holiday video and listening to "... udaas raat hai ... zuban pe dard ..." from her parents’ bedroom one night (83), or Talat in a Blue Mood (86), and Chal Akela (87). Dressed in her Reeboks and fashionable salwar kameez, Hari-jan is the new face of BrAsian upper-class youth, learning to value certain things from both cultures and reject the restricting influence of either. She looks forward to the Tania, Mala, Sunita or Angie of the later novels, who are rooted to their cultural background as both British and Asian.

Thus in this 1992 novel, addressed to young readers, Randhawa articulates the anguish related to identity some of them might have felt, whose parents did not actively or forcefully inculcate an obsessive allegiance to everything Indian but allowed a healthy respect and kept alive a curiosity, who could not visit India but maintained a transnational cultural affiliation through film and music.

Coping With Sexuality And Betrayal In AWWC Stories.
Two of the short stories in Flaming Spirit (1994) contain references to BrAsian adolescents suitable for detailed analysis, as they render the violation of gendered geographies of personal space within the family, across the axes of class and racially constructed identity. The first one, “Still Waters” by Janet McDermott, an Anglo-Indian author deals with an incident in the life of a young British Muslim girl called Shazia Rashid, a lesbian jilted by the young white girl she loved.

Shazia is unable to bear the simple elegance and quiet fortitude of her mother’s bearing in the face of her certain academic future at Oxford, as she has to hide her tumultuous emotional future. Both guilty and upset at the news of rejection by Fliss, she feels that she cannot face her mother and hide this forbidden secret from her genuinely happy eyes. Her mother had “cried and laughed and pressed her wet cheeks against mine when the letter came” (FS 8) from Oxford, while her father sat proud and quiet, reading it over and over. Even when her brother Akib congratulated her in his own style, she had been thinking about Fliss’ possible reaction. Rejecting her own family culture, that of hard-working, religious, conservative Muslims to
whom lesbianism is alien and disruptive, she had adopted the ways of the West early, and was likely to be hurt in the process. Her white lesbian teacher gives her strength, without which she would have left Oxford. R. Raj Rao (2001) shows how Asian queers are often marginalised, victimised or betrayed by their white counterparts. He maintains, “The gays of the world are in a perpetually diasporic state. We are homeless in our own lands, which are heterocentric and heterosexist in value, and are in search of paradise where these tensions do not exist” (145).

The other story, “Cassandra and the Viaduct” by Rukhsana Ahmad has even more overt references to the mother’s outwork and the family’s response, and the daughter’s relationship with the mother and father and their cultural gap. Qaiser Hussain prefers to be called Cass, even Cassandra, and goes to study at a London school, where she makes friends with Marilyn, a white girl, rather than any from her own community. Qaiser’s mother worked as a part-time dinner lady, and she had to leave her job when they left Derby for London.

Though Mr.Hussain was raised in Bradford, his attitude to his BrAsian identity seems defensive, which he justifies as making good business sense. He is very image-conscious, and his family has to naturally suffer so many changes, uprootings, to allow him to secure his ideal self-image. Qaiser notes how they had to acquiesce whenever her father wished to do anything.

> Basically, when dad said we had to move, we knew we would have to, whether we liked it or not. We were that kind of family. In any case, Mama always said that that’s how she likes things to be, and if anyone did notice or comment on how Dad always had his way, she got kind of defensive. (FS 45)

Even though Qaiser realizes the innumerable cruelties her father metes out to her mother, she is hardly on her side, always. She does show some sensitivity towards her, but she too deliberately exploits her mother, for example, when she demands that samosas be made for her friend Marilyn to be entertained (53). The mother allows herself to be teased or overworked, not asking for help, keeping away from the limelight into the kitchen, to hide her inability to speak English when Marilyn comes for a visit (54). Qaiser does nothing to make her mother more comfortable, or give her company, except for guiltily helping her a little in the kitchen. Like Tania (LI) or Angie (T), she has a tendency to undermine her mother’s presence or to make fun of her weakness. This reminds one of the cruelties of some of the Bonerjee children to their mother (see Chapter One 1.2). Thus the cultural and emotional dynamics of the
mother-daughter relationship do become a powerful backdrop to the events in the short story.

Qaiser’s painful disillusionment of her father happens later, as he begins an illicit sexual relationship with her friend Marilyn, precocious, but still, his daughter’s friend. As in her dream, her father metaphorically rapes her, her identity as daughter, to be protected and cared for by the father, as his own religious background must have taught him. Qaiser and her mother have to pay the price of being lodged in this cultural double-bind, their conservative Asian identity, which makes them housebound, and their ugly exposure to the sudden moral lapse of their protector, which they thought they were immune against. He cheats Qaiser of her respect and love, and makes her prophetic dream come true, Qaiser becomes Cassandra the prophet as her nightmare about her father trying to touch her sexually, becomes superimposed on her dear friend Marilyn. In her dreams, Qaiser had been imagining her father touching her body with violent sexual urges. Qaiser’s body becomes the site of multiple exploitation and brutalisation in the conflation of dream and reality.

Qaiser also believes that she is a better cultural navigator than anyone, her mother, father or Marilyn, none of whom “quite understood the delicate balance of two quite antithetical cultures that I constantly achieved in my day-to-day living” (FS 56). Ironically, she loses this balance rather dramatically, when she witnesses her father fondling Marilyn in his shop and feels totally disoriented after the episode (57), little realizing that it is the two cultures which have clashed like the train on the viaduct of her dreams.

Thus, it was not just Qaiser’s body, but her very identity as her father’s daughter, as a South Asian girl in Britain, that was being compromised. It is experiences like this that makes any foreclosed definition of diaspora really impossible: both Janet McDermott and Rukshana Ahmad have been able to, like many other women writing the diaspora, “dis-cover several contested spaces within the diaspora, address multiple forms of oppression and render definitive versions of diaspora impossible” (Vijayasree 2001: 139)

Family and Friendship: Fighting Race And Privilege (HSDY).

