

**Gendering the Diaspora: Continuity and Development
in Post-war Asian British Women's Writing**

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with selected works of fiction written by South Asian women in Britain, and published during the post-war period. As several accounts of the Asian British population's formation evince, the male experience of expatriation has often been treated as representative of South Asian diasporisation in general. Similarly, the gender-blindness of some diasporic literary criticism has bestowed upon men's fiction a comparably paradigmatic status. My focus upon women's writing represents one attempt to examine the heterogeneity of the South Asian diaspora in Britain.

In treating the selected texts as part of a corpus with its own forming tradition, I propose that South Asian diasporic women's fiction is divisible into two broad phases. The transition between the phases occurs in the early to mid-1980s, and is coterminous with the publication of fictional works by the daughters of first-generation immigrants. In order to examine this inter-phase shift, I compare and contrast how works from each period engage with a range of thematic and aesthetic issues. Many concerns are treated similarly in both phases. Whatever developments are apparent tend to become so in the second phase, denoting an evolving engagement with Asian and British cultural identities, and their gendered underpinnings.

The topics to which this thesis' main chapters are dedicated are: South Asian constructions of womanhood; gender in (neo-)imperial and (neo-)national ideologies and contexts; myths of return and arrival; inter-generational developments in the family; class, division and solidarity; and hybridity in language and form. Each one, in some way, highlights how (far) women's experiences are determined by constructions of gender, in the 'homeland' and in the diaspora. By way of conclusion, I consider how the generalism of certain theories of cultural hybridity is confirmed or interrogated by the selected works of Asian British women's fiction.

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Primary Texts

1) Rukhsana Ahmad, *The Hope Chest* (London, Virago Press, 1996)

also referred to as *THC*

2) Leena Dhingra, *Amritvela* (London: Women's Press Ltd., 1988)

also referred to as *A*

3) Attia Hosain, *Phoenix Fled and Other Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953,
republished by Virago Press Ltd., 1988)

also referred to as *PF*

4) Attia Hosain, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961,
republished by Virago Press Ltd., 1988)

also referred to as *SOABC*

5) Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve* (New York: John Day Company, 1954)

also referred to as *NIAS*

6) Kamala Markandaya, *The Nowhere Man* (London: Allen Lane, 1972)

also referred to as *TNM*

7) Ravinder Randhawa, *A Wicked Old Woman* (London: Women's Press Ltd.,

1987)

also referred to as *AWOW*

8) Ravinder Randhawa, *Hari-jan* (London: Mantra, 1992)

also referred to as *H-J*

9) Ravinder Randhawa, *The Coral Strand* (London: House of Stratus, 2001)

also referred to as *TCS*

10) Farhana Sheikh, *The Red Box* (London: Women's Press Ltd., 1991)

also referred to as *TRB*

11) Rukshana Smith, *Sumitra's Story* (London; Sydney; Toronto: Bodley Head,
1982)

also referred to as *SS*

12) Atima Srivastava, *Transmission* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1991)

also referred to as *T*

13) Atima Srivastava, *Looking for Maya* (London: Quartet Books Ltd., 1999)

also referred to as *LFM*

14).Meera Syal, *Anita and Me* (London: Flamingo, 1996)

also referred to as *AAM*

15) Meera Syal, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (London; New York; Toronto;

Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1999)

also referred to as *LIAH*

Introduction and Overview

Introduction

South Asian migration to Britain has been traced back to the early 1600s, when Elizabeth I granted the East India Company its royal charter. However, movement from the Indian subcontinent to Britain has occurred in the greatest numbers during the second half of the twentieth century.¹ The migratory waves of the last fifty or so years have been the most important, quantitatively, in the creation of the contemporary Asian British population.² Some of the impetus for this influx came from the partition of India in 1947 and the resulting clash over Kashmir. However, migration from the region was also actively encouraged by the Macmillan government, seeking to alleviate post-war labour shortages by drawing upon the Commonwealth's human resources. The work permit and voucher systems that pre-dated the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act enabled aspiring migrants with various levels of skill to seek employment in Britain. Furthermore, chain-migration allowed the first-generation immigrants, from whom the present Asian British population is derived, to accumulate in the erstwhile imperial 'motherland'. Those already settled in Britain facilitated the entry of other immigrants through sponsorship - the principal means by which families were reunited in the adopted country. South Asians now account for the majority of non-whites living in Britain; and their children are, overwhelmingly, British by birth.³

¹ In employing the term 'South Asian', I am aware that it is a somewhat contentious descriptor, as it tends to be used principally - and in homogenising fashion - by those outside the region. People who originate from the area tend to prefer more nationally and/or geographically specific designations, such as 'Bangladeshi' and 'Gujarati'. Rosina Visram asserts that "the recent arrival of Asian people in Britain is part of the long history of contact between Britain and India. The arrival of Asians in Britain has taken place precisely because of these long-established connections." See *Ayahs Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p.1. See also Ron Ramdin, *Reimagining Britain: 500 Years of Black and Asian History* (London; Sterling VA: Pluto Press, 1999), p.10. 'Indian subcontinent' refers to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (known as East Pakistan prior to achieving independence in 1971). I also use 'Subcontinental' to denote the people of the region.

² The South Asian diaspora in Britain also incorporates Indians who emigrated first to East Africa, where they became part of the mercantile middle classes. Many resettled in Britain following the granting of independence to these former colonies, when Africanisation became official government policy. The expulsion of Asians from Uganda by Idi Amin in 1972 is, perhaps, the most notorious example of Africanisation in action.

³ Ramdin, op. cit., pp.164-168, 308-309.

One way in which the Asian British population's increasing establishment has become evident is through its engagement with the adopted country's cultural life. In numerous artistic fields, Asian Britons have risen to prominence; and while this may be suggestive of their assimilation, many have achieved their successes by asserting the distinctive cross-cultural genesis of their identities. Thus, while inscribing themselves and their ancestors into the 'family tree' of Britishness, they also do so with an eye to their difference. Among the most prominent of these figures are: Talvin Singh, the Mercury Prize-winning musician and composer; acclaimed dancer and choreographer, Akram Khan; film director, Gurinder Chadha; and Shazia Mirza, who has been described (accurately or otherwise) as Britain's first Muslim, female stand-up comedian. The increasing popularity of Subcontinental art forms outside their region of origin and the reputations of their producers are such that what might previously have been regarded as 'white' projects have been overseen by South Asians. Shekar Kapur, director of *Bandit Queen* (1994), was also responsible for *Elizabeth* (1998), the cast of which included Cate Blanchett and Joseph Fiennes. Mira Nair's screen version of *Vanity Fair*, scheduled for release in January 2005, has not (unlike Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice*) been reinterpreted within an Indian *milieu* and with a predominantly Asian cast.⁴

Furthermore, the increasing familiarity of non-Asian audiences with the conventions of (an admittedly limited number of) popular Subcontinental art forms testifies to the cultural exchange facilitated by the presence of an Asian population in

⁴ Scripted by Julian Fellowes, *Vanity Fair* stars, among others, Reese Witherspoon, Jim Broadbent and Gabriel Byrne. See John Hiscock, 'Becky Sharp goes East', *Daily Telegraph*, 3rd September 2004, p.19. *Bride and Prejudice*, as Chadha's version of *Pride and Prejudice* has been retitled, went on general release in October 2004.

Britain. The most obvious example is the burgeoning popularity of Indian film. Thanks to local import and distribution networks, satellite television channels and specialist cinemas in areas with a large South Asian population, Indic-language film has continued to reach its expatriate 'homeland' audience.⁵ However, the products of the Bombay film industry - Bollywood - in particular have begun to find a more diverse reception, with multiplex cinemas in 'non-Asian' areas dedicating screens to recent (re-) releases.⁶ The industry's production base now extends to Britain, and Anglo-Indian projects, such as *Lagaan*, have been internationally screened and acclaimed.⁷ Indeed, some of the most distinctive conventions of popular Indian cinema now inform media texts aimed at a general audience. Film, advertising, music video and even the BBC's continuity 'idents' have drawn upon the lavish song-and-dance sequences that often feature in Bollywood movies.⁸

However, the art form with which this dissertation is concerned is literature - in particular, fiction by writers from Britain's South Asian population. Some of these texts are primarily concerned with events in the 'homelands' of the Indian subcontinent. The majority, however, concentrate on examining and representing the Asian British diaspora.⁹ Susheila Nasta and C.L Innes trace South Asian writing in Britain back to the

⁵ The term 'homeland' is historically associated with ethnic separatism - particularly the designation, under apartheid, of ten self-governing 'Bantu' homelands for exclusive occupation by particular indigenous African peoples. The word is now often used to refer to a person's native country, without the original separatist connotations. I draw more upon the latter meaning in my own usage of the term, even though the partition of India created theoretical 'homelands' for Hindus and Muslims.

⁶ For a useful overview of Bollywood - its history, institutions and aesthetic conventions - see Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004)

⁷ *Lagaan* (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001) is the first Indian film to be nominated for a 'Best Foreign Film' Academy Award.

⁸ Baz Luhrmann's film musical *Moulin Rouge* (2002) bears the imprint of Bollywood in several respects, narrative and aesthetic. Indeed, Luhrmann has stated that his film is an intentional tribute to the conventions of Bollywood cinema. See Caspar Llewellyn Smith, 'Bollywood Calling', *Daily Telegraph*, 9th March 2002, p.2. Bollywood-eque routines can be seen in the promotional video for Basement Jaxx's single, *Romeo* (2003), and in the Halifax Building Society's 2003 television advertising campaign. The term 'idents' refers to the short films interspersed between programmes as continuity links, and as reminders to the viewer of the channel's identity.

diaspora.⁹ Susheila Nasta and C.L Innes trace South Asian writing in Britain back to the publication in the late eighteenth century of Sake Dean Mahomet's *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794) and *Shampooing* (1822).¹⁰ However, according to Ashok Bery, the years since Indian and Pakistani independence have witnessed the most significant "unleashing of...literary energies" from the region and its diasporas - an assessment that underscores the importance of post-war migration to the artistic life of Subcontinental populations in the West.¹¹ During this period, South Asian writing in Britain has moved from the margins of niche interest, and publication by small or specialist companies, into the cultural centre ground marked out by the major publishing institutions. The critical and commercial successes of writers such as Hanif Kureishi and Meera Syal are symptomatic of the increasing frequency with which novels written from the Asian British diaspora are publicised, discussed and reviewed in the mainstream arts media. Furthermore, rather than being characterised as Asian writers primarily, a number of these authors are treated as rising stars of the *British* literary scene - a tendency evident,

⁹ I tend to favour the use of 'diasporic' and 'immigrant' over alternatives such as 'exile' and 'expatriate' - although when writers opt for the latter descriptors, I tend to follow suit. Misgivings have been expressed about the adequacy of 'diaspora' and its related terms. Farhad Karim suggests that it "masks the heterogeneity of the people involved", while Ralph Crane and Radhika Mohanram ask whether it is a term that can be properly applied to acts of voluntary migration that arise from relative privilege. However, there are a number of factors in its favour. Ranjana Ash points out that while men largely emigrated to Britain of their own volition, "women had little free choice in the matter", having largely resettled as dependants. Furthermore, 'diasporic' avoids the 'either/or' connotations of 'exile' and 'expatriate', which are too suggestive of a consciousness defined overwhelmingly by longing for the country of departure. Along with immigrant, 'diasporic' also connotes resettlement. As such, it most adequately captures, if not the nature of the migratory act, then at least the sensibility arising from it of being 'there' and 'here'. See 'The Second Generation Speaks: A Panel Discussion' in Carla Petievich (ed.), *The Expanding Landscape: South Asians and the Diaspora* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), pp.198-202; Ralph J. Crane & Radhika Mohanram, 'Introduction: Constructing the Diasporic Body' in Ralph J. Crane & Radhika Mohanram (eds.), *Shifting Continents/Colliding Cultures: Diaspora Writing of the Indian Subcontinent* (Amsterdam - Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 2000), p.vi; Ranjana Sidhanta Ash, 'Remembering India: Homeland, Heritage or Hindrance in the Writing by Women of the Indian Diaspora in Britain' in Kathleen Firth & Felicity Hand (eds.), *50 Years after Independence: Images in Literature, Film and the Media* (Leeds: Peepal Tree, 2001), p.92.

¹⁰ Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p.17; C.L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain 1700-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.46.

¹¹ Ashok Bery, 'Independence Day: Reading Indian Literatures in the 1990s', *Wasafiri*, 26, 1997, p.37.

to some extent, in the plaudits that have been bestowed upon writers such as Monica Ali and Hari Kunzru.¹²

While popular interest in contemporary fiction gathers momentum, it is not matched by a comparable degree of curiosity about the works of earlier South Asian diasporic novelists - writers who have, arguably, prepared the terrain on which the Kunzrus and Alis have since built. Indeed many of the selected works from the post-war diasporic corpus remain out of print. However, in the academic world, interest in the writings of the South Asian diaspora is characterised by a considerably wider historical scope. If anything, *more* critical material is available on earlier texts, perhaps reflecting the fact that these have been the objects of scholarly attention for a longer period. A number of undergraduate literature courses now offer options on diaspora writings (frequently classified under the rubric of post-colonial literature); and specialist postgraduate courses in particular often take a longer overview of English-language works from 'other' regions. The publicity material for the University of London's NILE (National and International Literatures in English) MA, for example, specifies that its "focus on historical antecedents is crucial to an understanding of contemporary literary practices". This interest in the history of South Asian diasporic writing is also manifest elsewhere: at academic conferences such as *Migrating Discourses* and *South Asian Passages*; and in the considerable range of critical writings on South Asian diasporic literature in specialist journals such as *Wasafiri*. Furthermore, an increasing number of monographs and critical editions - some of which utilise migration as a conceptual

¹² On the basis of one - at the time, unpublished - novel, Monica Ali was famously included in *Granta's* 2003 list of Britain's best young writers, which is published once every decade. Hari Kunzru was awarded the 2003 John Llewellyn Rhys fiction prize, sponsored by *The Mail on Sunday* for *The Impressionist*. However, Kunzru snubbed the award in protest at the *Mail* group's coverage of asylum and immigration-related issues, and asked that the £5000 prize money be donated to a Refugee Council charity.

framework - devote considerable attention to writers of South Asian immigrant provenance.¹³

Although the migrant has come to be regarded as the paradigmatic figure of the modern transnational age, this “unencumbered” conception, as Nasta points out, obscures the fact that “not all...are in the same boat”.¹⁴ One way in which the differences between them may be examined is through the effects of gender upon their circumstances and consequent experiences. This topic has already proven to be something of a ‘blind spot’, often narrowing the scope with which analyses of Britain’s South Asian diaspora have been undertaken. Early accounts of post-war migrations from the Indian subcontinent show little interest in the women of the population they document. Studies such as Rashmi Desai’s *Indian Immigrants in Britain* (1963) tacitly assume that the story of the itinerant adult male represents *the* migrant narrative, all other experiences being variations on this dominant ‘theme’. As a result, scant consideration is given to the possibility that gender inflects the nature of expatriation and resettlement.¹⁵

Rationalising this omission by claiming that “very few [Indian immigrant women] work outside the home or come into contact with members of the host society in any other way”, Desai nonetheless misses an important opportunity to examine the

¹³ The *Migrating Discourses* conference was held at Parsifal College in London in November 2000; *South Asian Passages* took place at the Museum of London in June 2001. Critical editions include: Alastair Niven (ed.), *Commonwealth Writers Overseas: Themes of Expatriation and Exile* (Brussels: Didier, 1976), and R.K. Dhawan & L.S.R. Sastry (eds.), *Commonwealth Writing: A Study in Expatriate Experience* (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1994). Examples of monographs include Anil Kumar Bhatnagar, *Kamala Markandaya: A Thematic Study* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1995) and Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Hanif Kureishi* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Op. cit., p.6.

¹⁵ Rashmi Desai, *Indian Immigrants in Britain* (London; New York; Bombay: OUP, 1963).

cultural politics of diasporisation in more complex detail.¹⁶ In his case, the omission of gendered perspectives may be partly explained by the fact that, in the period during which his research was conducted, men made up the great majority of first-generation immigrants. However, this critical oversight is, to some extent, replicated in studies that focus on the *next* generation, where one would assume this compositional imbalance to be less marked. In particular, J.H. Taylor's 1976 study of young Asian Britons in Newcastle focuses entirely on male case studies.¹⁷ Females are only mentioned as the girlfriends of Taylor's primary respondents, but never as subjects in their own right.

Hereafter, however, a progressively fuller picture emerges of women's and girls' diasporisation from studies by, among others: Amrit Wilson (1978); Muhammad Anwar (1979); Parminder Bhachu (1985); Rozina Visram (1986); Robert Jackson and Eleanor Nesbitt (1993), and Roger Ballard (1994).¹⁸ Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996) provides one of the most sustained and comprehensive analyses of how gender inflects the experiences of South Asian women living in Britain, focusing on topics such as women in education and work, the gendering of racism and the limitations of female solidarity. Nirmal Puwar and Parvati Raghuram's *South Asian Women in the Diaspora* (2003) boasts a comparable analytical scope.¹⁹ Nonetheless, Aparna Rayaprol's observation, only a year after the publication of Brah's volume, provides a necessary

¹⁶ Op. cit., p.9. Desai devotes almost as much attention (i.e. not much) to European women, as to their Indian diasporic counterparts.

¹⁷ J.H. Taylor, *The Half-Way Generation: A Study of Asian Youths in Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (Windsor: NFER Publishing Co. Ltd., 1976).

¹⁸ Amrit Wilson, *Finding a Voice* (London: Virago, 1978); Muhammad Anwar, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979); Parminder Bhachu, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain* (London; New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985); Visram, op. cit.; Robert Jackson & Eleanor Nesbitt, *Hindu Children in Britain* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1993); Roger Ballard (ed.), *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1994).

¹⁹ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Nirmal Puwar & Parvati Raghuram (eds.) *South Asian Women in the Diaspora* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

caveat against reversion to excessively homogenised conceptions of migration and resettlement.

Women have been left out of many studies...[their] experiences have been generally subsumed under those of men [and] 'uniquely female or private familial events' are considered less important by scholars studying immigrant lives.²⁰

The (initial) lack of attention to the gendering of diasporisation also afflicts the field of literary criticism. Indeed, South Asian writing in Britain has sometimes been envisaged as the production of male writers only. Nasta cites the 1982 Festival of India - one of the first conferences on South Asian writing held in Britain - as an example of this assumption: "There were no Asian women writers from Britain either invited to speak, or as far as I can remember, in attendance in the audience".²¹ Even early literary criticism by women is sometimes marked by its disregard of gendered perspectives - a fact exemplified by Viney Kirpal's *The Third World Novel of Expatriation* (1989), which is among the first texts to focus on the literature of migration.²² Although Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* (1972) is examined, Kirpal's analysis barely acknowledges how the author alludes to the influence of gender upon her characters' expatriation. Emmanuel Nelson's *Reworlding* (1992), though less inclined than Kirpal's study to treat expatriation as a collective - and thus somewhat homogenised

²⁰ Aparna Rayaprol, *Negotiating Identities: Women in the Indian Diaspora* (New Delhi: OUP, 1997), pp.17-18.

²¹ Op. cit., p.139. Nasta's observation also suggests that women may have been unable or unwilling to see themselves as part of the diasporic literary community.

²² Viney Kirpal, *The Third World Novel of Expatriation: A Study of Émigré Fiction by Indian, West African and Caribbean Writers* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1989). Kirpal's methods of reading tend towards homogenisation: although the volume deals with three broadly-defined but nonetheless distinct areas of origin, they are often treated collectively, because of "similarities in the histories of the 'non-white' ex-colonies and affinities between their presents". Op. cit., p.vii.

experience - nonetheless focuses primarily on regional, rather than gender, variation.²³

In his introduction to the volume, no consideration whatsoever is given to how the latter variable might differentiate expatriate experience - a considerable oversight given that C.L. Chua's contribution to the volume is a comparison of selected works by Bharati Mukherjee and V.S. Naipaul.²⁴

However, from the mid-1990s onwards, the possibility that "the appellation 'migrant' only signals one component in the experience and identity of the diaspora writer" is acknowledged with increasing readiness in literary criticism. Initiated by A. Robert Lee's emphasis in *Other Britain, Other British* (1985) on the "internal dynamics of heterogeneity and, often enough, tension" within immigrant populations, subsequent research has been emphatic about the necessity of recognising the different - gendered - positions from which the writings of the diaspora emerge.²⁵ These include volumes (edited) by Roger Bromley (2000); James Proctor (2000); Susheila Nasta (2001), and C.L. Innes (2002).²⁶ However, as is the case with diasporic historiography, the necessity for caution remains. Farrukh Dhondy may celebrate the successes of "the 'A' team" of Naipaul, Rushdie and Kureishi with reason; but the admission of these writers into the cultural mainstream, as representatives of Britain's Asian voice, is symptomatic of how

²³ Emmanuel S. Nelson (ed.), *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (Westport CT: Greenwood, 1992).

²⁴ C.L. Chua, 'Passages from India: Migrating to America in the Fiction of V.S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee', *ibid.*, pp.51-62.

²⁵ Paola Marchionni, *Writers of the Asian Diaspora* (London: Commonwealth Institute, 1994), p.i; A. Robert Lee (ed.), *Other Britain, Other British: Contemporary Multicultural Fiction* (London; East Haven CT: Pluto Press, 1995), p.2. Lee acknowledges that, "just as 'English', 'Scottish', 'Welsh' and 'Irish' themselves pluralise as nomenclature into lines (syndromes?) of class, gender, religion, region or even language" (my emphasis), so too do "hybridisations like 'Asian-British', 'Caribbean-British' or 'African British'" (*ibid.*). Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); James Proctor (ed.), *op. cit.*; Nasta, *op. cit.*; Innes, *op. cit.*

²⁶ Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); James Proctor (ed.), *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2000); Nasta, *op. cit.*; Innes, *op. cit.*

the corpus' female writers continue to run the risk of being sidelined.²⁷ The attention surrounding the publication of Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) and its treatment of gender, though undoubtedly welcome and merited, is also a tacit admission of how little awareness the general reading public has of this author's many and varied female predecessors.²⁸ As Felicity Hand argues, within the diasporic literary corpus, "women's experiences are among those that still need to be made known".²⁹

Although some notable studies of South Asian diasporic writing devote considerable space to women novelists, there is (to my knowledge) no volume at the time of writing that is concerned *exclusively* with women's writing as a body in the process of forming its own tradition. This dissertation is one attempt to partially fill this lacuna, as it concentrates entirely on a selection of Asian British women writers. My adoption of this focus enables me to examine in more detail writers, works and periods that the scope of existing volumes has been unable to accommodate in anything more than a fairly cursory manner. Bromley, for example, divides his attention between a variety of diasporic populations in North America and Britain. As his treatment of British writing encompasses Blacks and Asians, and men as well as women, only one female author from the South Asian diaspora - Meera Syal - is accorded sustained consideration. Innes' volume, although focused upon diasporic writing in Britain, also divides its attention between Black and Asian writers of both sexes. Consequently, the space is not available for an in-depth consideration of many of the writers on whom I concentrate. Indeed, some of them - Smith, Dhingra, and Srivastava - merit no attention at all. This is also the case, to some extent, with Nasta's *Home Truths*, which examines

²⁷ Dhondy offered this assessment at the *South Asian Passages* conference.

²⁸ Margaret Forster's praise for Ali's capacity to "tak[e] me into a life and culture I know so little about" is, in this respect, the most revealing of the 'puffs' on the novel's cover. Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London; New York; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 2003).

²⁹ Felicity Hand, 'Forget India, We're British!' in Firth & Hand (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.113.

three female writers from different generations of the South Asian diaspora in detail, while compressing the contribution of others into a much smaller space. It is, therefore, the case that some of the works selected for examination in this dissertation have been the subjected to very little critical consideration so far.

Gender-related issues *are* often foregrounded in *Home Truths*: organised around the immigrant's physical and psychological journey from departure to resettlement, the volume examines parts of the itinerary through the works of male *and* female writers. There is also a generational dimension to the volume, insofar as it traces the movement from works by early settlers to those produced by authors who have been born and/or raised in Britain. However, neither Nasta, Innes nor Bromley is able, within the space at their disposal, to give sustained attention to emergence of a *body* of women's writing - a corpus characterised by thematic and aesthetic continuities and developments within itself. My intention in this dissertation is to examine post-war South Asian diasporic women's writing on these very terms. The works on which I concentrate have, overwhelmingly, been produced during the latter half of the twentieth century, a period whose importance to the genesis of Britain's contemporary Asian population has already been acknowledged.

Within this timespan occur events that are especially germane to the development of the Asian British women's literary *oeuvre*.³⁰ These include the reconstruction of families in the diaspora (the reason for many Asian women to migrate to, and settle in, Britain), and the coming-of-age of their offspring. In order to balance breadth and depth, I have limited my analysis to fifteen works, precise details of which

³⁰ Ravinder Randhawa's *The Coral Strand* is an exception to the twentieth century focus of this study, having been published in 2001.

are given in the prefatory list of primary texts. I make no claim that this selection represents the aesthetic variety of the post-war women's literary corpus: the majority of chosen texts are of the social realist genre, and the more fabulist modes of writing with which some South Asian women writers have engaged are not discussed in this dissertation. Nor, indeed, are the *oeuvres* of individual authors dealt with in their entirety.³¹ The choice of texts does, however, enable me to map out some broad thematic and aesthetic trends, which I explain in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

The selected works are not spread equidistantly across the period under consideration; in fact, there is an imbalance in their distribution, inasmuch as most of them date from the 1980s onwards. That this is so is, perhaps, reflective of various factors. One is that their authors are usually the *children* of first-generation immigrants. As such, they are women who have had better access to educational opportunities than many of their elders, and who possess the greater proficiency in English that comes from the sense that it, as much as any Subcontinental tongue, is their language. The daughters of first-generation immigrants have also come of age in 'Thatcher's Britain' - the period of Conservative rule being one in which, according to Tariq Modood, the 'new racism', endorsed in previous decades by figures such as Enoch Powell, was revitalised.³² Although theoretically more concerned with cultural, rather than chromatic, difference, the 'new racism' manifested itself in the continued rebuttal of

³¹ Of Markandaya's considerable output, for instance, only two novels are selected for consideration here - one Indian and one (largely) British in setting. However, the fact that they have been chosen from among her earliest and latest publications allows for some examination of how far back into her *oeuvre* the diasporic sensibility evident in *The Nowhere Man* extends.

³² See Tariq Modood, 'Difference', Cultural Racism and Anti-racism' in Pnina Werbner & Tariq Modood (eds.), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-racism* (London: Zed Books, 1997), pp.154-156. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, parties such as the National Front and the British Movement were also in the ascendant.

claims by non-white minorities that they be accepted as full members of British society.³³

The cultural ascendancy of post-modernism may also have contributed to the volume of (post-)1980s diasporic writing, as it fostered the artistic and political interrogation of essentialised categories of identity, including those based on race and on gender. Children of first-generation post-war immigrants have, therefore, come to literary 'voice' armed with a number of linguistic, political and cultural tools with which to assert their right to be both *in* and *of* Britain.³⁴ The 1980s, as Innes observes,

saw the emergence of many women writers and supportive groups such as the Asian Women Writers Collective (including Ravinder Randhawa and Rukhsana Ahmad), and the Caribbean Women Writers Group, much of [whose] earlier work was featured in anthologies devoted to writing by black and/or Asian women.³⁵

The increasing recognition by publishers - most notably those specialising in women's narratives, such as Virago and Women's Press - that an audience existed for such fiction has also been a factor in the greater volume of Asian British women's writing published during the 1980s.³⁶

³³ Brah points out that the 1981 Nationality Act "divide[s] the world into patrials (mainly white) with rights normally associated with citizenship, and non-patrials (mainly blacks) who are subject to immigration control, deportation and restrictions on taking employment." A patrial is defined as someone whose parent or grandparent was born on British soil. *Op. cit.*, p.74.

³⁴ Ravinder Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) has been declared the first *British* Asian novel. See Amer Hussain, 'Changing Seasons: Post-colonial or 'Other' writing in Britain today', *Wasafiri*, 20, 1994, p.16.

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.237-238.

³⁶ It was during this period that Virago republished Attia Hosain's works. It is also worth noting that the circumstances of many first-generation immigrant women were not conducive to literary production. As guardians of cultural norms in the diaspora, they were primarily engaged in being housewives and mothers. A significant proportion lived in shared households, and some took on paid work in addition to their domestic responsibilities.

Chronological readings of the selected texts provide further evidence that the 1980s were a significant time for diasporic women's writing; for, in this period, a marked shift becomes apparent in its thematic and aesthetic character. I believe it is one of sufficient magnitude to warrant an assertion that the *oeuvre* as a whole may be divisible into two broad phases. Within the selection of texts on which I concentrate, the transition from one phase to the next is marked by Rukshana Smith's contentious novel for teenagers, *Sumitra's Story*, published in 1982 (the year of the, apparently woman-free, Festival of India). However, it is a work that, by dint of its occasional atypicality among the first-phase texts with which it is categorised, also demonstrates that the division between the phases is not an absolute one. My examination of a selection of diasporic women's texts attempts to determine the clarity with which this transition is apparent in the treatment of certain themes, and in matters of style.

There are sufficient areas of continuity between first and second-phase fiction, I believe, to justify the characterisation of South Asian diasporic women's writing as a corpus. However, the attention I pay to these similarities is balanced by a complementary focus on the extent of difference and development in later works. The thematic and aesthetic topics on which I focus are those that preliminary readings of the selected texts suggest are relevant to the whole of the post-war period. They are not absolutely exclusive of each other; and where a convergence or resonance is apparent, it will be acknowledged briefly but sufficiently to indicate the interconnectedness of the issues under examination. It should also be noted that most of the chosen texts lend themselves more readily to analysis under some rubrics than others. It will, therefore, not be the case that every work is commented upon in every chapter. However, given the degree of overlap between their respective ambits, it may well be the case that texts

not examined in one chapter are nonetheless of considerable relevance to another, proximate area.

Overview of thesis

The main chapters of this dissertation have a common structure. In most cases, a general theoretical framework is established at the outset, and is followed by two or three main sections, depending on the number of relevant foci. The conclusion to each chapter summarises the dominant trends in the treatment of the designated topic, by outlining the continuities that bridge the two phases of diasporic writing, and the differences that mark the development from one to the next. Narratives of expatriation and resettlement that focus on men often delineate the social shifts their protagonists undergo from positions of gendered superiority in the country of origin, to those of racialised and culturalised subordination in the diaspora. However, it has been suggested that works by and about diasporic *women* are remarkable for the extent of *continuity* they describe between the experiences of home and abroad. According to C. Vijayasree, “women are born into an expatriate state” and “need not leave home to be exiled or expatriated”.³⁷ Bromley argues along similar lines, claiming that women’s narratives tend to focus on the ways in which their individual, autonomous identities are denied, both “within the marginalised community...and by the dominant culture”.³⁸

According to these readings, the social status of women is fundamental to the ways in which they write from and about diasporisation; and, as Innes observes, much diasporic women’s writing is concerned with “addressing specific grievances against

³⁷ C. Vijayasree, ‘Alter-Nativity, Migration and Narration’ in Crane & Mohanram (eds.), op. cit., p.124.

³⁸ Bromley, op. cit., p.4.

their male counterparts”.³⁹ Therefore, Chapter 1 of this dissertation focuses on how the selected works depict the process by which South Asian females, whether in the ‘homeland’ or outside it, are inducted into the particular social roles by which ‘correct’ womanhood is defined in patriarchal environments. The various foci adopted in existing criticism on first-phase ‘homeland’ narratives are, in themselves, indicative of the tension between women’s acquiescence with, and resistance to, these norms of socialisation. Nasta’s reading of Hosain’s works, for example, highlights the ambivalence that suffuses their attention to the “sometimes arbitrary and hypocritical *perpetuation* of traditions” (my emphasis).⁴⁰ Among the means by which the reproduction of existing gender *mores* is secured is the practice of *purdah* (the concealment of women from non-familial men), which is portrayed more assiduously in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) than in any other chosen text. Several critics remark on how Hosain’s depiction of the practice not only underscores *purdah*’s importance to gendered patterns of social reproduction, but also delineates its consequences for those subjected to its strictures.⁴¹

In contrast to this emphasis on the forces of stasis, Maryvonne Nedeljkovic’s reading of Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) focuses on social *dynamism* and its effects on women.⁴² Nedeljkovic examines the novel’s female characters as respondents to, and agents of, change. Furthermore, she treats their mutating status as one of the

³⁹ Op. cit., p.238.

⁴⁰ Op. cit., p.36.

⁴¹ See, for example: Anjali Roy & Manasi Sinha, ‘Growing up in a Zenana’ in Viney Kirpal (ed.), *The Girl-child in Twentieth Century Literature* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1992), p.217; Jasbir Jain, ‘Erasing the Margins: Questioning Purdah’ in Jasbir Jain & Amina Amin (eds.), *Margins of Erasure: Purdah in the Subcontinental Novel in English* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1995), pp.1-2; Sarla Palkar, ‘Beyond Purdah: *Sunlight on a Broken Column*’ in Jain & Amin, op. cit., pp.108-109; Anuradha Roy, *Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers* (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1999), pp. 53-65, p.121.

⁴² Maryvonne Nedeljkovic, ‘The Role of Women in Kamala Markandaya’s Novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*’, *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, 8.1, 1985.

most important yardsticks by which the gradual advent of modernity into the rural environment is measured. However, continuity and change do not simply unfold over time, but also over space. Patrick Williams's reading of Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box* (1991) is particularly valuable in this context. It pays sustained attention to how the forces of resistance and regulation interact in the lives of women outside the 'homeland', as well as to the ways in which this interaction develops across generations.⁴³

My analysis of how diasporic women's fiction depicts the induction of females into particular social roles amalgamates these precedents. I focus on the extent to which the construction of womanhood is naturalised into stasis; but I also consider how far its development challenges the concept of an essential South Asian female identity. Furthermore, because I am concerned with diasporic women's writing as a body incorporating individual authors and works, I examine how (far) resistance and regulation emerge as significant themes between texts as well as within them. In other words, by covering the transition from first-phase to second-phase writing, I consider the extent to which the workings and contexts of resistance and regulation remain the same over time. Williams, for example, focuses largely on the relationship diasporic women have to traditional Subcontinental *mores*. Informed by the fact that most second-phase narratives are set in Britain, I also consider how female characters are regulated by, and resistant to, the gendered expectations that prevail in the society of resettlement.

Moreover, I devote a separate portion of the chapter to examining the depiction of marriage in South Asian women's fiction, and the changes it undergoes in the

⁴³ Patrick Williams, 'Inter-Nationalism: Diaspora and Gendered Identity in Farhana Sheikh's *The Red Box*, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 30.1, 1995.

transition from first-phase to second-phase writing. Orientated towards securing the welfare of society rather than individuals, marriage is an intrinsic part of the process by which a woman's identity is defined. It is the end towards which her upbringing is aimed. As such, it furnishes the rationale for many of the social regulations to which a girl is subjected, as well as providing another context in which she is expected to devote herself to the performance of functions for the benefit of others. However, marriage is also the site of numerous acts of resistance - whether to traditional gendered *mores*, or to those that prevail in the adopted cultural environment. It is, therefore, one of the most important means by which South Asian diasporic women's writing charts continuity and development in the construction of womanhood.

Chapter 2 examines how the chosen works represent the role of gender in the ideologies and practices of imperialism and Indian nationalism. It is also concerned with the ways in which these historical precedents inform the cultural politics of Britain as a destination for immigrants from the former colonies. Several of the selected texts draw a line of continuity between the operations of the Raj in India and racism in Britain - a fact that is acknowledged especially clearly in readings of Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* by Jasbir Jain, Emmanuel Nelson and Hena Ahmed.⁴⁴ I build upon their observations by explicating what these critics do not address overtly: the extent to which Markandaya alludes to the hierarchy of gender that underpins imperial ideology. Through the feminisation of the colonised people, and the masculinisation of their rulers, I consider how the novel traces the invasive and destructive exercise of imperial power from India through to the neo-colonial terrain of Britain in the mid-to-late

⁴⁴ Jasbir Jain, 'Strangers in Enemy Territory: Expatriates and Exiles', *LITCRIT* (Trivandrum), 7, 1978; Emmanuel S. Nelson, 'Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee and the Indian Immigrant Experience', *Toronto South Asian Review*, 9.2, 1991, pp.5-8; Hena Ahmed, 'Kamala Markandaya and the Indian Immigrant Experience in Britain' in Nelson, op. cit., pp.142-146.

twentieth century. I extend this analysis to second-phase texts such as *The Red Box*, with a view to elucidating how the gender politics of imperialism are institutionalised in the erstwhile metropolis.

In doing so, I cover ground that falls outside the ambit of existing analyses of women's texts such as Williams', by examining how the trope of the mixed-race relationship is deployed in a range of narratives as an index of diasporic neo-colonialism.⁴⁵ Kirpal and A.A. Sinha have drawn attention to the significance of the mixed relationship in *The Nowhere Man*, characterising it as emblematic of the sterility of cultural hybridity, and the incompatibility of Indian and British values.⁴⁶ Neither critic, however, considers whether the gender of each partner is of any significance - something of an oversight given the extent to which both sexual appropriation and the purported protection of women inform the exercise of colonial power. My reading of the selected works suggests that the prevalence of white male-Asian female partnerships is, in part at least, a deliberate allusion to the patriarchal gendering of races on which the rationale of imperialism depends, and from which its promotion of a paternalistic 'duty of care' derives. Moreover, I extend the ambit of this study further by examining how South Asian diasporic women's fiction represents the place of white women in the gendered imperial hierarchy, and their subjection to patriarchal norms.