A powerful text which deserves some discussion, though not written by an author of Indian origin, is Haven’t Stopped Dancing Yet by Shyama Perera (1999), a media person of Sri Lankan origin. The novel places the parameters of class, gender and family ties over racial bonding. Mala’s mother Vino provides positive
reinforcements to her from time to time: she upgrades her own career from manual labourer to a clerk’s job at a post office, gets better housing, gives her some exposure to middle-brow fellow Sri Lankan adult society rather than low-class neighbourhood friends. But in Mala’s attitude to her mother there is a mixture of irony and exasperation as she grows from childhood into the teens.

The novel proceeds through all its important stages with Mala remembering and recording snatches of seventies’ music floating through the text. Central to the novel are the strange ways in which Mala’s childhood friends Bethany, Janice and Caroline become intimately linked with her future, and in the case of Bethany, her past as well. The four girls’ destinies are linked intimately to each other’s, much like the three heroines from Meera Syal’s Life Isn’t... but they are all BrAsian, whereas here there is a BrAsian, a Chinese, an English and an Irish girl.

It often seems as if the novel is making a case for the balance between internalization of western influence and retention of native subjectivity that happens to Mala. She retains her friends and family, and finding happiness and success in life. Though situated in the seventies, Mala in Haven’t Stopped Dancing Yet is the precursor to portraits of successful BrAsian heroines with a rebellious identity.

To ‘Belong’ In Order To ‘Become’: Three Londoners (LJ).

In Life isn’t all ha ha hee hee (2000) Meera Syal portrays the coming of age of three British Punjabi seventies “girls”, who are now in their late thirties. The narrative criss-crosses through their memories and current experiences, and weaves a rich tapestry of London life seen through women just past their prime. They often think of their growing up years in the London suburbs. Tania, Chila and Sunita were schoolmates and family friends: they belonged to respectable Punjabi business or working class families.

Tania’s mother had a lot of expectations from her, and she subtly blamed Tania for her own unhappiness. Again, both of these issues link unfailingly to Claire Chow’s documentation of Chinese American life: “Accepting a parent’s authority without question was another strong family legacy…. The great weight of parental expectations is perhaps one of the most common themes in the lives of Asian American women” (1998: 39). Later, Chow confesses something which Tania feels strongly as well:

For me, there is a constant, subterranean pull to fashion my life into a form that will please her. Sometimes it seems very clear; I have the power to make her happy or unhappy. It would be selfish to make
choices that would disappoint her. (54)

However, Tania could not make her parents happy in their lifetime. As far as social adjustment is concerned, Tania in her thirties, finds that it is easy for Asian youngsters to walk on the streets with their loud bhangra rap and remixed Hindi film songs, without people staring or telling them off, and she finds that she is jealous of them (LI 43-44). She cannot appreciate their tastes yet, nor fall in step with them. She does love the street-life, it is her street, but it has changed, part of the thrill of early rebellion and secretiveness has gone. Tania notes how much she must have contributed to this new street life by her nonconformity.

She had the powerful urge to stick her head out of the window and tell them that they were standing on her street corner and if it hadn’t been for her and all the mini-wars she had fought on this road, maybe they wouldn’t be loafing around in their mix and match fashions listening to their masala music with not a care in the world. (44)

The other friends Sunita and Chila had shared her rebellious instinct only in supportive roles. When Tania discovered Bhangra rap, Chila had preferred Lata Mangeshkar’s Hindi songs, and Sunita had not bought the tapes though mouthing “Wow! Yeah” and “Wicked” (43). Simon Frith’s comments on music, are relevant here: he says that music can be a key to one’s identity, in making or listening to music we undergo “direct experiences of the body, time, and sociability” and gain the capacity to move between social groups and subject positions (1996: 124). In her teens, Tania moves ahead of the others in her group as she responds to Bhangra rap, and yet is uncomfortable with remixes of Bollywood later, as a woman in her thirties.

The other two girls are from slightly different backgrounds, though daughters of businessmen and of Punjabi origin, Chila is from East Africa, whereas Sunita’s parents are Punjabis from India. Chila’s is the most traditional family, which was trying to arrange matches for her for many years. Chila’s mother is one of the most vibrant women in the novel, with her hordes of inquisitive friends and she trains Chila’s how to cope with life’s pressures. So, Chila is certainly capable in dealing with her husband’s and Tania’s betrayals. Her character offers a deep insight into the psyche of a young BrAsian woman who is tradition bound and yet not to be taken for granted. She has a quiet strength, high moral standards, and a heart full of loving kindness. She loves to laugh freely, loudly, loves a good cry as well. It was her mother who told her “Life isn’t all ha ha hee hee, so if you know there’s going to be a
few tears, you might as well try and enjoy them” (27).

Sunita, who comes from a more liberated background, had better options. Tania wishes she had Sunita’s parents:

Her parents were considered the coolest around. Yeah, her brothers got away with murder, but her mum and Dad always insisted she should get her education and then think about marriage, if she wanted...Her Dad insisted they call it “Assisted, marriage, no arranging in his house...” etc. (149)

The lives of these three girls crisscross in myriad ways across the time span of the novel, and they seem to represent the changing face of the community which makes them both laugh and cry, with each other, through good times and bad. They do not seem to need male friends in their adolescence except for casual intermingling. They stand for survival, not as puppets but as individual subjectivities with shared spaces and time, with shared losses and gains. C.Vijayasree writes that migration and expatriation are only an accentuated exile borne by women always, and that it is this “perpetual elsewhereness that steadily reinforces the woman’s need for survival and self-preservation” (2001: 131). She makes a case for survival as a multi-faceted and adaptable idea of many, often overlapping and coalescing types: physical, cultural, social, psychological and spiritual survival. She says that “women writers in exile voice the essential estrangement of women in a man-made world” (132), and as is appropriate to the context of the three friends in Syal’s novel, “women writers clearly suggest that the major source of courage for a woman, especially under oppressive conditions, is another woman” (137).

“Home and Away”: Transnational Influences (OHSW).
Preethi Nair’s novel One hundred shades of White (2003) is a Bildungsroman, so the record of the relationship of dependence between the mother and the adolescent children, in the early days after their immigration, is invaluable for our understanding of how that shaped the protagonist Maya’s life. Nalini and her teenage children (OWSH) apparently share a relationship founded on mutual respect and abiding love, but, circumstances pose challenges to this bond. Gradually, the Kathi children make it known that the Indian traditions their mother clings to are outmoded and their preference in terms of food, personal habits and dressing are certainly different from what their mother preferred (see 2.2). The entire subversive effort in which the two children are united lends a touch of irony and humour to the text, especially since the narrative alternates between the mother’s and the daughter’s voices. Though they help
her to put their lives together, and protect her from more sorrow, yet the author
confesses to the reader that there is judgement, criticism, preference and selection as
opposed to imposition of the mother’s way.

Using specific spices for every mood, Nalini associated a therapeutic value to
them that could override all appeals to the palate, and the real value of these spices,
metonymically signifies traditions of India. The therapeutic use of spices to cure
moods is a direct echo of Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices*, though it must be
acknowledged that the autobiographical mode grips the readers’ attention over
intertextuality in the novel. The text remains valuable for the way the children, with
their mother, acquire cognitive and corporal agency through gendered geographies of
power, with the help of their Irish friends, their BrAsian friend Suri in their
adolescence, and later, Ravi, their stepfather. This is one more of the texts, which
depict male and female friendship both within and outside the Hindu, working class
community as having a positive impact both in adolescence and adulthood of
BrAsians.

The novel preserves the essence of South Indian rural culture through its
portrayal of life in a Kerala village, replete with descriptions of a happy life despite
poverty, which is carried over into the narrative even when it is based in London.
India looms large in the early part of the novel, when memories are evoked, of
Maya’s mother and grandmother eking out their living by cooking for feasts. In the
latter part, Maya herself goes in search of her roots in the lush green Kerala village
where her grandmother lived and died, and in bustling Bombay much later. Until then,
the role-played by the absent grandmother, and the absent country of origin, India, is
enunciated through the lives and actions of Maya, her brother Satchin, and mother
Nalini. Thus the children’s subjectivities develop not as hybridized individuals but as
something beyond mere cultural intersection, as transnational subjects with the notion
of home as the heart or mind, irrespective of locations in space. They inhabit India in
their multi-locational imagination, which Roger Bromley discusses in the introduction
to his book (2000: 7-16), with reference to Anthony Appiah’s model of “rooted
cosmopolitanism” in which “each of us can have roots in a specific location and dwell
in the world at large” (ibid).

At first rejecting the food her mother cooked, Maya suffered a lot, but when
she started partaking of this food, cooking, preparing jars of pickles at the end of the
novel, she met her childhood sweetheart Suri again, and felt “like I had finally,
finally, come home” (OHSW 293). There is an unmistakable echo of many similar diaspora novels with similar passages like Sara Suleri’s *Meatless Days* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), Chitra Banerjee’s *The Mistress of Spices* (Black Swan, 1998) and Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (Houghton Mifflin, 2003). From this sample, Harjinder’s (*HJ*) transformation after listening to Hindi film songs which leads to her falling in love, provides comparison. Thus in the 2003 novel, a writer like Nair is able to relate the India connection in a way that earlier writers like Randhawa or Leena Dhaingra did in the 1980s, Atima Srivastava in the ‘90s: India appears as a place of the mind, as a certain means of self-realisation, harbinger of inner peace and sense of wholeness to the restless denizens of the first world who have traveled there after long journeys across civilizations, across time zones.

Nair won a contract with Harper Collins to write three novels after *Gypsy Masala*, and only *OHSW* retains some loyalty and sincerity to the depiction of the BrAsian community. Nair’s third novel *Beyond Indigo* (2004) is a strange mixture of subtlety and crude lampooning: the passages describing art and the romantic escapades of the protagonist Nina are finely rendered, but the constant reference to round rotis and rolling pins in her mother’s hands, wrong articles in her father’s pidgin English reflect an urge, no, perhaps a compulsion in the author to answer to Harper Collins’ expectation of caricature of BrAsians in the novel. These novels befit descriptions (see Chapter One section 1.4; Chapter Two section 2.1) of Werbner (2004) to the core, though her generalisation leaves serious work done by committed writers out of the pale of serious critical engagement with this body of work.

**Performance Pressure: New Frontiers (CCC).**

Mallika in Saumya Balsari’s *The Cambridge Curry Club* (2004) is a very interesting example of someone on the crossroads of cultures, waiting to find her own path. Hirsute and overweight, the teenager’s chances of being Asian chic are too remote. Being completely under parental control as the daughter of Swarna and Mr. Chatterjee, Mallika is really a loner, afraid to socialize, though she too had dreams of her own:

Growing up on Newton Square, Mallika, like her father, had stared furtively at the covers of magazines. She longed to have the pale, translucent skin, pinched, aquiline noses, light eyes and long, fair legs, not only of the models but of her own classmates. Mallika stopped looking in the mirror; she was convinced it would crack. Black, black, hair and skin, she wept as she contemplated a life of unremitting ugliness (186).
Meena’s worries about her skin in *Anita and Me* as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis come to the mind, or Lara’s wearing a yellow pullover on her head in Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara* (1997). Roger Bromley calls this an example of “ethnic erasure”, “a ceremonious refusal or willed nullification of the ‘mirror stage’, which annuls both self and other, a desire for differentiation in all senses” (2001: 146).