⁴⁵ Although I employ the term 'race' without quotation marks, I am aware that the contentious nature of this descriptor is such that it is often punctuated in this way. As Steven Rose points out, "modern population genetics makes the concept of 'race' in the human context biologically meaningless, although still socially explosive. The definition of race is essentially a social one... While there are differences in gene frequencies... between population groups, these do not map onto the social criteria used to define race... Gene frequencies differ between people in North and South Wales, yet no-one would think of classifying those two populations as two different races." See Steven Rose, *Lifelines: Biology, Freedom Determinism* (London: Allen Lane, 1997), p.37. Similarly, when employing unparenthesised descriptors such as 'black' and 'white', I am aware that these are as inadequate chromatically as 'race' is biologically. The only context in which 'black' is punctuated in this dissertation (other than the present one) is when it is used to denote the collective name applied to political alliances of non-white groups.

⁴⁶ Kirpal, op. cit., pp.53-54; A.A. Sinha, *The Novels of Kamala Markandaya and Arun Joshi* (Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1998), p.19.

Depictions of 'homeland' nationalism in fiction have received more comprehensive critical attention than has the representation of imperialism. G.P. Sarma and Pramila Garg have produced notable volumes dedicated to examining nationalism in Indo-Anglian literature, including readings of works by Markandaya.⁴⁷ However, *The Nowhere Man* is considered in neither text. What commentary exists on Markandaya's *oeuvre* focuses largely on its depiction of communal factionalism, and of the ethics and feasibility of non-violent resistance. The same is true of Sudarshan Sharma's analysis of *Sunlight on a Broken Column*.⁴⁸ My examination of nationalism entails something of a shift of focus, as my principal interest is in the place of gender and women within the ethos and practical workings of the broad movement. Nasta's observation, that Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* disturbs and complicates patriarchal accounts of India's move towards self-rule, is especially useful here. I attempt to examine this aspect of the novel in some detail; but beyond this, I also attempt to locate a similarly critical perspective in other texts, such as *The Nowhere Man* and *The Red Box*. By such means I attempt to elucidate Markandaya's and Sheikh's ambivalence about the terms on which women are included in the nationalist struggle.

The nationalist legacy and its limitations have been explored more comprehensively in relation to second-phase diasporic narratives. Bromley and Schoene-Harwood read into Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) an allegory of nationalist cultural rediscovery; and both - Schoene-Harwood, in particular - emphasise the untenable nature of the protagonist's self-reinvention as an 'authentic' Indian

⁴⁷ G.P. Sarma, *Nationalism in Indo-Anglian Fiction* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1978); Pramila Garg, *The Freedom Movement in Indian Fiction in English* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1993).

⁴⁸ Dr. (Mrs.) Sudarshan Sharma, *The Influence of Gandhian Ideology on Indo-Anglian Fiction* (New Delhi: Soni Book Agency, 1982), pp.189-190.

daughter.⁴⁹ The incompatibility of the diasporic sensibility with exclusive national identities has also been remarked upon by Rosemary Marangoly George, who sees in immigrant writing a “disregard for national schemes”.⁵⁰ In order to extend studies such as these, I pay particular attention to a matter that Berthold Schoene-Harwood discusses implicitly, but that George does not address at all: whether the inability to endorse a ‘homeland’ identity as a form of neo-nationalist diasporic resistance is a function of the practitioner’s gender. Furthermore, I consider the extent to which the texts under consideration suggest that effective quasi-nationalist redress of the imperial legacy entails the symbolic disavowal of the male, whose supremacy underpins the ideology by which colonial rule justifies its imposition.

The focus of Chapter 3 is on myths of return and arrival. It is a topic that is concerned with the depth of the migrant’s attachment to the country of origin as well as the country of destination, and one that attempts to chart the physical and psychological journeying of South Asian diasporic women’s writing between ‘there’ and ‘here’. The myth of return has been conceptualised in the first instance in sociological contexts - most notably in histories of diaspora and race relations such as those by Ellis Cashmore and Barry Troyna, as well as in Anwar’s *The Myth of Return*.⁵¹ It describes the purportedly temporary condition of post-war migration from South Asia, and attempts to account for the migrant’s attachment to the country left behind.⁵² In the light of its definition in these terms, I examine how (far) Asian British women’s fiction addresses the material and economic factors that prompt departure and thwart return, and whether

⁴⁹ Bromley, op. cit., p.143, p.147; Berthold Schoene-Harwood, ‘Beyond (T)race: *Bildung* and Proprioception in Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me*’, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 34.1, 1999, p.163.

⁵⁰ Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth Century Fiction* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1996), p.171.

⁵¹ Anwar, op. cit; Ellis Cashmore & Barry Troyna, *Introduction to Race Relations* (London; New York; Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1990).

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.151-152

this literary engagement with the topic changes over time. Furthermore, I consider how (far) the ideal of return to the 'homeland' is revised in the transition from first to second-phase fiction.

Other, more psychological, conceptions of return that have been elaborated in sociological sources are also evident in critical readings of diasporic fiction. These prevail in the essays collected in Vera Mihailovich-Dickman's *Return in Post-Colonial Writing: A Labyrinth* (1994) which are as concerned with returns by means of memory, 'homeland' languages and literary structures, as they are with physical journeys.⁵³ Kirpal admits that, with the passage of time, the expatriate writer's ability to accurately imagine the 'homeland' is eroded.⁵⁴ Thus, even though she sees the writer's primary responsibility and attachment as being to his own people and culture, the impossibility of its fulfilment haunts this conviction, as the migrant's mental connection with the 'homeland' is not always reliable. It is within this framework that I read *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, extending its mode of analysis to *The Nowhere Man* in a way that challenges Kirpal's interpretation of Srinivas' mental return as the reclamation of his true identity.⁵⁵ In turning my attention to second-phase writing, I attempt to trace how the sadness that casts a shadow over the thwarted return in earlier texts gives way to an acceptance - even celebration - of the impossibility of recapturing what has been left behind.⁵⁶ Ralph Crane's reading of Leena Dhingra's *Amritvela* (1988) provides a useful

⁵³ Vera Mihailovich Dickman (ed.), *Return in Post-Colonial Writing: A Labyrinth* (Amsterdam - Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1994).

⁵⁴ Kirpal, op. cit., p.6.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 109-110.

⁵⁶ The shifting position of writing from the diaspora over time is reflected in the (re-)orientation of relevant literary criticism, from prioritising the nostalgia for 'home' of exile and expatriation, to a position that indicates a degree of rootedness in the new country. See, for example, Niven (ed.) op. cit. and Bromley op. cit.

framework for examining this development, which also extends the notion of return to cover a more metaphorical journey to capture a lost identity.⁵⁷

I also examine the ways in which women are represented as sustaining the desire to return to the place of origin. Uma Parameswaran claims that “one of the areas that can productively be explored is the gender difference in the kind and degree of nostalgia”.⁵⁸ Therefore, some of the ways in which women evince their mental attachment to the place from which they have come are addressed in this section of the chapter. My interest in this topic focuses squarely on the extent to which the gendering of the returnee’s identity determines the (im)possibility or (un)desirability of return to an ‘original’ self. Explored over the transition from first to second phase, it illuminates the emergence in later works of a potentially contentious emphasis on gendered difference from beneath the subsuming categories of ‘ethnicity’ or ‘race’. In this respect, the scope of this chapter overlaps with that of Chapter 2, inasmuch as it evokes the (in)ability of the South Asian woman to endorse in its entirety the adoption of a ‘homeland’ construction of womanhood as an act of neo-nationalist resistance.

Furthermore, this chapter addresses the symbiosis between myths of return and myths of *arrival*. I explore how psychological arrival in the country of destination is repeatedly hindered; and the extent to which the reactive strategy of return is engendered by this failure. In tracing the development of arrival across the second phase, I examine whether the concept remains a focus of lament (as an obstacle to return), or whether it is re-evaluated to permit a greater degree of settlement in the

⁵⁷ Ralph J. Crane, ‘ “Who...am...I?” Displacement and Identity in Leena Dhingra’s *Amritvela*’ in Crane & Mohanram (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp.5-7.

⁵⁸ Uma Parameswaran, ‘Home is where your feet are, and may your heart be there too!’ in Jasbir Jain (ed.), *Writers of the Indian Diaspora* (Jaipur; New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1998), p.32.

adopted country. To this end, I explore how locations are used to plot the co-ordinates of identity and belonging, in ways that challenge the supposedly singular, complete and bounded status of 'home'. I also focus on how the division of space is used to signify the changing shape of the community - that is to say, how it delineates the expansion or contraction of communal boundaries that include some and exclude others. Several readings of *The Nowhere Man*, notably those by Margaret Joseph, F.A. Inamdar and Madhusudan Prasad, are attentive to the social significance of open spaces and domestic dwellings in particular.⁵⁹ I apply the principles of such readings to other first-phase texts, but expand the topic by examining the import of *homelessness* within the context of inter-cultural dynamics. The trope can be seen to develop over the course of the *oeuvre*, as the notion of alternative and/or multiple homes emerges as a viable proposition in the second phase of diasporic fiction.

The trajectory from expatriation and exile to new belongings charted in diasporic literary criticism is also relevant to Chapter 4, which is concerned with generational shifts in families. George claims that the multi-generational cast is a typical feature of immigrant fiction, but limits her discussion of its effects to "a narrative tendency towards repetitions and echoes".⁶⁰ Amina Amin's reading of *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, however, is more emphatic about the *developments* that accompany the passage from one generation to the next.⁶¹ Both of these approaches frame my examination of how South Asian diasporic women's fiction treats continuity and change

⁵⁹ Margaret P. Joseph, *Kamala Markandaya* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1980), p.77; Madhusudan Prasad, 'Introduction' in Madhusudan Prasad (ed.), *Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya* (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1984), p.x; F.A. Inamdar, 'Image and Symbol Pattern in Kamala Markandaya's Novels' in Prasad (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.224.

⁶⁰ *Op cit.*, p.171.

⁶¹ Amina Amin, '*Sunlight on a Broken Column: The Disintegration of a Family*' in Kamini Dinesh (ed.), *Between Spaces of Silence: Women Creative Writers* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1994), pp.49-56.

within the family. I attempt to follow Amin's *and* George's precedents by emphasising how 'other' values and the changing parameters of identity act as forces of both fission and fusion between different generations of the family. Incorporated into this is a consideration of how the obstacles to arrival discussed in Chapter 3 illuminate the similarities or differences in each generation's political character. Monteith usefully interprets Randhawa's use of spatial barriers, such as walls and doors, in *A Wicked Old Woman* as indicative of the fissures within the Asian British community the novel depicts. However, she is also emphatic about the potential of inter-generational alliances (especially between women) to bridge some of the clefts in this population.⁶² In the light of this observation, I also pay particular attention to how the representation of the grandparent changes over time. This concern extends into a closer examination of the connection between inter- and intra-generational relationships than is permitted by the ambit of Amin's and Marangoly George's readings of family relationships.

There is little suggestion in George's observations that gender may exert an influence on the repetitive dynamics by which, she claims, the family narrative is characterised. In contrast, Gayatri Spivak is convinced that "the great *divide* between...the mother and daughter, in the new immigrant family, is one of the most instructive things to meditate on" (my emphasis).⁶³ For this reason, I devote a section of Chapter 4 to a discussion of how gender inflects inter-generational relationships within families. I examine the investment that each sex has in the reproduction of existing social norms, and the extent to which divergence from the parental precedent is rendered more or less problematic by the gender of the child. My discussion of

⁶² Sharon Monteith, 'On the Streets and in the Tower Blocks: Ravinder Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman* (1987) and Livi Michael's *Under a Thin Moon* (1992), (*Critical Survey*, 8.1, 1996), p.32.

⁶³ Cited in Williams, op. cit., p.50.

women's inter-generational relationships is framed by the contrast between Anuradha Roy's characterisation of the mothers in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* as the guardians and enforcers of traditional values, and Arundhati Chatterjee's portrait of Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* as the "universal mother" - all-encompassing and unconditionally supportive.⁶⁴ I consider the extent to which the (dis)integration of the mother-daughter relationship is determined by the rigidity and tenacity of the social *mores* outlined in Chapter 1.

Furthermore, I touch upon the significance of the motherless daughter, drawing on *Sunlight on a Broken Column's* depiction of Laila's orphan status. The examination of motherless daughters is extended to second-phase works to examine the extent to which a novel such as *The Coral Strand* (2001) echoes or diverges from the precedent set by Hosain's much earlier work. However, I build upon these readings by examining the evolution of the *quasi*-maternal figure whose ministrations supplement those of real mothers. This type of character falls outside the scope of existing commentaries on maternal relationships in diasporic women's writing; but it is, nonetheless, one whose significance develops in the second phase in ways that resonate with broader inter-generational developments in ethnic and gender identities. I also extend the examination of inter-generational dynamics between women by considering the various ways in which relationships between South Asian mothers and daughters are contextualised by representations of equivalent white relationships - a tendency that emerges most notably in the second stage of diasporic writing.

⁶⁴ Roy, op. cit., p.61; Arundhati Chatterjee, 'Rukmani, the Mother Figure in *Nectar in a Sieve*' in G.S. Balarama Gupta (ed.), *Studies in Indian Fiction in English* (Gulbarga: JIWE Publications, 1987), p.85.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the extent to which class identities promote division or solidarity between members of ethnic groups in general, and between women in particular. First-phase narratives set in the 'homeland' pay considerable attention to the enormity of the wealth gap under feudalism, and readings of relevant texts often underscore the perpetuation of this material division. Nedeljkovic's analysis of *Nectar in a Sieve* emphasises the inescapable poverty that Rukmani's family suffers, and although much of the critic's ire is directed at the caste system, it is conflated with the tenacious inequalities engendered by land ownership. While Nasta's examination of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is more emphatic about "the erosion of [the landlords'] elitist position", the novel's epilogue also suggests that some degree of social and economic privilege can survive immense social upheaval.⁶⁵ One area of interest is, therefore, how 'homeland' narratives represent relationships between different classes, and the continuity of the divisions between them.

As later works are largely concerned with the South Asian diaspora in Britain, the passage of class affiliations from the 'homeland' to the adopted country can also be explored through the comparison of first and second-phase fiction. *The Red Box* not only represents the material and experiential gap between the rural peasantry and the moneyed urban classes of contemporary Pakistan. It is also sensitive, as Williams' reading of this text demonstrates, to how the more exploitative relationships between different classes are carried into the diaspora in various forms.⁶⁶ However, Williams' attention to the *emergence* of class fissures and 'new' class identities within the Asian British population is limited. Therefore, one way in which I extend the scope of existing criticism is by examining in more detail how the writings of diasporic women treat class

⁶⁵ Op. cit., p.41.

⁶⁶ Op. cit., pp.52-53.

aspirationalism and its effects within the Asian British population. In doing so, I consider how the focus of second-phase texts upon communities, rather than on individual families, results in a more complex treatment of the ways in which immigrants negotiate between race and class identifications.

I also devote considerable attention in this chapter to the various ways in which class identities intersect with those of gender. Drawing upon the approved patterns of female socialisation outlined in Chapter 1, I examine Asian femininities as functions of class interest. In particular, I consider how, in the wealthier strata of 'homeland' society, both adherence to, and divergence from, traditional notions of acceptable femininity are means by which elite women are distinguished from those of other classes. My examination of the mutual articulation of class and gender is, in many ways, congruent with the issues surrounding the interaction of class and racial identities inasmuch as I am concerned with the extent to which class is accorded greater priority as a determinant of identity. To examine whether gender takes precedence over class in fictional representations, I explore how far the representation of women's (non-) conformity to dominant models of femininity is inflected by their position in the social hierarchy. Furthermore, I consider the extent to which the consequences of non-conformity are rendered more or less grievous by issues of class.

Much of my study of later diasporic narratives is informed by the suggestions of, among others, Modood and Steve Bruce, that the lower economic strata within the South Asian immigrant population are more likely to assert a traditional identity by observing 'homeland' practices in private *and* in public. The middle classes, by contrast, tend to confine their most identifiably ethnic practices to the private realm of

the home.⁶⁷ Among the factors underpinning these modes of differentiation is the extent to which each class is in touch with the *mores* of white society. That such contact may influence the character of femininity is suggested by Charlotte Butler who, citing Raza, asserts that the acquisition of middle-class status through education and income tends to lead Asian women into adopting more Westernised values.⁶⁸ The focus of second-phase writing on communities furnishes a greater number of classed portraits, enabling comparison of how far traditional norms inform the gender identities of women from different social strata in the diaspora. This topic also allows me to consider whether the link between class and gender identities is an immutable one, be it in the 'homeland' or in the diaspora.

Diasporic narratives also address the socio-economic underpinnings of relationship between white Britons and diasporised Asians; and Joseph's and Kirpal's respective analyses of class mobility in *The Nowhere Man* suggest a framework for examining the antagonistic dynamics between immigrants and 'hosts'.⁶⁹ I extend the lines of enquiry they establish by considering how the fear with which the immigrant's social ascendancy is viewed varies with the class of the 'host'. However, the scope of later works especially suggests that it is insufficient to concentrate only on the extent to which the white Briton's class identity influences his perception and acceptance of the Asian immigrant. For this reason, I also explore how the *immigrant's* class identity

⁶⁷ Tariq Modood, 'New Forms of Britishness: Post-immigration Ethnicity and Hybridity in Britain' in Rosemarie Sackmann, Bernhard Peters & Thomas Faist (eds.), *Identity and Integration: Migrants in Western Europe* (Aldershot; Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2003), p.83; Steve Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), p.83.

⁶⁸ Charlotte Butler, 'Cultural Diversity and Religious Conformity: Dimensions of Social Change among Second-generation Muslim Women' in Waltraud Rohot, Khachig Tololyan & Caroline Alfonso (eds.) *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁶⁹ Joseph, op. cit., p.73; Kirpal, op. cit., p.63.

affects his treatment at the hands of the 'host', thereby underscoring the link between class and the notion of arrival discussed in Chapter 3. In doing so, I bear in mind A. Sivanandan's observation of the connection between class and social integration: that the celebration of cultural negotiation between ethnic minorities and mainstream society is often "completely oblivious to the fact that there are whole sections of ethnic minorities mired in poverty and racism".⁷⁰ However, by also focusing on the potential for immigrant social mobility in the diaspora, Asian British women's writing raises the possibility of interrogating and, indeed, undermining racialised hierarchies. Roger Bromley's reading of *Anita and Me* is one example of a critique that draws attention to how the disenfranchisement of sections of the 'host' population can underlie the resentment directed at Asian immigrants who are perceived to be of higher status.

Chapter 6 examines the aesthetics of Asian British women's social-realist fiction. It is congruent with the preceding chapters in its concern with the changing contours of diasporic identity, and the interplay between the cultural 'materials' of the Subcontinental 'homelands' and those of the adopted home in Britain. Existing commentaries on uses of language in South Asian diasporic women's fiction tend to fall into two broad camps. One, exemplified by N.K. Jain and Ranjana Ash, focuses on the clarity, elegance and plausibility of the language, and is evident largely in relation to the works of Markandaya and Dhingra.⁷¹ The other, exemplified by Anita Desai's reading of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* alludes more to the mixture of linguistic influences evident in the author's prose style.⁷² My study is influenced more by the latter school of

⁷⁰ A. Sivanandan, 'The Colour Line is the Poverty Line: Interview' in Susan Greenberg (ed.), *Hate Thy Neighbour: The Dividing Lines of Race and Culture* (London: Camden Press, 1998), p.49.

⁷¹ N.K. Jain, 'Kamala Markandaya: *Nectar in a Sieve*' in N.S. Pradhan (ed.), *Major Indian Novels: An Evaluation* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1985), pp.82-83; Ranjana Sidhanta Ash, 'Writers of the South Asian Diaspora: A Survey of Post-War Fiction in English', *Wasafiri*, 21, 1995.

⁷² Anita Desai, 'Introduction' in Hosain, op. cit., p.x.

analysis, but I concentrate on an area that has been the focus of scant commentary: the relationship between English and Indic languages in the texts under consideration.

The theoretical framework for this section of the chapter is, consequently, derived from sociolinguistic sources, such as the work of Jean Aitchison, as well as from literary critical precedents notably the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin on linguistic hybridity.⁷³ My interest is not in simply acknowledging that the works in question, although written predominantly in English, draw upon a range of languages. Rather, it is more concerned with: how (far) the Indic languages are integrated into the body of the text; which terms are marked as foreign inclusions, and whether their presence may prove an obstacle to the unfamiliar reader. This section of the chapter touches upon the extent to which gender determines the nature and potential of linguistic hybridity; and in extending this study over the two phases of diasporic writing, I explicitly link the multilingual character of the text with its developing vision of inter-cultural negotiation. Therefore, my reading of the language of second-phase works is inevitably attentive to how conceptions of cultural hybridity change across the period under consideration.

The second section of the chapter is framed by Julia Kristeva's theories of intertextuality.⁷⁴ It concentrates on how the influences of *particular* literary works are apparent in the selected narratives - an interest that is informed to some extent by

⁷³ Jean Aitchison, *Language Change: Progress or Decay* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981); Mikhail Bakhtin, 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London; New York: Longman, 1988), pp.150-155; Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.20-22; Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.14-30.

⁷⁴ Rosalind Coward & John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London; New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp.51-53; Jay Clayton & Eric Rothstein, 'Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality' in Jay Clayton & Eric Rothstein (eds.), *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp.3-36; Allen, op. cit., pp.30-60.

Sandra Ponzanesi's reading of Sunetra Gupta's works and their "appropriation of...founding myths".⁷⁵ My examination focuses on how Eastern and Western intertexts are treated in the selected works: the contexts in which they are cited; and whether their 'original' significance is kept intact, or subverted. The relevance of gender, and of particular conceptions of cultural hybridity, to the relationship with the antecedent text is also discussed. In shifting my attention to second-phase writing, the same concerns inform my study, but the scope is widened in accordance with the aesthetic developments that become apparent in this later period. For example, in considering the cultural provenance of relevant intertexts, I examine the possibility that the selected writers display a consciousness of their works as part of a tradition in formation, evinced by a greater intertextual reliance upon other novels from South Asian diasporic *oeuvre*. Furthermore, I examine the purchase of non-literary influences on the chosen works, and whether their treatment varies according to their cultural source.

As an example of how intertextuality can encompass forms as well as individual texts, the third and shortest section of the chapter focuses on the treatment of the *bildungsroman* in South Asian diasporic women's literature. This is a form that Schoene-Harwood claims is of little relevance to narratives characterised by cultural dislocation.⁷⁶ I examine how far the selected first-phase texts support the veracity of this claim, and the extent to which this remains the case in second-phase writing. To expand the scope of this study, I pay particular attention to the remaking of the *bildungsroman* in diasporic fiction. I am especially concerned with how the writers' absorption of Indian narrative forms is used to challenge a Western literary model that is teleologically orientated towards the protagonist's self-realisation. Furthermore, I am

⁷⁵ Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Feminism and Diaspora in South Asian and Afro-Italian Women's Narratives* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Utrecht, 2000), p.146.

⁷⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.159.

interested in the extent to which these strategies challenge the purported universality and 'natural' logic of the *bildungsroman* form. Incorporated into this examination is a consideration of whether the narratives under consideration are of specific, 'local' relevance; or whether - in common with many examples of the *bildungsroman* - they are constructed to have a more metaphorical, inclusive applicability that bestows a paradigmatic status upon the diasporic experience.

Chapter 1

Continuity and Change in South Asian Constructions of Womanhood

Introduction

The induction of South Asian women into particular social roles is one of the principal themes in the texts under examination. A topic common to first and second-phase writing, it also unites narratives set in the 'homelands' with those located in the diaspora. Furthermore, it informs, or overlaps with, many of the concerns discussed elsewhere in this dissertation - hence the priority it is accorded as the focus of the first chapter. My concern here is with the ways in which Asian British women's fiction depicts the preparation of the young woman to become a wife and mother, and the extent to which it suggests that her eligibility as a spouse depends upon her social and sexual circumscription. In South Asian *milieux*, women are constructed as "the cultural carriers of the grouping who transmit group culture to the future generations".¹ Thus, it is, as Deniz Kandiyoti remarks, incumbent on them to act as "the custodians of cultural particularisms": to be living symbols of ethnic practices, and to conserve the community's customs.² Furthermore, their sexual probity often functions as one of the clearest "boundary markers" between the collectivity's *mores* and those of other groups - for which reason women's modesty is seen as fundamental to ethnic integrity and honour.³ Moreover, their duty to ensure the passage of cultural norms means that they are responsible for keeping children "within the boundaries of the collectivity, not only biologically but also symbolically".⁴

¹ Gita Sahgal & Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Introduction: Fundamentalism, Multiculturalism and Women in Britain' in Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis (eds.) *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain* (London: Virago, 1992), p.8.

² Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation' in Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p.377.

³ *Ibid.*, p.382. This belief underlies the (recently much-publicised) phenomenon of 'honour killing', that is committed to restore the reputation of families whose women are deemed to have strayed from the prescribed path.

⁴ Sahgal & Yuval-Davis, *op. cit.*, p.8.

Thus, it would appear that Nira Yuval-Davis is justified in claiming that the family is the cornerstone of how women are subjugated in the name of ethnic fidelity; for the cultural construction of femininity evidently envisages the family - parental or marital - as the field within which women are to operate.⁵ It is where women are inculcated into their 'correct' social roles, and where it is intended that their responsibilities be fulfilled. However, as Brah points out, marriage particularly is "a pivotal mechanism in the regulation and control of female sexuality".⁶ It is the end towards which a girl's upbringing is directed; and the emphasis placed on the biological legitimacy of the collectivity's children demands pre-marital chastity and post-nuptial fidelity. Therefore, this chapter also pays particular attention to the dynamics of marriage: how the responsibilities for which the young woman has been prepared are realised, and how the construction of gender established by her pre-marital training is reinforced by her responsibilities to her 'new' family.

In many South Asian cultures, religion is cited as the basis for gendered *mores*. Patriarchal ideologies construct the home as "the 'rightful' place" for women; and, as Rosemary Marangoly George observes, the *Manusmriti* scriptures that codify Hindu law represent domestic service as a woman's natural function.⁷ Its edicts place her under the authority of (in order) her father, husband and sons; and it is her duty to enable them to pass through the four stages of the *dharmic* life cycle.⁸ On this basis, George claims

⁵ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Ethnicity, Gender Relations and Multiculturalism' in Werbner & Modood (eds.), op. cit., p.195.

⁶ Brah, op. cit., p.76.

⁷ Yuval-Davis, op. cit., p.195. Composed in Sanskrit, these scriptures date from the 1st century BC. According to legend, they were authored by Manu who, in Hindu mythology, is the father of the human race. See George, op. cit., p.126.

⁸ The four stages are: religious student; householder; forest-dweller, and mendicant. According to Julius Lipner, "traditionally, Hindus have...spoken of the *dharma* of something in the sense of the essential characteristic, the basic property of that thing...socio-religiously, *dharma* is that which acceptably upholds private and public life, which establishes social, moral and religious order." See Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 186-187.

that, according to traditional prescription, a woman's "salvation lies in serving her household and her household gods", within which ambit fall the three aforementioned categories of men.⁹ Even where religious instruction is not gender-specific, the male domination of the institutions of interpretation often means that they are treated as especially applicable to women. For example, the *Koran* requires men *and* women to practise pre-marital chastity and marital fidelity. While Mirza Ghulam Ahmad acknowledges that failure to observe this prohibition results in "disgrace and humiliation for *both* parties" (my emphasis), he only uses one example to illustrate the social necessity of fidelity: one in which a husband is urged to divorce his wife for tolerating a sexual approach by another man.¹⁰ Leila Ahmed claims that "where [women's] lot is miserable...as in certain tribal areas, it is to be attributed to Muslim male tyranny, not Islamic advice".¹¹ Practically, however, the greater responsibility for upholding sacred tenets falls upon women, and it is they who first experience the consequences of any intensification in the collectivity's religious identity.¹²

What, then, are the effects of expatriation on the socialisation of South Asian women? Ponzanesi reminds us that "the notion of diaspora does not do away with gender inequalities" - hence the fact that some of the most vociferous fictional critiques

⁹ Op. cit., p.126. Although the selected novels do not cover the issue of widowhood, the cultural construction of this state, as characterised by Shirley Firth, underscores the 'divinity' of the husband. "If her primary purpose was to serve her husband as a god...her failure to keep her husband safe was both a source of blame by his family, and internalized guilt for her own supposed part in his death." See Shirley Firth, 'Hindu Widows in Britain: Continuities and Change' in Rohit Barot, Harriet Bradley & Steve Fenton (eds.), *Ethnicity, Gender and Social Change* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press), p.111.

¹⁰ Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, *The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam* (London: Islam International Publications Ltd., 1979), p.26.

¹¹ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p.43. Irshad Manji, however, points out that, on the question of women's treatment and position, the *Koran* is actually more inconsistent than Ahmed suggests; and that some endorsement can be found in its text for the exercise of male tyranny to which Ahmed refers. See Irshad Manji, *The Trouble With Islam: A Wake-up Call for Honesty and Change* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Co., 2004), pp.45-47.

¹² See, for example, Leila Ahmed, op. cit., pp.233-234, where the impact upon Pakistani women of General Zia ul-Haq's Hudood Ordinances is outlined. See also Sara Suleri, 'Women Skin Deep: Feminism and the Post-colonial Condition' in Williams & Chrisman (eds.), op. cit., pp.252-255 for a further elaboration of the same theme.

of gendering emerge from narratives concerned with the Asian populations of Britain.¹³ Women's behaviour can, as Yuval-Davis points out, "gain special significance in 'multicultural societies'", as a means of articulating immigrants' rejection of *mores* that seem threateningly at odds with their own.¹⁴ In order to uphold the collectivity's ethnic identity in such circumstances, women may find themselves under especially intense pressure to be "the primary bearers of a distinctive 'home' culture", and thus to remain "less assimilated, both culturally and linguistically into the wider society".¹⁵ To this end, as Yuval-Davis asserts, girls are likely to be subjected to much stricter social control than are boys. However, the gendered retention of 'homeland' customs is not simply a cultural-political response; it is also a means of coping with the psychological upheaval that accompanies relocation to another country. For first-generation migrants especially, the recreation of what Ballard terms *desh pardesh*, or a home-from-home, is a particular necessity in an unfamiliar land where assimilation is either difficult or undesired.¹⁶ If the norms of 'home' are most readily identified with the conduct of women, the conservation of their traditional roles becomes a virtual imperative.

However, the conservation of gendered *mores*, both at 'home' and abroad, cannot be attributed solely to their imposition by men. The extent to which immigrant women and their daughters resist or comply with their defining norms also determines their survival. Kavita Sharma points out that many Asian women internalise patriarchal values "as an essential part of their own culture" - a fact that may be explicable by the relative absence or exclusion of other ideologies of gender.¹⁷ The possibility of

¹³ Sandra Ponzanesi, *op. cit.*, p.2.

¹⁴ Yuval-Davis, *op. cit.*, p.197.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Kandiyoti, *op. cit.*, p.382.

¹⁶ Roger Ballard (ed.), *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Kavita A. Sharma, 'Sisterhood of Silence' in Malashri Lal (ed.), *Feminist Spaces: Cultural Readings from India and Canada* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Ltd., 1997), p.47.

punishment for 'deviant' behaviour may also deter women from interrogating cultural constructions of gender. Furthermore, membership of the family (and the larger cultural collectivity) has positive aspects that Brah is keen to assert. A sense of emotional connection and belonging are, for many women, reasons for the family to remain a primary means of self-identification. Moreover, "the need to assert cultural identity in an alien land" may militate against complete rejection of the male-governed family. Even where women are privately dissatisfied with the definition of their roles, other priorities - such as racial discrimination - may take precedence, with the result that their gender-specific concerns are relegated to a position of lesser importance. Thus, for many South Asian women, the situation is that delineated by Yuval-Davis: "a realization that to fight for their liberation as women is senseless as long as their collectivity as a whole is subordinated and oppressed".¹⁸

Women's ambivalent position - desirous of change in their circumstances, while simultaneously aware of more widespread forms of oppression - is discernible in the strategies they adopt when they *do* interrogate their subordination. This is, for example, evident in Ahmed's extensive overview of the history of Muslim women's activism, which elucidates two dominant patterns of critique.¹⁹ One endorses secularism and modernity as the way forward for women. The other, mindful of Western cultural imperialism, deploys the ethnic group's cultural repertoire to effect change from within - for example, interrogating the validity of traditional customs by referring to 'unadulterated' religious edicts. Both strategies can be discerned at work in the diaspora. The Pakistani British student, in whose case Akbar Ahmed was asked to intervene, exemplifies the first tactic, having chosen to "adopt Western civilisation" as a

¹⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Women, Ethnicity and Empowerment' in Ann Oakley & Juliet Mitchell (eds.), *Who's Afraid of Feminism?: Seeing Through The Backlash* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p.89.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp.169-234.

resistive strategy.²⁰ Yasmin Ali, however, focusing on the issue of girls' educational rights, points out that "an intellectual understanding of Islam, as opposed to simple obedience to theocracy" is "a potentially subversive force in the conservative communities of the North of England".²¹ Using Islam itself to critique the subjugation of Muslim women by their own people obviates the need to rely solely on the Eurocentric feminisms, whose inadequate accommodation of 'other' women's concerns and perspectives has been asserted by numerous 'black' feminists.²²

Consequently, critical positions emerge in the diaspora that interrogate South Asian *and* British norms of female socialisation. As Brah points out, the fact that immigrant women stress the importance of the family does not mean that they accept it must be a bastion of male privilege. Indeed, her research reveals that Asian British women are challenging several established notions of acceptable female conduct. Many girls, for example, aspire to marriages that are altogether more egalitarian than the traditional norm; and they are often more fiercely critical of the gendered division of labour than are their white contemporaries. However, they do not necessarily assume, as a result, that western marriage conventions offer a significantly better alternative. Rather, they see marriage *per se* as problematic, whatever its cultural provenance; and

²⁰ Akbar S. Ahmad, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), p.156. Ahmad was asked to mediate between this young woman and her family, particularly her father. The girl's brothers had "demanded death" as punishment for her rejection of Islamic *mores*. Ibid.

²¹ Yasmin Ali, 'Muslim Women and the Politics of Ethnicity and Culture in Northern England', in Sahgal & Yuval-Davis (eds.) op. cit., p.114. Butler also observes that "adherence to Islam enables [Muslim women] to construct roles that give them more freedom and choice". Op. cit., p.149.

²² See, for example, Heidi Safia Mirza, *Black British Feminism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997); Andrea Stuart, 'Feminism: Alive or Dead?' and Pratibha Parmar, 'Black Feminism: The Politics of Articulation' in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp.34-38, pp.104-112; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' in Williams & Chrisman, op. cit., pp.196-220. However, Fauzia Ahmad cautions that "in many instances, black feminist perspectives project pre-conceived attitudes towards Islam and Muslim women that are just as damaging as sexism and racism". See 'Still 'In Progress' - Methodological Dilemmas, Tensions and Contradictions in Theorizing South Asian Muslim Women' in Puwar & Raghuram (eds.), op. cit., p.51.

they recognise that many of the patriarchal norms associated most readily with South Asian societies may also operate within western cultural *milieux*.

Furthermore, the majority of Asian British women support the right of their sex to engage in paid work outside the home. Although, this entails a “double shift” of external *and* domestic work - for which reason some lament the absence of the extended family’s supportive network - many nonetheless defend women’s pursuit of an independent income.²³ Moreover, a number of Asian women in Britain have been - and are - engaging very actively in the fight against male-instigated abuse and violence. Brah points to the establishment of refuges by, and specifically for, Asian women, “to enable these victims of violence to work out their futures in the supportive environment of other Asian women facing similar problems”.²⁴ However, where expedient, the religious, cultural or caste exclusivity of some organisations takes second place to membership of broader political alliances. In short, Asian women are making highly considered decisions about when it is in their interests to maintain or challenge their collectivities’ ethnic identities.

Brah also suggests that the impetus for change is sufficiently widespread that it can no longer be characterised as a generational or gender-specific phenomenon. She points out that “many Asian *parents* are very keen for their daughters to gain higher-level qualifications” (my emphasis). Some of her case studies also suggest that, even when their initial reactions are ambivalent or even resistant, fathers and mothers often end up supporting their daughters’ academic and professional aspirations.²⁵ To some extent this can be accounted for by economic imperatives similar to those that

²³ Brah, *op. cit.*, p.77.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.82.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.80.

compelled an earlier generation of immigrant women to venture outside the home into paid employment. However, in several cases Brah observes a degree of positive encouragement that goes beyond such narrow explanation. Furthermore, the implementation of the arranged marriage system - so often deployed by the British media to characterise Asian culture at its most 'other' - testifies to cross-generational and cross-gender inquisitions of the status of women. Contrary to the stereotypical idea of tyrannical parents forcing their children into unwanted marriages, "a significant majority...saw the whole process as a joint undertaking" in which "there was scope for negotiation between the generations".²⁶ As Bhachu's research on the British Asian diasporas from East Africa reveals, economic activity enables women to wield more influence in the family - allowing them, for example, to exercise a greater degree of control over who and how they marry.²⁷ The socialisation of women is, therefore, one of the most important means by which the heterogeneity and dynamism of South Asian (diasporic) populations may be charted.