Towards the end of the text, we learn how Mallika befriends a young African boy Joseph next door, and falls in love, not with him, but with the world outside Cambridge, from his exciting stories and rich description. Joseph acts as a catalyst to her imagination; his friendship adds diversity to Mallika’s bland life as a BrAsian. She does have the innate Bengali love for the ephemeral, the innocuous and the adventurous, the more remote the better (Meenakshi Mukherjee 1995). Inspired to see the world, she decides to leave her cozy home. Before the close of the novel, we hear that she had finally decided to apply to Stanford and got good recommendations for herself as well. This was no mean threat to the Chatterjees who feared further, that she would be corrupted by the influences of the Banerjee’s daughter who had married an Albanian and stayed too close to Stanford, and too far from her parents to even visit them from time to time. The final stage in what they felt was the assertion of her hybrid identity, as opposed to their desire to see her as uncontaminated, authentically Bengali, was too close to be warded off any more, and the Chatterjees return to Kolkata for some time. The family’s expectations from Mallika echo the Asian immigrant’s by now accepted routine: success, both academic and material, as well as marriage, preferably within the community, and to a higher class (Gidoomal 1997: 26-27). The text leaves Mallika’s story unfinished, but with a brief glimpse of her aspirations, so typical of scores of Asian young women abroad, as discussed in Chow’s non-fiction. Mallika reminds us of the centrality of imagination, which “is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (Appadurai 1997: 4).

The Chatterjees are more anxious that their daughter Mallika should not become Americanised, marry someone with a strange name from some strange culture, and stay away from them forever like the daughter of the Banerjees. This is the same anxiety born out of the fear of vulgar Westernization represented by America, which is there as a subtext in many of the narratives (*AWOW, OHSW*) as
studied in this chapter. It appears that BrAsian life is still tolerably conservative and rooted to an abstract Indianness as opposed to the libertine atmosphere of America. Mr. Chatterjee shuddered at the thought of life among the Indians in San Ramon dotted with temples, restaurants offering Chinese-Indian food. To him this meant losing “your daughter forever” (CCC 63) to the “real tough” (219) schedules of America, which granted so little annual leave. Hooliganism increased, in the meanwhile, in his Cambridge neighbourhood, and the NHS was deplorable in its tardiness and bureaucracy, his interest in reading the headlines or watching the neighbourhood waned. The sheer length of the introspective narrative devoted to the Chatterjees suggests the commitment of the writer to portray the anxieties of the upper class older generation intelligentsia, at odds with the changing social mores, putting on an optimistic façade, anxious of the onslaught of globalised capitalism and its hotchpotch culture. In other words, they stand for the fraying edges of the nation-state in transition, they gradually give their daughter away to the faces of transnationally controlled capital, image, media and culture, away from Rabindra Sangeet into “garage” and “gangster rap”. As the older woman, Swarna’s description of her early days in England are full of her homely needs, the need for a rolling pin, coriander, the missing Kolkata ambience, and the enforced emotional need “to like this country, even other Bengalis, the weather, even my own house…” (48). Swarna and Durga argue about the second generation BrAsian and their values:

They are confused, and they feel pressure. They are trying to be like these English girls. Parties and clubs, drink, wearing those clothes showing everything, and they want — “Wild sex with white blokes,” interrupted Durga. Swarnakumari was shocked. “My Mallika needs—” “Wild sex with black blokes? Oh, of course, sorry, these things don’t happen in good Asian families.” (45)

Race is an issue BrAsians are uncomfortable with, when they are themselves implicated in racialising the black male or female in British society. This is obvious from the authors’ general silence in portrayals of black people in their novels or films. In Chapter Five of this thesis, the issue of discriminatory practices against black people and their BrAsian partners is discussed, as found in the texts and in sociological research. When she cannot take this discussion forward, Durga barrages Swarna with her own questions on tradition:

“And what’s with you first-generation Indians, anyway? You came here thirty years ago with a suitcase you never unpacked. It’s all about tradition, family, culture, honour, isn’t it? Why are you so keen on
carrying on tradition? It's as if you're scared --- you have to obey, or else. But does tradition exist? Is it real for us to taste, smell, feel and hold?’’ (ibid)

Durga is even more upset with Swarna endorsing the popularity of Hindi films as the messenger of Indian values.

“Did you understand anything I said? Oh, and about Bollywood, let me tell you, the only reason you welcome those films is because at last there’s something much bigger than a bunch of coriander to reflect your ‘Indian values’. But I think Bollywood has stereotyped us further in this country, shut us all in a cage called ‘Asian’. One size fits all, so my Asian bum doesn’t look big in this. Do the J. Kumar grocer and I have anything in common? No, but we’re all Asian, so let’s party. Swarna, the future is so bright it’s not orange but brown.” (47)

Durga’s transnational identity is something she cherishes far more than her talent or youth. She knows she would be happy anywhere if she has the right parameters, the freedom to learn new things, develop her identity from a traditional Indian girl to someone who would not have to be secretive about the baggage of tradition and values she carried, “too afraid to unlock and unpack its contents” (239). The unique perspective of the author allows her to make a somewhat comical entry into their complex, idiosyncratic thought processes, and though the action takes place on a single day, she is yet able to enliven them into lovable characters. The elegant prose, the sheer familiarity and local colour marks out the text as one written by someone as much in love with British Asian University town life as the fictitious Mr.Chatterjee himself.

This latest entry into the BrAsian fictional arena in this sample captures many of the contemporary anxieties of South Asians of several generations, across gender, class, age group and regional origins. The novel also raises other issues close to the diaspora’s construction of modernity. One of the poignant thoughts are those of Barry, a very minor character who expresses one of the crucial fears BrAsians share: like the Chatterjees, he too fears for his son. His son had been taking drugs, and he wished he could take him back to India. He wondered if he would find a job there, knowing that they would find “none of the luxuries they took for granted in England”. His only hope was that “he would never again feel the fear, the black pounding of his heart as he discovered the cannabis hidden behind his son’s physics textbook” (32). Barry’s fears were more for what effect the shock would have on his wife, the doting mother of his wayward son Ari. He had told Ari that “…it is hard to live in this British
society. You can’t be mediocre if you want to be accepted here, you have to show you are the best at something – swimming, maths, science, computers, something at least – then they will admire you” (33).

Barry’s fears and concern are genuine: a sudden slide into oblivion because of a dissipated lifestyle is something that the diaspora Asian cannot accept, either in Britain or elsewhere. As Ram Gidoomal says, “the society is becoming more vulnerable to the social pressures that the west as a whole is facing” (1997: 184-185). He also adds:

British society was becoming more liberally inclined and materialistic. John Major’s back to basics campaign highlighted the fact that in many crucial areas the UK was close to moral bankruptcy...The new generation is moving away, further removed from the country of origin... A rise in the suicide rate among Asian young women is just one indication that increasing wealth doesn’t automatically lead to a higher level of contentment. (187)

Barry does not realize that his son had tried to resort to drugs to allay feelings of frustration due to pressure, to perform, to live up to the expectations of family and community whether he had the capability or not. Thus the novel points out a crucial area of concern for the older generations of BrAsians: to stabilize their children socially in a demanding, fiercely competitive environment. To Asian readers this is a routine experience, and England would seem a haven away from the killing fields of competition. However, this genuine concern being expressed appropriately in this novel, contemporary readers from metropolitan centers would surely react to such similarities to their own lives. It may also be possible to theorise upper class BrAsian adolescents’ lives from the standpoint of competitive pressure and family expectation, an area taken for granted by BrAsian studies.

**Inter-Racial Romance, Career And Compromise: Bhaji On The Beach And Bend It Like Beckham.**

It is interesting to see how Bhaji on the Beach (1992), and Bend it like Beckham, (2002), two films by Gurinder Chadha may be seen as a part of the continuum of the story of the second generation immigrant’s aspirations. The first film shows three teenagers, Ladhu, Madhu, the irrespressible twins, and Hashida, a student of medicine, carrying the child of her Afro-Caribbean boyfriend on a holiday with older BrAsian women, to Blackpool, a popular British holiday town by the sea. The twins from a suburban Punjabi family are excited to be on their own, the younger one being more adventurous, wanting to befriend a couple of boys at the beach. Their
casual drinking, flirting and a surfeit of happiness is like a nausea, one of them vomits on the giant wheel with excess of consumption (Desai: 2003). Hashida is in love with a West Indian boy from a decent home, whose father is supportive of his relationship, if he makes it permanent, whereas her parents are mortified to even open their doors when he visits. The hostile relationship between the two communities, black and Asian, despite shared histories in Britain, is portrayed effectively in the film. The older generation among the trip-members condemn Hashida’s affair like an extended community or family, and they alienate themselves from Hashida. Their respect for Hashida, who is going to become a doctor, vanishes when they find out about her black lover. She ultimately elopes with her boyfriend who arrives chasing her on a bike, Bollywood style, showing that marrying outside the community, here race and religion, is a reality that can no longer be evaded in the 1990s. The film thus deals with the realities of growing up, in a multiracial society which has a long way to go to become truly multicultural: a society which is fully ingrained in the transnational influences of South Asian consumerism via Bollywood and repeated exposure to it in Britain itself, compressed into Blackpool, a commercial holiday centre largely for the working class.

_Bend It Like Beckham_ shows Jess Bhambra, a BrAsian teenager in suburban London who wishes to make a career in football rather than learn how to make _aloo gobhi_ or go to the Gurudwara to pray. Her white British mate Jules and her Irish coach Joe are both very encouraging, and lend her all kinds of support in advancing her career, despite tremendous opposition from her parents. An American scout, who offers her a scholarship to study law in an American university if she plays for them, spots Jess. Mr. Bhambra finds it difficult to grant her permission till he sees her play, and score valuable goals for her team, because he has vivid memories of being discriminated on account of his turban while trying to secure a place in the local cricket team in his early days as an immigrant.

The film has two important turning points that call for comment: Jess has to pray to Babaji, Guru Nanak’s photograph, no longer to Beckham, her personal god, before she can really play well enough to be selected by the scout. Though she does get to bend rules, she cannot so easily commit herself to Joe before she finishes studying or he is well accepted by the family, by playing cricket with her father, and perhaps licking Mrs.Bhambra’s _aloo gobhi_ with his fingers. This leads on to the other moment: Mr. Bhambra finds it very difficult to accept the romantic involvement of
Jess and Joe, but the film closes with the two of them playing cricket in their backyard, full of bonhomie and good cheer, with other members of the family and friends. Thus the god of football, Beckham, cannot shower blessings on Joe to gain entry into the Bhambra family: Joe is brought round to play cricket, the South Asian obsession, with them to win their hearts.

Thus many cultural rules are only bent, not changed, in the film, and it reiterates the fact that the older generation of both communities should have the sagacity necessary to live in multicultural England, and enjoy their lives like the younger inheritors of cross-cultural harmony. As Bhikhu Parekh says about the ideal multicultural society:

> While cherishing their respective cultural identities, members of different communities also share a common identity not only as citizens but as full and relaxed members of wider society, and form part of a freely negotiated and constantly evolving collective “we”. This does not mean that members of such a society will not deeply disagree about important issues or find each other occasionally exasperating and incomprehensible, but rather that they are likely to feel sufficiently committed to it to live with their differences and not to want to harm its well-being (2000: 238).