The socialisation of the South Asian woman: preparation for marriage

In this section of the chapter, I examine how diasporic women's fiction represents the South Asian girl's induction into the norms of feminine identity, especially in the period during which she is under the jurisdiction of her father and mother. Although the selected 'homeland' narratives of the first phase focus on different economic and religious *milieux*, the means by which a girl is socialised are remarkably

²⁶ Ibid., p.77.

²⁷ Op. cit., pp.38-39, 91-96, 165. Kulwant Bhopal also finds that the more highly educated an Asian woman is, the more likely, and better able she is to challenge the arranged marriage system - a tendency that Bhopal attributes to their greater self-sufficiency. See 'South Asian Women and Arranged Marriages in East London' in Rohit Barot, Harriet Bradley & Steve Fenton (eds.), *Ethnicity, Gender & Social Change* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), p.127.

similar. The higher value placed upon male children highlights how the inequality of the sexes is asserted from the moment of birth. This phenomenon is portrayed most clearly in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, which suggests that the reception of the newborn child depends on its gender and that of the parent. The tenacity of patrilineal values is reflected in Nathan's desire for "a son to continue his name".²⁸ He envisages their putative relationship in terms of a gendered destiny and inheritance: his boy will "walk beside him on the land", in a scenario that alludes to the transmission of responsibility and - in this case, imaginary - property from one generation of men to the next.²⁹ In the *milieu* of the (tenant) farmer depicted in the novel, the importance of land underlies the greater desirability of sons. While the conviction persists that women cannot meaningfully engage in agricultural labour, daughters continue to be regarded as a drain on family resources: mouths to be fed, and dowries to be accumulated; but incapable of compensating for such expense.

One way in which *Nectar in a Sieve* critiques the devaluation of the daughter is by interrogating the theoretical division of labour that underwrites her inferiority. The novel represents women as a vital part of the agricultural workforce, performing many tasks with as much competence as men. It is clear that the family is at a significantly greater risk of starvation if Rukmani does not participate in the tending of the crops. Markandaya also raises the possibility that the inequality of sons and daughters is reinforced by the self-serving investment males have in upholding the tenets of patriarchy. The novel's *menfolk* most insistently assert the lesser value of the daughter - a fact exemplified by the contrast between the subdued manner in which Nathan and Rukmani's father respond to Ira's arrival, and their jubilation at the birth of Thambi.

²⁸ Op. cit., p.20.

²⁹ Ibid.

While Rukmani accepts that her husband is disappointed at the birth of a daughter, the extent to which she subscribes to the same creed is debatable. Baby Ira is welcomed into the world by her mother and grandmother as lovingly as are her younger brothers.

Whether in the 'homeland' or the diaspora, the construction of womanhood is represented in first-phase works as orientated towards marriage and motherhood - preferably at an early age. The normality of this cultural expectation is established within the first few paragraphs of *Nectar in a Sieve*: the weddings of the protagonist - at the age of twelve - and her three sisters are described in a baldly matter-of-fact manner; and at no point does Rukmani question the wisdom of her parents' decision to dispose of their daughters in this way.³⁰ Indeed, according to Bano's mother in 'Time is Unredeemable' (a short story from Hosain's 1953 collection, *Phoenix Fled*), "both safety and wisdom counsel a [daughter's] early marriage".³¹ *Sumitra's Story* endorses a similar view: "Soon we *must* start thinking about looking for a husband" (my emphasis).³² Similarly, in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, the possibility of the teenaged Zahra's marriage is regarded as the potential fulfilment of an important duty, and as the culmination of a careful preparatory process. However, the inevitable separation of the daughter from her parents can cast a poignant shadow over what is otherwise a period of urgency - one during which the girl must develop the skills and attributes she will need as a wife. For Bap (SS), "[t]ime and place were illusions. One minute a baby was born

³⁰ B.S. Nagi observes that "the repercussions of child marriage are more serious for girls than for boys", leading towards "discontinuation of education [and] physiological and psychological damage... due to early and frequent pregnancies". See 'Trends in Age at Marriage among Boys and Girls' in Dharam Vir & Kamlesh Mahajan (eds), *Contemporary Indian Women: Vol. 3 - Kinship, Family and Marriage* (Delhi: New Academic Publishers, 1996), p.172. The educational implications of the traditional female role are discussed shortly.

³¹ Op. cit., p.59.

³² Op. cit., p.101.

and the next, or so it seemed to him, dowry settlements were being discussed with a future son-in-law".³³

Domestic skills are among the most vital that a young woman must acquire in preparation for marriage. Hosain alludes to their 'sanctification' in Aunt Majida's (*SOABC*) description of her daughter's exemplary upbringing. By means of juxtaposition, Majida suggests that religious observance and domesticity are proximate points on a single continuum, boasting that Zahra "has read the Quran... knows her religious duties...[and] can cook and sew".³⁴ The necessity of practical, household skills is also emphasised by the contempt in which Hasina is held in 'The Street of the Moon' (*PF*): "Can she hold a needle? No. Can she cook? No... Who will marry her for all her fine looks?"³⁵ The enforcement of a strictly gendered division of work within the family is not, however, exclusive to the 'homeland' narrative. It is a practice that, in first-phase fiction, survives the passage to other countries and cultural environments, as *Sumitra's Story* testifies. Smith's portrayal of the absolutism with which the division of labour is enforced underscores the constructed nature of supposedly essential feminine responsibilities.

[Sumitra] turned suddenly and looked at Mai. "Do you like cooking?" she asked, wondering how her mother could bear this life day after day. Mai was bewildered.

"What questions you ask!" she replied. "I don't know. Women cook for their families. You must help me and learn to cook for your own family..."³⁶

³³ Ibid., p.6.

³⁴ Op. cit., p.24.

³⁵ Op. cit., p.28.

³⁶ Op. cit., p.101.

The representation of domestic service also underscores its importance in maintaining the inequality of the sexes. In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Zainab attends to the needs of her mother, father and *brothers*. While *all* men are served, a woman is only free to be the beneficiary of such efforts when the household acquires another - usually younger - woman to perform the relevant tasks. Smith too suggests that the patriarchal imbalance of power in the family is manifest in its distribution of responsibility. The seniority that age theoretically bestows on Sumitra's grandmother is superseded by the inferiority of her gender - a fact made apparent by the older woman's domestic servility: "Give your uncle that bit, it is tastier. I will have the burnt piece. I am only a woman".³⁷ Through the imperious manner in which Bap and Singhvi address their daughters and wives, Smith reiterates how the division of labour entrenches sexual inequality. The tone each man adopts befits the 'master-servant' dynamic of their relationships with women, thereby suggesting the vested interests that inform their assertive defence of women's domesticity.

In first-phase fiction, the 'correct' socialisation of women is secured by the inhibition of other developmental opportunities. Both Hosain and Smith place particular emphasis on how gender determines access to academic education. Singhvi (SS) easily envisages a glittering future for his nephew: "He is going to get a scholarship, very clever boy, probably be a doctor or lawyer or something, have much money".³⁸ His teenage daughter, however, can no longer attend school as she must fill the domestic vacuum left by her mother's death. Similarly, while it is taken for granted that Laila's (SOABC) male cousins will attend university, there would ordinarily be no such assumption about Laila herself. Only her father's insistence on the unconventional

³⁷ Ibid., p.125.

³⁸ Ibid., p.10.

nature and level of his daughter's education prevents her from having an upbringing identical to Zahra's. Laila's (*SOABC*) formal schooling outside the home, and its extension to tertiary level, are anomalous in a world where educating a woman beyond the demands of domesticity is seen as, at best, extravagant. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, for example, Rukmani's mother views literacy as a pointless skill for a daughter to possess. 'Extra' education is often depicted as justifiable only if it renders a girl more marriageable. Zahra (*SOABC*) is taught a little English because it is "what young men want now".³⁹ Sumitra's parents also see the prospect of a more propitious marriage as the best consequence of their daughter's educational success: "It is good you have passed your exams. You will marry well!"⁴⁰ At worst, the 'excessive' education of girls is viewed as undesirable. As Hosain and Smith suggest, school attendance enables girls to share ideas with people their families consider social 'others', and is thus instrumental in the development of an interrogative capacity.

Just as the education of girls is, according to first-phase fiction, implicitly circumscribed by the prospect of marriage, so too is their social conduct. At the heart of this norm lies the 'management' of female sexuality; for any perceived violation of the edicts of modesty can significantly reduce a woman's marital eligibility. In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Laila's defence of a young couple's elopement is enough to disqualify her from consideration as a potential wife for Begum Waheed's nephew. Citing the couple's love as the reason and justification for their actions, Laila is seen as shamelessly able to comprehend emotions underpinned by sexual attraction. In *Sumitra's Story*, a night spent without permission at a (female) friend's house may be

³⁹ Op. cit., p.24.

⁴⁰ Op.cit., p.101. Ania Loomba observes that "arguments for women's education in metropolitan as well a colonial contexts rely on the logic that educated women will make better wives and mothers". See *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), p.218.

sufficient to bring ineradicable shame upon a daughter: “You spent a night away from home. We will never get you and your sisters good husbands now.”⁴¹ The damage that a woman’s lack of circumspection inflicts upon the family’s *izzat* - its moral reputation - is such that Jumman (*SOABC*) can claim that *his* “honour was besmirched” by Nandi’s unchaperoned visit to the men’s quarters.⁴² Her action, like Sumitra’s, is seen by others as indicative of parental failure to instil the correct values, which deem that a lone woman inevitably places herself in the way of temptation.

In first-phase fiction, the limited - and limiting - conception of female modesty is repeatedly held up to scrutiny. Hosain critiques the rigidity of dominant attitudes by highlighting how women’s lives become expendable under the aegis of a strict moral code. In Saliman’s (*SOABC*) view, it is preferable for a woman to die in childbirth than to bear the slur of shamelessness that examination by a male doctor would bring. In the same novel, Jumman threatens his daughter with death for tainting his reputation. First-phase novels also interrogate such norms by claiming that, although socially constructed as the acme of morality, unthinking adherence to circumscriptive norms can hinder a greater good. In a gesture reminiscent of Sonya in *Crime and Punishment*, Ira (*NLAS*) prostitutes herself to ensure that her malnourished brother is fed.⁴³ The fact that she is, thereafter, the village pariah demonstrates the greater importance attached to extra-marital sex than to the reasons for it. What Ira sees, and what the villagers and her father cannot accept, is the possibility that her actions are those of a higher morality.

⁴¹ Op. cit., p.120.

⁴² Op. cit., p.26.

⁴³ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, translated by Constance Garnett (London: Everyman Library, 1911).

The premium placed on women's moral probity is underscored in first-phase works by their more restrictive upbringing. Social circumscription begins in earnest at the onset of physical maturity, the point from which girls are regarded as legitimate objects of male interest. First-phase works provide several critical portraits of how young women's freedom is curtailed to preserve their value in the marital marketplace. Ira's (*NIS*) ignorance of her beauty and its effects elicits Rukmani's pity for a daughter who is "bewildered by the many injunctions we laid upon her".⁴⁴ However, the most complete form of restriction is represented in Hosain's works. Focusing on *purdah* [the concealment of women from non-familial men by means of the *burqa* and/or domestic confinement] these provide the most assiduous first-phase critiques of women's social circumscription. Hosain's treatment of the practice in *Phoenix Fled*'s 'The Loss' alludes to its erasure of female identity: Amma walks "ghostlike behind her escort in her veiling 'burqa'".⁴⁵ *Sunlight on a Broken Column*'s critique is multi-faceted, one of its suggestions being that *purdah* undermines its own rationale. By presupposing that the subtext of most male-female interactions is sexual, it encourages this limited perception in its adherents, and thereby sets up the psychological conditions for the fulfilment of its own 'prophecy': the concealment of women actively provokes curiosity about the female body.⁴⁶

Furthermore, in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, the elopement of a pair of students whose social contact is prohibited by the rules of *purdah*, indicates that however comprehensively it is practised, the custom cannot guarantee its intended aims.

⁴⁴ Op. cit., p.34.

⁴⁵ Op. cit., p.129.

⁴⁶ Sarla Palkar is especially attentive to the psychological consequences of *purdah*, particularly its effect on the female psyche. Op.cit., pp.106-118.

Although Mrs. Wadia attributes the girl's actions to innate immorality, Hosain suggests that the enormity of her transgression is prompted by the extremity of the restriction placed upon her. Aspects of the 'homeland' scenario find a resonance in *Sumitra's Story's* diasporic narrative. Within the expatriate community it depicts, women are characterised primarily as sexual beings who must cover their bodies - if not absent themselves entirely from male domains - because of the distraction they 'inevitably' create. The free mixing of the sexes that Sumitra cannot avoid at school is otherwise forbidden: "No one was to go out alone at night, no one was to go to English clubs, no one was to attend teenage parties".⁴⁷ Smith also reiterates Hosain's concern about the consequences of imposing excessively tight restrictions upon girls. *Sumitra's Story* suggests that the drastic course Sumitra takes in running away from home is a direct result of her parents' inflexible views about their daughters' social freedom.

There are a number of continuities between first and second-phase depictions of the construction of womanhood, which emphasise the tenacity of its traditional conception. The lesser value accorded the female child, evident in Rukhsana Ahmad's *The Hope Chest* (1996), emphasises how the acquisition of daughters remains onerous, especially in the poorer sections of Asian society. Aijab Khan's anger at the attempted treatment of his sick baby daughter - whose welfare he regards as "only *his* business" (my emphasis) - is implicitly informed by his belief that another female child will be a burden to his family.⁴⁸ Second-phase narratives also reiterate the greater value attached to sons in *diasporic* communities. Randhawa underscores the importance attached to the continuation of the family name through the male line in *Hari-jan* (1992). The sexual inequality that such a credo perpetuates, and the concomitant relegation of women to the

⁴⁷ Op. cit., p.76.

⁴⁸ Op. cit., p.38.

margins of society, are possible reasons why the novel's female protagonist adopts the name by which Gandhi referred to India's Untouchables. Similarly, Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) contrasts the status of the "waste-of-space little girl" with that of the "little prince" son - the male inheritor of the 'kingdom', as envisaged by Nathan in *Nectar in a Sieve*.⁴⁹

The expectation of marriage and motherhood provides another common thread between first and second-phase texts. Several second-phase works suggest that, among first-generation immigrants, the conviction persists that their single, female protagonists *ought* to be married. Angie in *Transmission* (1991) and Tania in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* are subjected to the kind of questioning that conceives of their lone status as a problem needing rectification. Indeed, in some second-phase depictions, gendered expectations are based on so profound an internalisation of 'homeland' norms that even direct experience of their shortcomings cannot foster a more critical attitude towards their edicts. Despite having been left by her husband to raise three children single-handedly, Ammi (*AWOW*) still believes that her daughters *must* marry, and regards their refusal to do so as an act of infidelity to the family as grievous as that committed by their father. Other novels, such as *The Hope Chest*, suggest that the imposition of such expectations upon younger generations is latently informed by the parents' desire to validate the course of their own lives. Shahana's ambitions for her eldest daughter extend beyond merely finding her an appropriate match; she also searches for a man whose character resembles that of her own husband.

⁴⁹ Op. cit., p.198. Syal and Randhawa suggest that couples will persist in having children in the hope of conceiving a son. Parents in both of their novels believe that, having had two female children already, they have 'paid their dues' and should now rightfully have a boy.

In common with its predecessor, second-phase fiction suggests that the expectation of marriage imposes a brevity and preciousness upon the parent-daughter relationship. The tension between the social characterisation of the daughter as a marriageable adult, and the parent's consciousness of her childish vulnerability - most evident among first-phase texts in *Sumitra's Story* - is especially apparent in phase two in *The Hope Chest*. Rehmat Bibi accepts that "soon it will be time to let [Reshma] go"; but she is also anguished by the prospect of losing her "sensible and wise *little girl*" (my emphasis).⁵⁰ As is the case in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Ahmad's novel sensitively depicts the sadness the mother experiences, knowing that the child to whom she has such a strong emotional attachment will, all too soon, be lost. By implication, the abrupt and sometimes harsh treatment to which Reshma is subjected is an attempt by her mother to fortify both of them against the sorrow of their inevitable parting. Nonetheless, the preference for marriage at a young age remains a constant between the phases - and, indeed, between the 'homeland' and the diaspora. Harjinder's (*H-J*) decision to stay at school beyond the compulsory age is a source of displeasure to her mother: she perceives it as a deliberate act of procrastination, undertaken in preference to "hit[ting] the marriage trail".⁵¹

The control of a girl's social conduct, which, in part, informs the preference for earlier marriage, is also depicted as a vexatious matter in second-phase works. If anything, the importance of restricting girls' social interactions is magnified in diasporic narratives, where the threat posed by 'other' cultural values is deemed to require a more vigilant, collective strategy of resistance. Although prohibitive action is rooted in a fear of "what would happen to women and *children* under the English influence" (my

⁵⁰ Op. cit., pp.39-40.

⁵¹ Op. cit., p.15.

emphasis), it is evident that concern for the welfare of the younger generation is not as gender-neutral as suggested.⁵² In several second-phase diasporic narratives, the circumscription of young women's freedom is depicted as a communal responsibility in a way that boy's social conduct is not. Girls are made aware that if they are seen in public places other than those permitted by necessity, they may be called to account by people outside their immediate families. The protagonists in *A Wicked Old Woman*, *The Red Box* and *Hari-jan*, are all obliged to exercise considerable circumspection about their visibility to preserve what freedoms they have - if necessary, lying about their whereabouts.

The continuity between first and second-phase works is thus also evident in the fact that boys are subjected to much less rigorous surveillance than girls. *The Red Box* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* offer contiguous, if more overt, representations of this inequality than *Sumitra's Story's* more narrowly focused narrative can. In these later works, young men are able to act with relative impunity - an imbalance that Sheikh also illustrates in her portrayal of *purdah*: the Said daughters are barely seen in public, while their brother is a frequent face at 'high society's' more licentious parties. Moreover, the imperatives of *izzat* enable males not only to police the conduct of their female contemporaries, but also to turn the conventions of female chastity to their own advantage.⁵³ The threat to publicly impugn her moral reputation affords Arif a degree of power over Tahira that cannot be reciprocated within the conventional construction of gender.

⁵² Ravinder Randhawa, *A Wicked Old Woman*, op. cit., p.7.

⁵³ According to Yasmin Ali, "Young men in [northern] colleges often form an informal intelligence network with a hotline to 'opinion-formers' in the community: reporting, for example, on unapproved relationships, attendance at social events or even styles of dress and immodest behaviour". Op. cit., p.120.

The creed of female morality is critiqued further by being portrayed as exploitable by non-Asians. A policeman exerts his will over Tahira and Gita by alluding to the possibility of their punishment for immodest behaviour: “What were nice Pakistani girls doing talking to boys, sitting alone with them in a shed? What would their fathers say about it?”⁵⁴ The policeman’s tactic in *The Red Box* reiterates a concern raised in the first phase by Hosain: that a sexual subtext is always assumed when insufficiently familial men and women mix. The same idea is critically evoked in *Harijan*, whose protagonists are aware that, should a young female be seen in the company of a male, even “an accidental meeting gets turned into something that it isn’t”.⁵⁵ The social restrictions by which girls must abide also account for the representation across the phases of schools as places in which young Asian-British women are able to question the parameters that define their Asian identities. This has less to do with the formal curriculum, than with the fact that School is one of the few places outside the home to which parents are obliged to allow their daughters access, and which affords them a measure of critical distance from parental values.

Second-phase novels continue to underscore and critique the division of labour between girls and boys. The link between domestic service and marriage is made clear in *The Hope Chest*, where the first exchange between Reshma’s parents revolves around their daughter’s household responsibilities, and the extent to which her father believes these may serve her possible betrothal. However, Rehmat Bibi’s arguments against acceptance of the proposal are based upon the enormity of the domestic burden that will be placed upon Reshma’s shoulders: “She can’t take care of two children... What do

⁵⁴ Op. cit., p.112.

⁵⁵ Op. cit., p.42.

girls have to do but work - for the rest of their lives, once they go to their own homes".⁵⁶

The Red Box's interrogation of the labour division, like that in *Nectar in a Sieve*, does not simply focus on the persistent belief that there is a 'natural' distribution of responsibility; it also emphasises how little relation this belief bears to the actual extent and breadth of women's work:

"[T]hey're always saying how women in Pakistan don't really do that sort of work, you know, producing things...I read somewhere that Pakistan's own official documents say that only one hundred and forty-eight women work on farms and things".⁵⁷

There are, however, numerous ways in which the texts of the second phase develop the treatment of South Asian women's socialisation. *The Red Box* offers a more critical assessment of the complicity of tradition and religion in the naturalisation of women's domesticity, illuminating how the selective reading of religious texts enables the diasporic survival of this norm.

"What about these different roles? Does this text tell you what the roles of a woman are?"

"No, but its sort of," Nasreen was struggling for clarity, "you know the woman, she brings up the children, and she looks after the house, she cooks the dinner, and she washes her husband's clothes. Everything like that, and the man's a sort of breadwinner. He earns for them".

"...Is that what a woman is, then, in her natural state? Someone who gives birth and looks after the family? Is that what the surah tells you?"

This surah doesn't actually say it."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Op. cit., p.42.

⁵⁷ Op. cit., p.155.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.129-130.

There is also evidence, in some second-phase novels, of a willingness to disentangle the sexist division of labour from the value of the tasks themselves. Asserting that there is nothing inherent in such work that it can only be carried out by women, Randhawa's works especially represent domestic tasks in a way that tacitly admits their practical value. Furthermore, the weight of domestic responsibility that Suresh bears in *Hari-jan* enables Harjinder to describe the - usually unequal - distribution of household chores in a tone of *mock*-chastisement: "Now if [boys'] mothers kept them busy and occupied, doing the housework, shopping, cooking, cleaning, they wouldn't have time to get together and play war games".⁵⁹

Second-phase fiction also testifies to the revision of women's education and non-domestic work over time and space. In the chosen first-phase novels, the value or otherwise of education is circumscribed by the inevitability of a girl's marriage. Second-phase texts, however, provide many examples of daughters pursuing education for its own sake, and especially for the professional opportunities it may afford. *A Wicked Old Woman*, *The Red Box* and *Anita and Me* suggest that many parents live in the hope that their children will enjoy more fulfilling lives than their own - an ambition often channelled as much through daughters as through sons. While this does not mean that the expectation of marriage is abandoned, it is invoked rather less as a reason for aspiring to educational and professional success. Nargis Rashid (*TRB*), for example, harbours ambitions for her daughter "to stay at school, and do better and better and definitely get a good job".⁶⁰ Some mothers also embrace the disruption of the gendered socialisation cycle that such parental aspirations may entail - a possibility that some parents embrace. When Kuli (*AWOW*) decides to leave school and ask for a traditional,

⁵⁹ Op. cit., p.27.

⁶⁰ Op. cit., p.146.

arranged marriage, both of her parents are shocked and angry; but her mother feels especially keenly her daughter's "loss of glittering opportunities", and "wilful self-destruction".⁶¹ To Darshana, Kuli's choice represents the desecration of her wish that her child will "know all that [she] can never know...see in all the ways in which [she is] blind" and "give life to [her] dreams for life to change".⁶²

The revision of the female role is symptomatic of the redefinition that *izzat* undergoes in the diaspora, where financial imperatives impact upon the 'homeland' definition of honour. Several second-phase texts acknowledge the importance of women's earnings in enabling the immigrant family to retain its dignity and improve its status, both within and outside the ethnic community. The reconfiguration of *izzat* also enables young diasporic women in second-phase texts to move within mixed-sex societies, especially when it is beneficial to their (higher) education and professions to do so. In *Hari-jan*, neither Harjinder nor Ghazala is prevented from attending a co-educational school, just as the protagonists of both of Srivastava's selected works are able to attend university and live away from home. Furthermore, the fact that Angie in *Transmission* works in a male-dominated environment is a matter of little consequence to her parents, who support her professional aspirations. *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* suggests that in the diaspora at least, the social interaction of the sexes, which in other second-phase texts is represented as a focus of parental vigilance, becomes more acceptable with necessity and the passage time.

The teenagers lounged easily against each other...Some of them smoked.
None of them noticed Tania. They weren't looking over their shoulders,
wondering who was watching. When did it become easier?⁶³

⁶¹ Op. cit., p.52.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Op. cit., p.42.

A further development in second-phase fiction is its suggestion that more overt expressions of dissent against gender norms may be possible, compared to the covert anguish of Rukmani (*NIAS*) in the first phase. Rani's (*THC*) anger at her situation is articulated in a number of oblique, yet very visible ways. Her anorexia externalises her disintegrating sense of self in the face of her mother's conservative ambitions, deliberately "blight[ing]" the "moment of [physical] bloom" at which society would see her as most eligible for marriage.⁶⁴ Rani's artistic endeavours also offer a public, if allusive, critique of how her mother's unquestioning replication of social forms has reduced her and her daughter's lives to nothing more than husks.

Guavas, mangoes and tiny berries froze into a stony death beneath her sculpting touch and lost all their wholesome flavour, smell, taste and nourishment as they were reduced to juiceless sterility, in her lonely attempts to replicate reality.⁶⁵

Second-phase fiction is also characterised by the clear suggestion that the norms of socialisation to which South Asian women are subjected exist in other cultural *milieux*. In an ambiguous turn of phrase, Kuli (*AWOW*) claims that "even in England's 'liberal' land a woman is still nothing except her spot of blood, her vaginal passage".⁶⁶ This suggests not only that 'homeland' *mores* persist in the diaspora, but also that white womanhood too is defined primarily in terms of sexuality. In one of the novel's many overt comparisons between cultural constructions of gender, *Anita and Me* delineates the sexual contradictions that beset English girls. Peer imperatives may push Anita towards sexualisation at a young age - Sheikh too makes allusions in *The Red Box* to the

⁶⁴ Op. cit., p.154.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.165.

⁶⁶ Op. cit., p.123.

(appearance of) maturity cultivated by young English girls - but society also condemns her promiscuity with a ferocity that is not applied to males. Furthermore, as Nasreen (*TRB*) observes, the naturalisation of women's domesticity and motherhood is not confined to Asian societies. It applies to "most women in the world".⁶⁷

Marriage, gender and power

As is already evident, the conviction that a girl must marry shapes her upbringing to a very significant extent. My concern in this section is with the ways in which marriage reinforces the naturalisation of gender roles; and, especially, how (far) the pre-marital construction of womanhood extends into the contract between husband and wife. In the selected first-phase texts, the majority of which are set in the 'homelands', marriages tend to be arranged in accordance with tradition: a girl's husband is chosen, not by her, but by her parents and other elders. Hakiman Bua's (*SOABC*) insistence that Aunt Abida was *fated* to wait many years to marry is, therefore, true inasmuch as her mistress has no decisive role in the process. The passivity of the servant's language emphasises that Abida is expected to accept unquestioningly the judgements of others on the suitability of a potential spouse. Furthermore, since the family is regarded as the fundamental unit of society and marriage, the pre-existence of love between putative partners is deemed unnecessary.⁶⁸ Indeed, given the regulatory functions that marriage is intended to perform, love is often seen as an anti-social emotion: shamelessly cognisant of sexual attraction, and too individualistic in its focus.

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.130.

⁶⁸ See B.C. Parekh, *The Indian Family* (Southall: Scope Communications, 1977), pp.9-11.

Being socially and morally obligatory, the arrangement of children's marriages is an integral part of a parent's "burden of responsibility".⁶⁹ The lengthy celebrations surrounding a wedding testify, in part, to the relief that attends the successful discharge of this duty. However, the principal function of marriage, according to Ballard, is "the maintenance and advancement of family honour" which, in *Nectar in a Sieve*, depends upon socio-economic elevation or decline.⁷⁰ While the marriages of Rukmani's older sisters benefit their status as daughters of the village headman, the same is not true for Rukmani herself. Her betrothal to an illiterate tenant farmer indicates the low esteem in which her father's dwindling finances and obsolete position are held by the time she reaches marriageable age. Hosain's works place as much emphasis on how marriage, as a tool of moral containment, buttresses a family's *izzat*. To the parents of Bano and Arshad in 'Time is Unredeemable', it provides a form of "insurance", while in Zahra's (*SOABC*) view, "[t]he cure for a good girl is to get her married quickly; the cure for a bad girl is to get her married quickly".⁷¹ The social, cultural and moral imperatives towards marriage are also evident in *Sumitra's Story*, which suggests that, in the diaspora, the preservation of an established *modus vivendi* through endogamous marriage is essential to a family's reputation. Convention demands that children "obey their parents [and are] partners in arranged marriages within the Patel clan".⁷²

The treatment of arranged marriage varies considerably in the first phase of South Asian diasporic women's writing. Partnerships such as that of Zahra and Naseer (*SOABC*), in which both parties abide by convention and fulfil their roles, are depicted as successful on their terms, if not on Laila's. Overall, however, Hosain and Smith are

⁶⁹ *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, op. cit., p.113.

⁷⁰ Cited in Faith Robertson Elliot, *Gender, Family and Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), p.49.

⁷¹ Op. cit., p.58; op. cit., p.29.

⁷² Op. cit. p.72.

highly critical of how the arranged marriage system tends to treat the couple at its centre as “two small cogs in a huge social machine”.⁷³ Both writers endorse the love-marriage as a more humane practice in its apparent respect for individuality and autonomy, and its refusal to demonise love. However, Markandaya’s works, especially, offer more unequivocally positive representations of arranged marriages, which suggest that they can evolve into genuinely loving partnerships. Nathan (*NIAS*) sees a beauty in Rukmani that eludes everyone else. He neither resents her relative erudition, nor prevents her from exercising it; and in the ‘town’ chapters of *Nectar in a Sieve*, the mutuality of support between the partners is often highly affecting. With Nathan’s death, “the sweetness of [Rukmani’s] life is gone”.⁷⁴ This perception resonates with the barren imagery that Markandaya employs in *The Nowhere Man* to convey the profundity of Srinivas’ grief at Vasantha’s death. A recurrent motif, it counterpoints the tropes of fertility used elsewhere in the novel to suggest the fulfilment that an arranged marriage can bring - an implication reinforced by the contrast between the Srinivas’ loving partnership and the Radcliffes’ fractious relationship.

A greater degree of consensus is apparent in the first-phase treatment of gender inequality in marriage. The negotiation process that traditionally precedes a couple’s engagement underscores the imbalance of power between its male and female participants by emphasising the secondary position occupied by the potential bride’s family. The extent to which first-phase texts ‘address’ these inequalities often depends on the *absence* of certain kinds of representation. In none of the selected novels is an engagement initiated by a girl’s family. Putative brides and their associates are obliged to await a proposal - a convention that is in keeping with the construction of passivity as

⁷³ Op cit., p.215.

⁷⁴ Op. cit., p.62.

a feminine virtue, indicative of modesty.⁷⁵ *Sunlight on a Broken Column* pays particular attention to the exclusion of women's agency from the procedures around marriage. Nandi's actions suggest that it is only possible by making no genuine emotional investment in the conventions of marriage that a woman is able to exercise power. A girl who takes pleasure in *acting* the part of the bride, Nandi is prepared to marry "the first old goat [her] father finds, if he will keep [her] in comfort"; but she retains the right to believe that "no man is worth a woman's loving or trusting".⁷⁶ In order to marry the man of *her* choice, Laila risks being - and, indeed, is - estranged from her family.

The reinforcement of the Subcontinental woman's disadvantageous social position is most emphatically evident in depictions of the power balance *within* marriage. According to tradition, a wife's responsibilities are orientated towards the welfare of her husband's kin, as Zainab in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* well knows: she fully expects to serve the family into which she marries. No reciprocal duty of care is expected from a husband towards his wife's parents and siblings, illustrating further the elevated position of the male partner and his associates. However, the central duty of a wife is to provide her husband with a male heir. Should she fail to do so, he is permitted to look elsewhere for the fulfilment of this function, as Nathan does in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Although Rukmani accepts his disappointment at her failure to produce a son, she is also dissatisfied with this state of affairs, especially when her own daughter falls victim to infertility: "sometimes, when I was weak or in sleep, while my will lay dormant, I found myself rebellious, protesting, rejecting and no longer calm".⁷⁷ Through

⁷⁵ According to Kalwant Bhopal, the inequality inherent in the betrothal process is evident in the fact that women have little, if any, right to refuse a proposal of marriage. "If a girl says no, it's considered a bad thing...but not for boys, they can say no as much as they like, and people just think they're being careful." See Kalwant Bhopal, 'South Asian Women and Arranged Marriages in East London' in Barot, Bradley & Fenton (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.121.

⁷⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.169.

⁷⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.66.

her protagonist's consuming anxiety about the precariousness of her position, Markandaya critiques the detrimental impact upon women of this stipulation in the arranged marriage's contract. What is also striking about Rukmani's private admission is the attention it draws to the social and psychological obstacles that prevent her from articulating her criticisms of marriage norms openly.

First-phase novels also highlight the unequal gender dynamics within marriage through the scarcity of easy companionship between husband and wife. Relationships between spouses tend to be portrayed as physically distant, inequitably formal and marked by a limited repertoire of conversation. The idea of a wife "go[ing] about arm in arm with [her] husband talking 'git-pit, git pit'" is ridiculed by Zainab as a mode of conduct appropriate to the English, but unbecoming to a Muslim couple; for, despite the centrality of sex to the fulfilment of the marriage contract, husbands and wives avoid displays of intimacy.⁷⁸ The deferential manner in which a wife is expected to address her spouse reinforces this formality, but also underscores her lower status. For Rukmani (*NIAS*), "it is not meet for a woman to address her husband except as husband", although *she* can expect to be addressed by name.⁷⁹ In addition to militating against women's equal status, this custom also disavows the importance of the individual character by placing greater emphasis upon the social role that each partner must perform.⁸⁰ The custom is noticeably observed by Aunt Saira who, for all of her

⁷⁸ Op. cit., p.105.

⁷⁹ Op. cit., p.83.

⁸⁰ Parekh claims that, because Asian marriages are more concerned with the ability to adopt the appropriate role, than with the idiosyncrasies of the individual personality, almost anyone can be a spouse. Kali in *Nectar in a Sieve* echoes this view in her claim that, to a man, "one woman is like another". Parekh, op. cit., pp.9-11; Markandaya, op. cit., p.12.

superficial modernity, “was unable to shake off tradition and never addressed [Hamid] by name.”⁸¹

The imbalance of power connoted by this formal convention is evident elsewhere in first-phase depictions of marriage. The concomitant of wifely subordination in many of the selected narratives is loyalty. Rukmani (*NIAS*) believes emphatically that a woman’s place is with her spouse, whatever the circumstances. In ‘Time is Unredeemable’ (*PF*), Bano tries to change herself in accordance with the altered sensibilities she believes her husband has developed during his lengthy stay in England. A similar dynamic is evident in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, where a wife’s loyalty is expressed through the adoption of an identity of the husband’s choosing, rather than one rooted in an autonomous sense of self. Hosain characterises the cosmopolitanism by which Zahra and Saira are distinguished as the “gloss” and “fancy dress” that each dons to render herself a suitable adornment to her spouse.⁸² The swiftness with which Zahra is transformed by her marriage is especially indicative of the insubstantial nature of the personae she adopts; and Hosain’s choice of imagery underscores both their superficiality and the hollowness at Zahra’s heart:

She was now playing the part of the perfect modern wife as she had once played the part of a dutiful purdah girl. Her present sophistication was as suited to her role as her past modesty had been.⁸³

⁸¹ Op. cit., p.110. Parekh stresses that, while a woman is expected to be deferential, “this is generally a façade that hides wide varieties of attitude”; and “one of the reasons why the belief in women’s degraded condition has gained currency is that the outward form has generally been treated as reflecting the reality”. This disjunction is evident in *The Nowhere Man*, where the young, unmarried Vasantha adopts this deferential convention *subversively* when addressing Srinivas, in order to make him comply with her wishes: “[H]e would do almost anything to make her desist”. Parekh, op. cit., pp.7-8; Markandaya, op. cit., p.109.

⁸² Op. cit., p.140, p.87.

⁸³ Ibid., p.140.

Deference is something of a keynote in first-phase portrayals of marriage. While women may appear to have internalised this norm, their private dissent often suggests that such acceptance is more akin to resignation. Smith is especially critical of the expectation that the Indian wife in the diaspora must be as subservient as her 'homeland' counterpart. In *Sumitra's Story*, she lays much of the blame for this tendency on men like Jayant who neither expect, nor are able to tolerate, dissent from their wives. However, women are also deemed to be complicit with their own subordination: Sumitra castigates expatriate Indian women, like her mother, who fail to break the "Banquo line" of cultural reproduction.⁸⁴ Smith nonetheless attempts to redress the balance by asserting, through the character of Maria, that the expectation of blind loyalty is not confined to South Asian marriages: "The trouble is[n't] really to do with being Indian or black, or Pakistani, or Greek, or Jewish...I'm English, my family is English" and "they believe it's the woman's place to follow the husband."⁸⁵ Markandaya's novels, however, provide something of a contrast to the other selected works of first-phase fiction. *The Nowhere Man* represents Vasantha's wifely loyalty as a virtue that is reciprocated by her husband, and is noticeably absent in the failing Radcliffe marriage.⁸⁶

The defence of the arranged marriage is one respect in which a degree of continuity can be discerned between first and second-phase representations of the institution. Arguably, its positive treatment emerges from a specifically *diasporic* perspective that is sensitive to how governmental agencies and 'host' media

⁸⁴ Op. cit., p.102.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.134.