The English women’s football team in the film is as multi-racial as possible, though the Asian boys play football separately, and the Asian families keep to themselves, both highly supercilious of the white British and their culture. However, the white friends and coach approach Jess’s problem with respect and appreciate the family bonding and mutual care. Through the wedding scenes and Bollywood style song and dance sequence, Chadha exoticises BrAsians as the latest in ethnic chic, and that if the Asian seniors were more inclusive in their approach, Bhambra could be the new Beckham. Moreover, though the medium is English, there is an intertextuality in the film that does not go unnoticed to the BrAsian audience: there are Punjabi words and expressions like “oye”, “kuri”, “munda” etc; actors who appear in Bollywood and BrAsian teleseries, which also deal with inter-generational difference; wrong English usage like “lisbo” for Lesbian, as is commonly found among BrAsians. That is why the film was such a success both in Britain and internationally. Also, there is a sensible, matter-of-fact approach to “goal-setting” in more senses than one, and in that aspirational sense, the film has a very positive orientation towards the apparent impossibility of having to live in a multi-cultural society. Being an insider, Chadha’s focus has clearly been on the highly ambitious British Punjabi teenagers making it
good in mainstream life, and yet not losing the conviviality of the community in them.

3.5 Summary Of Findings.

Taken in a continuum from 1985 to 2004, the texts offer five major findings regarding the identity of BrAsian teenagers and young girls.

Examining Stereotypes.

The early texts, from 1985 to 1988, often reflect mainstream stereotypes, either to attest to their veracity, as in SS (1985), or to examine them, and reject them, as in AWOW, RW. Sumitra’s identity as a BrAsian teenager, seems to be smothered by mainstream stereotypes, so, like Zara (RW) or Rosalind (AWOW) she tries to leave home to break free of them. The difficulty of assimilating into white society is shown to be a futile exercise for Kulwant (AWOW), but in the same text, Shazia is able to find her own place in both, a ‘third space’ of the would-be journalist, studying society without discrimination. The twins in ‘War of the Worlds’ (RW) ranting at adults in the Gurudwara represent the rebel activists. Thus the authors of the first phase of the 1980s, Rahila Gupta, Ravinder Randhawa and others, find a voice for the BrAsain girl who is not often heard while she struggles for integration in a racialised society.

Locating Agency.

The next phase, from 1991 to 1994 has a burst of publications which reflect the same concern with a balanced portrayal of BrAsian young women as seen in Parmar’s (1988) and Chadha’s (1989; 1992) films (see Section 1). Farhana Sheikh, Ravinder Randhawa, and the short story writers of FS, Randhawa included, place the BrASians in their community, which they adopt sincerely and try to combat prejudice and draw strength from, to fight oppression at all levels. Hari-jan is thus a suitable successor to the teenager Angie, who had been intimidated by racist white girls, whereas Tahira (RB), Ghazala (HJ) and Shazia (FS) are young BrAsian Muslim girls who negotiate structures of power at home, in the social spaces outside like the street, the coffee-shop or the school. Sometimes they are not able to break out of the system openly, like Nasreen, Raisa (RB) or Qaiser (FS), but their eyes are opened to the gendered hegemonies of power controlling them, and this could be the first step towards agency. Thus, gendered geographies of power show the exceptional and the imaginative individual the ways of finding agency, both cognitively, and physically, by acts of courage and resistance, whereas there may be muted recognition of the
problematics of the situation in more passive individuals, as the texts suggest.

**Portraying Teenagers With Conviction.**

The third group of texts (1994-2000) allows the voices of these individuals to grow stronger, the narration more dense and stylised, as with Sunetra Gupta. BrAsian diasporic writing finally seems to surge forward, confident in self-expression, experimental in style, following representational patterns gleaned from experience rather than expectations of ornateness answering to Western stereotypes. However, it must be acknowledged that the sudden burst of writing indicates an interest among publishers and the readers in BrAsian identities, rendered into commodities by Asian *Kool* through the mediated images of BrAsians. Thus there is a place for Preethi Nair’s later novels and Nisha Minhas’ work in these spaces. As with all resistance movements, superficial alliance or compliance with the majority culture creates a space for subversion and resistance: voices of BrAsian writers must be heard within Britain, published and critiqued by the mainstream, not appropriated by the sending nation or Western academia dominated by the US (Puwar and Raghuram 2003: 1-17). Sunetra Gupta’s novels display a variety of themes and a highly stylised version of the BrAsian novel which shifts its location transnationally from time to time, whereas Syal’s *Anita and Me* defies categories of location in its portrayal of childhood and adolescence seen through the prism of cultural, class and racial confrontation. All the novels published in this period, including *HSDY* and *LFM*, and the short stories, are concerned with the portrayal of strong young women, exceptionally imaginative and poised towards the attainment of subjecthood, or, having already attained it, capable of maintaining their social position as free, influential and powerful members of BrAsian society.

**Responding To Transnational Influences.**

The texts published in the first four years of the new millenium (2000-2004) show how BrAsians are even more open to transnational influences (*OHSW*) than before, and yet these texts project a hybridised, integrated self of the BrAsian young person. In some of the novels we find BrAsian teenagers revolting actively, against the materialistic aspirations of their parents (*CCC*), or the high expectations of transnational loyalty to the land left behind (*OHSW*), and against expectations of the family in marriage and choice of career (*CC, BI*).

**Authors As Cultural Mediators.**
By foregrounding the centrality of the representation of teenagers and young adults in a diaspora, the BrAsian writers are raising issues relevant to contemporary migration studies and culture studies, and transforming the role of cultural mediators in a multiracial, multicultural society (Stein 1998; Parekh 2000). These authors take cognizance of the transformatory power of the text, to create exemplary figures who can represent their community and the mainstream. This, in the long run, brings about more harmonious blending of cultural mores through non-essentialised attitudes and unbiased admission of failings whenever appropriate (Brah 1996; Alibhai-Brown 2000; Nasta 1999).