⁸⁶ See Anil Kumar Bhatnagar, *Kamala Markandaya: A Thematic Study* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1995), p.135. See also Ann Lowry Weir, 'Review of *The Nowhere Man*', *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 16.1, 1981, p.230.

organisations may disseminate a caricatured vision of the arranged marriage to demonise South Asian culture as a whole.⁸⁷ As Parita Trivedi argues, “Asian women want to make their own choices as to how and why they challenge their own marriage norms, rather than accept a racist definition of such marriages.”⁸⁸ Second-phase South Asian diasporic women’s writing bears out this claim through its numerous depictions, in novels such as *Hari-jan* and *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, of young Asian British women *voluntarily* entering into marriages that satisfy the traditional expectations of their elders. Although Harjinder (*H-J*) sometimes satirises her community’s conflation of “history and tradition”, she does not use these terms in a pejorative manner overall; rather, she comes to regard both as valid reasons for sustaining the arranged marriage system.⁸⁹ Moreover, Binny’s (*H-J*) initiation of the engagement process exemplifies how the conventions of the arranged marriage system need not always militate against women’s active and decisive participation.

Most of the continuities between first and second-phase representations of marriage are underpinned by critiques of its gender inequality. Tania’s and Chila’s (*LIAH*) respective experiences of pre-marital negotiations testify to the dominance of the process by the male and his party. Furthermore, the perception of the daughter (-in-law) as a liability, and its implicit reinforcement by the dowry custom, are objects of explicit critique in later works. Deepak (*LIAH*) capitalises on this conception of women, describing himself as “the man who will take your daughter off your hands for ever”, and to whom his in-laws must, therefore, “bow down and be grateful”.⁹⁰ However, the

⁸⁷ See Brah’s account of 1980s legislation that seeks to prevent the entry of South Asians into Britain by questioning the legitimacy of the arranged marriage. *Op. cit.*, p.38.

⁸⁸ Cited in Brah, *op. cit.*, p.78.

⁸⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.103.

⁹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.10.

greatest degree of continuity between the phases concerns the contract between husband and wife, which remains the focus of considerable anxiety in later examples of South Asian diasporic women's fiction. Sita (*SOABC*), in the first phase, likens the traditional marriage to a prison sentence without trial; Reshma (*THC*), in the second phase, sees it as "a windowless chamber with a low ceiling, without doors, without any visible routes of escape" for a woman.⁹¹

The provision of a male heir remains a matter of concern in some second-phase narratives. This is especially marked in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, where curses such as "May she only bear daughters", and the popularity of clinics that guarantee the sex of children allude to the problems a wife might face should she not fulfil this obligation.⁹² The clinics in particular suggest that this aspect of the marriage contract is untouched by diasporisation, and sustained with the complicity of the second generation. However, it is Reshma's experiences in *The Hope Chest* that underscore most emphatically how a married woman's fertility is deemed to be at the disposal of her husband and the perpetuation of his family name. Despite the fact that, in a short space of time, "God's given [her] three boys" by whose demands she is exhausted, Afshar Khan believes that Reshma must carry a fourth pregnancy to full term as well.⁹³ By choosing to have an abortion and sterilisation, Reshma overrides her husband's 'right' of jurisdiction over her childbearing capacity. Afshar Khan is enraged by the news of his wife's actions largely because "she, a mere slip of a girl...had the wherewithal to do this, *without his permission*" (my emphasis).⁹⁴ Indeed, Reshma's unilateral decision is perceived by

⁹¹ Op. cit., p.77.

⁹² Op. cit., p.26.

⁹³ Op. cit., p.210.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.265.

Khan as so grievous a violation of the marriage contract, that it warrants her irrevocable exile from her children and the conjugal home.

The Hope Chest is also an especially valuable text in exemplifying how second-phase works, like their antecedents, critique the subordination of wives to husbands. However, the considerably greater force with which they do so is suggestive of a marked frustration with the tenacity of this dynamic over successive generations in the 'homeland'. The arrangement of Reshma's marriage highlights the extent to which a wife's deference to the wishes of her husband remains the norm. Despite her initial opposition, Rehmat Bibi eventually accedes to her husband's decision - as he assumes she will - that Afshar Khan's marriage proposal to their daughter be accepted. Her verbal articulation of dissent gives way to a less obvious, gestural challenge which lasts for only "a rebellious instant".⁹⁵ Fearing that Reshma will be subjected to similar expectations, Rehmat Bibi views her imminent marriage with "a great sense of pain and injustice".⁹⁶ She evidently has good reason to do so, given the approval with which Afshar Khan's mother compares the young girl to "soft green wood, you bend it into the shape you like and it won't break".⁹⁷ *The Hope Chest* provides, perhaps, the most overt representation of how a woman's acceptance of her subjugation is regarded by men as evidence of her decency and modesty: for exercising independent judgement, Afshar Khan brands Reshma audacious and brazen.

However, the expectation of subservience is not confined in the second phase to narratives set within the Subcontinental 'homeland', as *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* demonstrates. While Tania's eligibility as a wife is enhanced by her looks, her

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.53.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp.77-78.

intelligence and her mother's "loud religious leanings", it is hampered by the likelihood that she will accept neither subordination to a husband, nor unquestioning compliance with his family's wishes.⁹⁸

The feedback was fairly standard: "She is too modern" (too independent to do as he says and maybe a bit of a slapper)... "He needs someone who will fit in with his job" (she has a job that will prevent her from supporting his career); "We have a joint family system" (she will never agree to pooling her wages and spending weekends going to kitty parties with us).⁹⁹

The normalisation of wifely deference is also critiqued through the suggestion that its equation with loyalty perpetuates an unequal sense of responsibility between the sexes. Chila's (*LIAH*) fidelity to, and love for, her husband are only reciprocated up to a point: where duty and desire collide, the latter prevails, as Deepak resumes his affair with Tania with little thought for his wife. However, it is this dynamic that enables a second-phase text like *Looking for Maya* (1999) to suggest, as *Sumitra's Story* does in the first phase, that similar inequalities also exist in European marriages. Ralph guiltlessly embarks on numerous affairs, in comparison to which Matty's single attempt at infidelity - committed primarily as an act of retribution - seems all the more pitiable.

The division of labour, especially the compulsory nature of the wife's domestic role, also remains a focus of critical attention in second-phase fiction. Afshar Khan's mother is comforted by the thought that Reshma "will be able to do the work", not only of (step-) motherhood, but also of tending to the needs of the rest of the Khans, including herself.¹⁰⁰ The palpable exhaustion experienced by Daljit Kumar in *Anita and*

⁹⁸ Op. cit., p.148.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Op. cit., p.78.

Me, and by Sunita in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* results from the cultural construction of the private home as a repository of Subcontinental norms. Central to its characterisation as such is the domestic servitude of the wife - an orthodoxy to which each husband tacitly subscribes. Even when a wife is permitted or encouraged to work outside the home, it does not absolve her of her obligations within. *The Red Box* and both of Syal's selected works depict working wives and mothers who find themselves saddled with both "their outside work, and their "natural" inside work! That's double the work!"¹⁰¹

Second-phase fiction develops the representation of marriage in a number of ways. Whereas parents in first-phase fiction overtly insist upon the necessity of marriage, second-phase works depict a more insidious engineering of events to the same end. Even when marriage is characterised by parents as an *option* rather than a requirement, the subtext of obligation is never far below the surface. Syal offers especially keen portrayals of the 'doublespeak' immigrant parents employ to impress their wishes upon their less traditional children. Daljit Kumar (*AAM*) suggests to Meena that "you are going to have to learn to cook if you want to get married, aren't you?"¹⁰² But, despite the agency connoted by "want", it is framed by two imperative verbs that suffuse the entire sentence with the connotation of inevitability. Similarly, Sunita (*LIAH*) is encouraged to attend university, "and then think about marriage, *if she wanted*" (my emphasis)¹⁰³. However, the context of this apparently non-committal suggestion is one in which her parents' "insist[ence that] she should get her education" is, if not contradicted, then certainly qualified by "offers of introductions, and

¹⁰¹ Sheikh, op. cit., p.130.

¹⁰² Op. cit., p.62.

¹⁰³ Op. cit., p.147.

encouragement to find her own partner” .¹⁰⁴ It is Ahmad, however, who provides the second-phase’s most sharply critical representation of the manipulative parent. Shahana believes she exemplifies the shrewdest kind of parenting that, with tactical cunning, encourages children to believe their marriage choices are entirely voluntary.

Match-making was about the art of the possible. It was about making young people aware of the probabilities of the future. You need never force the issue. *You suggest*. You wait for the suggestion to work, and then you step in, to strike at the perfect moment. Chances are, if you’ve raised your children right, they’ll go exactly for the kind of person you yourself would have chosen for them.¹⁰⁵

A further development in the second-phase treatment of marriage concerns the clarity with which the wife is depicted as the family’s chattel. *A Wicked Old Woman* demonstrates a keen awareness of how a ‘homeland’ wife is effectively owned by her husband and his kin. If she is a ‘proper’ spouse, she possesses no self-determined identity - only that defined by her relationship to her new family: “The daughter disappears, transforms into the eldest daughter-in-law, functionary of the mother-in-law who rules a sprawling household of family, relatives, workers and spongers”.¹⁰⁶ In this respect, the novel has much in common with *The Hope Chest*. However, Ahmad’s depiction of the ‘bride price’ custom, as practised by Pathans in Pakistan’s Northern provinces, offers the most overt critique of the conception of women as property. Afshar Khan (*THC*) regards his payment of ten thousand rupees for Reshma, not as compensation to her parents for the loss of their child, but as the price for “a right to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Op. cit., p.162.

¹⁰⁶ Op. cit., p.164.

[Reshma's] lithe young body", and for "a woman he could possess, command and enjoy".¹⁰⁷ However, the novel implies that, psychologically, men too are victims of such patriarchal notions. Its depictions of marital rape are brutal; but Ahmad also suggests that every time Khan forces himself upon his wife, he inwardly recognises that he is undone by the heedless manner in which he sates his desires. If Khan is in thrall to the idea that marriage entitles him to sex, whenever the urge strikes and regardless of his wife's consent, it is partly because this appears to be true for "most men around him".¹⁰⁸

Development is also evident in second-phase critiques of how the naturalisation of gender roles within marriage is sustained by selective readings of scriptures. The subtitle of Sunita's (*LIAH*) choice of book - *Dark Lotus: The Mythology of Indian Sexuality* - clearly suggests that religion is a formidable tool in constructing womanhood as an essentially subservient state. This process is explicated by the chapter entitled 'Patriarchy Made Divine', which argues that the prominence accorded to Sita normalises the idea of feminine self-sacrifice to such an extent that "many Indian women subconsciously equate marriage and partnership with trial and suffering. *Indeed, they expect it, welcome it as proof of a virtuous liaison, blessed by tradition*" (my emphasis).¹⁰⁹ For this to be so, other, more challenging goddess archetypes, such as Kali, must be relegated to the margins of consciousness, so that they are unable to disturb the equation of 'proper' wifhood with "masochism, martyrdom and the subjugation of self".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Op. cit, p.78.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Ahmad's treatment of Khan's 'victimhood' is thus less sceptical than is Syal's representation of the emasculated diasporic man. Akash's (*LIAH*) insistence that "it's much harder being a man" is treated as a joke, albeit "a good one". Op. cit., p.275.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.208.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.209.

Second-phase works extend their critique of marriage by introducing divorce to the South Asian woman's repertoire of resistance. Reactions to divorce are employed by several writers to condemn those who insist on the inviolable status of traditional marital *mores*. Nargis Rashid's (*TRB*) family accepts the necessity of her self-initiated separation from her husband; but "there are still loads of people who try and make you feel like dirt and like you're not as good as them".¹¹¹ Similarly, despite the burns and broken bones she has repeatedly suffered at the hands of her ex-husband, Divorced Auntie (*LIAH*) is "the whore for leaving him": 'damaged goods' who, unlike her husband, is prevented by the attitudes of her community from remaking her life.¹¹² Indeed, the fact that Sunita endows her with this name is evidence of the extent to which her divorced status eclipses all other aspects of her identity in the eyes of her compatriots. Furthermore, the second phase witnesses the emergence of the woman for whom being single is a pro-active choice. Tania in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* and the protagonists of both of Srivastava's selected novels are all successful, single women, although the censure to which Tania is subjected for this is greater than that suffered by Srivastava's characters.¹¹³ The unsatisfactory outcome of their relationships suggests that they are unsuited to the possessive dynamics of long-term partnership, and that men cannot endow these women with the sense of completion for which they are searching. Tania (*LIAH*) and Mira (*LFM*) in particular emerge as women whose most comfortable, creative state is to be single. This is also true of *The Hope Chest*'s 'homeland' narrative. For Rani especially, solitude is the condition that allows her atrophied artistic creativity to regenerate and, like her sister, she arrives at the unmarried state by choice.

¹¹¹ Op. cit., p.157.

¹¹² Op. cit., p.79.

¹¹³ Gayatri Gopinath observes that women who do not conform to the heteronormative character of the family are often disowned. "The family [is] a reproductive unit, through which the stability of gender roles and hierarchies is preserved"; and single women who do not participate in its reproductive dynamic may be deemed to be outside the fold. See Gayatri Gopinath, 'Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion' in Braziel & Manmur (eds.), op. cit., pp.263-264.

The ways in which European marriages are held up for comparison with, or in contrast to, Asian marriages undergoes significant development in second-phase fiction. In first-phase works, European and Asian marriages either exist in a relationship of contrast (as in *The Nowhere Man*), or focus largely on the more negative dynamics of marriage (as is the case with *Sumitra's Story*). However, second-phase texts are as likely to underscore similarities that depend on more positive qualities. This is especially true of older couples, such as the Worralls and the Christmases (*AAM*) who exemplify a lifetime of steadfast loyalty and uncomplaining mutual care - characteristics that it is easy to imagine unfolding across the course of the Kumars' marriage. The novel also suggests that European marriages - in theory, distinguished by romance - can be as lacking in companionship as their Asian counterparts. The Ballbearings women lead lives that, apart from sex, are largely separate from those of their husbands. However, whereas first-phase texts represent this as a negative quality, Syal suggests that, rather than being a factor in, and symbol of, the lesser status of wives, it enables a degree of female solidarity and social autonomy.

Development is also discernible in how later texts utilise the contrast with European marriage conventions to assert the validity of South Asian practices. Rather than prioritising the (in)compatibility of individual couples, as Markandaya does in *The Nowhere Man*, second-phase works focus on the shortcomings of love marriages more generally. The works of Randhawa and Srivastava, for instance, assert that partnerships based exclusively on love can be as problematic as those that are arranged. Harjinder (*H-J*) condemns Gazzy's compliance with the arranged system as "marry[ing] for money", but nonetheless concedes that "you could see the being in love business

doesn't work out that great either".¹¹⁴ The potentially detrimental consequences of the 'freedom' of romantic love are also a focus of second-phase criticism. *A Wicked Old Woman* suggests that the absence of social obligations, of the kinds that surround the arranged marriage, encourages a *laissez-faire* attitude to relationships. Pam is abandoned by the father of her child during pregnancy, while Richard's suicide attempt can be traced back to his partner's insistence on an open relationship. In *Looking for Maya*, the strength of the commitment between Mira's parents - symbolised by Mira's habit of merging her parents' names into the single term, 'Ravikavi' - is all the more striking in contrast to the serial infidelities of Ralph. Although they focus on young Asian British women who conduct their relationships according to western norms, neither *Transmission* nor *Looking for Maya* suggests that these are essentially superior to the more traditional marriages of the protagonists' parents. Rather, both novels depict the latter with considerable affection, as reservoirs of security in an uncertain world.

Conclusion

The chosen works across both phases direct their critical energy at the perpetuation and essentialisation of gender inequality. Many focus on the devaluation of the girl-child, the gendered division of labour and the restriction of women's social, educational and sexual freedom. They also critique the systematic way in which women's inferiority is established at birth, and reinforced thereafter - often by recourse to sources supposedly beyond human intervention, such as religious texts.¹¹⁵ This tends

¹¹⁴ Op. cit., p.108.

¹¹⁵ *Nectar in a Sieve*'s somewhat anomalous suggestion, that Ira's violation of sexual norms eventually becomes acceptable to her family, is not so much a reflection of existing *mores*. The narrative is also 'aspirational' inasmuch as it seeks to assert the necessity of social reform on a range of issues, including traditional constructions of gender.

to be more overt in second-phase works: later 'homeland' narratives underscore the tenacity of patriarchal *mores* over the phases of diasporic fiction, but explicate more emphatically the proprietorial relationship that men have with 'their' women. The theoretical link between women and the reproduction of cultural norms is confirmed *and* challenged by diasporisation. Both phases of immigrant fiction suggest that the potential impact of 'other' cultural values encourages a particular vigilance about women's conduct and mobility, and the necessity of preserving the collectivity's ethnic integrity. However, the revision of *izzat*, especially in second-phase works, also testifies to the ways in which diasporisation undermines some of the same circumscriptions.

Authorial attitudes towards the socialisation of women are also variously inflected by diasporisation. With the possible exception of *The Nowhere Man*, none of the selected first-phase writers fails to comment upon the construction of gender roles. The diasporic narrative of *Sumitra's Story* may offer the most obviously *feminist* critique of women's social inferiority; but other early texts also suggest that the impact of 'other' cultural values helps to foster a more critical stance towards the position of women in South Asian communities. However, diasporisation is also linked with experience of metropolitan bigotry. The racist utilisation of women's subordination to denigrate South Asian cultures in their entirety lies behind the assertion that gender inequalities are not the exclusive preserve of South Asian cultures. Tacitly, such a conviction may account for *The Nowhere Man's* relative lack of concern with the status of South Asian women, as the novel is set in a period during which feminism had yet to take hold, and British families functioned by means of similar constructions of gender. However, emphasis on Western patriarchies tends to be more emphatic and frequent in

second-phase works, and in this respect, *Sumitra's Story's* patent claims that patriarchal values cross ethnic lines align the novel more closely with its successors.

In keeping with the treatment of gendered socialisation, the inequality of women within marriage remains the focus of criticism across the phases. So too does the normalisation of this imbalance, which is represented as undergoing little variation between the 'homeland' and the diaspora. The trajectory this process follows is similar to that which determines a woman's pre-nuptial socialisation: her inferiority is established at the outset, and each subsequent requirement is, in some sense, a concession to, or compensation for this 'fact'. The acquisition of a wife is represented as onerous, and the demands that marriage makes of women prioritise the fulfilment of certain social and domestic duties to offset this burden. Through her fertility and her skill as a household functionary, the wife is expected to serve her husband's family: by perpetuating its name through a male heir, and by ensuring the ease and comfort of its members. It is, perhaps, this existing imbalance that accounts for the more critical treatment in later texts of loyalty in marriage, which is represented as a responsibility far more incumbent on wives than on husbands. Through their depictions of female-initiated divorce and separation, second-phase texts expand the range of ill-treatment that women are supposed to endure in the name of fidelity and feminine modesty.

As is the case with the socialisation of women, the impact of diasporisation on perceptions of marriage is apparent in various ways. Its interrogative consequences can be discerned in the assertions of second-phase writers, born or largely raised in Britain, that it is sometimes in the best interests of women to conclusively breach the social contract of marriage. However, diasporisation, in terms informed by the experience of

racism, also influences the positive treatment of South Asian marriage customs. Tim Youngs' analysis of how arranged marriages function in dramas with Asian British protagonists (including works by white playwrights) points out two particular kinds of elision that afflict its representation.¹¹⁶ One is a lack of recognition that the arranged marriage has played an important role in *British* history, and has only been superseded by the love-marriage fairly recently. If South Asian diasporic writing addresses this cultural similitude at all, it is through the possibility that marriages within supposedly different cultural *milieux* may in fact have comparable social and gendered dynamics.

The other elision is a failure, when addressing marriage in South Asian *milieux*, "to distinguish between enforced marriages and those in which choice is offered and agreement sought".¹¹⁷ The treatment of marriage in first-phase texts is varied; for, while Hosain and Smith do indeed represent the traditional system as coercive in certain respects, it is also one that many of their characters (come to) accept. Markandaya's depiction of arranged marriage, in common with her treatment of gendered socialisation, is arguably informed as much by the possibility of reciprocal responsibility between partners, as by the opposite scenario. Furthermore, many of the chosen second-phase texts, despite their criticisms of the system, cumulatively assert that 'arranged marriage' should be regarded as an 'umbrella' term denoting various degrees of parental intervention. Randhawa and Syal both suggest that a young woman's ability to exercise decisive power is not necessarily incompatible with the mechanisms of the arranged marriage system.¹¹⁸ Moreover, second-phase texts are

¹¹⁶ Tim Youngs, 'Morality and Ideology: The Arranged Marriage in Contemporary British-Asian Drama', *Wasafiri*, 9, 1988.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3. Parekh is also insistent that the arranged marriage does not automatically entail the imposition of the parent's choice of partner upon his child. *Op. cit.*, p. 9-11.

¹¹⁸ Binny's engagement in *Hari-jan* endorses the possibility of combining a voluntary choice of partner with the procedural norms of a traditional marriage, so that the needs of all interested parties are met.

especially keen to assert the positive attributes of a marriage system in which the pursuit of individual desires does not necessarily supersede a sense of responsibility to others.

Chapter 2

Gender, Imperialism, Nationalism: Empire and its Diasporic Legacies

Introduction

Some of the earliest works under consideration are by writers who left the Subcontinent around the time - and, to some extent, because - of the region's partition. Their texts evince a considerable commitment to depicting the impact of imperial rule on the Subcontinental peoples. This chapter examines how South Asian diasporic women's fiction represents the British Raj in India, and the nationalist resistance movements to which it gave rise. I focus, to a large extent, upon the ways in which the selected writers critique the gender dynamics upon which the ideologies and practices of imperial rule and nationalist response were based. The majority of the chosen texts, however, are primarily attentive to the South Asian population in Britain, and many trace the lineage of the cultural politics of the diaspora space back to the colonial relationship between India and Britain.¹ Through the emergence of this theme as an ongoing concern, I also examine how the chosen works use tropes of gender to delineate the imperialist and nationalist legacies that affect Asian Britons.

The complicity of sexual and racial hierarchies in imperialist and nationalist ideologies is, therefore, of particular relevance to the ambit of this chapter. In *Colonial Desire* (1995), Robert Young explicates the sexual categorisation that informs the racial ideology of imperialism.² He reminds the reader of the frequency with which the attribution of cultural values, such as degrees of civilisation, to particular racial groups has also depended on the allocation of sexual characteristics. The quasi-Darwinian "evolutionary scale of [racial] development" stretched from "a feminized state of

¹ Brah defines 'diaspora space' as "a conceptual category... 'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous".
Op. cit., p.181

² Op. cit.

childhood (savagery)” at the bottom, to “full (European) manly adulthood” at the top.³ ‘Savage’ races were not, however, perceived as equally feminine, but were “carefully gradated and ranked”.⁴ Ronald Hyam offers several examples of this mode of classification. Bengalis, for instance, were condemned as “unmanly and degenerate”, while the Burmese were more approvingly credited with masculine, martial spirit.⁵

To illustrate the symbiotic relationship between sexual and racial imperialism, Young focuses particular attention upon Gobineau’s 1853 *Essay on the Inequality of Races*, according to which the innately masculine character of the white race impels it to go forth and spread its civilising influence. Attracted by the inherent femininity of the non-white races, whites are represented by Gobineau as acting upon an unavoidable biological impulse that also renders non-whites ‘natural’ objects of appropriation.⁶ He thereby justifies imperialism as the inevitable consequence of congenital imperatives. However, the deployment of the parent-child metaphor in imperial ideology, as it is characterised by Young, must also be noted. The trope naturalises racial and sexual patterns of authority as unquestionably necessary for the welfare of the weaker party. As Ania Loomba observes, “in the language of colonialism, non-Europeans occupy the same symbolic space as women. Both are seen as...ripe for government, passive, *child-like*, unsophisticated (my emphasis).”⁷ Thus the legitimisation of men’s dominance over women is simultaneous with the endorsement of white supremacy. Or, as Young succinctly puts it, “just as the white male rules at home, so he lords it abroad”.⁸

³ Ibid., p.94.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 202-203.

⁶ Op. cit., pp.99-117.

⁷ Op. cit., pp.159-160.

⁸ Op. cit., p.111.

The importance of gender to the imperialist conception of racial hierarchy is not only evident in the ideology of British rule over India, but also in its execution. The colonial claim, that Indians were at a lesser stage of human development, was 'proven' by reference to the inferior status of women in Subcontinental society. The Indian woman, as Uma Chakravorti points out, afforded the colonial masters a means of rationalising their intervention in the region: for, without the guiding hand of European civilisation, it was claimed that she had little, if any, chance of elevation from her degraded position.

The 'higher' morality of the imperial masters could be effectively established by highlighting the low status of women among the subject population...the women's question thus became a crucial tool in the colonial ideology.⁹

The veracity of such claims has been a matter of debate. Bhikhu Parekh insists that the idea of the Indian woman's lowly condition gained - and continues to have - currency because the external character of gender relations in Subcontinental society has been (wrongly) assumed to reflect their interior substance.¹⁰ Furthermore, despite its purportedly benign intentions, the intervention of the imperial power did much to *exacerbate* whatever disadvantage afflicted the Indian woman. That this was so indicates, according to Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, the mutual accommodation between British and Indian patriarchies - a "complex inter-relationship of contest and *collusion*" (my emphasis).¹¹

⁹ Uma Chakravorti, 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past' in Kumkum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick; New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p.34.

¹⁰ As discussed in Chapter 1, Parekh sees the deferential conduct of the traditional Indian wife as "a façade that hides wide varieties of attitude". Op. cit., pp.7-8.

¹¹ Sangari and Vaid claim that this collusive relationship between patriarchies could be observed in the colonial regulation of agrarian relations. The British ideal of femininity, according to which women were under the custodianship of men, was applied to India to authorise the removal of inheritance rights from rural Indian women. Op. cit, p.7.

Gayatri Spivak's characterisation of imperialism as "white men...saving brown women from brown men" elucidates the extent to which, under the aegis of 'salvation', the Indian woman also became the object of colonial sexual possession.¹² Indeed, Gobineau's use of sexual tropes to delineate the interaction between colonising and colonised races acknowledges this possibility by eroticising the attraction of the former for the latter. Hyam notes that interracial sex was not only a common occurrence, but also, until the early 1800s, *part of* the imperial mission. The donation of a christening present to each baptised child of a British soldier and an Indian woman exemplifies the parallel relationship between the seizure of Indian territory and the appropriation of the Indian womb. As Loomba remarks, "from the beginning of the colonial period till its end...female bodies symbolise the conquered land".¹³ The keeping of an Indian mistress was also a well-established practice, not simply for the purposes of sexual gratification, but also as a means of improving British knowledge of Indian languages and affairs.¹⁴

Moreover, as Hyam points out, the encouragement of inter-racial sex underscored the imbalance of power between colonised and colonising males:

If, for whatever reason, white men were anxious to keep black men away from their womenfolk, they (notoriously) imposed no parallel self-denying ordinance on themselves in their relations with black women.¹⁵

Indian women were, therefore, of considerable strategic and symbolic importance to the imperial powers. So that their status might be exploited, the women of the Subcontinent had to be depicted with the broadest of brush strokes, for as individuals they were of

¹² Cited in Loomba, *op. cit.*, p.154.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.152.

¹⁴ "Colloquially, the *bibi* [high class woman] was spoken of as a 'sleeping dictionary'". Hyam, *op. cit.*, p.115.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

little interest - hence George's claim that imperialism "collaborated in hollowing out all specificity from Indian women".¹⁶

George's emphasis on collaboration, much like Sangari and Vaid's assertion of patriarchal collusion, suggests that Indian politics and practices were guilty of similar shortcomings in relation to women. Susie Tharu confirms this view, remarking that nationalist resistance movements often utilised ideas about gender that were comparable to those current in imperial circles.¹⁷ A number of nationalist organisations looked to the archetypes of religious history to construct a definitive national character; but how far this identity was opposed to its colonial counterpart in terms of its gender politics is debatable. George stresses that nationalism, as much as imperialism, constructed women as symbols "of tradition, of modernity, of suffering, of strength, of love, of self-sacrifice" and, crucially, "of the nation itself".¹⁸ Her claims are resonant with those of Yuval-Davis and Brah, discussed in Chapter 1, each of whom asserts that women's sexuality is "central to the creation and perpetuation of nationalist ideologies".¹⁹ A particular onus was placed upon women to exemplify the national ideology in their conduct, and to direct their fertility towards "the physical regeneration" and continuity "of the nation's weakened people".²⁰ However, Loomba claims that, "as mothers to the nation, women are granted limited agency".²¹ The veracity of such an assertion is

¹⁶ Op. cit., p.137.

¹⁷ Susie Tharu, 'Tracing Savitri's Pedigree: Victorian Racism and the Image of Women in Indo-Anglian Literature', in Sangari & Vaid (eds.), op. cit., p.262.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p.137. Kandiyoti's overview of how women were incorporated into nationalist movements also emphasises the contradictory dynamics at work. On one hand, "nationalist aspirations for popular sovereignty stimulate an extension of citizenship rights, clearly benefiting women". On the other hand, "nationalist policies...mobilise women when they are needed in the labour force or even at the front, only to return them to domesticity or to subordinate roles in the public sphere when the national emergency is over". Op. cit., p.376.

¹⁹ Brah, op. cit., p.164.

²⁰ Chakravorti, op. cit., p.60. Victorian women were also encouraged to see their primary contribution to the imperial effort in terms of fertility, child-rearing and household management.

²¹ Op. cit., p.218.

supported in this context by the implicit prohibition, “unstated, but nonetheless clearly understood”, on Indian women organising around gender-specific concerns.²² It is a restriction that underscores the extent to which nationalism, as much as imperialism, disavowed the importance of women *in themselves*; for, “while ‘social problems’...had a legitimacy and were widely discussed, there was an uneasy sense that the crucial areas where power operates (for women)...were outside the scope of debate”.²³

According to Partha Chatterjee, reformist policies on women were absent from the broad nationalist agenda because the movement had already resolved the women’s question in accordance with its own priorities. Underpinning this resolution was a conception of the nation’s cultural character as comprising its inner/spiritual and outer/material aspects. Provided its internal core remained intact, it was possible to tolerate the encroachment of ‘other’ cultural ideas into the nation’s external realm. The nationalist treatment of the women’s question identifies this dichotomy with gendered social roles.

The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture and women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (i.e. feminine) virtues; they must not, in other words, become essentially westernised.²⁴

The role of domestic and spiritual gatekeeper did not necessarily mean that women were confined to the home. They could feasibly operate in the public world, provided the

²² Vasantha Kannabiran & K. Lalitha, ‘That Magic Time: Women in the Telegana People’s Struggle’ in Sangari & Vaid (eds.), op. cit., p.119.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Partha Chatterjee, ‘The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question’, in Sangari & Vaid (eds.), op. cit., p243. See also pp.237-246.

integrity of their spiritual identity was preserved - a state that would be appreciable in their observance of socially-approved differences between female and male conduct.²⁵

The means by which women were practically included in nationalist protest were often similarly mindful of their existing status. Gandhi's *satyagraha* [non-violent resistance] movement was able to incorporate women precisely because it did not challenge their traditional role. For example, the importance placed on spinning *khaddar* cloth as a gesture of self-sufficiency worked around, rather than against, the physical restrictions to which many women were subjected in traditional communities. Furthermore, wherever a clash occurred between familial responsibilities and the desire for political participation, Indian women were urged to give priority to the former; for, by serving the individual family, it was claimed that they were also serving the larger family of the nation. Rumina Sethi sees Gandhi's tactics as an intentional subversion of the primacy of masculine values, and a promotion of traditionally feminine attributes and skills as politically efficacious.²⁶ Sethi's view concurs with that of Parekh, who insists that Gandhi "well understood the power of the Indian woman", especially her capacity to exhaust the abusive will of opponents with her passive demeanour.²⁷ Others, such as Amrit Srinivasan, see in the same methodology the appeasement of social conservatives; for the *swaraj* [self-rule] project involved no critique of how Indian woman were constructed as essentially domestic beings.²⁸

²⁵ Citing Yuval-Davis, Kandiyoti points out that "we should be wary of ethnocentric definitions of the private and the public, and acknowledge the extent to which the boundaries of the so-called private domain are in fact structured by the state". Op. cit., p.377.

²⁶ Rumina Sethi, *Myths of the Nation* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), pp.132-133.

²⁷ B.C. Parekh, op. cit., p.8.

²⁸ Amrit Srinivasan, 'Women and Reform of Indian Tradition: Gandhian Alternative to Liberalism' in Leela Kasturi and Vina Mazumdar (eds.), *Women and Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1994), p.8.

Where this chapter shifts its focus to the diaspora, one of its primary concerns is the extent to which the neo-colonial politics of the (former) metropolis are informed by the rationale of colonialism.²⁹ One area in which imperialism's legacy is evident is in the 'management' of Britain's culturally diverse population, which has seemingly undergone a shift from what Parekh characterises as a fundamentally monocultural position, to a more multiculturalist one.³⁰ The monocultural option of assimilation proved unacceptable to many first-generation immigrants, hence its supersession by a policy of *integration*. Described by Roy Jenkins as "equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual trust", it was emphatically not a process of "flattening out" cultural differences. As such, it can be seen as the precursor of more recent conceptualisations of Britain's multiculturalism, which accord the preservation of cultural particularity considerable weight.³¹ However, the extent to which such a policy lacks a neo-colonial subtext is a matter of debate. Kenan Malik characterises "[t]he promotion of pluralism [as] a tacit admission that the barriers that separate blacks and whites cannot be breached".³² As such, it is a modern equivalent to colonial ideas about inherently and immutably separate races.

Rushdie, furthermore, argues that modern British racism is the legacy of imperialism's disrespect for the indigenous peoples of the colonies. "Four hundred years of conquest and looting; four centuries of being told that you are superior to the fuzzy-wuzzies and the wogs leave their stain."³³ Rushdie discerns the traces of this stain in several places. For example, he castigates the popular media for their limited and

²⁹ In this case, 'neo-colonialism' denotes the assertion of white supremacy, and discrimination against non-whites.

³⁰ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multi-culturalism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), p.6.

³¹ Brah, op. cit., p.24. Jenkins was Home Secretary under Wilson's Labour government, from 1965-1968.

³² Kenan Malik, 'Equal v. Plural?' in Greenberg (ed.), op. cit., p.59.

³³ Salman Rushdie, 'The New Empire Within Britain' in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), p.130.

largely negative representation of immigrant(-descended) communities. State authorities, such as the police, the Home Office and Parliament itself, are also accused of racially discriminatory practices. At no point, however, does Rushdie address the possibility raised by Brah, that “racism is...a gendered phenomenon”.³⁴ The hierarchy of gendered difference that underpins colonial ideology does not inform Rushdie’s analysis of the racial malaise imperialism has bequeathed the former motherland - a shortfall that, as I discuss later in the chapter, I believe South Asian diasporic women’s writing attempts to rectify.

If imperialism is the ‘parent’ of contemporary British racism, in what ways, if any, does resistance to racism in the diaspora derive from the nationalist precedents of the colonies? Yuval-Davis’ examination of ethnicity, difference and community underscores the particular burden that women bear when immigrants react to ‘host’ racism by closing ranks and asserting their particularity. The responsibility for maintaining and prolonging its cultural integrity lies with the community’s women - a task that, in theory at least, condemns them to an atrophied female identity, if not to the intensification of patriarchal control in the name of solidarity. Paul Gilroy is cautious about the efficacy of neo-nationalism - which, like its antecedents, can depend on the invention of ‘authentic’ and often homogenous identities - as a response to racism. In his view, it is an inherently problematic resistive strategy: partly because it risks validating imperialist ideas of innate racial and national characters; but also because it operates as a communal ideology by refusing to recognise that ethnicity “is riven by class, gender and generation”.³⁵ In such refusal lies the continuing essentialisation of the gendered social roles that have been discussed in Chapter 1. What is more, it is also the

³⁴ Op. cit., p.156.

³⁵ Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London; New York: Serpent’s Tail, 1993), p.116.

means by which any interrogation by women, of the terms on which they are accorded a place within the collectivity, is suppressed.

The gendering of imperialism and nationalism in the 'homeland'

My concern in this section of the chapter is with how (far) each phase of South Asian diasporic women's writing acknowledges the importance of gender to imperialist and nationalist ideologies. It will inevitably be the shortest section as only a minority of the selected works are concerned to any significant extent with events in the Subcontinent. In order to trace the degree of continuity or development in the treatment of imperialism and nationalism, my initial focus is upon the 'homeland' narratives of the first phase which prepare much of the ground for this chapter's ambit as a whole. One way in which colonial power has a very direct impact upon women is evident in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Nita's death is a direct result of the crowd-control tactics employed by the colonial police force. The actions of which she is a victim contradict the notion that Indian women are beneficiaries of imperial *largesse*. Rather, they suggest the intolerability of an Indian woman publicly interrogating the discourse that, among other strategies, institutes her as a victim of her 'own' people.

However, the most frequent way in which first-phase writing underscores the importance of gender to the exercise of imperial power is through the equation of women with territory. This is expressed primarily through the seizure of Indian women by colonial agents - a phenomenon that Hosain's 'Phoenix Fled' addresses with its allusions to the sexual dangers posed by British soldiers. To re-assert colonial authority after the 1857 Mutiny, the soldiers are engaged in the destruction of Indian villages; and, in the course of forcibly appropriating the land, they also engage in the forcible

appropriation of Indian women. Their threatening presence is the most immediate memory of the aged grandmother, who recalls “[t]he red-faced ones, like monkeys in red coats”, from whom “[n]o woman is safe, no girl is safe”.³⁶

The sexual undercurrent of colonial power that Hosain acknowledges is explored in the greatest detail in *The Nowhere Man*. Markandaya, like Hosain, depicts the invasive destruction of the home by the police as parallel to the assault of women; by characterising the storming of *Chandraprasad* as a “violation”.³⁷ Markandaya’s ambiguous depiction of the house as a place with “hidden spaces...where a man might lie” endows it with the character of the female body.³⁸ That a masculine dynamic underlies the ‘penetration’ of this private territory is confirmed by Srinivas’ gendered understanding of the policemen’s excitement: “his nostrils reeked with the smell of what they exuded and his palms grew wet and his groin was slippery in a kind of hideous identification”.³⁹ However, the sexual energy that drives the invasion of *Chandraprasad* is most obvious in the British officer’s visible arousal, which finds an outlet of sorts in the exposure of Vasantha’s naked body to public view. Srinivas’ implicitly recognises that the ‘seizure’ of “his father, *and Vasantha and their country*” by “white men’s hands” (my emphasis) are not discrete events, but effectively a single act.⁴⁰

³⁶ Op. cit., p.13. Nayanika Mookherjee characterises such rape as “a means of retribution and pre-emption, as well as a metaphor of sacredness and humiliation”. By way of illustration, she cites a 1972 poem by Jasimuddin, which has a particular relevance to Hosain’s depiction of imperial rape. ‘Dogdhogra’ (‘Burnt Village’) compares “the ravaging of the pastoral surroundings of Bengal with that inflicted through rape and torture by the Pakistani army”. Furthermore, Mookherjee claims that rape demasculinises men, by underscoring “their loss of agency as protectors of the honour of their women”. See ‘Gendered Embodiments: Mapping the Body Politic of the Raped Woman and the Nation in Bangladesh’ in Puwar & Raghuram, op. cit., pp.160-164.

³⁷ Op. cit., p.140.

³⁸ Ibid., p.141.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.154.

Women and the home are also central to other ways in which Markandaya represents British attempts to subjugate the native population. She highlights the difficulties Vasudev's mother faces in trying to maintain the integrity of the family home under colonial rule, and does so to a degree that *Sunlight on a Broken Column's* focus on the privileged (and sometimes collaborationist) *taluqdar* class permits less readily. The financial hardship Vasudev's mother suffers as a result of the "culling [of] the wage-earning heads" belies imperial claims of an improvement in the Indian woman's degraded position.⁴¹ Furthermore, Markandaya lays considerable emphasis on the emotional burden she bears as a result of her husband's incarceration, as he is, in accordance with tradition, one of the principal foci of her quotidian responsibilities. Her anguish is clear, as "she twist[s] her hands, yearning to use them in the service of her husband".⁴² The resignation of Vasudev's father, in response to the introduction of internment without trial, may also be read as a gendered act. By compelling him to leave the profession that enables him to support his family, the imperial power strikes at the heart of his gendered role as a provider, and exacerbates this state of affairs through his imprisonment. The destitution of the family is, therefore, a metaphorical testimony to the emasculation of Vasudev's father.

The home is not only a channel through which the colonial power tries to undermine native strength; it is also a site of nationalist resistance, especially for women. Fortitude in the face of domestic hardship was one of the principal ways in which Indian women were encouraged to support the anti-imperial effort. "By shouldering family responsibilities when their men went to jail or got killed" women were entrusted with the task of "maintain[ing] the cohesiveness of family life and the

⁴¹ Ibid., p.123.

⁴² Ibid.

solidarity with the kin group, to which men were unable to devote much attention.”⁴³ However, in first-phase texts, the (range of) protest activities that women undertake is subjected to various levels of criticism, underpinned by consciousness of the circumscriptive power of traditional gender roles. The nationalist conception of the home as symbolic of the country’s sacred cultural interior is scrutinised in a way that suggests the impossibility of the task entrusted to women, of safeguarding its purity. The relative ease with which *Chandraprasad* is destroyed by the invading officers in *The Nowhere Man* suggests that to conceive of the home/woman as an *unimpeachable* area is more an ideal than a feasible actuality. The hidden spaces that bestow a feminine character upon the house also suggest that there is a lacuna in the nationalist construction of womanhood that renders it vulnerable to the harbouring of ‘other’ values.

The nationalist insistence on women’s cultural ‘purity’ is also critiqued in Markandaya’s depiction of the burning of foreign textiles. Another means of approved protest for women, it is undertaken by those of the Vasudev family: they “kindled a bonfire and burned on it every article of what they thought to be British-manufactured that they could find”.⁴⁴ In *The Nowhere Man*, the bonfire is a recurring motif, associated with the exclusion or destruction of those deemed to be outsiders. The critical tone with which the image is employed elsewhere in the narrative suggests that, by endorsing a purification of its own culture, Indian nationalism is, to some extent, afflicted by the chauvinistic mindset against which it reacts.⁴⁵ Its indiscriminate range of targets is underscored by the fact that “silks and cottons, doilies of Brussels lace and crepe de

⁴³ Kasturi & Mazumdar, op. cit., p.xxvi, p.xiv.

⁴⁴ Op. cit., p.113.

⁴⁵ This possibility seems even greater if one considers the sympathy with which the novel treats Srinivas’ aspiration towards a less exclusively national identity.

Chine bought from *innocuous* Chinese hawkers” (my emphasis) are also consumed by the fire.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the textiles themselves function as symbols of the austerity imposed upon women by an overriding concern with the maintenance of cultural purity. The gaiety and eclecticism of the fabrics is contrasted with “the lumpish, coarse, off-white homespun” the women are obliged to wear as a mark of their nationalist allegiance.⁴⁷

There is also a palpable sense in first-phase texts of the exclusion of women from the public sphere of nationalist politics. This is especially marked in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* which, as Nasta observes, interrogates “the seamless and often patriarchal telling of the history of Independence”.⁴⁸ The irrelevance of women to the nationalist agenda in anything but the most functional capacity is summed up by an unnamed young woman on the night of the elections: the female *taluqdars*, who have been urged so assiduously to vote, “do[n’t] matter anyway” as “[e]verything will be decided by the men”.⁴⁹ The novel vividly captures the ambivalence of its protagonist, caught between a passionate concern for the autonomy of her country, and misgivings about how this is to be achieved. It is a dilemma that appears especially stark in comparison to the experiences of Laila’s male compatriots, for whom there is far less of a disjunction between their intellectual and practical politics. Isolated in her (feminist) mistrust of purportedly nationalist motives, Laila resorts, as she has done in other contexts, to the imagery of theatre - this time, to convey the hollowness of the political ‘commitment’ she witnesses around her.⁵⁰ She feels “ominously detached” from the

⁴⁶ Op. cit., p.113.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Op. cit., p.34.

⁴⁹ Op. cit., p.257.

⁵⁰ In Chapter 1, similar images are used to suggest the superficiality of Zahra’s and Saira’s respective personae.

violence of the student demonstration, “as if [she] were strapped to a chair in an empty auditorium, watching a performance”.⁵¹

The limited inclusion of women in nationalist politics is also delineated in other first-phase texts. Markandaya’s comparison of the Vasudev women’s “own small contribution” to the “lavish and picturesque” gestures of resistance by the family’s men evinces a sensitivity to the confined scope of women’s participation.⁵² In first-phase fiction, public protests by women that foreground their visible presence are few in number. The only acts that truly do so are Vasudev’s mother’s (*TNM*) deliberate disruption of British soldiers’ practice routines, and Nita’s (*SOABC*) participation in a demonstration against the Viceroy’s visit. Most forms of protest undertaken by women are in some way informed by traditional expectations, and do not transgress the boundaries within which they are supposed to operate. This tendency is apparent even in Laila and Sita’s (*SOABC*) decision to wear ‘national flag’ saris to school and to not sing the British national anthem. Their acts of defiance are public only to a certain extent, taking place, as they do, within a secluded, all-female environment. Furthermore, their refusal to sing foregrounds their silence - a customary expectation of women anyway. Moreover, Laila is keenly aware that the ways in which women do express their nationalist solidarity are often determined by the priorities of their particular *milieux*, as defined by ethnicity, religion or class, rather than by their concerns as women. Nadira’s involvement in the movement is circumscribed by, and observant of, the commitment of her family to the *Muslim* cause. Similarly, Sita and Perin express

⁵¹ Op. cit., p.157.

⁵² Op. cit., p.113. Uma Chakravorti observes that “vast sections of women did not exist for nineteenth century nationalists”, whose ideal of Indian femininity was derived from the women of the elite classes. Hosain and Markandaya suggest that the same may be true for the nationalists of the twentieth century: foreign goods can only be boycotted by those with the means to possess them in the first place. See Sangari & Vaid (eds.), op. cit., p.79.

their nationalism as consumers and patrons of Indian arts - that is to say, through the channels of wealth and privilege that define their class, and which they are desperate to conserve. In these respects, women remain the badges of every cause but that of their own advancement.

Second-phase novels that focus on the 'homeland' are small in number, and most of those that make reference to the Subcontinent do so in passing. Some degree of continuity with earlier texts is nonetheless discernible. Nanima's stories in *Anita and Me*, for example, testify to the calculated destruction of Indian homes and families. Meena's grandmother recalls the period of her husband's imprisonment as a time of utter dispossession: "I lived as a widow until he returned, and he returned to nothing. Even the pots and pans we ate from had been sold, or taken".⁵³ Although the matter is portrayed in less detail than is the case in first-phase fiction, it continues to function as an indictment of colonial policy, whose effects are again represented - despite imperial claims - as inimical to Indian women's welfare. *The Coral Strand* also acknowledges how the capture of the Indian man works to the detriment of the Indian woman, but does so by focusing on a small community of Bombay prostitutes. For many of them, the soldiers of the Indian National Army are effectively their 'providers', being among their most regular clients. When the men are incarcerated for insubordination, the prostitutes are plunged into poverty.

Developments in the second-phase treatment of imperialism and its gender politics are most obvious in *The Coral Strand*, which is the only one of the selected texts to offer a sustained examination of the topic. The novel's representation of white men's possession of Indian women places considerably more emphasis upon factors not

⁵³ Op. cit., p.231.

addressed in the chosen first-phase novels. One of these is a shift away from the equation of Indian women with territory, towards a greater emphasis on their treatment as material possessions. According to Anthony Child: “[Indians] have their women, we have our women...and their women”.⁵⁴ The proprietorial connotations in Child’s language are clear. Moreover, the fact that he claims to be descended from Josiah Child of the East India Company underscores the correlation between the Empire’s economic acquisitiveness, and its sexual avarice. Such attitudes are not confined to Child. Thomas’ (*TCS*) colonial adventure is as motivated by the sexual mythology surrounding Indian women, as it is by the material possibilities the country has to offer one in his position - both of which are, he believes, his for the taking. His possessive attitude towards Indian women is evinced in several ways, the most obvious of which is, perhaps, his gift of a young Indian girl to Champa. Donating the child in acknowledgement of his mistress’ sexual favours, this is an act that testifies to Thomas’ view of colonised women as chattels for purchase. It is also the case that while Champa marvels at Thomas’ intimacy with Britain for itself, he sees the value of his mistress’ familiarity with India and its languages primarily in terms of how it may advance his business interests.

Randhawa further develops the treatment of gender and imperialism by suggesting that the objectification of females is not confined to those of the colonies, but also extends to British women. Thomas’ proposal to Emily is motivated largely by commercial interests, for he knows that he will be perceived as more respectable and trustworthy by the people with whom he hopes to do business if he is married. That Emily is a useful prop is also evident in the fact that the spontaneous affection between

⁵⁴ Op. cit., p.173.

Thomas and Champa is noticeably absent from his relationship with his wife. It is also the case that Child's rape of Emily is very much the act of a man claiming back his rightful property from Indian hands. It is, moreover, indicative of how inter-racial sex exemplifies the power imbalance between British and Indian *men*. Child's succinct declaration, already quoted, and his treatment of Gopal make clear the absolute unacceptability of Indian men 'having' white women. The narrative also actualises the emasculation of the Indian man in colonial ideology through Gopal's brutal castration. Furthermore, the forced complicity of Emily, his former lover, in this horrific act of retribution is suggestive of how colonial discourse defines the English woman as more masculine than the Indian man.

The treatment of gender in nationalist ideology and practice provides further evidence of how second-phase novels develop the thematic range established by their predecessors. *The Red Box* is as critical as earlier works of how women are discouraged from participating publicly in the nationalist struggle; but it also draws more emphatic attention to the systematic erasure of women from anecdotal and official histories of Independence. In Tahira's view, "it suits blokes that we forget all that" political activism because of its potential to challenge the gendered *status quo*.⁵⁵ Furthermore, by focusing on the place of sexual violence in communal antagonism, works such as *A Wicked Old Woman*, *Anita and Me* and *The Coral Strand* underscore the similarity between imperialist *and* nationalist constructions of the Indian woman as a territorial and cultural symbol. The sexual terrors of communalist creation are alluded to in *The Coral Strand*, in which it is rumoured that women are being captured and raped by the men of the opposing side. "The worst imaginings...for those women who were never

⁵⁵ Op. cit., p.133.

found” echoes Kuli’s mother’s (*AWOW*) recollections of Partition as a time “in which decency was eclipsed and violence freed upon the world” and “women were - disappeared”.⁵⁶ Aunt Shaila’s (*AAM*) account of the mass migrations of this period is similar in emphasis:

“We could see the Muslims on the other side...Don’t look, *mamaji* said, don’t look...Sumi looked and they were crossing the river on horses... mad men, mad eyes, sticks with red tips...They just took her. She was too beautiful. They took her...”⁵⁷

Thus, second-phase fiction testifies to a greater willingness to admit that the imperial power is not the sole architect of women’s victimisation.

Gender and the imperial legacy in the diaspora

The majority of novels under consideration are concerned with the experiences of the diasporic South Asian population in Britain, and a number suggest that the expectations and hardships to which it is subjected originate in the ideologies that once supported British rule in the ‘homeland’. My concern in this section of the chapter is to explore the extent to which gender is implicated in the inter-ethnic dynamics of the diaspora. The selected first-phase texts overwhelmingly represent the workings of diasporic neo-colonialism through the exercise of British masculinity. *The Nowhere Man* most clearly employs this issue to draw a line of continuity between colonial and metropolitan racisms; for in both cases, abuses of power and the will to dominate are equated with the assertion of masculine strength.⁵⁸ However, whereas its ‘homeland’

⁵⁶ *The Coral Strand*, op. cit., p.237; *A Wicked Old Woman*, op. cit., p.165.

⁵⁷ Op. cit., p.74.

⁵⁸ This is, perhaps, why P.S. Chauhan attributes a “feminine sensibility” to the novel. See P.S. Chauhan, ‘Sense and Sensibility’, in *Literary Criterion*, 12.2-3, 1976, p.146.

manifestation focuses on the violation of the Indian woman (represented by Vasantha), Markandaya alludes to its diasporic equivalent through the feminisation of the Indian man (Srinivas). *The Nowhere Man* clearly signals that the two phenomena are linked: the military garb that Fred dons to prepare the bonfire by which Srinivas will be killed explicitly links his vision of unquestioned white supremacy to the mechanics of imperial rule depicted elsewhere in the narrative. But what relates it specifically to the *masculine* exercise of power - and, therefore, the relative feminisation of Srinivas - is the fact that Fred, like the colonial officer before him, is sexually aroused by the destruction he wreaks upon the British version of *Chandraprasad*, and upon Srinivas himself.

It is, therefore, insufficient to claim, as H.M. Williams does, that Fred Fletcher detests non-white immigrants simply because he is “paranoid and subnormal”.⁵⁹ To do so disengages Fred’s actions and attitudes from the historical matrix to which Markandaya alerts her readership. Bhatnagar is closer to the mark with his suggestion that unemployment is the chief reason for Fred’s loathing of his Indian neighbour. He does not, however, sufficiently elaborate the crisis of *masculinity* that the absence of a job exacerbates in a character whose pride and standing have been damaged already. Fred’s fruitless emigration to Australia necessitated his return to England; but Bhatnagar draws no attention to the fact that the reparation of his esteem rests upon the destruction of another - more successful - immigrant.⁶⁰ A comparable sense of masculine competitiveness is also evident in Laxman, whose (dis)regard for his parents often echoes Fred’s racist views. One manifestation of this tendency is Laxman’s vision

⁵⁹ H.M. Williams, ‘Victims and Virgins: Some Characters in Markandaya’s Novels’, in Prasad (ed.), op. cit., p.33.

⁶⁰ Op. cit., p.108.

of Srinivas as part of a lesser order of masculinity: the younger man compares his father's "shriveled-up skin" and "pulpy flesh" with his own "firm swelling body".⁶¹ Furthermore, in Laxman's eyes, his father's apparent passivity seems markedly feminine in comparison to the masculine energy of his own thrusting ambition.

Continuity with earlier texts is evident in how some of the chosen second-phase novels delineate the gendered legacy of colonialism in the metropolis. This is achieved primarily through the feminisation of the Asian man - a matter of particular importance to *The Red Box's* depiction of diasporic cultural politics, which represents the emasculation of the Asian male as integral to the assertion of white supremacy. This is most literally evident when a white boy suggests that the best outcome of a racially-motivated fight between two students would have been for the white pupil to "cut [the Asian one's] prick off".⁶² Not only is the student body depicted as a repository of neo-colonial attitudes; so too are some of the staff.⁶³ One respect in which this is evident is the treatment of Aslam, the School's only Asian teacher. Like Narayan in *The Nowhere Man*, Aslam is ordinarily overlooked to the point of ostracism. He is, however, endowed with fleeting importance by the principal, who, in Macauley-esque fashion, believes that the intervention of a 'familiar' messenger may disarm the protesting Asian students.⁶⁴ When his efforts fail, Aslam is swept to the periphery of events, along with the school's female teachers; for the power struggle between staff and students is clearly envisaged by the School's managers as the business of men. The demonstrators who leave the

⁶¹ Op. cit., p.65-66.

⁶² Op. cit., p.118.

⁶³ Its imperialist character is initially suggested by other means, including the teaching of a literature curriculum based upon the English canon, which Tahira regards as of little interest to her. In this respect, *The Red Box* resonates with *Hari-jan*; indeed, Harjinder (*H-J*) uses the designation "Eng. Lit." to allude to the colonial provenance of the syllabus.

⁶⁴ In his 1835 'Minute on Indian Education', Thomas Macauley endorsed the creation of "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect", to be employed as "a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern". Cited in Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man' in *The Location of Culture* (London; New York, 1994), p.87.

deepest impression upon the principal and his deputy are the most threateningly masculine, while a cry of protest is immediately discounted when it becomes clear that its source is a female pupil.

The School's neo-colonial character is reinforced by Sheikh's allusions to other institutional bulwarks of white supremacy in the colonies. The belittling of the Asian male by the School authorities is exacerbated by Jamshid's expulsion. Aslam effectively complies with his own humiliation; but Jamshid's defiant attitude towards Mr. Kern necessitates more obviously harsh action. Adopting the manner of a prosecutor (thereby implicitly evoking, through his regulative role, the colonial courts' punishment of Indian insurrection), the principal treats the School as a synecdochical representation of Britain. He repeatedly constructs the boy as an outsider and an inferior, with an insufficient grasp of proper British values: "It seems that you don't understand some of *our* ways in this school...It's a criminal offence *in this country* to carry weapons - you do know that?" (my emphasis).⁶⁵ Kern's exclusionary approach is echoed in the conduct of his deputy, Mr. Busby - a name with obvious military connotations. As the Asian students congregate to protest at the lesser punishments meted out to white pupils involved in racial violence, Busby loses himself in reveries of a "green and private Essex", untouched by non-white immigration.⁶⁶

Second-phase works develop the representation of diasporic neo-colonialism in several ways. The cultural symbolism of the Asian woman in neo-imperial discourse is a much more pressing concern in later works, and is evocative of how, in the

⁶⁵ Op. cit., p.76. Mr. Kern's views are evidently shared by others in the locality. Watching the gathering of the students, a local woman remarks that "[I]t wouldn't be allowed in *their own* countries" (my emphasis). Ibid. p.105.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.104.

'homeland' narrative of *The Nowhere Man*, the white expression of superiority over the natives encompasses the sexual denigration of the Asian woman. Although Tahira and Mumtaz are not physically assaulted, as Vasantha is, they are publicly branded as "dirty Paki slags" - a slur implicitly directed towards their entire community.⁶⁷ However, the extent to which racist disgust at Asian women is interwoven with desire (an ambivalence apparent in the conduct of the officer in *The Nowhere Man*) is evident in the fact that the verbal attack is preceded by expressions of sexual interest by the same men.

Mumtaz was the first to notice the car. A dented Ford Escort, 'R' registration, had started to cruise alongside them. "Hurry up, Tahira. Those four blokes in that car, they're looking at us".

Tahira turned to look at the car. "What's that filthy pig doing with his tongue?"⁶⁸

The confluence of disgust and desire is, perhaps, captured most effectively in *A Wicked Old Woman*: in Rosco's attempted assault on Rosalind/Rani, and in the doggerel that charts Michael's adolescent romance with Kuli.

How she missed the banana boat is a mystery to me,

How she kissed is history to me...

How she turned her back was sad to me

How much a wog she was, was clear to me.⁶⁹

Indeed, its emphasis on inter-racial relationships, personal and professional, is perhaps the most important development in how second-phase fiction depicts the gendered workings of diasporic neo-colonialism. The colonial prohibition on liaisons

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.53.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Op. cit., p.84.

between Asian males and white females is echoed in several second-phase works set in Britain. In *The Red Box*, the fear and disgust with which a younger generation of white girls regard Asian males testify to the persistent sexual demonisation of the latter.

“It’s that wanker Jam-sheed that gets me,” said Kelly, rubbing her ear-lobe again. “Always gives me the creeps. Know what I mean?”

“Right,” Julie said. “Like imagine being alone with him.” The three shuddered in unison.⁷⁰

While continuing to highlight the role of particular institutions, second-phase fiction incorporates the trope of the mixed relationship much more into its representations of how diasporic neo-colonialism is sustained. Later novels are far more emphatic about the disapproval with which relationships between Asian men and white women are regarded, whereas in *The Nowhere Man*, Laxman’s marriage to Pat is barely examined in such terms.⁷¹ Evoking narratives such as *The Raj Quartet* and *A Passage to India*, *A Wicked Old Woman* suggests that the forces of law and order may be brought to bear upon the Asian man’s possession of a white woman.⁷² The novel depicts the vicious police beating to which Arvind is subjected for this ‘crime’, and there is a vivid irony in Randhawa’s description of “his blood and teeth dropping like confetti”.⁷³ Only in *The Coral Strand* does a relationship between a white woman and a non-white man appear to suggest the tentative erosion of neo-imperial attitudes. The novel concludes in the summer of 1997, and amongst its harbingers of change is Diana Spencer’s alleged

⁷⁰ Op. cit., p.118.

⁷¹ Although Markandaya does not make the point explicitly, it is conceivable, given Vasantha’s history and experiences in India, that her distress at the news of Laxman’s engagement to Pat is informed by a residual memory the treatment of Indian men who dared to consort with white women.

⁷² Paul Scott, *The Raj Quartet* (London: Heinemann, 1976); E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: E. Arnold & Co., 1924).

⁷³ Op. cit., p.87. Furthermore, Shirley’s policeman father asks her to leave home because of the hostility her choice of partner attracts.

romance with Dodi Fayed. While it alludes to the possibility that the relationship is threatening to the establishment, the novel also suggests that the liaison is also the object of some *positive* excitement.

However, reflecting the importance of gynocentric narratives in South Asian diasporic women's fiction, it is the relationship between the Asian female and the white male that plays the major role in second-phase fiction. Its configuration symbolises the masculine-feminine dichotomy on which colonial ideology based its differentiation of white from non-white, and is a type of union that is barely explored in first-phase works. Only *Sumitra's Story* touches upon it, and then fleetingly.⁷⁴ The attention paid to relationships between British men and Asian women is more persistent and critical in second-phase texts. In her depiction of Michael and Kuli's (*AWOW*) relationship, Randhawa suggests that a colonial legacy is present from the start, and does not simply emerge from an embittered man's sense of abandonment. While Kuli enjoys Michael's apparently ironic, orientalist characterisations of her as an Indian princess and the "Mata-Hari of his heart", a discordant note is sounded early in the narrative.⁷⁵ His deliberate confusion of South Asian Indians with Native Americans, evident in his recurring references to wig-wams, resembles the racist graffiti that Kuli sees on a bus: "Smoke signals only. Indian driver".⁷⁶ However, the neo-colonial character of Michael's relationship with Kuli becomes most evident when she refuses his proposal of marriage. Employing the monosyllabic and grammatically incomplete speech

⁷⁴ *Sumitra's Story* does not see metropolitan racism as having any connection to the gendered hierarchy that underpins imperial ideology. Smith takes a largely positive view of white men, and represents their interest in Sumitra in terms of potential inter-cultural dialogue - a potential that the novel never realises because of the uncongenial social climate in which the narrative is set. At no point does Smith suggest that the attention of which Sumitra is the object is intrusive or expressive of a neo-colonial sense of sexual proprietorship.

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6, p.9.

patterns with which the natives of the colonies might be addressed, Michael bemoans the backwardness and hypocrisy of Kuli's inherited culture. Because he expects her to conform to a European romantic etiquette, it is tempting to see a deliberate chromatic reference in Michael's demand that Kuli "play[s] *fair*" (my emphasis).⁷⁷

The white man's belief in his right to determine his Asian partner's cultural identity is noticeably tenacious in second-phase fiction. It is one example of how, in later works, the figure of the white male functions as a symbol of institutionalised neo-colonialism in the diaspora - in this case representing how the state conceives of, and manages, its multicultural society. The context of Kuli and Michael's relationship is that of an assimilationist society, in which the British way of life is the norm that 'incomers' must strive to emulate. However, as later second-phase texts suggest, the emergence of a greater emphasis on ethnic difference does not necessarily prevent the white male from judging the adequacy of his partner's cultural identity. The attractions of 'otherness' in mixed relationships are addressed most strikingly in two second-phase novels, in which white males are enthralled by the 'alien' qualities of their South Asian partners. Difference is the cohesive force in Mira's relationship with Luke in *Looking for Maya*: "we were constantly in touch with the differences: it fascinated us, this lack of sameness".⁷⁸ However, whereas Srivastava depicts a reciprocal dynamic in her protagonist's relationship, Syal offers a more sinister – because less mutual – portrayal of 'otherness' as a focus of desire. Martin (*LIAH*) bemoans Tania's "lack of *native* culture" (my emphasis), overlooking the fact that, by birth, she is British.⁷⁹

[T]here he was, thinking he was getting the genuine article, looking

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.25.

⁷⁸ Op. cit., p.17.

⁷⁹ Op. cit., p.144.

forward to spitting with my family and having forbidden encounters in borrowed places, planning a romantic tour with me around the one-hut, dung-filled villages he visited as a student...⁸⁰

The expectations to which Tania is subjected are as restrictive as any nationalist insistence that women be the embodiment of 'authentic' culture, and as inflexible as Michael's endorsement of Kuli's unconditional assimilation. There is little sense, however, that Martin recognises the deficiency in his outlook: he prefers to see Tania, rather than himself, as the architect of his disappointment.

In second-phase works, the institutionalisation of neo-colonial attitudes in the diaspora is also apparent in the cultural politics of media stereotyping, which too are represented by relationships between white men and Asian women. *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* addresses the topic by means of Tania and Jonathan's professional relationship, while in *A Wicked Old Woman* it is examined in part through Maya's doomed collaboration with Martin and Maddison. Both texts are concerned with how, and by whom, Asian Britain is represented; and the workings of media organisations are often portrayed as instrumental in the perpetuation of an impoverished vision of Asian cultures. The difficulties of challenging existing stereotypes is evident in *A Wicked Old Woman*, where Maya is sidelined from the project on madness in the Asian community when it becomes clear that her research does not fit the narrative upon which Martin and Maddison's "receiving aerials" had already decided.⁸¹ Tania's (*LIAH*) ascent within the media world has come at the price of her complicity with the prejudices of "forty-

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Op. cit., p.104. Maya's situation is comparable to that outlined by Puwar and Raghuram, where "in projects on racialized minorities managed by senior white academics, the appointment of South Asian women as researchers can be confined to providing social documentation of ethnic minorities. Once the 'data' and stories are collected, much of the theorizing is then left to the more senior staff". See '(Dis)locating South Asian Women in the Academy' in Puwar & Raghuram, op. cit., p.1.

something white men [who] told her what was important and real...and explained to her what it meant to be Asian and British, at least for the purposes of television".⁸² A number of the projects with which Tania has been involved reiterate the kinds of well-worn stereotype - arranged marriages and "heavy exposés of mad Muslims" - that, like Raj imperialism, often utilise the oppression of women to condemn Asian cultures as a whole.⁸³ The relationship between Tania and Jonathan also alludes to the education system - one of the key colonial institutions foregrounded in *The Red Box*. Syal's depiction of its dynamic underscores the paternalistic authority and the possessiveness with which Tania is kept 'in line' by a man with the demeanour of a "slightly fanatic headmaster". By merely "plac[ing] a *proprietary* arm on her back" (my emphasis) Jonathan assumes the right and the power to guide his *protégée* in the direction of his choosing.⁸⁴

The white male-Asian female relationship is also deployed in second-phase writing to exemplify how the law reinforces Britain's neo-colonial dynamics. Syal and Sheikh in particular illuminate the extent to which the latent patriarchy of the legal system conspires against diasporic Asian women, and colludes with Asian male chauvinism in doing so. As discussed in the previous chapter, the young constable who banishes Tahira and Gita (*TRB*) from the scene of the demonstration achieves his aim by threatening to impugn the girls' moral honour, thereby exploiting the patriarchal norms that prevail within their community. The complicity of patriarchies is even more evident in the case of Jasbinder Singh, portrayed in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* and

⁸² Op. cit., p.61.

⁸³ Ibid. It is not only diasporic Asian *women* who are represented through the eyes of Jonathan and his ilk. The "corner shop [owners], long-suffering Indian waiters, and smiling beggars" are also reduced to stereotypical camera fodder. Ibid., p.63.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.59, p.61.

possibly based on the real-life case of Kiranjit Ahluwalia.⁸⁵ The censure of the Asian community, to which Singh is exposed for leaving her husband, is compounded by a legal system that excuses his murder of their sons as a crime of passion. The decision effectively reinforces the belief that the children are his property alone, and that Singh herself must bear ultimate responsibility for her husband's conduct. However, one mixed relationship in *A Wicked Old Woman* suggests that *Sumitra's Story's* earlier implication, that mixed relationships represent the possibility of positive inter-cultural dialogue, may have some relevance in a legal context. The sympathetic conduct of the police officer in charge of Rani's case is, arguably, attributable to the fact that his wife is Asian.

Gender and the nationalist legacy in the diaspora

My focus now shifts to the ways in which Asian Britons respond to the neo-imperial dynamics of diasporic life, and how (far) the gender politics of Subcontinental nationalism inform the strategies they employ. In other words, how - if at all - is the construction of women as guardians of the nation's cultural integrity germane to acts of resistance? And to what extent are they informed by the conception of the home as the locus of the 'original' nation's cultural spirit? Of the selected first-phase novels, *The Nowhere Man* provides the most obvious example, in the form of Vasantha, of a diasporic woman's loyalty to her inherited culture. Because she follows her new husband to England, Vasantha's emigration from India is more a matter of necessity than of choice; and her approach to living in the diaspora is implicitly informed by the tactics of nationalist resistance in her country of origin. Her refusal to make any

⁸⁵ A lengthy campaign was conducted during the 1980s and 1990s to overturn Ahluwalia's conviction for murder, after she killed her abusive husband.

substantial changes to her identity reflects the belief, discussed in Chapter 1, that women are the culture's spiritual and practical custodians. Vasantha retains the sartorial and culinary markers of Indian tradition; and, in maintaining her religious observance, she dismisses Christianity - the currency of the colonial missionary - as a conceptually immature faith. More than Srinivas, it is she who ensures that their sons' upbringing has a strongly Indian dimension, as a counterbalance to the assimilatory pressures to which they are subjected. In all of these respects, her response to the politics of the diaspora may be said to emerge specifically from the nationalist allocation of gendered responsibility.

However, the absolutist value judgements about British culture and Britons themselves, that often accompany the valorisation of Indianness, are the objects of considerable authorial criticism. The imagery of disease that is employed in the novel to reflect the contagion of British racism against 'others' also hovers around Vasantha: her reactions to the news of Laxman's engagement and marriage to a white woman resemble the symptoms of nascent illness.⁸⁶ Furthermore, following Vasantha's death, Srinivas admits that his view of England was somewhat "infected" by his wife's.⁸⁷ In *Sumitra's Story*, the tendency of the Patel elders and their peers to characterise white people as "irreligious, dirty [and] ignorant" resonates with Sumitra's own views only occasionally: she concedes, for example, that the bigoted Jean deserves such castigation.⁸⁸ However, more often than not, Sumitra is frustrated by her parents' inclination towards such Manichaeian cultural characterisations - in part, because of its

⁸⁶ Thakur Guruprasad characterises Vasantha as "one of two very sensitive, delicate Indian souls" – the other being Seshu – who "could not survive the British transplant". Guruprasad links Vasantha's early death to the fact that she makes no attempt to assimilate. See "And Never the Twain Shall Meet": *The Nowhere Man* in R.K. Dhawan (ed.), *Indian Women Novelists: Set II, Vol.III* (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1993), p.181; p177.

⁸⁷ Op. cit., p.71.

⁸⁸ Op. cit., p.43.

proximity to the kind of racist stereotyping to which the Patels are opposed when they are its objects.

There is also a sense in which the negative characterisation of British culture impacts upon Sumitra as a *female*. Her social circumscription is frequently underpinned and justified by the uncritical assumption that “we are better than them”, and that the restrictions placed upon women in the ethnic community are evidence of this elevated status.⁸⁹ Perhaps because of the (pre-women’s movement) period in which the narrative is set, Markandaya offers no specifically feminist critique of Vasantha’s diasporic adherence to Indian cultural patterns. Rather, it is Smith who, among the selected first-phase novelists, examines how women’s inequality, as Yuval-Davis suggests, is essential to the reactive conservation of ethnic identity in hostile circumstances.⁹⁰ *Sumitra’s Story* critically depicts the ways in which gender inequality is endorsed under the aegis of defending Subcontinental cultural norms against contamination by an unwelcoming society’s values. In *Sumitra’s Story*, much of the friction within the Patel family centres around the parents’ loyalty to their diasporic *biraderi*. Although the term refers to the village-kin network as a whole, the fact that *biraderi* means ‘brotherhood’ in Urdu is emblematic of the extent to which the community is male-governed. Sumitra sees Mr. and Mrs. Patel’s adherence to the *biraderi*’s tight, ‘home-from-home’ circle not only as an act of solidarity in the face of hostility, but also as an acceptance of male domination. Indeed, Sumitra suggests that men such as Jayant are especially keen to maintain the cultural exclusivity of the *biraderi* because they have a vested interest in shielding its patriarchal norms from interrogation by ‘external’ values.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ See introduction to Chapter 1.

In this respect, *Sumitra's Story* is more typical of second-phase writing: it diverges from *The Nowhere Man's* precedent by suggesting that resistance to the 'host' culture through the adoption of traditional 'homeland' identities is especially problematic for women. In part at least, this may be accounted for by the fact that the majority of second-phase novelists write from a position of greater distance from the 'homeland'. Their greater immersion in the cultural heterogeneity of Britain more readily enables critical readings of how women's inferiority often exemplifies the authenticity of 'homeland' national cultures. Some second-phase texts take issue with the conservation of traditional gender roles in the diaspora by emphasising the practical and psychological burdens women are obliged to shoulder, because of the requirement that the home remain a repository of Subcontinental norms. Syal's novels in particular exemplify this mode of critique. Both of her works give prominent roles to South Asian diasporic women whose employment in the public sphere is 'compensated for' by their efforts to preserve traditional Asian norms in the home - a strategy that, according to Chatterjee, was approved by 'homeland' nationalists.

However, as Syal's novels elucidate, the reality for diasporic women is often an exhausting circuit of full-time work *and* full-time domestic responsibility. Daljit Kumar (*AAM*), a teacher "c[o]me[s] back from school and [goes] *straight* into the kitchen" (my emphasis), and bears the responsibility of caring for her baby son almost single-handedly.⁹¹ The intensity of the post-natal depression to which the novel alludes is exacerbated by the fact that Daljit's diasporised circumstances deprive her of the support that the other women of an extended family can provide. *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* also underscores the exhaustion experienced by women juggling a non-

⁹¹ Op. cit., p.135

traditional role outside the home, with a highly traditional one inside. Furthermore, the novel suggests that the contrasting expectations to which these women are subjected are 'schizophrenic'. The condition is upheld by the husbands children and parents who are the beneficiaries of women's domestic labour.