3.6 Conclusions Offered By The Texts.

As recounted in section 3.2, the three basic observations about BrAsian culture as noted in Dr. Ghuman's (1999) report are about its preference for collectivism rather than individualism, gender role differentiation and religious allegiance, as opposed to individualism, gender equality and secularism of the British mainstream. Pnina Werbner (2004) discusses how themes of transgression of authority abound in the new South Asian cultural output, be it film, fiction or television, largely in Britain, sometimes elsewhere as well. When she writes about the two generations of Asians in Britain, Werbner (see also section 2.2) tends to limit her perspective to the semi-ironic mockery of the textual performance, she totally ignores the warmth of understanding that forms the support or mainstay of the average BrAsian family, in which both young and old still enjoy simultaneous titles or position, defined by a mutual respect for hierarchy and dignity, nurturing and care, gender roles and life-stages. She foregoes the ironical portrayal of both white mainstream and Asians alike in such products: in her assessment it seems that the second generation cultural production is only an exercise in self-criticism, the artists or producers only addressing the older generation to challenge their stereotypical expectation or behaviour.

Intergenerational Difference, Not Conflict.

The readings from the texts suggest that these are very limited views on all accounts. To start with, every community in all times finds some amount of generational difference, even conflict, related to individualism, but that cannot become its singular characteristic: it can help the community grow, not stagnate,
change for the better, not worse. The same applies to the BrAsians from the 1970s till date: generational difference, not conflict, has made the community grow stronger over the years, and the so-called BrAsian “success genes” (Gidoomal: 1997) have been carried down the generations. There is certainly a differential approach to socialisation with the mainstream between the older and younger generation. It seems from the texts that the older generation of the BrAsians are more ready or eager to assimilate, but only by trying to remain invisible socially, like Meena’s (AM) parents, or Kulwants (AWOW). But the younger generation is more impatient to blend in, not to stand out because of colour, gender or race, and therefore feels the pain as Meena, Kulwant and most of the adolescent and young protagonists do. The older generation seems to be more concerned with “survival”, the younger with “exclusion”, to borrow Claire Chow’s phraseology (1998: 170). Through the development of the teenager’s identity as British Asian, there is always an oppositional attitude towards the community’s traditional stance.

There is certainly an element of sarcasm or humour in the portrayal of both the generations and their different aspirations, but contempt or ridicule is hardly ever noticed. Sometimes a particular text may have a mixture of some of these attitudes, blending censure with loving care, admonition with protectionism. Yet, except in Sumitra’s Story, there is hardly any instance of a wholehearted assimilation into the mainstream with scant attention or respect to the parent community: either the author shows a change of heart or a reconciliation between the teenager and the family or community; (“Leaving Home” in RW, AM, HSDY, OHSW), or there is no reconciliation but a reassertion of the value system imbibed at home (AWOW); or there is total disillusionment, with either one or both of the communities as in “Cassandra and the Viaduct”, or “Still Waters” or “Manoshanthi” (FS), usually mitigated by a mediator, often another woman, as discussed shortly.

Moreover, the texts show self-assured young people, living with their parents in an amicable atmosphere which allows for development, with the occasional difference of opinion and banter, and an open-minded criticism of the limitations of both mainstream and immigrant communities at relevant places and times. Sometimes the protagonist articulates her rebellious attitude openly like Suki or Tania (L), sometimes only the reader is privy to her grievances (SS, OHSW). Some texts show how the intergenerational difference is also an extension of a clearly anti-patriarchal struggle (SS, RB). When one encounters portrayals of such successful, energetic and
self-assured women like Chila, Tanya or Meena in Meea Syal’s writing, or reads about the adventures of Mira and Angie in Atima Srivastava’s works, one sees individuals marked out by their specific problems and ability to find unique solutions through the mediation of their inherited community or social positions, their family background, friendship and community support.

**Exploring Nuances Of Mother And Daughter Relationships.**

The representative texts also portray mother and daughter relationships, as discussed in the earlier sections, dwelling on mutual dependence, admiration and support, with occasional exceptions. The texts portray the mother’s attitude towards the daughter’s BrAsian identity as often a mixture of apprehension and hope (AM, LI) and fear of social exclusion and desire for socially upward mobility (SS, HSDY). The daughter is often the one to fulfil parental aspirations and societal expectations, not only just the prerogative of a son (Kulwant in AWOW, Meena in AM). On the part of the daughter, there is often found a mixture of affection and criticism (AM, AWWC stories) respect and suspended resentment (CCC), understanding and longing for mutual development of the family to a more accommodative socioeconomic position (Hj, OHSW). Thus the mother and daughter relationship, like the generational difference, is not something that can be easily summarised into a uni-dimensional social phenomenon, falling into a flat stereotype. It has many dimensions to it, it is an ongoing, dynamic relationship as all parent-child relationships are, as the texts show in the later chapters as well.

Mala Pandurang also writes something similar in her essay on South Asian women writers:

An understanding of the migrant history of the parents (the mother in particular), and especially their experiences of racism and marginalisation, become integral to the process of self-definition of the next generation of British Asians (in this context, the daughter). (2001: 20)

While commenting on the way generation gap is depicted in these texts, Pandurang adds:

Avtar Brah rightly points out that “inter-generational differences should not be conflated with conflict” (Brah 1996:43). Rather than being caught in a hostile generational conflict, the daughter negotiates the links between the world of her mother and her own new worlds until she gradually arrives at an understanding of how to work out a new identity of the self. (ibid)