...[M]ost of my girlfriends...between them...run business empires, save lives on operating tables, mould and develop young minds, trade in non-existent commodities with shouting barrow boys, kick ass across courtrooms and computer screens...Then they reach their front doors and forget it all...within a minute they are basting and baking and burning fingers over a hot griddle, they are soothing children and saying sorry, bathing in-laws and burning with guilt...wondering why they left their minds next to the muddy wellies and pile of junk mail in the front porch.⁹²

Other second-phase fiction suggests that women's traditionalism, as a reaction to the hostility of British society, is necessarily superficial. The fallacy of Kuli's reinvention as a traditional wife and mother is, as Innes notes, signalled in the prologue to *A Wicked Old Woman*, in which Kuli paints a *bindi* onto the forehead of a Russian doll.⁹³ The varnish runs down the doll's face, symbolising the possibility that Kuli's efforts will end in tears, and thus portending the failure of her reactive immersion in a traditional role. However, the significance of the doll can be extended beyond Innes' suggestion, to illustrate more specifically the cost of Kuli's experiment. Only the outermost figure is painted, indicating the superficiality of Kuli's reversion; but more

⁹² Op. cit., p144-145. Syal's vision contrasts with that of Hasmita Ramji, who claims that contradictory pressures on women are usually resolved "through a re-articulation of the household in the form of a nuclear family, and by limiting and redefining responsibilities at the extended family and community levels". Hasmita Ramji, 'Engendering Diasporic Identities of Women in Professional Work' in Puwar & Raghuram (eds.), op. cit., p.235.

⁹³ C.L. Innes, 'Wintering: Making a Home in Britain' in Lee, op. cit., p.30.

disturbingly, the fact that several smaller dolls are contained inside the largest suggests that most of Kuli's other selves must be suppressed or denied for her enterprise to succeed.⁹⁴ The possibility that diasporic women who conform to 'homeland' precepts in response to assimilatory pressures pay a considerable price in doing so is reiterated by other second-phase novels. Writing of *Anita and Me*, Schoene-Harwood describes Meena's transformation into a dutiful Indian daughter as "yet another inauthentic act of purely expedient self-(de)formation": a course undertaken in order to feel a sense of unconditional belonging *somewhere*, regardless of its cost.⁹⁵

The Red Box also emphasises the self-denial that reactive traditionalism imposes upon women. The strictly Muslim environment in which Nasreen is raised seeks to exclude many Western cultural influences. The extent to which this aim is met is debatable, as Nasreen's insistence that her cultural identity is, first and foremost, defined by her religion depends on two acts of disavowal. The culturally transgressive actions in which she imagines herself participating suggest that she has assimilated some Western norms as valid forms of conduct. However, she dismisses the same actions as the doings of a bad Muslim, and therefore not part of her "real self" who would be "at home with [her] family and being good".⁹⁶ It is, however, the case that while she tries to absolve herself of responsibility for her imaginary conduct, the transgressive nature of her daydreams remains a source of considerable private

⁹⁴ This resonates with Sonita Sarker's claim that *A Wicked Old Woman* shows a keen awareness of how Asian diasporic women are colonised twice over. Its first, "micro-level" manifestation is evident in the transporting of Indian cultural norms to Britain. See *Untold: Exile, Dissidence and Desire in Twentieth Century Women's Fiction* (Ph.D. thesis, UCLA, 1993), p.134.

⁹⁵ Op. cit., p.163.

⁹⁶ Op. cit., p.131.

gratification. Furthermore, it is sufficiently vivid that her reveries quickly gather their own narrative momentum.⁹⁷

To one such scene, Nasreen, with intense pleasure and concentration, returned again and again... Briefly, Nasreen paused to consider how the woman in her head had come to be drunk, and why Zahid wasn't incensed by the sinful lapse. She must have sipped the wine unknowingly. Was that possible? Perhaps she drank the wine to stop her husband from taking alcohol, however occasionally. "If you can drink, so can I," she'd say to shock him into abstinence. She started to weigh the plausibility of such motivations, but the lure of the plot was too great.⁹⁸

Furthermore, in order to defend the gendering of religious education and the division of labour, Nasreen denies the patriarchal provenance of her inherited values, even though she is privately dubious of their "self-evident" import.⁹⁹

Second-phase writings assert the importance of interrogating neo-nationalist orthodoxies that construct women as cultural guardians. They emphasise how the purportedly clear-cut boundaries of national-cultural identity are breached by the upheavals of migration, and highlight the potential that exists in these fissures for inter-cultural negotiation. Williams emphasis on "inter-nationalism" suggests that it is the

⁹⁷ In the novel's first 'fantasy' episode, Nasreen is reading *Jane Eyre*. Indeed, "she *understood* the young Jane Eyre with her hidden window-seat and her imaginings" that enable her to 'escape' temporarily from her uncongenial circumstances (my emphasis, p.34). The importance of mirrors in Nasreen's daydream evokes the point in Bronte's novel when Jane first glimpses Bertha Mason in a mirror. Just as Bertha represents Jane's repressed sexuality, so the reflection of Nasreen is both "her and not-her" (p.35). The evocation of emergent female sexuality is extended by Sheikh's allusion to *Romeo and Juliet*, even though Nasreen's dream of the dark-room has no sexual conclusion. Compare "Though she possessed the room somewhere in her mind, she never quite saw what lay inside" (p.35) with Juliet's declaration on her wedding night that "...I have bought the mansion of a love/ but not possessed it" (Act. 3.1, ll.26-27).

⁹⁸ Op. cit., pp.38-39.

⁹⁹ Op. cit., p.134. As Saeeda Khanum has pointed out, "the education of Muslim girls has less to do with schooling than with the exercise of control by Muslim men over the lives of women in the family and wider community... Single-sex education is preferred by Muslim parents, and nearly always for their daughters only". See 'Education and the Muslim Girl' in Sahgal & Yuval-Davis (eds.), op.cit., p.130.

characteristic mode of identity formation, especially for women, in an era of diaspora and migration.¹⁰⁰ All of the female characters in *The Red Box* are compelled to revise the extent to which their identities as South Asian Muslim women require their compliance with traditional, inherited patterns of behaviour as the best expression of cultural fidelity. Arguably, then, it is the emphatic gynocentricity of second-phase narratives that enables them to interrogate the terms of national-cultural belonging - a possibility that George does not consider when she claims that “the immigrant genre [of writing] is marked by a disregard for national schemes”.¹⁰¹ Tahira (*TRB*) chooses to conform to Asian sartorial customs as a gesture of anti-racist defiance: “Now I think, if you really want to know, I don’t mind wearing Asian clothes, because I don’t care. English people, they can go...”.¹⁰² However, she also participates in activities that, to others in her community, may seem inappropriate for a Pakistani girl. Her organisational role in the student demonstration is regarded by some as a ‘crime’ equal to that which prompted the protest: by associating with boys and adopting a highly visible role, Tahira is committing the grievous sin of besmirching her *izzat* and that of her family. Thus, in electing to take part in the protest, she does not only challenge the neo-imperialism of the school. Recognising the similarities between her situation and that of Nasreen’s grandmother, Tahira also counters the (neo-)nationalist orthodoxy that decrees the home to be the most appropriate forum for women’s anti-imperial resistance.

Second-phase interrogations of the gendering of national culture incorporate more dialogic forms of questioning than are apparent in an earlier work such as *Sumitra’s Story*, as the terms on which ‘belonging’ is granted in *Britain* are subjected to

¹⁰⁰ Williams, op. cit., pp.45-54.

¹⁰¹ Op. cit., p.171.

¹⁰² Op. cit., p.17.

comparable scrutiny. Randhawa asserts the importance of inherited tradition in *Hari-jan* which, in common with *A Wicked Old Woman* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, displays considerable scepticism about the extent to which white and feminist orthodoxies can accommodate the priorities of Asian women.¹⁰³ While Rani in *A Wicked Old Woman* rejects her traditional Asian upbringing entirely because of the constraints it imposes upon her as a female, the novel also depicts the dangerous consequences of embracing assimilation without an adequate understanding of its limitations. It is the ministrations of local Asian community members that ultimately draw her back from the brink of madness - reasserting her Indian identity and reminding her of how valuable membership of a collectivity defined by inherited culture can be.

However, in keeping with Williams' conception of 'inter-nationalism', some second-phase novels suggest that it is possible for Asian British women to combine their 'homeland' cultures and traditions as sources of strength, with a cogent challenge to the gendered double-standards that sometimes inflect their practices. In *Hari-jan*, Laxmi Richardson's decisions to marry an Englishman and to only wear *khaddar* during and after her wedding are indicative of such a dialogic pattern of refusal. Firstly, by disallowing her family the customary right to arrange her betrothal, she challenges the conventional social import of Subcontinental marriage, and the functional role women play in its perpetuation. Secondly, in an act that rejects the assimilatory dynamics often symbolised by relationships between white men and Asian women, Laxmi refuses to give up the Indian part of her identity, and "become foreign"

¹⁰³ *A Wicked Old Woman* deploys a pattern of naval imagery to suggest the tenuous nature of solidarity - including that between women. Kuli is critical of Caroline's glib (and, arguably, essentialist) assertion that while Asian and white women "may be sailing in different boats...the sea is the same. In *Hari-jan*, it is Suresh's *feminist* objections to the beauty pageant that endanger the participants' social empowerment. For a further example of Randhawa's ambivalence towards Eurocentric feminism see her short story for teenagers, 'India', in Rosemary Stones (ed.) *More to Life than Mr. Right* (London: Piccadilly Press, 1985), pp.11-29.

to her parental culture.¹⁰⁴ Ghazala in the same novel is a younger example of diasporic ‘inter-nationalism’ in action. Since adopting a more religious way of life, indicated externally by conformity to the Arab-Islamic dress code, Ghazala’s manner has become “much quieter, but strangely, it’d got very solid, like she was really sure of herself”.¹⁰⁵ However, her sartorial acquiescence with a particular manifestation of religious/cultural identity is implicitly accompanied by a more critical reading of the strictures it imposes upon women. Ghazala’s inclusive interpretation of the *Koran* renders it compatible with activities that compel her to socialise widely, and to take on the kinds of public responsibilities and leadership roles that are customarily seen as exceeding the ambit of permissible female conduct. Like Laxmi’s, Ghazala’s adoption of a sartorial code that, in the ‘homeland’, could be seen as compliant with (women’s) subordination, is rendered otherwise by its diasporic context, where it signals criticism of (ethnic) subordination by the ‘host’.

This strategy not only demonstrates the dialogic character of women’s ‘inter-national’ identity formations. It also exemplifies how ‘inter-nationalism’ enables its practitioners to translate traditional cultural practices into new settings, and to ascribe alternative meanings to them. Ahmed asserts that the adoption of Islamic dress by Muslim women coming of age during the 1970s and 1980s “cannot be seen as a retreat from...affirmations of female autonomy and subjectivity”.¹⁰⁶ Rather it signals women’s arrival in the public sphere; for by proclaiming their adherence to Islamic moral precepts, it enables them to occupy what are ordinarily male-dominated environments without taint to their reputation. Therefore, “far from indicating that the wearers remain

¹⁰⁴ Op. cit., p.66. Laxmi’s choice of clothing may, therefore, be seen as a feminist appropriation of a symbol of nationalism.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.19. Ghazala is the name of one of early Islam’s most famous female warriors. See Leila Ahmed, op. cit., p.71.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.224.

fixed in the world of tradition and the past...Islamic dress is the uniform of arrival, signaling entrance into, and determination to move forward in, modernity".¹⁰⁷ The traditional requirement that, in the interests of propriety, women socialise largely with other women is also subverted to more liberating ends when the practice is translated to the diaspora. The "insidious segregation of the sexes" that Syal represents as increasingly common in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* enables women to pursue causes of special relevance to themselves.¹⁰⁸ This "incestuous circuit where they all converged eventually" functions like a female version of the *biraderi*, albeit without the traditional membership criteria of kin and village. Rather, it operates as a network that exists to promote the welfare of its 'members'.

Indeed, the emergence of the female *biraderi* exemplifies how 'international' identity formations furnish some of the best possibilities for opposing the neo-colonial institutions outlined in the previous section of this chapter. Utilising the network's collective talents and contacts, the proposed documentary on Jasbinder Singh has the potential to mount challenges on two fronts. Firstly, it could illuminate how a miscarriage of justice has been generated by the collusion of supposedly different patriarchies. Secondly, it could interrogate the ethnocentric criteria that deem the story too Asian to be of general interest to mainstream news media. In short, it has the potential to interrogate the patriarchal and racial terms of national-cultural inclusion.¹⁰⁹ In this respect, *A Wicked Old Woman* is something of a precursor to *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*; for Randhawa's narrative insists that opposition to the iniquitous workings of the law and the media must be addressed primarily by women, including its victims. *A*

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.225.

¹⁰⁸ Op. cit. p.213.

¹⁰⁹ The film will also enable Tania to redress her complicity with the neo-imperialist mechanics of a male-governed media establishment.

Wicked Old Woman is emphatic about the need for diasporic women to seize the representational reins: Shazia's articles and Maya's film will publicise Rani's case from angles that foreground both its female and Asian British perspectives. By enabling a more thorough examination of the social, cultural and political structures - British and Asian - that shape the case, its perception and its likely outcome, Randhawa's women destabilise the notion that Rani's is a simple story of endogenic madness. They, like Syal's characters, issue a direct challenge to the racial and gendered criteria according to which this case would be considered insufficiently newsworthy.

However, despite these similarities, *A Wicked Old Woman* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* part company thereafter, exemplifying the diversity to be found within the second-phase treatment of diasporic neo-nationalism. For Syal, diasporic women's 'inter-nationalism' flourishes best within its 'own' circle - a collective of Asian females whose focus is undisturbed by the presence of obviously 'other' racial or sexual influences and priorities. Randhawa's position is different. Despite the primary role of the Asian community in Rani's rehabilitation, the constituency of protest, as Randhawa conceives it, must broaden so that its composition exemplifies 'inter-nationalism' at work. Randhawa's treatment emphasises to an extent that Syal's does not, that the moral responsibility of men and whites to interrogate the basis of their respective privileges may be best awakened by incorporating them into struggles against the institutionalised prejudices from which they benefit.

Conclusion

First-phase texts tend to devote a greater amount of attention than do second-phase works to British imperialism in India. Focusing on issues such as sexual seizure and the destruction of Indian homes, first-phase fiction delineates the impact of imperial ideologies upon the women of the Subcontinent. The explicit condemnation of the colonial power's ethics continues in the novels of the second-phase, where the aspects of imperialist practice that degrade Indian women remain the objects of critical attention. Although considerably less space is devoted in the majority of later narratives to this kind of critique, this is not true of *The Coral Strand*. Uniquely among the selected examples of second-phase fiction, Randhawa's novel introduces a number of other foci to the treatment of imperialism that underscore the pervasive scope of its chauvinistic ideology. Inter-racial sexual relationships underscore the imbalance of power between the natives and their colonisers, and the absence of mutuality within such unions serves to reinforce this lack of parity. The novel also literalises the emasculation of the Asian male in colonial discourse, and links this explicitly to the prohibition on relationships between Asian men and white women. Furthermore, the objectification of women in imperial ideology is extended to the white female. There is, however, little evidence that the comparability of their treatment engenders any kind of solidarity between Asian and British women. Rather, their imperial construction as symbols of distinct national characters takes precedence, so that they are represented and perceived first and foremost as ethnicised beings.

The position of women in nationalist discourse also emphasises their status as symbols of national culture, and militates against any kind of feminised identification with white women. First-phase texts lay particular emphasis on the considerable

demands that commitment to the nationalist cause makes of women, whose inclusion remains circumscribed by traditional patterns of socialisation. *The Nowhere Man* emphasises the fortitude and commitment to cultural preservation that women are required to uphold; and its narrative highlights the extent to which the construction of the Indian woman as the symbol of her country effectively legitimises her suffering. Furthermore, her exclusion from the public sphere of politics is one of the means by which the contribution of the Indian woman is effectively erased from the record of the Independence struggle. *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, meanwhile, is especially critical of how various factions within the pro-independence movement see fit to use women as emissaries of their cause, but ignore their specific needs. Second-phase works continue with this precedent inasmuch as they too emphasise the pressures on Subcontinental women to confine their resistance to the private realm. The censure heaped upon Nasreen's grandmother in *The Red Box* for her visible participation in anti-imperial demonstrations highlights the attempt to obliterate evidence of women's activity. It also suggests that this restriction is underwritten by the fear that permitting women to overstep their customary boundaries in one context may encourage them to challenge their traditional roles in other ways.

Diasporic neo-imperialism in first-phase fiction is consistent with its Subcontinental antecedent insofar as it is represented as the exercise of masculine power. However, it is suggested that its range of targets expands in the metropolis to include the Asian male. This remains the case in second-phase writing as well, which also transfers from the 'homeland' to the diaspora the prohibition on intimate relationships between Asian men and white women. As colonial discourse characterises woman as territory and man as its conqueror, the necessity of curbing the power of the

Asian male becomes particularly pressing if he is entering or 'invading' the colonial motherland. Thus, in its engagement with the 'others' in its midst, the former metropolis still bears the traces of its imperial history. However, the major development in second-phase depictions of diasporic neo-colonialism is the importance accorded to the relationship between the Asian female and the white male, and the feminine-masculine dichotomy of imperial discourse that it symbolises. The Asian woman in the diaspora is, like her 'homeland' predecessor, conceived of primarily as a representative of her inherited culture. When paired with a white male, her narrative presence reinforces the conviction, established through other forms of gendered mixed relationship, that British society is bent upon maintaining the imperial economy of power that subordinates the non-white citizen.

The construction of the Asian woman as cultural symbol also informs the treatment of neo-nationalist resistance to diasporic racism. In first-phase texts, some diversity is apparent in this topic's treatment: women are depicted as willing *and* unwilling adherents to the traditional conception of South Asian femininity - especially its prioritisation of domesticity and cultural purity. Nonetheless, the validity of a nationalist-inspired denigration of all things British is the object of critique in both of the selected diasporic narratives from the first phase. *The Nowhere Man* and *Sumitra's Story* are concerned with the possibility that the neo-nationalist endorsement of Indian cultural norms replicates, in certain respects, the British racist attitudes to which it is theoretically opposed. Furthermore, *Sumitra's Story* engages in a feminist critique of how adherents to this orthodoxy are complicit in the continuing subordination of South Asian women in the name of cultural authenticity. This concern in particular remains current in second-phase examinations of gender and diasporic neo-nationalism - a

tendency that highlights the extent to which *Sumitra's Story* is the bridge between first and second-phase writing. Later works evince an especially strong sense that the uncritical endorsement of 'homeland' identities is a problematic response to racism for women. The maintenance of the private home as the locus of Subcontinental tradition, regardless of the changing demands created by life outside the 'homeland', is depicted as forcing diasporic women into a number of unhappy compromises that are ultimately unsustainable.

Second-phase writing develops the treatment of diasporic resistance to racism by emphasising the benefits of 'inter-national' identities over those that are defined more exclusively. The scrutiny to which diasporic women subject South Asian traditions is also evident in their relationship to British norms, the viability and, indeed, desirability of which are debated rather than assumed. In this respect, second-phase fiction effectively merges the critical positions exemplified by *Vasantha (TNM)* and *Sumitra (SS)* in earlier works, by interrogating the constructions of womanhood in both the original and adopted 'homelands'. 'Inter-nationalism' militates against the imposition of a monolithic conception of femininity, by positioning Asian British females neither firmly inside nor outside any cultural *milieu*. In second-phase narratives, the translation of 'homeland' practices into the diaspora space is one way in which the creative potential of 'inter-national' identities is explored. Customs originally associated with women's subordination are transformed, in a new context, into the conduits of empowerment. Their adoption depends upon a simultaneous respect for, and critique of, the conventions of female conduct - the very norms that imperialists seize upon to demonise the 'other' culture, and that nationalists cite as evidence of their moral and cultural superiority.

Chapter 3

Myths of Return and Arrival

Introduction

One of the most significant developments in South Asian diasporic women's writing is its transition from narratives focusing on the material and psychological dimensions of uprooting, to those more concerned with resettlement and its long-term consequences. To put it in terms more pertinent to this chapter, the *oeuvre* demonstrates, in its movement from one phase to the next, a shift of attention from the desire for return to the 'homeland' to the reality of arrival in the metropolis. As Anwar points out, many Pakistani post-war migrants assumed that residence in the erstwhile colonial centre would be temporary. However, the belief that "they [were] in Britain to save, invest and eventually return to their villages back home" was not confined to migrants from this country, but also prevailed within other sections of Britain's South Asian population.¹ The perception of the 'homeland' as the place of final, permanent settlement was reinforced by those still there, who expected the migrant to maintain his economic and customary obligations to the family. Considerable economic demands were placed upon migrant workers by such expectations. Consequently, as Anwar points out, financial necessity, which prompted initial departure, was also instrumental in transforming 'return' from ideal into myth: "in reality, most [migrants were] here to stay because of economic reasons and their children's future".² Brah reiterates the fundamental importance of money, observing that, with commitments such as the reunion of families in the diaspora, and investment in houses and/or business ventures, "the myth of return' bec[a]me largely accepted as such and attention was directed much more towards life in Britain".³

¹ Anwar, op. cit., p.ix. See also Rashmi Desai, op. cit.

² Op. cit., p.ix.

³ Op. cit., p.36.

The country left behind is undoubtedly thought of with particular longing. However, years of removal from its physical, social and cultural environment mean that even recollections of the 'homeland' can acquire the quality of myth. Rushdie, writing of expatriate Indian fiction, emphasises how selective a vehicle of truth memory can be for those engaged in the literary recreation of the native country.

If we do look back, we must...do so in the knowledge - which gives rise to profound uncertainties - that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions...imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.⁴

In South Asian diasporic women's writing, the mythical quality of the former home is similarly apparent in novels that, although set within a single country, prefigure the momentous upheaval of transnational migration through narratives of internal displacement. Even where return is temporary, the discrepancy between the 'homeland' of memory and its actuality is often such that the migrant does not experience the return imagined. As Brah asserts, because "'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination...it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'".⁵

The returnee's disappointment is acknowledged more overtly by George Robertson, who suggests that the passage of time lies at its heart. Memory remains stalled at the point of departure; thus, "[t]he dream of home and eventual return is shattered at the longed-for-moment of re-entry" as "the home we return to is never the

⁴ Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands' op. cit., p.10.

⁵ Op. cit., p.192.

home we left”.⁶ A similar concern vexes Rushdie, whose various applications of the term “imaginary homeland” are linked by an implicitly atrophied vision of a ‘lost’ or ‘pure’ culture. Envisaging the country left behind becomes an act of self-deception, if the entropic impacts of time and space upon the ‘homeland’ - and upon the returnee - are denied. Furthermore, while it is comprehensible and, perhaps, necessary to balance the profound changes of departure with imaginings of an unchanging ‘homeland’, it does not always enable migrants to cope with their translated situations.⁷ Indeed, Isabel Santaolalla raises the possibility that the mythologising of ‘home’ is actively counterproductive: “The unavoidability of change is a fact humans must learn to cope with and assume, so as to be able to maintain a sense of *continuity* despite the multiple variations” (author’s emphasis).⁸

Marangoly George characterises the imagining of home as a political act that depends upon “a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions” if it is to function successfully as “a way of establishing difference”.⁹ The implied possibility that the myth of return is, in part, a factor in the (non-)development of migrant cultural identities, has been elaborated by other critics. Among the fiercest interrogators of the mythologising of the ‘homeland’ by expatriates is Ashis Nandy, who, in *Dialogues in the Diasporas* (1998), outlines his misgivings about the concept of the ‘non-resident Indian’.¹⁰ Immigrants who define themselves in this way effectively refuse to recognise,

⁶ George Robertson, ‘As the World Turns: Introduction’ in Robertson, Mash, Tickner, Bird, Curtis & Putnam (eds.), *Travellers Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p.3.

⁷ By ‘translation’, I mean the movement from one place or condition to another.

⁸ Isabel Santaolalla, ‘A Fictitious Return to the Past: Saleem Sinai’s Autobiographical Journey in *Midnight’s Children*’ in Mihailovich Dickman, op. cit., p.163.

⁹ Op. cit., p.2.

¹⁰ ‘The Limits of Diaspora: A Conversation with Ashis Nandy’ in Nikos Papastergiadis, *Dialogues in the Diaspora: Essays and Conversations on Cultural Identity* (London; New York: Rivers Oram Press, 1998).

and act upon, the innovative potential of their diasporised circumstances; and, instead of a decisive political engagement with the country of settlement, they align themselves most readily with the 'homeland'. These are decisions that Nandy believes work to the detriment of both migrants and their resident Indian counterparts. Echoing Gilroy, he claims that the depth of attachment between migrants and their imaginary 'homeland' is instrumental in creating some of the "most chauvinistic and homogenising pressure groups" in the diaspora, that are willing to validate only a narrow range of identities as ethnically authentic.¹¹ Vijay Mishra offers a comparably scathing assessment of the conservatism of cultural fidelity, pointing out that the notion of the 'homeland' is a recurrent element in "racist fictions of purity" and "anti-miscegenation narratives".¹²

According to Anwar, most South Asian migrants left the Subcontinent with no intention of engaging socially with the British and their culture, a thesis with which Dilip Hiro concurs:

Outside the economic field, the average Asian had no aspiration or expectation. He had come to Britain knowing full well that white people were culturally alien in his eyes. And he had neither the inclination nor the intention to participate in their life.¹³

However, other observers of diasporic cultural politics regard commitment to the 'homeland' less as an *a priori* fact, than as a reaction against the unwelcoming reception extended by the 'host' population to non-white incomers. Consequently, a number

¹¹ Papastergiadis, *op. cit.*, p.107.

¹² Vijay Mishra, 'The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora', *Textual Practice*, 10.3, 1996, p.423.

The idea of the 'homeland' that Mishra evokes is closer to its usage within the context of apartheid, where each 'Bantu homeland' was designated for exclusive occupation by one ethnic group. His use of the term 'imaginary' is also more emphatic about ethnic chauvinism than are Rushdie's and Papastergiadis' deployments. Although drawn from the same Lacanian sources as Mishra's 'imaginary', Papastergiadis' use of the term characterises the home less negatively, as a "privileged place where origin and destiny intersect, a place where security and integrity are not compromised". *Op. cit.*, p.2.

¹³ Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), p.129.

defend the considerable investment many immigrants have in the idea of a 'homeland', and in the retention of its cultural norms in the adopted country. In doing so, they approximate Robert Fraser's conception of return as a psychological state - "less a physical event than...a mental return to origins", and symptomatic of a "re-ordering of priorities".¹⁴ Madan Sarup asserts that one of the first reactions of any minority facing hostility is to "tighten...its cultural bonds to present a united front against its oppressor".¹⁵ Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg also argue that a reinforced commitment to a 'homeland' identity is politically necessary for a diasporic population that feels under threat in a new environment.¹⁶ Furthermore, Cashmore and Troyna imply that the exclusion of white cultural norms from the Asian home functions as a form of retribution for the social marginalisation Asian immigrants suffer at the hands of the white world.

The ethnic preserve [of the home] gave Asians an added dimension in their lives: it gave them a consciousness of belonging to an elite. They belonged to groups that were essentially their own: whites didn't have access.¹⁷

In all of these claims there is, by implication, a period between landing on British soil and re-asserting the greater value of inherited norms that is filled with some attempt at social engagement with the 'host'. Could it be the case that it is occupied by the migrant's entertainment of a theory of arrival that, in common with that of return, reveals itself to be a myth? Anwar does not elaborate such a theory although, given the circumstances under which a number of his case studies came to be in Britain, he may

¹⁴ Robert Fraser, 'Mental Travellers: Myths of Return in the Poetry of Walcott and Brathwaite' in Mihailovich-Dickman, *op. cit.*, p.7.

¹⁵ Madan Sarup, 'Home and Identity' in Robertson *et al* (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.95.

¹⁶ Smadar Lavie & Ted Swedenburg (eds.), *Displacement, Diaspora and Geographies of Identity* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1996), p.12.

¹⁷ Ellis Cashmore & Barry Troyna, *op. cit.*, p.153.

well have had reason to do so. Having been invited to migrate by the British government, many Commonwealth immigrants, including South Asians, anticipated that theirs would be a welcome presence to the ordinary Briton; and, as far as some of the indigenous population was concerned, this was, indeed, the case. However, as Ramdin points out, a large proportion experienced considerable difficulties in securing accommodation and work, while calls for repatriation schemes provided more overt evidence of the resentment sections of the 'host' population felt towards non-white immigrants. The fact that Ramdin describes this as the "*shock of initiation*" (my emphasis) suggests a considerable gap between the expectations Commonwealth migrants had of their reception in the 'motherland', and their actual treatment as alien interlopers.¹⁸

What might these expectations have been? Brah writes of "arrival and settling down", suggesting a measure of psychological ease and material stability.¹⁹ Rushdie sees the connotations of "arrival and entrance" that surround the term 'immigrant' as problematic, thereby suggesting that arrival consists of more than the granting of a formal right of entry, and the immigrant's physical presence on British soil.²⁰ It also entails an ungrudging acceptance into British society, the recognition of equal human value, and parity of treatment. Should arrival of this nature prove to be a myth, retreat into an 'original' ethnic identity and rejection of the 'host's' value systems may seem the most feasible means of repairing the damaged self. However, as Brah remarks, the relationship between the first-generation migrant and the place of destination is different to that forged by subsequent generations, "mediated" as it is "by memories of what was

¹⁸ Ramdin, *op. cit.*, p.165.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.182.

²⁰ Cited in Nasta, *op. cit.*, p.149.

recently left behind”.²¹ Those who make the journey from the ‘homeland’ suffer the particular pain of departure; but only they have a repertoire of memories from elsewhere to which they may turn for solace. The generations born or substantially raised in Britain have a less assured grasp on (the idea of) an alternative ‘home’; and immersion in the values of the ‘homeland’ may prove difficult for those who are equally, if not more, familiar with the cultures of the adopted country. This possibility is acknowledged by Gilroy, who identifies age as one of the determinants of fissures within the purported homogeneity of ethnic communities.²²

Various strategies have been suggested to enable the immigrant’s movement out of the rut that myths of return and arrival can create. George endorses revising the concept of ‘home’ in ways that acknowledge “the inauthenticity or the created aura of all homes” - a tendency she sees as especially characteristic of immigrant fiction.²³ Others advocate the merits of assuming that incorporation into the diasporic culture will be incomplete, and of placing as great an emphasis on the points of contact between the migrant and the ‘host’ as on their discontinuities. Trinh T. Minh-ha, though convinced that immigrants will “never really fit in”, nonetheless concedes that they may be accepted conditionally.²⁴ Brah too observes that while “experience of social exclusion may inhibit public proclamations” to this effect, a place may still feel like ‘home’.²⁵ But even those who support the revision of arrival as a state of incomplete integration do not discard the notion of ‘home’ entirely. Like Brah, Nasta urges recognition that the concomitant of a desire for a lost ‘homeland’ may be the wish to fulfil the “homing

²¹ Op. cit., p.194.

²² Op. cit., p.116.

²³ Op. cit., p.175.

²⁴ Trinh T. Minh-ha, ‘Other Than Myself/My Other Self’ in Robertson *et al* (eds.), op. cit., p.13.

²⁵ Op. cit., p.193.

desire” elsewhere; for the diaspora space is “as much about settlement as displacement”.²⁶ Brah herself insists that the “homing desire” may be fulfilled in several places simultaneously, and asserts that “the double, triple or multi-placedness of ‘home’ in the imaginary of people in the diaspora does not mean that such groups do not feel anchored in the place of settlement”.²⁷ Other suggestions, emerging from more ‘Nandy-esque’ positions, underscore the innovative potential of diasporisation. Nasta’s citation of Anuradha Needham, for instance, draws attention to the creative possibilities of immigration, asserting that “living in a diaspora space enables the growth of ‘new identities and subjectivities’, new alliances which exist outside what has been called the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference”.²⁸ Bromley echoes something of this in his characterisation of diasporic literature as narratives that delineate “a new belonging”.²⁹ Between utopian myth and dystopian reality, a new state of belonging may potentially emerge.

Treatments of myths of return

In first-phase writing, returns to original homes tend to be depicted as somewhat illusory. The passage of time is one factor that renders the ideal of seamless reintegration impossible - a topic to which Hosain’s works are especially attentive. Of the short stories collected in *Phoenix Fled*, ‘Time is Unredeemable’ is, perhaps, the most pertinent. Strikingly sensitive to the hopes of those left behind, the narrative focuses to a large extent on how the news of Arshad’s imminent return to Pakistan, after

²⁶ Op. cit., pp.7-8. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller characterise ‘homing’ as a phenomenon that can occur either at home or in migration. The crux of the matter is home-building, and “the recreation of... ‘soils of significance’”. See Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier & Mimi Sheller (eds), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2003) p.9.

²⁷ Op. cit., p.194.

²⁸ Op, cit., p.7.

²⁹ Op. cit.

many “years destroyed” studying in wartime England, engenders expectations of his unproblematic resumption of village, family and married life.³⁰ However, the opening image of the cablegram trembling in his father’s hand, “as if an unseen current caught it in the still air”, augurs the possibility that these expectations will not be met.³¹ Just as the cablegram threatens to free itself from the father’s grip, so Arshad may escape the ‘grasp’ of those anticipating his arrival. His return is marked by disappointments: his own, expressed in “a helpless anger against himself, his homecoming, his father, his mother, everyone”; and Bano’s, as she is rejected (albeit with considerable guilt) by the husband whose return promised an end to life as “neither a wife nor a widow”.³² While time has effectively been suspended for Bano during her husband’s absence, Arshad is all too conscious of the alienation wrought by its passage.

Unlike ‘Time is Unredeemable’, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* makes no reference to South Asian diasporisation. However, by concentrating on ‘internal’ displacements and journeys, the final section of the novel in particular addresses the difficulties of returning to a former home after many years away. As Antoinette Burton observes, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* testifies to the importance of the house in women’s Partition fiction, as a locus that may be revisited but is never the same.³³ The reader is prepared for the deterioration of the family home by the epilogue’s opening inventory of changes to Lucknow’s cityscape - differences that testify not only to the erosive impact of time, but also to the social and political upheaval that has occurred since Laila’s departure. However, it is upon the principal family dwelling, *Ashiana*, that the greatest degree of attention is bestowed; and it becomes abundantly clear that the

³⁰ Op. cit., p.58.

³¹ Ibid., p.57.

³² Ibid., p.61, p.75.

³³ Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archives: Women Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford; New York: OUP, 2003), pp.105-137.

house can no longer offer the security implied by its name, which means 'nest'.

Although this section of the narrative has been dismissed by some critics as little more than a sentimental indulgence on Hosain's part, it is undeserving of such harsh judgement.³⁴ Such condemnation overlooks the extent to which it performs an important function for the novel as a whole, by explicating what Laila describes as "the complex vision of my nostalgia".³⁵ Laila is, in her own words, "*nearly home*" (my emphasis), and in this phrase lies the problematic ambivalence of memory. There is comfort to be found in reliving and confronting the events that took place in *Ashiana*, as each chapter of the epilogue takes the reader into a different room and a corresponding facet of the family's life. But every entry opens with a summary of the room's dereliction, which 'crops' the vividness of the images that constitute Laila's recollections. Memory cannot overcome the fact that the damaged familial and national structures, of which the broken columns are emblematic, remain irreparably fractured.

The works of the first phase not only address the myth of return through the disappointments that attend journeys to erstwhile homes. They also acknowledge that, for some, the myth resides in the fact that the journey will never be made, despite the tenacity of its ideal. This concern is especially evident in *Nectar in a Sieve*, and is, to a large extent, a matter of economics: financial need drives the outward journey, but also prevents its return leg. Like *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Markandaya's novel exemplifies how a narrative set entirely within the Subcontinent is able to engage with the topic of thwarted return that is so integral to the experiences of many transnational

³⁴ Amin cites David McCutcheon's judgement of Part 4 as 'an orgy of nostalgia', while Meenakshi Mukherjee claims that the same section contributes little to the novel's structural cohesion. See Amin, '*Sunlight on a Broken Column: The Disintegration of a Family*' in Dinesh, op. cit., p.56; see also Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English* (New Delhi; London: Heinemann, 1971).

³⁵ Op. cit., p.270.

immigrants. When Rukmani and Nathan leave for the city to find their son, Murugan, they go in search of a future, as their tenancy on the landlord's farmland has become unsustainable. Although their itinerary does not cross national borders, its momentous significance for the impoverished couple - requiring the partners to effectively pack up their lives and take most of what they own with them - is such that the hallmarks of a journey of much greater magnitude are present.

Unable to ascertain their son's whereabouts, Rukmani and Nathan's only reason for remaining in the anomic bustle of the city is to acquire enough money to resume the life they know best by returning to the village. But, as is apparent in so many histories of working-class diasporisation, the amount needed is too great to be amassed from meagre and sporadic earnings. Furthermore, the dream of returning home together is rendered impossible by Nathan's death. The diasporic sensibility that informs *Nectar in a Sieve's* engagement with return journeys is, however, most evident in the departure of the family's eldest sons in search of work - an act that evokes the dynamics of many a post-war migration from South Asia to Britain. Despite assurances to the contrary, Rukmani knows that, should Arjun and Thambi join the colonial labour force, they are unlikely to return from Ceylon.

“If you go, you will never come back,” I cried. “The journey costs hundreds of rupees, you will never have so much.”...They spoke soothingly - of how much they would earn and how one day they would return...They left at first daylight, each carrying a bundle with food in it, and each before he went kissed Nathan's feet first, then mine...I knew we would never see them again.³⁶

³⁶ Op. cit., p.96.

Returns, actual and metaphorical, enable Asian British women writers to explore a matter that has often been absent from ‘official’ versions of diasporic history - the importance of gender to uprooting and resettlement. Many works draw attention to the significant role played by women in the sustenance of the return ideal, through their contribution to the finances and morale of the displaced family. Without Rukmani’s (*NIAS*) fortitude, resourcefulness and earnings, it is unlikely that she and, especially, Nathan would be able to survive in the city for as long as they do. However, it is more often the case, in first-phase works, that women’s importance to the ideal of return lies in the extent to which they ensure a degree of moral and cultural continuity between the ‘homeland’ and diasporic environments. Physical barriers, often in the form of domestic dwellings, are something of a *leitmotif*, representing the exclusionary dynamics that George claims are essential to the creation of home as a political space of return. In *The Nowhere Man*, it is Vasantha who is most insistent that the family acquires a house as a locus of metaphorical return - a place “where we can live according to *our* lights (my emphasis)”.³⁷

The diasporic home is also an important site of symbolic return in *Sumitra’s Story*. Domestic normality for the elder Patels in particular lies in the ‘homeland’ balance of power between the sexes - something that is threatened by their tenancy in the hostel. Represented as the “no-man’s land” in a cultural, political and social battle, the hostel harbours those who have, by dint of homelessness, been cut loose from their conventional moorings.³⁸ As such, it functions as a liminal space, and a greater degree of interaction between its residents is, therefore, possible than would normally be the

³⁷ Op. cit., p.21.

³⁸ Op. cit. p.70.

case.³⁹ However, once the family has acquired its own house, Bap is able to begin “marking out his territory. This was his house, and here he reigned. He was an Indian father, once more head of an Indian family.”⁴⁰ Maintaining the gendered *status quo* is essential if the community depicted is to keep “the golden thread of active Indian life” running through its successive upheavals. For this reason, the prospect of return is also at its most literal in this novel, as Sumitra is threatened with being sent to India to rid her of her unacceptably Westernised conduct.⁴¹

The connection between return as a psychological state and the traditional conception of female identity is underscored differently in Hosain’s ‘The First Party’ (PF). At a social gathering, a young bride of strict upbringing is exposed to the less constrained conduct of her husband’s female friends. This unfamiliar experience engenders “anger, hatred, jealousy and bewilderment” in a young woman who becomes suddenly aware of the restrictive nature of the rules that have governed her upbringing, but who has internalised them sufficiently to feel uncomfortable with any other state.⁴² Her husband’s apparent ease with this more lax/relaxed version of female conduct exacerbates her discomfort, facing the bride with the dilemma of being a loyal partner to her spouse, as tradition requires, while remaining within the moral parameters to which she is accustomed. In the face of such confusion and ambivalence, the idea of return offers solace: “[s]he longed for the sanctuary of the walled home from which marriage

³⁹ In this respect, the hostel’s significance is comparable to that of *Chandraprasad’s* basement in *The Nowhere Man* - a less regulated environment with the potential to nurture co-operation and camaraderie.

⁴⁰ Op. cit., p.70.

⁴¹ Reiterating the importance of ‘return’ to the construction of womanhood, one of Anwar’s case studies claims that he will return to Pakistan with his family when his daughter approaches puberty. Op. cit., p.200.

⁴² Op. cit., p.22.

had promised an adventurous escape. Each restricting rule became a guiding stone marking a safe path through unknown dangers.”⁴³

Whereas the bride in ‘The First Party’ longs for a metaphorical return to familiar terrain, ‘Time is Unredeemable’ emphasises how, for a man, resolution may lie in taking a hitherto unexplored path. The lengthy and distant separation of Arshad from Bano ends with the literal return of Arshad to his ‘homeland’, and - it is assumed - the metaphorical return of both characters to their married state. Hosain suggests that their respective abilities to deal with the resumption of their marriage may be influenced by gender. As a woman, Bano is expected to conduct herself in such a way that, even when her husband is absent, her ‘place’ remains with him. In her case, “the strong weight of her upbringing levelled all her reactions to acceptance of this stranger who was her husband”.⁴⁴ It is clear from the narrative that Arshad too is expected to sustain his commitment to his village, his family and the marriage that was contracted to ensure his cultural fidelity in a foreign land. However, being male, he is also allowed more social freedom than is his wife for whom it would have been inconceivable to live unsupervised in a strange country. The exposure to ‘other’ influences that his relative freedom permits militates against Arshad’s easy reintegration into his old life.

The difficulty men face in returning metaphorically is also evident in *The Nowhere Man*’s diasporic narrative. Having realised that his attempts to integrate into British society will never succeed entirely, Srinivas attempts to recapture his former, Indian self. His psychological return lays considerable emphasis on the physical approximation of Indianness: he dons a *dhoti*, goes barefoot, and takes refuge in his

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Op. cit., p.74.

attic in a bed made of teak - the wood from which his childhood home was constructed.⁴⁵ However, he lacks the mental commitment needed for this reversion to be truly effective. The futility of his efforts is symbolised by the state of the tin trunk in which he keeps the mementoes of his 'old' life, and to which he turns when attempting to reconstruct his Subcontinental identity. Brought over from the 'homeland', the vessel is still intact; but, much like Srinivas' sense of his Indianness, it is also badly dented.⁴⁶ By his own admission, he aspires to an identity that is bound by neither nationality nor culture, and is able to do so without compromising his (and his family's) honour, as would be the case for a female contemporary.⁴⁷ Again, it is the permissibility of men's diasporiation, and Srinivas' consequent awareness that he can never be as Indian as he once was, that renders his metaphorical return brief, insubstantial and as painful as the rejection to which it reacts.

The trope of the 'internal' displacement, evident in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *Nectar in a Sieve*, has no obvious purchase in later works, whose concern is more emphatically with the physical and psychological journeys undertaken by the diasporised. Yet, despite this shift in focus, second-phase writing continues to treat sympathetically the desire of first-generation immigrants to return to their native countries. The disparity between the 'homeland' at the time of departure, and its present reality, is a recurrent motif; and although the topic is broached in the first phase, its second-phase treatment is more attentive to the immigrant's suspended vision. The theme receives its most detailed examination in Dhingra's *Amritvela*, in which Meera

⁴⁵ For an elaboration of the significance of wood in *The Nowhere Man*, see Hena Ahmed, op. cit., p.147.

⁴⁶ Viney Kirpal insists that Srinivas' (re)actions represent a return to his true nationality, but in doing so overlooks his aspiration to a more inclusive identity. Furthermore, his inability to achieve this state has more to do with the prevailing, myopic conception of identity, than with the essential and immutable Indianness that Kirpal implies. Op. cit., pp.109-110.

⁴⁷ Vasantha, in keeping with Subcontinental precept, has taken care to preserve her Indian identity.

returns to India to investigate the possibility of a permanent resettlement. She has spent most of her life in England where she believes herself to be, at best, an object of ambivalence, but more often an irrelevant, despised outsider. In the way that Nandy claims is typical of diasporised Asians, Meera looks to her native land for the reparation of her fractured sense of selfhood. The country to which she imagines she is returning is the one she left as a child, idealised now as a place in which she will experience a complete sense of belonging. To some extent, Meera is right to make these assumptions: time's passage is barely discernible inasmuch as her family welcomes her back unquestioningly, and addresses her as if she *is* still a child.

Initially, Meera only registers the details of the environment that fit her expectations, taking these as evidence of its quintessential Indian character. But repeatedly, she is obliged to face an altogether more complex reality as she becomes bewilderingly conscious of the country's - and the family's - actual cultural hybridity. Forced to admit that her memories of childhood are highly selective, the solution to Meera's problem is her acceptance not only of India's cultural 'impurity', but also her own. Evinced, in part, in the novel's epistolary chapters, it is also the subtext of Meera's dream, in which she is standing on a frozen river. By choosing to walk forwards to the point at which the river is thawing, she signals her subconscious recognition that she must embrace the inevitability of cultural flux, over a self-deceiving suspension of animation.⁴⁸ In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, the impossibility of return is treated with wistful sobriety. In *Amritvela*, the elusiveness of absolute return becomes a matter worthy of celebration - a significant testimony to the developing treatment of the topic in second-phase fiction.

⁴⁸ Her half-Indian, half-English daughter's presence in the dream is a more literal reminder of the intimate investment Meera has in cultural hybridity.

Randhawa also alludes to how memory preserves the country left behind in terms that are no longer necessarily applicable. *A Wicked Old Woman* sympathetically describes migrant men living “in the camaraderie of an enforced bachelorhood; still believing that soon they would have earned enough/saved enough to go back and rejoin the fabric and tapestry of a life left behind”.⁴⁹ Nargis Rashid (*TRB*) also aspires to resettling in her native village, dreaming of buying some land to which she can return with her British-bred children. Both novels reiterate the unlikelihood of the desired return ever materialising, and, like *Nectar in a Sieve*, attribute this to economics. *The Red Box*’s repeated allusions to Nargis’ relative poverty suggest that it will be a long, and possibly unsuccessful, struggle for her to accumulate the money that the fulfilment of her ambition requires. *A Wicked Old Woman* also emphasises how the financial demands made of the migrant by his relatives minimise the chances of his return. Obligated to “split [his] money three ways, between [his] parents, [his] family and himself”, he must spend most, if not all, of his working life in the place he imagined would be a temporary abode, exercising considerable frugality in order to survive.⁵⁰

Second-phase fiction also continues to explore the possibility that gender inflects the desire to return. One way in which this is apparent is through the metaphorical return of recreating a ‘home-from-home’ which, in second-phase works such as *The Nowhere Man* and *The Red Box*, often functions as a tacit admission that an actual return to the ‘homeland’ is unlikely. Cashmore and Troyna’s argument, that cultural fidelity is essential to the migrant’s well being, establishes the expatriate’s domestic dwelling as the diasporic symbol of the ‘homeland’. An alternative world in which the

⁴⁹ Op. cit., p.7.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.128.

beleaguered Asian can take refuge, the home becomes a repository of inherited *mores* - a state of affairs remarkably in keeping with the Indian nationalist conception of the domestic realm, discussed in Chapter 2. In *Anita and Me*, the creation of an environment that reminds its occupants of the place they have left is, in certain respects, a cross-gender phenomenon. The *mehfils* [musical gatherings] and parties to which the Kumars invite new-found Indian friends are not gender-exclusive; and during the *ghazals* [songs] especially, Meena is conscious that “my elders, in these moments...were *all* far, far away” (my emphasis).⁵¹ However, it is Meena’s *mother* who, in search of even a tenuous reminder of her native country, insists on living in a village.

When she stepped off the bus in Tollington...she saw fields and trees, light and space, and a horizon that welcomed the sky which, on a warm night and through squinted eyes could almost look something like home.⁵²

The possibility of a link between gender and the desire to create a ‘home-from-home’ is also present in *The Red Box*, which emphasises more assertively that the ‘homeland’ construction of female identity lies at the heart of this longing for the native country. As the product of a very traditional family, Sabah is less at ease with her diasporised circumstances than is her more cosmopolitan husband. Much of her discomfort is attributable to the disjunction she perceives between the female identity into which she has been inducted by her own family, and the one she is required to adopt upon marrying and migrating. As Raisa points out, “My father had travelled far more than she; but it was Sabah who had moved worlds”.⁵³ Whether Sabah’s claims are true, that financial necessity compels her to work as a seamstress, is debatable,

⁵¹ Op. cit., p.72.

⁵² Ibid., p.35.

⁵³ Op. cit., p.214.

especially given the family's relative wealth. The novel implies that there may be other explanations. Firstly, sewing is a traditional activity of women in Pakistan. Secondly, the area in which the Ahmeds live has no South Asian expatriate community of the kind that exists in other, less affluent parts of London. The garment factory, however, is an employer of many poorer immigrants from various countries, a number of whom are probably familiar with variants of the conservative village environment from which Sabah is barely a generation removed. Apart from the homes of relatives on the other side of London, the workplace is one of the closest approximations that Sabah has to the kind of 'home-from-home' gatherings from which the Kumars (*AAM*) derive such comfort.

A number of the developments that emerge in the second-phase treatment of return are due to its greater concentration upon South Asian communities in Britain, and its more contemporary focus. Among the most discernible shifts is the suggestion that not all immigrants *want* to return. In *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, Syal suggests that this reluctance may be detected in the same first-generation immigrants for whom the idea of returning is supposed to have a particular resonance. Superficially, Chila's mother and her ilk resemble the conservative immigrant women depicted in *Sumitra's Story*: theirs is an "unchanging circle of close cohorts who had recreated their own little village in the surrounding streets".⁵⁴ However, the advent of grandchildren is "most importantly, the most *convenient* reason they all quoted for not retiring back to India" (my emphasis).⁵⁵ With the passage of time, the impossibility of returning 'home' has evolved into the undesirability of going back to a place that continues to be imagined in terms that "had vanished around the time of black and white films and enforced

⁵⁴ Op. cit., p.191.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

sterilization”.⁵⁶ *The Red Box*, however, suggests that the reluctance to return varies with age. The offspring of first-generation immigrants, having spent most of their lives in Britain, do not regard the idea with the same equanimity as do their parents. Tahira (*TRB*) believes that her mother “must be bloody joking” when she suggests that her daughter might work in Pakistan.⁵⁷ Acknowledging the family’s lack of means, and its younger members’ unfamiliarity with the ‘homeland’, Tahira asks a pertinently ambiguous question: “What would we go back to?”⁵⁸

This points to a further development in second-phase writing: its frequent suggestion that actual and metaphorical returns are impeded by the (unnoticed) emergence of more diasporised cultural sensibilities. In *Amritvela*, Meera’s desire to ‘authenticate’ herself is symbolised by her decision to walk in Indian shoes of “traditional design”:

I want the shade closest to my own skin colour ...I walk down the street shuffling my feet to get the full feel of my comfortable new chappals. My heels drag along the ground, and I begin to imagine I’m taking root.⁵⁹

Ironically, the shoes in which Meera feels most comfortable are not the kind worn by the locals, but those intended for the export market - a fact that resonates with her own ‘export’ overseas at a young age. Herein lies one of the novel’s most potent symbols of Meera’s actual identity. Regardless of whether she desires it, Meera’s disavowed Englishness is noticed by those around her, hindering her attempts to pass herself off as a ‘real’ Indian: “I wonder if there is something different in my demeanour or dress that makes [the shopkeeper] address me in English”.⁶⁰ Furthermore, her diasporisation has

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.191-192.

⁵⁷ Op. cit., p.146.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.148.

⁵⁹ Op. cit., p.56-57.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.57.

endowed her with a (hitherto unacknowledged) critical perspective on patterns of conduct - such as the dismissive attitude towards labourers - that her 'homeland' family takes for granted. Not only do others regard Meera as something of a misfit; her equanimity ultimately depends upon her own acceptance of this fact.

Underlying Tahira's (*TRB*) questions to her mother about the wisdom of returning to Pakistan is the recognition that immigrants (and their offspring) who have become accustomed to life in a new environment experience considerable difficulty re-acclimatising to the 'homeland' culture. Some second-phase works suggest that this may prove an especially pressing problem for women; and it may even reverse the relationship between gender and return established elsewhere, in which women display a particular competence at, and disposition towards, 'going back'.⁶¹ In *A Wicked Old Woman*, immigrant men envisage no particular difficulty in returning to the native country. They, rightly or wrongly, believe that 'home' remains exactly as they left it, and that "they'd merely stepped out of a picture and left a blank outline of themselves waiting for the day when they could step back into the frame".⁶²

Such assurance is less obvious among the women in *The Red Box*. If Nargis impresses upon her children the need to keep their reputations intact, she does so out of an awareness that women, especially, who are perceived as at all Westernised are viewed with suspicion or disdain in environments where the conservation of feminine identity is a social priority. Indeed, the same appears to be true of parts of the diasporic environment, as evinced by Nargis' experiences as a divorcee: her pariah status is, to a large extent, the result of her willingness to challenge conventional ideas about wifely

⁶¹ In this respect, *Sumitra's Story* has more in common with later works.

⁶² *Op. cit.*, p.7.

loyalty. *The Coral Strand* also supports the idea that women's diasporisation is incongruous with the traditional environment, but elaborates the connection between return and unreconstructed South Asian womanhood from another angle. The novel acknowledges the preference of some Asian men to return to their 'homelands' in search of 'unspoilt' wives. Sita/Ferret realises that the new bride sitting with her husband in an Indian café is "*fresh from the pind! Culturally organic*" (author's emphasis).⁶³ The groom had "gone all the way back, for a home-grown girl!"⁶⁴

The particular difficulties faced by diasporised women in second-phase works are also evident in psychological forms of return. By emphasising this problem, later texts fill a lacuna in Cashmore and Troyna's endorsement of fidelity to 'homeland' *mores*, which pays no heed to the demands made of each sex in creating an oasis of cultural authenticity in the diaspora. The impossibility of recapturing a 'lost' Indian identity is explored in *A Wicked Old Woman* through the 'rebound' union with the Asian male. Kuli's request for an arranged marriage is undermined by her disengagement from the process, and the passive verbs and imagery she uses when describing events prior to the wedding indicate that she recognises this fact. Her conception of herself as a camera recording the events suggests that the import of the wedding rituals is only registered superficially, rather than being internalised. Furthermore, she "hand[s] herself over to every ritual, *hoping* the significance of each would seep in, making her what she wanted to be" (my emphasis).⁶⁵ Kuli eventually separates from her husband, and in doing so concedes that her diasporisation is partly to blame: her failure as a wife is one of "England's gifts" to herself and her family.⁶⁶ The

⁶³ Op. cit., p.147.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Op. cit., p.52.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.53.

arranged marriage does not have the same significance for her as it did for her mother who, having been raised in India, never lost the “anchor of certainty” about her cultural identity.⁶⁷

A more positive treatment of metaphorical ‘return’ is also evident in Randhawa’s *oeuvre*, marking a further development in the second-phase treatment of this issue. *Hari-jan* represents the recovery of an ‘original’ culture as not only feasible, but vital. In this respect the novel reiterates the issues surrounding Rani’s rehabilitation in *A Wicked Old Woman*, where it is her acceptance of her inherited ethnicity that brings her back into the world. Harjinder’s (*H-J*) discovery of her Indian heritage resuscitates “[a]nother ‘Me’, who’d lain ignored, suppressed” - the facet of herself that comprises “all the parts that didn’t synchronise with the ‘English Corporate Image’”.⁶⁸ This does not, however, lead to a reactionary valorisation of all things ‘authentic’, but rather to the selective integration of the Indian aspects of her being with the rest of her - more westernised - self. Harjinder’s embrace of tradition, therefore, has considerable dialogic potential.

In common with *Hari-jan*, *The Coral Strand* testifies to Randhawa’s concern with the necessity of psychological return: for, without an engagement with the ‘then’ from which one has come, only a superficial comprehension is possible of the ‘now’. Sita/Ferret’s recovery of the events leading to her present position, and the entwined, unequal histories of India and England they represent, enables her to engage more critically *and* more intimately with the ‘host’ culture from which she has hitherto

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.54. The certitude with which Kuli’s mother employs nautical imagery is at odds with its usage elsewhere to connote instability and tenuous solidarities.

⁶⁸ Op. cit., p.84.

maintained her distance. While she is alert to the ways in which Britain's imperial past is still celebrated (by the Victoria and Albert Museum's "Gothic/Colonial façade" and its "many artefacts brought over as 'official booty'") she also knows that, at individual and cultural levels, the influence of this history is fading.⁶⁹ Thus, whereas "in the past, Sita/Ferret would have been reserved", she is now more able to "avidly participate in that churning pool".⁷⁰

The Coral Strand's treatment of return also has the widest ethnic scope of all the selected second-phase works: the novel pays considerable attention to a number of white characters who intend to - and, indeed do - go back to England after a spell in India.⁷¹ Much of the narrative is concerned with Emily, a white, working class woman who migrates to India in the early 1940s, and whose experiences correspond in several respects with those of Subcontinental migrants in Britain. In common with many South Asian women, she is obliged to migrate as a dependant, following her husband to a country with which he has some familiarity, while she has none. Furthermore, the novel suggests that the family left behind assumes that its travelling member has 'made good' and can provide for all of its needs. Randhawa emphasises how important it is to the migrant to appear to live up to these expectations, as Emily gives no indication of the privations she suffers in the wake of her husband's death.

However, despite its attention to the common aspects of migration, *The Coral Strand* also deploys the theme of return to illuminate the inequalities of imperial rule and its legacies. Randhawa 'de-universalises' the dynamics of return by underscoring

⁶⁹ Op. cit., p.235.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ In December 2001, at London University's Institute of English Studies, Randhawa stated that part of her intention with *The Coral Strand* was to use white characters to represent and explore some of the experiences common to Asian immigrants to Britain.

how acts of economic migration differ in their motivations and results. For example, there is no equivalence between the cultural expectations to which Emily is subjected, and those imposed upon the South Asian diasporic woman. Emily is never led to believe that it is in her best interests to assimilate Indian cultural norms, nor that she can learn anything of value from them. Consequently, her cultural identity is not split by her stay in India, in the way that Kuli's (*AWOW*) is by living in England. Thus, she is free of the sense of cultural disjunction that a number of second-phase novelists cite as a principal obstacle to a successful return. Furthermore, while the loss of her husband requires Emily to be the architect of her own journey back to her native country - a fate also thrust upon Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Nargis in *The Red Box* - only hers is ultimately realised in accordance with her hopes. Unlike her Subcontinental counterparts, Emily returns home "in triumph, diamonds around her throat, a fur coat on her shoulders, with two servants trailing in her wake".⁷²

Treatments of myths of arrival

First-phase treatments of arrival are often attentive to the motivations behind departure from the 'homeland', as one way in which they emphasise the mythical nature of arrival is by focusing on the gap between the migrant's aspirations and the actuality of the journey's outcome. This is as true of relocations that take place *within* a single country as of those that cross national borders. Rukmani and Nathan (*NIAS*) hope that, by leaving the country for the town, they will achieve a greater degree of financial stability. Instead, they find themselves marooned in an unfamiliar and uncongenial environment, in which a hand-to-mouth existence once again becomes their norm. In diasporic narratives as well, material aspirations are fundamental to migration. Srinivas

⁷² Op cit., p.101, p.235.

(*TNM*) is forced to leave India in search of better career prospects; for, as a result of his association with anti-imperial activism, he faces being “black-listed in every school and college throughout the country. Government service is out too.”⁷³ Under threat of forcible expulsion, if not death, the Patels in *Sumitra’s Story* flee to England from Amin’s Uganda. Although Mai “always tell[s her children] that we are Indian”, the choice of England as the family’s destination is economically expedient.⁷⁴

“It is lucky we have British passports. There you will get good schooling, free... We cannot take any money with us. How could we live in India? In England we will get a house, you will go to school...”⁷⁵

In the selected diasporic narratives, such material aspirations are largely fulfilled. The illusory nature of arrival depends more upon the social rejection to which non-white immigrants are subjected by the ‘host’ population. Although colonial rule ends within his lifetime, Srinivas (*TNM*) believes himself sufficiently established in England to not consider returning to his native land. But however much he and his family contribute to, and sacrifice for, the adopted community and country, and however sincere his efforts to adapt to its norms, neither is enough to secure his place amongst those with whom he has spent the greater part of a lifetime.

[W]hat, at the end of these assimilating years can the terminal product be said to be? Srinivas asked himself...An alien, he replied, speaking for them...An alien whose manners, accents, voice[,] syntax, bones, build, way of life - all of him - shrieked *alien*.⁷⁶

⁷³ Op. cit., p.154.

⁷⁴ Op. cit., p.20.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Op. cit., p.241.

The 'host' perception of Srinivas as an eternal stranger may, as the quotation suggests, alight upon superficial features in the first instance; but it settles on an unshakeable belief in his essential - indeed genetic - otherness. The inequitable effect of (neo-)colonialism upon the immigrant's right to arrival is apparent in the fact that Joan Davis' parents in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* are able to think of two countries - England and India - as home, while Srinivas remains an outsider to both.

First-phase fiction depicts the attitudes that deny immigrants a sense of arrival in the metropolis as especially tenacious. Markandaya suggests their colonial provenance through *The Nowhere Man's* patterns of vitreous imagery, which connect the cultural politics of the Raj to those of the diaspora. Transparent, yet unavoidably present, glass symbolises the undiscussed but absolute barrier believed to separate British normality from foreign aberration.⁷⁷ The refusal of arrival crosses generational as well as spatial lines, being extended to the British-born offspring of first-generation migrants. Laxman is as English as a man of Indian descent can be. At the expense of his relationship with his parents, he has invested the best of himself, professionally and personally, in England. Yet, he is still perceived, first and foremost, in terms of his colour - a physical quality that many of the novel's white characters believe undermines his claim to Britishness, and disqualifies his entitlement to the success he achieves. The attitudes of Joe's father exemplify this mindset: "He says it isn't right, them [non-whites] coming here and doing us out".⁷⁸ Entitlement is also a keynote in *Sumitra's Story's* portrayal of

⁷⁷ The College Principal is able to "spin...about him, invisible but impassible barriers" (p.127). Mrs. Glass is an immovable believer in essential racial and cultural difference. Fred, meanwhile, wears a glassy-eyed expression as he prepares the fatal bonfire. Contrast all of these examples with Markandaya's description of Mrs. Pickering's character as like "spun glass with a flaw in the blowing (p.57). Dr. Radcliffe, too, finds that "the glass manufactured to preserve [his] insulation" is riddled with metaphorical holes (p.5). A very strikingly similar use of imagery is evident in Hosain's claim that "no matter how much I love [Britain] and I love its people, it is a feeling as if there was a sheet of glass between me and them". See Burton, op. cit., p.115.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.268.

the racism that denies the younger Patels the sense of belonging to which they aspire. Jean's view, that England is "being invaded" by "wogs and nig-nogs coming over 'ere and taking our jobs and houses" exemplifies how, to a significant proportion of white Britain, the Patels and their like are an unwelcome, acquisitive presence.⁷⁹

The elusiveness of arrival in these texts is reflected in their evocations of location. *The Nowhere Man* depicts neither its 'homeland' nor its diasporic location in fine detail, thereby suggesting how Srinivas lacks a sense of rootedness in either place. *Sumitra's Story* reflects the narrow parameters within which the Patels (are obliged to) confine themselves through its specific detail about a limited area of North West London, but a more nebulous depiction of the city beyond it. The only respect in which a concrete sense of place is established is through *The Nowhere Man's* imagery of domestic architecture, which nonetheless serves to emphasise the lack of acceptance extended to the immigrant. The walls separating individual dwellings in Srinivas' terrace represent the psychic barriers already suggested by the novel's vitreous *leitmotifs*. Only the bombing raids of the Blitz are able to "rip away...whole walls", making it impossible "for conventions to rule with their previous, inflexible rod", and forcing the neighbours into an unfamiliar camaraderie that is in marked contrast to the bitter resentment directed at immigrants in the narrative's later stages.⁸⁰ Srinivas exults in the destruction of the walls, and takes pleasure in the natural spaces they reveal. However, the loss of these open, communal spaces to small houses and high-rise blocks speaks of the triumph of a social vision that thrives on enclaves of difference and isolation.

⁷⁹ Op. cit., p.42.

⁸⁰ Op. cit., p.22.

An emphasis on the immigrant's search for better prospects is one respect in which the second-phase treatment of arrival is continuous with that of earlier works. Economic necessity prompts the Kumars' (*AAM*) journey to England; for, being "poor and clever [is] a bad combination in India", where access to opportunities is too often dependent on connections or wealth. The caste system can also be a hindrance to self-betterment in the 'homeland' - a possibility to which *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* alludes.⁸¹ Tania's father knows that "amongst his own, *his surname* and the size of his house *always* defined who he was" (my emphasis).⁸² However, works from the second phase of diasporic writing also continue to emphasise the lack of social acceptance extended to South Asian immigrants in Britain. Again, this refusal is shown to be underpinned by the 'host's' staunch belief in non-white incomers' immutable foreignness, and the conviction that their entitlement to any success in their adopted country is dubious.

A Wicked Old Woman's portrayal of an unnamed Asian family's treatment concisely illuminates the effects of such beliefs on the conduct of white Britons. Randhawa never reveals the names of the family members, thereby symbolising how they are regarded as types rather than as individuals - a fact that is all too apparent when their neighbour, Mrs. Randall, is invited to take tea. Her conversation is a catalogue of barely veiled accusations. From observations on differences between English and Indian tastes, her commentary widens its scope and highlights her barely suppressed resentment at a perceived ethnic takeover.

Mrs. Randall said "Very nice," eyes roving over the room, "you people do

⁸¹ For a more detailed discussion of the caste hierarchy, see the introduction to Chapter 5.

⁸² *Op. cit.*, p.148. The fact that Mr. Tendon is not allowed by his diasporic compatriots to forget his humble origins belies the conviction held by many Indians, that a journey across the *kala pani* [black waters] erases one's inherited caste identity.

like bright colours, don't you." They sensed the attack rather than knew it for sure... "You got this house cheap didn't you? Lucky!" picking up a piece of cake and ostentatiously unfolding her handkerchief under it to catch the crumbs. They hadn't put out any side plates... "Corner houses have lovely gardens. When Mr. Banner had to sell up so quick my brother was thinking of buying this. But he didn't have enough money. You people always seem to get it. A person might think you printed it."⁸³

Evoking Srinivas' (*TNM*) fate in the first phase, the dehumanisation of the family in the eyes of white society culminates in a fatal arson attack.

Second-phase works also reiterate the extent to which acceptance into the 'host' society is withheld from younger generations of Asian Britons. As attuned, if not more so, to the norms of the adopted country as to those of the 'homeland', they are often denied a sense of full integration by white peers who insist that Britain cannot be considered a true home to anyone of non-white immigrant provenance. This is one of the many ways in which Kuli (*AWOW*) is encouraged to believe that she does not belong in her adopted environment.

"Where are you from?" asked intellectual glasses.

"Up Birmingham way," she hoped with the right Brummie accent, imitating her cousins who actually lived up that way.

"I mean where are you really from?"⁸⁴

The 'hosts' refusal of the Asian Briton's right to stake a claim to the adopted country is also evident in *The Red Box*, as Sheikh's teenagers are forced to debate the extent to which they can and should assert their Englishness. Tahira's regard for England as "my

⁸³ Op. cit., pp.129-130.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.18.

country”, but for Pakistan as “my own country”, indicates the conditional status that she and her peers accord their place in British society - a conclusion at which they have arrived largely because [t]he English ain’t gonna let it be our country”.⁸⁵

The predicament faced by *The Red Box*’s young protagonists is reflected elsewhere in second-phase representations of immigrant offspring. Despite the flippancy with which she describes herself as “a wog and a *Paki*”, the extent to which Harjinder (*H-J*) believes she is articulating an uncomfortable truth is apparent in her self-designation as “an unwanted Brit. Cit.”.⁸⁶ Her choice of terminology suggests that, although she is tolerated at an official level, she believes herself to be unwelcome in any more intimate sense. The conditional extension of belonging is also evident in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*. Despite the success that Tania seems to have achieved, it is also the case that she is permitted a degree of ‘arrival’ in her chosen profession provided she confines herself largely to projects that focus on Asians. Furthermore, in second-phase fiction the insecurity of arrival experienced by the non-white immigrant in Britain is inversely proportional to that of the British expatriate residing in the Subcontinent. The alternation of focus in *The Coral Strand* between imperial India in the mid-twentieth century and London in the late 1990s underscores this lack of equivalence, for there is no Asian match for Emily’s conviction that “India’s fucking mine”.⁸⁷

One respect in which second-phase texts develop the treatment of arrival is through their more emphatic assertion that the educational and occupational opportunities immigrants expect of the diaspora are often not forthcoming. It is

⁸⁵ Op. cit., p.57.

⁸⁶ Op. cit., p.13, p.106. The term is also evocative of Harjinder’s use of ‘Eng. Lit’, which – as mentioned in Chapter 2 – connotes the neo-imperial character of the school curriculum.

⁸⁷ Op. cit., p.101.

suggested that this is so largely because of the prejudices of the ‘host’ population. For Maama Ji in *Transmission*, a “head full of Wordsworth and Shakespeare” is not enough to gain acceptance at an English university, and “somehow this land of opportunity ...evade[s] him”.⁸⁸ *Anita and Me* explicates this “somehow”, depicting the various ways in which ‘host’ prejudices impede the immigrant’s chances to make a life in a new country.

“You remember walking around Swiss Cottage, trying to find a boarding house that did not have that sign ‘No Irish, Blacks or Dogs’?... You know that old trick, you ring up and get an interview in your best voice, then they see your face and suddenly the job is gone.”⁸⁹

Second-phase writing also suggests that whatever jobs are available to immigrant applicants are often incommensurate with their aspirations and qualifications: Shyam Kumar’s (*AAM*) tertiary level education has proven to be “a damn waste of time in this country as it happens”.⁹⁰ Should the work be manual, as is the case in *A Wicked Old Woman*, it is often for little remuneration, making punishing schedules of overtime a necessity.

Arguably, the most significant development in the second-phase treatment of arrival is the critique of its conception as a permanent state of complete integration into a single environment. This notion is challenged, if not dismantled, by a number of later works. Its revision as a temporary condition is endorsed by, among others, *A Wicked Old Woman*, which charts Kuli’s journey through a number of different cultural, social and political environments. In each of these, the protagonist’s ability to find a truly comfortable niche is hindered by a disjunction between its *Weltanschauung* and her

⁸⁸ Op. cit., p.22.

⁸⁹ Op. cit., p.165.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.84.

own, as informed by her various - and sometimes contradictory - affiliations. Kuli's ethnicity, for example, compromises her relationship with the Party and its political priorities. For Caroline, however, it remains a valid focus of her activist energies. As the novel represents no environment as entirely-self-contained, Kuli is able to slip from one constituency into another, through the breach created by the friction of incompatibility. She is, therefore, able to find a partial sense of arrival in each one, but it is a temporary state of rest that is determined by the aspect of her identity Kuli prioritises at the given time. *Anita and Me* also evinces a strong sense of arrival as a finite phenomenon which as, Schoene-Harwood observes, "successfully facilitate[s] Meena's proprioceptive emancipation from - and beyond - the representational closure of any single ethnicity or culture".⁹¹ The consequence of Meena's moment of epiphany towards the close of the novel is her acceptance that she and her family will experience several temporary periods of settlement - "reincarnation[s] in our English life cycle" - of which their imminent move from Tollington to Wolverhampton is but one example.⁹²

Arrival is also represented as an incomplete and fluctuating condition. In *Hari-jan*, Harjinder's sense of alienation from mainstream society pushes her towards a more profound acceptance of her Indian identity; but when her American cousins criticise England, Harjinder experiences a strangely patriotic indignation that points to the real extent of her belonging in, and shaping by, the adopted country.

I felt like going out and buying a Union Jack. I could criticise England, I lived here. I could criticise the people, I had to deal with them...But these horrible twangy *foreigners* had no right (my emphasis).⁹³

⁹¹ Op. cit., p.167.

⁹² Op. cit., p.327.

⁹³ Op. cit., p.161.

In this respect, *Hari-jan* goes further than *Anita and Me* in explicating the shifting positions engendered by an incomplete sense of belonging; for, where Meena (*AAM*) learns to envisage herself as part of a larger, more integrated world, Harjinder's circumstances necessitate a more obvious degree of shuttling back and forth. Dhingra meanwhile portrays arrival as a multiple phenomenon - a perception that draws directly upon *Amritvela*'s treatment of the myth of return, discussed in the previous section. The novel's positive reading of the topic is evident in its assertion that its protagonist's numerous loci of belonging are such that "whichever way I am going, it always carries me home".⁹⁴ 'Amritvela' signifies the period just before dawn - "the coming of light to shed new perspectives on life".⁹⁵ Meera's journey has been her 'amritvela', inasmuch as it has radically altered her perspective on the validity of occupying a range of *milieux*. Her dream - specifically the presence of her daughter and English husband at the crucial point in its narrative - reminds Meera that the unexpected incompleteness of her arrival in India is, in fact, complemented by a greater degree of arrival in her adopted country than she has hitherto been prepared to admit.⁹⁶

To what, if any extent, is this sense of partial belonging in second-phase writing a matter of gender? Dhingra pays no attention to the matter, and instead places greater emphasis on class as one of the principal determinants of her incomplete sense of arrival in India - a matter discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. However, other second-phase writers suggest that gender may be a relevant factor. *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* and *Anita and Me* are among the second-phase works that depict the traditional expectations to which young women are subjected as militating against their complete ease within

⁹⁴ Op. cit., p.177.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Martin shows a considerable interest in Indian cultures. His daughter is familiar with her mother's religious and cultural background, and has an Indian name.

the home environment. Tania (*LIAH*) consciously uses her education to fashion a means of escape from her parents' home, and thus from the expectation that she will pursue the traditional path of marriage and motherhood. Meena's sense of unease in *Anita and Me* is also closely connected to gender. She often feels at her most disengaged from her home culture when compared to the daughters of her parents' Indian friends - girls who are uniformly "pleasant, helpful, delicate, groomed, terrifying".⁹⁷ Meena is, by comparison, "a freak of some kind, too mouthy, clumsy and scabby to be a real Indian girl".⁹⁸ In *A Wicked Old Woman* too, Rani's flight from home is prompted by the social strictures to which her father subjects her.