**Examining The Role Of Religion Among Teenage BrAsians.**

Young BrAsian girls also respect the value of religion, as shown in *Hari-jan,*
through the character of Ghazala. Though she rejects its rigid dictats, Ghazala learns to value the spirit and essence of religion, and draw strength from their reading of the Quran, as well as influence others to follow what is right. The same applies to Nasreen (RB), who questions and discusses religion with Raisa, but she is more prone to accept patriarchal interpretations of the Quran, and being under the control of her father, is still under doubt as to the spirit of equality hidden in its text. The twins ("War of the Worlds", FS) are clever enough to use the religious gathering at the Gurudwara to address the community on gender inequality and crimes against women, thus rebellion from within is represented in fiction, with the young teenagers as models for the community. The texts do not, significantly, show any particular aversion to religion, or interest in religion per se, in any of the BrAsian heroines except in the ways mentioned above. Marriages, other social rituals take place in the religious format, but there is no ostentatious depiction of religious sensibility, or rejection of it, in the adolescent or young adults like Sumitra, Hari-jan, Meena, Angie, Tania, Chila, Sunita, or Maya. They do not, as a whole, reject religion by adopting secularism: they maintain a respectful attitude to those who worship, and yet do not blindly follow, or pay lip service to any form of religion. Thus there is a wide gap between the premise on which the Ghuman report is based, and the representation of BrAsian adolescent girls’ attitude to religion by BrAsian women authors.

**Awareness Of Gender Roles.**

The third major difference in the two cultures relates to differential gender roles: the main objections to this may be that is the so-called gender neutrality of British society to be taken at face value, and is the BrAsian society as regressive in gender matters as such reports suggest? Young girls in the texts actually respect gender roles: except Sumitra who is very disturbed by it, the others show resentment only when they find meekness in the face of oppression, specially of their mothers. This may be because of their being deeply embedded in a patriarchal society, but they do respect, with an extraordinary sensitivity, their father’s (AM, AWOW, Hj, LI) or brothers’ (RB) roles in the face of exploitation or racialised discrimination as much as their mothers’ or their own. This sensitivity makes these young women better survivors against oppression or marginalisation of any kind in future: they are adept at realising any false step in social relationships or misuse of hierarchical power, as we shall see in the next chapter on careers of BrAsian women in these texts. The high
academic success of BrAsian girls, and their successful careers and professional achievements speak well of the liberated community, which nurtures these abilities. There are very few studies related to achievement statistics of BrAsian girls, and seeing BrAsian girls as role models: the establishment prefers to reinscribe them in gender segregated positions of relative powerlessness rather than speak about their success. There are cases of leaving home, elopement, depression and forced marriage, but they are not the norm, and far less than those happening in the mainstream communities. BrAsian womens’ organisations are seeking to redress these, to influence the establishment to reorient its vision rather than observe them from a distance as “cultural problems” like it often does, or misinterpret law to disfavour women as in the case of Kiranjeet Ahluwalia (Circle of Light by Kiranjeet Ahluwalia and Rahila Gupta, 1997, and Provoked, a film by Jagmohan Mundra, 2007), and many other victims of abuse (Wilson: 2006). Moreover, BrAsian fiction includes sensitive portrayals of the lesbian and the gay male as well. Thus sensitivity to gender roles, alternative sexuality and awareness of violation of gender codes are signs of the maturity of BrAsian fiction, which is slowly transforming BrAsian culture, as opposed to Mark Stein’s claim that it has already done so (1998). The road is long, the goals are not very clear, but the journey has begun with confident steps taken by unique individuals, with certain common inherited characteristics. One wonders whether academic debates on hybridity, identity crisis, multiculturalism with their tendency to essentialise and homogenize, to create new stereotypes of the confused or liberated hybrid should be taken seriously or a re-examination of their validity is not necessary? C. Vijaysree writes:

Women writing the diaspora dis-cover several contested spaces within the diaspora, address multiple forms of oppression and render definitive versions of diaspora impossible. Dislocations and alterities in diaspora living, therefore, need to be marked carefully to avoid conflating processes that are discrepant. Theories of diaspora, must move from intellectual abstractions to empirical evidence and actual lived experience, with a special sensitivity to the specifics of gender and class. (2001: 139)

Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004) write in a similar vein, insisting on intersectionality, that is social class and its intersections with race, gender and sexuality, as the only viable way to a complex and dynamic understanding of contemporary society. They argue that the post-Iraq scenario demands a fresh look at imperialism, secularism and fundamentalism, which are affecting feminisms all over
the world. They assert that feminist dialogues and dialogic imaginations will provide
the necessary tools to question hegemonies of new kinds in the power games of
politics, religion, class, race and sexuality. Thus instead of homogenizing, our gaze
should be more definitive, address the particular, look for the overlap of several
aspects that determine subjectivities in this complex body of immigrant writing even,
as it is the new voice of survivors of the neoimperialist cultural and economic
devastation.

Resisting Stereotypes, Asserting Selfhood.

To conclude, the identities of BrAsians resist being typecasted on the vagaries
of the mainstream opinion of them, as this vibrant literature shows. Perhaps what a
male writer, a fellow BrAsian, Ziauddin Sardar (2004), says about his own feelings
about being British becomes relevant here:

Frankly, I do not want to be celebrated any more than I want to be an
object of racial derision. And I certainly do not want colourful or
ethnic labels appended to my person. Throughout my life, I have
endured a number of identity labels, ... The aim of these labels is to
make you accept internally all the idiocy British society has been
storing up for centuries as its assessment of what makes the new
Britons who they are (10).

The BrAsian women writers portray such adolescents and young women who
try to break free from the shackles of a restricting community and a pressure to
conform to the dominant Western mode of life, by imbibing the best of the two worlds
as well as making significant contribution to both communities. In other words, they
are shown to be actively resisting both globalisation and the restricting effects of
transnationalism, and harnessing their positive influences. As Shada Islam (1998)
writes about the South Asian presence in Britain, quoting Jatinder Verma, director of
Tara Arts Centre in London, “Today their children are shaping the Britain of the new
millennium, catalyzing the transformation of a once staid and tradition-bound nation
into a vibrant blend of cultures and religions” (46).