However, this is one of the second-phase novels in which discontinuities emerge between a young woman's priorities and the norms of the environment in which refuge is sought. Because the social and sexual expectations of women that prevail in the squat are unacceptable to Rani, gender is also a factor in her return to the community fold. Sheikh too places gender at the heart of her narrative of (un)belonging, as each of her female protagonists is, or becomes, more attuned to how the conceptions of womanhood that prevail in her inherited *and* adopted cultures impact upon her life to both liberatory and constraining ends. For example, the belief that sexual relations constitute the "ultimate transgression" for females circumscribes Raisa's upbringing to a considerable extent; and as a matter of "natural morality" in her parents' eyes, it is not a topic that is open to discussion.⁹⁹ Yet, despite the difficulties Raisa experiences validating this order of moral priority, she is unable to sincerely internalise the endorsement of sexual licence

⁹⁷ Op. cit., p.149.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp.149-150.

⁹⁹ Op. cit., pp.211-213.

that inflects the feminine identities of her white girlfriends: “[t]he dissonance was never quite resolved”.¹⁰⁰

Second-phase novels are much more specific than are their antecedents in their uses of locations, which are deployed literally and figuratively to delineate how far, and in what ways, their characters may be said to have arrived. Furthermore, the extent to which this phenomenon is inflected by gender is more apparent in later works. In *The Red Box*, the least secure sense of diasporic rootedness is experienced by the ‘Barking *Badmaash*’ [outlaws] - a group of young Asian British males, whose gang name indicates their ambivalence towards their place of residence. It is a location in which they feel both entrenched and marginalised. Their nominal claiming of the town implies that they believe they *should* be able to enjoy a sense of arrival within its environs. However, the reason why they do not is implicit in the second half of their name, whose rendering in Urdu deliberately foregrounds their ethnicity, and does so with aggressive connotations.

In place of the reactive and reactionary machismo of the Barking *Badmaash*, the novel suggests that women are more adept at *negotiating* a place within the diasporic environment. Sheikh ‘allocates’ both Raisa and Tahira two places that, physically and metaphorically, represent the antithetical relationship between the cultural environment of the parental home and its ‘others’. To reach one from the other, each character must cross a threshold of sorts: the Thames in Raisa’s case, and London itself for Tahira. In Southall, away from the constraints of her usual location, Tahira feels at greatest liberty to explore her identity, and the extent to which she is prepared to Anglicise herself. Although the dialogic relationship between her Indian and British identities is played

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.218.

out primarily in 'Solly', its traces are clearly evident in her hometown of Barking. The Roundhouse performs a similar function for Raisa: as a space that is removed from her parents' home and the norms that prevail therein, it allows Raisa to explore the extent to which her competing selves may co-exist.

The possibility that women are in the vanguard of negotiating the arrival of immigrant communities in Britain is also raised by Syal's use of place. In *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, the street on which Tania lived as a child now attests to the ability and willingness of diasporic women to lay claim to the *visible* spaces in their new environment as part of their dialogic engagement with their indigenous neighbours. Tania is struck not only by the movement of more recent immigrants into the area, but also by the nascent emulation of some of their ways by the older, white residents.

[A]lmost every front garden in the street had been turned into an extended patio. It was mainly women in bright robes and saris who sat right outside their front doors...Their boldness had also encouraged a few white OAPs to venture into the once-hallowed space of the front lawn and just sit, to watch the baffling multi-coloured world go by.¹⁰¹

In second-phase writing, location is also the means by which a more general sense of arrival is charted, as it represents the gradual accustomisation of white Britons to the permanence of the immigrant population. Syal's use of place reflects the transition of Britain's migrants from, to adopt Bromley's terms, "rejected outsiders" to "critical insiders", with all of the latter's connotations of arrival.¹⁰² Meena's (*AAM*) desire to see herself as an integral part of Tollington is reflected in the assertively

¹⁰¹ Op. cit., p.270.

¹⁰² Bromley, op. cit., p.124.

cartographic precision with which she describes the village's layout. However, her descriptions also lay bare Tollington's obsolescence, suggesting that Meena's aspirations to fit into the village on its own terms may represent something of a cultural dead-end. It is surrounded by neglected meadows in which unused farming equipment rusts, and the buildings that should represent the heart of the community are barely used to that end. However, signs of new arrivals and reconfigurations of space are in evidence: the ownership of the Big House by an Indian immigrant; the increasingly visible presence of new industries on the horizon, and the widening boundaries of the conurbations. The urban landscapes of *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* also bear the marks of consecutive immigrant arrivals - notably the former workhouse in which the launch of Tania's film is celebrated. The hard-won successes of the Bengalis are especially evident in its immediate surroundings, which deliberately evoke London's Brick Lane. Also known as 'Banglatown', it represents the epicentre of burgeoning white interest in Asian lifestyles.

[A] wonderful and strange thing happened...Street names were rechristened with names like Imran's and bilingual road signs appeared, thirty years after they were really needed. How odd, [Imran] reflected: so much time and concrete spent keeping the world at bay and now the world comes smiling and spending to us.¹⁰³

The process of arrival is also evident in the contrast between the novel's opening and closing scenes. At the narrative's start, the crescent moon on the minaret of a Leyton mosque is likened to a "metal sickle", indicating the threat long-standing residents perceive in the advent of newcomers with unfamiliar ways.¹⁰⁴ The grey

¹⁰³ Op. cit., p.153-154.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.7.

snowflakes, falling like “a fine drizzle of ash”, are echoed in the novel’s final chapter by the ashes emerging from the chimney of the crematorium, where the funeral of Tania’s father is held.¹⁰⁵ However, the shared motif serves to underscore the *differences* between the scenes - most notably, the changing status of Asian immigrants, from cultural interlopers to representatives of other, viable ways of life. The response of Mr. Keegan to Sikh funeral customs testifies to this changing outlook.

He had never dared say, but he looked forward to these foreign cremations...it cheered him up no end, seeing all those cream and snowy silks instead of the usual black stiff suits, which always reminded him of scavenging crows. True, they made a lot of noise. It was upsetting sometimes, the dramatics, the flinging themselves around. But he wondered if it wasn’t better that way, to let it all out and not be ashamed...¹⁰⁶

It is Srivastava, however, who offers the most emphatic statement of arrival through the use of location in *Looking for Maya*. Mira luxuriates in her familiarity with London, her “beautiful city”, and the novel contains numerous references to identifiable landmarks that testify to the accuracy with which it is depicted.¹⁰⁷ Its bright and vibrant cosmopolitanism is not only in marked contrast to the muted gentility of Luke’s Brighton home; it is also captured in the kind of ‘visitor’s guide-book’ detail that exudes the narrator’s sense of ownership.¹⁰⁸ The manner in which Mira initiates Luke into the delights of London’s various environs reiterates this possessive quality. Her

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.329. Mr. Keegan’s reaction contrasts with that of his wife, whose desire to maintain the environment with which she is familiar is reflected in her attempts to obliterate the marks of time by “yanking out weeds [from around her brother’s grave] with military precision” (ibid.).

¹⁰⁷ Op. cit., p.8.

¹⁰⁸ While Brighton is not Mira’s preferred environment, she is warmly welcomed into Luke’s family and their home.

anthropomorphic vision of the city endows it with the status of a character with 'whom' Mira self-consciously displays the intimacy of her connection.

London was dressed up for Christmas, over-dressed as usual...Everything seemed fresh and new and good and when I spoke I could hear myself breathless with excitement, drinking in the night, feeling the city wrapped around me like a velvet cape of good hope.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

In first-phase diasporic fiction, the possibility of physical return to the 'homeland' is represented as highly illusory for several reasons. The families left behind are often conscious of the possibility that a spell in a different environment may pose a threat to the integrity of the migrant's cultural identity. Nonetheless, as exemplified by 'Time is Unredeemable', South Asian diasporic women's writing emphasises that the extent of this change can be underestimated, and draws attention to the chasm that is opened up between the returnee and those who remain in the 'homeland'. The gap between imagined and actual returns is also shown to be attributable to the changes undergone by the place of departure. The topic tends to be broached in narratives that deal with displacement through 'internal' migrations. These often emphasise the extent to which the home changes, as much as they underscore its familiarity and security; but the impossibility of restoring the home to its former state is also highlighted. All of this, of course, presupposes that a physical journey back to the place of departure is feasible.

¹⁰⁹ Op. cit., p.68 Mira's sense of the city as a living character is comparable to Tahira's familiar conception of Southall as 'Solly' in *The Red Box*. Her vivid evocations of London are also one of number of parallels between Srivastava's works and those of Hanif Kureishi. For further detail on this topic, see Chapter 6's discussion of intertextuality.

First-phase narratives that focus more on the diasporic South Asian often suggest that economic considerations prevent any such undertaking.

The issue of gender is accorded numerous kinds of importance in first-phase representations of return. Where actual journeys are concerned, women play an important role in maintaining the ideal of return, both financially and through the sustenance of morale. It is, however, the conservation of South Asian constructions of womanhood that informs both physical and psychological journeys of return. In *Sumitra's Story*, going back to the 'homeland' is regarded by those other than the novel's protagonist as a viable way of restoring in Sumitra the correct norms of female conduct that diasporisation has eroded. Where the traditional cultural identity of the woman remains 'unimpaired', or is ill-at-ease with less prescriptive conceptions of femininity, the desire to return, whether actually or metaphorically, is most evident in women themselves. However, they are not only represented as readily drawn towards the safety and familiarity of 'homeland' mores. Several texts also suggest that women are better able to cope with the upheaval of returns because of the particular social priority placed upon their retention of traditional values, regardless of their cultural circumstances.

Second-phase treatments of return are continuous with those in earlier texts in various respects. A number assert the necessity of anticipating and accepting the changes that inevitably occur in the country of origin with the passage of time. Several later novels also underscore the economic impossibility of physical return to the 'homeland'. In its place, the 'home-from-home' becomes more prominent in the works of the second phase, and its creation is attributed largely to women - a tendency that is

in keeping with the connection between gender and returns elaborated in earlier texts. However, the developments that emerge in later representations of return outweigh the continuities significantly, and are largely symptomatic of the second-phase concentration on South Asians in Britain. The emphasis in second-phase novels falls, to a marked extent, upon the diasporisation of South Asian identities, and the ways in which this compromises the possibility of return, whether real or figurative. At the level of the actual journey, diasporisation lies at the heart of a marked reluctance to go back to the 'homeland' permanently - a state of affairs that, as Syal suggests, depends on a tacit acceptance that both the country of origin and the returnee have changed in the interim.

Furthermore, the emergence of Asian *British* cultural identities effects a reversal in the relationship between gender and the intention or capacity to return to the 'homeland'. Diasporised women, especially those who are daughters of first-generation immigrants, are more frequently portrayed as wary of the gender dynamics involved in returning - to the 'homeland' itself, or to modes of female conduct and aspiration more in keeping with traditional South Asian norms. The concomitant of this is a more obvious enthusiasm on the part of men to go 'back home' in search of the kind of traditionally socialised South Asian female that her diasporic counterparts are reluctant to emulate. However, this is not to suggest that second-phase writing is wholly concerned with women's increasing distance from their inherited culture. Randhawa's works especially assert the considerable value of reconciliation with, and acceptance of, one's parental culture and history. Nonetheless, they endorse a dialogic engagement with traditional *mores*: inherited values and customs are represented as sources of strength, but their inequitable aspects are beyond neither criticism nor amendment.

In first-phase writing, the idea that the 'natural' consequences of arrival in the metropolis are social entry and acceptance is shown to be a fallacy. However, whereas the myth of return is largely attributable to the actions and assumptions of the migrant, the myth of arrival is shown to be as much, if not more, the responsibility of the 'hosts'. The impossibility of arrival on these terms is attributed primarily to an inherited British belief in the immutable 'otherness' of non-white immigrants - a conviction that presupposes the undesirability and unlikelihood of their integration. If diasporic Asians retreat into the '*laager*' of their inherited cultural circle, it is often portrayed as a reactive strategy, undertaken in response to the 'hosts'' tendency to prioritise race over all other theoretical determinants of identity. Even the familiarity with British culture that distinguishes the diasporised Asian is insufficient to ensure a degree of social acceptance comparable with that extended to whites. Consequently, first-phase texts are marked by a negative view of the status of immigrants who are neither 'here' nor 'there'.

Second-phase fiction is continuous with that of the first-phase in its depiction of the treatment of immigrants and their offspring in the country of arrival. The notion that there is no practical distinction between non-whites born and raised in British and those from outside continues to have considerable purchase on the 'host' psyche. Furthermore, second-phase writing sustains the suggestion that it is largely in response to such hostilities that Asian immigrants 'choose' to enclose themselves within their own communities. Developments in second-phase treatments of arrival are, however, more readily discernible. The expectation that 'belonging' entails complete, permanent integration into a single environment undergoes considerable revision in later works,

which endorse, in much more positive terms, the fragmentation of cultural allegiances and identities. As these texts tend to be by, and about, the younger generations within the Asian British communities, they reflect their determination to make the best of the diasporisation with which their protagonists are familiar.

The extent to which women capitalise on diasporisation is crucial to second-phase writing, which explicates a connection between arrival and gender that only starts to be forthcoming in the first phase in *Sumitra's Story*. The emphasis falls, to a considerable extent, upon the cultural dialogism engendered by diasporisation, and especially upon the ways in which women's conduct effects and testifies to change within their ethnic communities. Women in later texts are not, however, represented as so assimilationist that they cannot see the gender inequalities in their adopted society as well as their own. In this respect, second-phase writing makes a more emphatic, convincing statement than is evident in *Sumitra's Story* about the necessity of balancing the various cultural influences at play within the diaspora. Furthermore, by introducing others to the dialogism that characterises their own lives, and by allowing the multiculturalism of the outside world to permeate the 'inner' life of the immigrant home, the dichotomy between the public and private realms around which gender roles are often organised is interrogated. The increasing confidence of diasporic women is, for example, evident in their more assertive claims to space - especially, as Syal suggests, visible space. Thus, under the aegis of negotiating 'new' cultural identities, later writing arguably represents women as paradigms of more general immigrant experience.

Chapter 4

Family Relationships: from Generation to Generation

Introduction

A number of the developments in Asian British women's writing outlined in the preceding chapters are underwritten by generational shifts. For example, challenges to gendered patterns of socialisation in the diaspora are attributable, in part, to the transference of attention and power from first-generation immigrant women to their daughters. Similarly, the myth of return, and the concomitant revision of belonging, are less reflective of first-generation immigrants' priorities, than of those of their offspring. According to George, the "use of a multi-generational cast of characters" typifies immigrant writing - a claim whose relevance is borne out by the fact that almost every text selected for examination in this dissertation is concerned with at least two generations of a family.¹ George also claims that the multi-generational perspective of immigrant fiction enables it to "straddl[e] several times, spaces and languages at every point of the narrative".² The extent to which the selected works are concerned with 'then' and 'now', 'there' and 'here', is a matter of some variation. Nonetheless, the experiences of different generations - especially the degrees to which they overlap or diverge - are among the most important means by which works from the immigrant *oeuvre* mark "the changing political map of the world in which [their characters] live".³

The interaction between first-generation immigrants and their offspring is frequently imagined to be highly antagonistic: older expatriates refusing to relinquish the *mores* with which they were raised, and a younger generation keen to question the relevance of the same values in a different environment. J.H. Taylor's characterisation of the parent-child relationship as "a gulf of inter-generational conflict" is typical of this

¹ Op. cit., p.171.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

view, with its emphasis on a potentially unbridgeable chasm.⁴ *The Half-Way Generation* supports the idea that younger Asian Britons are more inclined towards assimilation, even if the extent to which they act upon this preference is somewhat circumscribed. Elsewhere in the historiography of Britain's South Asian diaspora, the Asian parent is represented as highly conservative. Anwar's research among Pakistani immigrants reveals a strong sense of cultural custodianship among first-generation immigrants, who regard the preservation and transmission of inherited values to the next generation as, perhaps, their primary duty. More recent studies reiterate the extent to which this cohort tends to remain relatively unassimilated. Ken Blakemore and Margaret Boneham, for example, claim that "the preoccupations, values and standards of many British Asians, especially those of the older generation, are shaped more by the culture of the old country than by British or Western influences".⁵

However, a number of other diaspora historians contest the idea that cultural identifications fall into distinctly generational patterns; and in doing so, they interrogate the notion that inter-generational relations are necessarily antagonistic. Gerd Baumann cautions against assuming that "the forging of post-immigration 'Asian' culture [is] the preserve of youngsters alone".⁶ The flexibility that many first-generation immigrants have demonstrated in adapting inherited customs to a new environment has been recorded by, among others, Ramdin and Bhachu, who point to changes in religious, dietary and sartorial practice as evidence of their responsiveness to new circumstances.⁷ Furthermore, the supposition that younger Asian Britons are likely to be intent on

⁴ J.H. Taylor, op. cit., p.9.

⁵ Ken Blakemore & Margaret Boneham, *Age Race and Ethnicity: A Comparative Approach* (Buckingham; Philadelphia: OUP, 1994), p.79.

⁶ Gerd Baumann, 'Dominant and Demotic Discourses of Culture: Their Relevance to Multi-Ethnic Alliances' in Werbner & Modood (eds.) op. cit., p.218.

⁷ See Ramdin, op. cit., and Bhachu, op. cit.

assimilation, whatever the cost, is also questionable.⁸ Although Ramdin claims that many were confused by the contradictions between their various cultural *milieux*, he also points out that inter-generational relations “tended towards a degree of synthesis”.⁹ Brah also stresses the “considerable overlap in the attitudes, norms and values” of older and younger Asians.¹⁰

[T]he great majority of Asian parents interviewed expressed sympathy towards the predicament of young Asians growing up in Britain, although certain areas of experience of young people were sometimes outside the range of experience of their parents. Equally, the young Asians seemed to understand, if not always agree with, the constraints which were binding upon the parents.¹¹

Thus, while the potential for conflict exists, it should not be taken as read that interactions between different generations are necessarily schismatic in character. Such an assumption implicitly imagines that the Asian immigrant family is marked by a greater degree of antagonism is its white equivalent. However, Brah’s investigations reveal no higher incidence of conflict within Asian British families. How far ethnicity is responsible for whatever fissures *do* emerge is, therefore, difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, the extent to which diasporisation is a factor in inter-generational conflicts is also debatable. Characterisations of the immigrant family as riven by conflict tacitly presuppose that the ‘homeland’ family is a harmonious entity. According to Parekh, this is, indeed, the case: “There are no sharp age distinctions”; and because the child is able to mix freely with adults, “a mixture of physical force and appeal to the child’s love and

⁸ Even Taylor concedes that the young men on whom his study focuses go about their culturally-transgressive behaviour “without obvious defiance, to minimize conflict”. Op. cit., p.124.

⁹ Op. cit., p.245.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.43.

¹¹ Ibid., pp.42-43.

respect for elders” is sufficient to maintain harmony within a family structure that is at once “hierarchical and informal”.¹² Others, however, claim that the extent to which younger members are actually and willingly deferential to their elders cannot be taken for granted. With reference to Harlan’s 1964 study of Indian village communities, Blakemore and Boneham point out the potential inaccuracy of assuming that younger generations are unquestioningly respectful towards their elders. “*Superficial* observation of interaction between grandparents and their younger relatives” (my emphasis) might suggest unconditional deference to, and respect for, the old and “signs of pleasure and friendliness towards older relatives”.¹³ However, it is also the case that “the old would be (politely) reminded of the limits of the respect to be accorded to them”.¹⁴

It is, however, insufficient to account for the inter-generational dynamics within families solely by reference to their ‘internal’ mechanisms, as if these are in no way influenced by wider social dynamics. Cultural norms in the country of destination also shape relationships within immigrant families, and determine whether hairline cracks between generations widen into more serious fissures. For example, the normalisation of the ‘generation gap’ and the adoption of distinctive youth sub-cultural identities are aspects of the ‘host’ society that may exert a divisive influence on inter-generational relations within the Asian immigrant family. One way in which this is evident is in the cultural identifications chosen by each generation. According to Baumann, first-generation immigrants tend to endorse particularised racial and cultural identities that observe religious, linguistic and geographic distinctions.¹⁵ In certain contexts, these are definitions with which the second, and subsequent, generations concur. However,

¹² Op. cit., pp.1-5.

¹³ Op. cit., p.30.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Op. cit., p.209-215.

Baumann suggests that, when expedient, they also endorse more fluid conceptions, appropriating the designation 'Asian', imposed by the 'host', to more politicised and deliberately inclusive ends.¹⁶ In doing so, they dissolve the equation of 'community' with an implicitly uniform culture, to which their parents subscribe. This deliberate disengagement of habitually linked ideas is symptomatic of what Baumann terms the "demotic discourse" that renders cultural identities negotiable.¹⁷ But, while it elucidates some differences between the identifications, politics and tactics of different generations within the South Asian diaspora, this particular example does not suggest that relationships between parents and children are rendered especially fissile. One reason for this may be that the identificatory choices of younger generations are often made in response to racism, which a number of diaspora historians, including Desai, Ramdin and Brah, identify as having a cohesive effect on the bonds between parents and children.

In contrast to racism, the importance of gender in determining the character of inter-generational relationships has received a variable degree of attention in diasporic historiography. In earlier studies such as those by Anwar and Desai, women are represented cursorily, and their retention of traditional 'homeland' status is not opened up to particular scrutiny.¹⁸ More recent accounts, however, discuss in greater detail the impact of gender ideologies on the formation of the Asian British population, and the role played by women in reproducing inter-generational patterns of gendered identities - a tendency exemplified by Ramdin's account of Asian diasporic history.¹⁹ Ramdin

¹⁶ R. Radhakrishnan, however, is equally emphatic about the extent to which first-generation immigrant parents *cannot* share their children's particular experiences of racism. See R. Radhakrishnan, 'Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora' in Evans, Braziel & Manmur (eds.), op. cit., p.122.

¹⁷ Op. cit. As Radhakrishnan remarks, "it is important to understand that many of [the younger generations] find their 'ethnic Indian' identity (as distinct from the 'Indian' identity experienced at home) not in isolation, but in a coalition with other minorities". Op. cit., p.125.

¹⁸ Regarded largely as adjuncts to the male migrants who constitute the main focus of study, women are characterised in the terms elaborated in the introduction to Chapter 1.

¹⁹ Op. cit., p.243.

claims that, while parents may have become more accommodating of the differences between themselves and their native British offspring, “many felt that a line had to be drawn with their daughters”; for it remains imperative in the eyes of many to keep girls within the existing parameters of South Asian womanhood.²⁰ However, despite the pressures towards, and testimony to, conformity with traditional gender roles, a significant amount of evidence suggests that second-generation diasporic women are not necessarily compliant with the priority placed upon cultural reproduction. Indeed, according to Brah’s and Bhachu’s studies, there is considerable dissatisfaction among younger generations of Asian British women with the *status quo*, as discussed in the introduction to Chapter 1.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown’s more recent research documents the views of young Asian British women who, having observed the freedoms apparently available to contemporaries in other cultural *milieux*, are keen to effect changes in the gendering of social and domestic roles within their own communities. The particular investment younger women have in breaking inter-generational patterns of repetition is starkly illustrated by interviews with nineteen-year-old twins - a brother and a sister - of Asian descent. Despite being born and raised in Britain, Hamid is keen that his ethnic group maintains the distinctiveness of its identity, and regards the conservation of established gender relations as essential to the achievement of this aim. The dynamics that Hamid endorses are proprietorial in character, and presume the right of men to decide the parameters of female identity. “[L]ike [his] uncles and [his] father” he believes that “*our* girls...should stick to *our* ways” (my emphasis) and “be housekeepers and good wives

²⁰ This is deemed especially pressing when they reach their teens - the age of (imminent) sexual maturity and potential marriageability, “when girls were not expected to adopt the styles, attitudes and practices of their British counterparts”. Ibid.

and mothers like Allah says".²¹ Hamida, however, is highly sceptical about her sibling's motivations, for all their proclaimed religious authority.

He doesn't want to change because he will have a great time in the future...What do young men like him have to lose?...We want more in life ...I mean I don't agree with those crazy white feminists but I don't want to be a doormat either.²²

Thus, an example of 'demotic discourse' with more obviously divisive effects is provided by the critical activities of second-generation women, as represented by groups such as Southall Black Sisters and Women Against Fundamentalism. While opposed to expressions of racism against non-white minorities, these collectives also seek to challenge head-on practices such as domestic violence, arranged marriages, the dowry system and sexual abuse in the family. If we do not confront these patriarchal structures and forces, we will be guilty of colluding with them.²³

The crucial difference between this example of 'demotic discourse', and those already discussed that focus primarily on defining Asian cultural identity, is that the latter's criticism is principally targeted 'outside': that is to say, at the racist structures in the diaspora, whose inequities demand the most voluminous opposition that can be mustered. SBS and WAF, however, direct much of their criticism 'inwards', at the gender inequalities within the Asian population. The response of 'community leaders' to the challenges posed by these organisations has been to represent them as outside the

²¹ Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), pp.240-241.

²² Ibid.

²³ Baumann, op. cit., p.221. See also Nira Yuval Davis, 'Women, Ethnicity and Empowerment', op. cit., p.94.

boundaries of the 'real' ethnic corpus; and, thus, to imply that race takes priority over gender as a determinant of identity. However, the conception of cultural identity that informs the operations of SBS and WAF - one that does not accord race permanent, unquestionable precedence - means that its emphasis on gender has the potential, in certain contexts, to exert a disruptive influence upon inter-generational relationships within the South Asian diasporic population. It is striking that George attributes immigrant fiction's "narrative tendency towards repetitions and echoes" to the prevalence of the multi-generational cast, but does not consider how this characteristic is inflected by gender.²⁴ The second section of this chapter will, therefore, be devoted to examining how South Asian diasporic women's writing represents the impact of gender on inter-generational relationships.

Continuity and change: intergenerational relations within the family

First-phase texts attribute the integrity or volatility of the South Asian family to how it deals with the impact of 'other' cultural values. *Nectar in a Sieve* suggests that in some cases, the advent of new influences is a positive phenomenon, and one with the capacity to unite different generations. This is especially evident in the family's relationship with Kenny - a British doctor, whose plans to establish a hospital in Rukmani's village will introduce allopathic medicine to an environment in which other forms of healing have time-honoured priority. As the success of Rukmani's treatment testifies, the fact that Kenny's methods are new does not mean that they are without value. Indeed, in a very literal sense, they are 'familiar': Rukmani and Nathan are able to create the next male generation of their family, as custom requires, thanks to Kenny's

²⁴ Op. cit., p.171

medical intervention. The doctor's cohesive impact is also apparent through his relationship with Selvam. This partnership between "the young and the old" represents the productive potential of a marriage between established and new methods, exemplified by the benefits that the hospital offers the villagers.²⁵ However, a more personal example of Kenny's unifying presence emerges through Selvam's influence on his parents - especially Nathan - and their reactions to the birth of Ira's illegitimate, albino son. Having internalised his mentor's rationalist approach, Selvam's support of his sister and nephew is a valuable and necessary counterpoint to the superstitious attitudes of those villagers who reject Ira for her prostitution, and see the birth of Sacrabani as a negative omen. Selvam's unconditional acceptance of his sister and nephew is highly instrumental in reintegrating his own family.

Most first-phase texts, however, tend to focus on how new cultural influences result in the fragmentation of the family - a phenomenon that is attributed primarily to the varying degrees to, and ways in which, different generations engage with 'other' values. In these works, the adoption of British customs precipitates a virtually irreversible process of fission within the South Asian family, whether in the 'homeland' or the diaspora. In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, the unhealed rift between Baba Jan and his son, Hamid, is traceable to the latter's relatively uncritical Anglophilia. Although he counts a small number of its people amongst his closest acquaintances, Baba Jan's student days spent in England have left him with the (ironic) conviction that his fellow Asians under colonial rule should use "the weapons of the foreigners...against them to preserve inherited values and culture".²⁶ Hamid's concern with Englishness has less to do with the intellectual tools that so interest his father, than

²⁵ Op. cit., p.10.

²⁶ Op cit., p.86.

with the adoption of Anglicised manners. Where Baba Jan thinks it “abhorrent” to emulate the “alien ways” of the British, his son chooses to live by the same, “bringing his wife out of purdah” and “neglecting the religious education of his sons...openly and proudly”.²⁷

The divisive impact of ‘other’ values on familial relationships is also evident in *Nectar in a Sieve*. One way in which their advent into the rural Indian environment is depicted is through the establishment of the British-owned tannery - a particular object of suspicion for many older villagers, who see it as a foreign intrusion.²⁸ Its presence is a negative development in several respects: the conditions under which employees have to work are harsh; wages are meagre and Raja is killed by a security guard while attempting to break into the compound. There are, however, compensations. For the younger villagers, it offers employment opportunities outside the agricultural field upon which their parents depend - livelihoods that are potentially more stable, being less subject to the vagaries of nature. Rukmani is urged by Nathan to accept the tannery’s presence, as “[t]here is no going back. Bend like the grass that you do not break.”²⁹ Its arrival may be said to be literally ‘un-familiar’ in terms of the physical and psychological distances it precipitates between different generations.

Inter-generational estrangement is also evident in the British-set novels of the first phase - narratives in which the monoculturalism of the ‘host’ society endorses the assimilation of British norms, but in which immigrant parents assume that their children

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Because of the advent of the tannery, the village experiences an influx of workers, who bring wives, children and unfamiliar ways with them. This dynamic suggests a ‘homeland’ equivalent to the post-war waves of migration from the subcontinent to Britain. However, the emphasis Markandaya places upon the tannery’s British ownership tacitly reminds the reader that colonialism itself is an act of economic migration.

²⁹ Op. cit., p.43.

will replicate the norms of the 'homeland' society. In *Sumitra's Story*, the retention of a familiar *modus vivendi* is of paramount importance: "conventions demanded...that their children would be preserved in the same mould".³⁰ Similarly Vasantha rejoices in the purchase of the family's house, as it will enable her and Srinivas, "and our children after us, and after them theirs", to live in accordance with 'homeland' customs.³¹ *The Nowhere Man* delineates the schismatic impact of 'other' values on the Asian family by focusing on how Britain's stigmatisation of Indian culture alienates Laxman from his parents.

By the age of eight or nine, his eyes were slanted, looking askance at his two parents who belonged to a despised subcontinent. When he was ten, Srinivas put him right about the sub, which Laxman had imagined meant below in degree. It made little difference. The boy preferred to believe the version of his English contemporaries.³²

In adulthood, it becomes clear how far Laxman's view of Srinivas has been shaped by the 'host' insistence on the Indian's inherent primitiveness. The younger man's remarks about his father's "ape-like arms" allude to evolutionary theory in a way that is later echoed by Fred Fletcher.³³ However, for Markandaya, Laxman's attitude testifies to his victimhood: his rejection of his parents is conditioned by his susceptibility to Britain's 'imperial hangover' of hostility towards the peoples of its former colonies. By contrast, the assimilative zeal that Sumitra displays in *Sumitra's Story* is attributed to the coercive inflexibility of her parental culture.

Had she never come to England, the problem would not have existed. She

³⁰ Op. cit., p.72.

³¹ Op. cit., p.21.

³² Ibid., p.216.

³³ Ibid., p.94; Fred refers to Srinivas as a "fucking ape" on p.172.

would have grown up in an Indian community and learnt to perpetuate its culture. But now she was...surrounded by boys and girls who appeared to be free...while she was restricted.³⁴

Smith represents the splitting of the family - cemented by Sumitra's secret flight from her parents' home - as a necessary evil. The novel strongly suggests that its protagonist be applauded for making a necessarily stark choice.

Grandparents in first-phase narratives generally do little to bridge the rifts between parents and children. In *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Baba Jan remains a somewhat distant and forbidding presence in Laila's eyes, despite respecting his late son's iconoclastic instructions about how she should be educated: "Baba Jan had been young once...Could he have been tender and gay, and doubted and wondered? Was there ever a time when in his presence anyone could talk and laugh without restraint?"³⁵ Convinced of the merits of tradition, Baba Jan is emblematic of - and, therefore, cannot reduce - the disjunction between Laila's home environment and her inclination to question its norms. In *Sumitra's Story*, Dadima exacerbates the alienation that Sumitra already feels from her parents. Represented as another cog in the machinery of oppression, the grandmother spends whatever time she is afforded in the narrative reinforcing Mai and Bap's conservative expectations of their daughters. Consequently, "now that Dadima had come, life was even more tedious than ever."³⁶ Even the unequivocal generosity and love of Ira's grandmother in *Nectar in a Sieve* has little beneficial effect upon the relationship between her son-in-law and her granddaughter.

³⁴ Op. cit., p.80.

³⁵ Op. cit., p.32.

³⁶ Op. cit., p.125.

Second-phase texts, like their predecessors, are concerned with how the political consciousness of younger characters differs from that of their elders. *The Red Box* illustrates this especially effectively, foregrounding the question of how different generations define their cultural identities. In this respect, the novel is in keeping with antecedent works such as *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, *The Nowhere Man* and *Sumitra's Story*. However, whereas the protagonists of earlier narratives are inclined to actively embrace Westernisation, there is a more emphatic lack of deference in the conduct of Sheikh's teenagers. Unlike Laxman (*TNM*) and Sumitra (*SS*), they refuse to accept that their entitlement to Britishness is compromised by their unwillingness to assimilate entirely; and in doing so, they augur the emergence of distinctively *Asian* British identities that lie between the monocultural and multicultural poles of assimilation and ethnic conservatism. Furthermore, the attention in later texts such as *Hari-jan* is focused on a younger generation for whom it is politically expedient to validate an inclusive conception of Asianness, thereby eliding the differences of religion, language and geography that often shape their parents' identities. Many of the teenagers depicted in second-phase fiction have friendships that cross such lines of division. Their disengagement from the attitudes of previous generations is evident in their embarrassment at "stories...about Hindus and Muslims and stuff about fighting *in the old days*...we don't talk about them things" (my emphasis).³⁷

Although they are conscious, and often heedful, of their parents' ambitions for them, there is a discernible difference between how each generation believes these aims should be achieved. The younger characters refuse to keep their heads below the parapet. They are unwilling to endorse the comparatively subservient attitudes of their parents, which prioritise "work[ing] hard" within the existing systems of a country to

³⁷ Sheikh, *op cit.*, p.87.

which they believe they have little claim, in the hope of securing purportedly “successful lives”.³⁸ The most obvious exemplars of this generational shift are characters such as Jayesh, whose open interrogation of the criteria and methods of advancement endorsed by his parents’ generation tacitly assumes that he has a firm right to a stake in the adopted country. Thus, the generational shift is also apparent in the emergence of emphatically Asian *British* cultural identities.

“School ain’t my scene. Exams and all that shit ain’t gonna get me what I want...I reckon in a year or so I’ll be earning more in a week than my dad did in six months. It’s sad, man, I mean for my dad, *but it’s his fault for taking all the shit.*”³⁹ (My emphasis.)

Among the most significant developments in second-phase fiction is the suggestion in many of the selected works that inter-generational schisms can be bridged by common concerns such as the experience of racism. *A Wicked Old Woman* is a key text in this respect: the impulse towards assimilation felt by Rani, Arvind and the young Kuli is tempered by the racism that feeds it, and that emerges in response to their actions. Among the preconditions of the novel’s more positive depiction of family relations is a highly critical assessment of how Englishness is equated with freedom. It is far more attuned than is *Sumitra’s Story* to the insidious means by which Britain’s self-elevation entails the neo-colonial denigration of its ‘others’.

Believing the messages that came with the jam, spreading the golliwog’s smile on hot buttery toast, biting it, and crunching it and swallowing it whole as the eyes read avidly of Kipling’s *Kim* or latched like leeches on to Stewart Granger in *Bhowani Junction*. What the food and fiction missed

³⁸Ibid., p.110.

³⁹ Ibid., p.56.

out the history and geography books filled in...Freedom became an English patent and to be free was to imitate an Englishness...⁴⁰

A Wicked Old Woman's stance implicitly questions whether the rebellious actions of a character such as Sumitra (SS) really are those of an “urban freedom fighter”, when they also entail conformity to a different, equally rigid set of cultural definitions.⁴¹ Furthermore, the novel focuses on the consequences of Rani's flight, particularly the profound sense of bereavement it engenders in Shanti. In doing so, it critiques the creation of inter-generational splits within families by external forces more attentively than does *Sumitra's Story* in the first phase.

Second-phase fiction is also developmental in its emphasis on more conciliatory relations between different generations. In a number of second-phase works, protagonists are keen to explore unfamiliar cultures, but are also sufficiently accepting of parental sensibilities that they will try to avoid offending them - a marked contrast to the activities of younger characters in first-phase diasporic narratives. In *A Wicked Old Woman*, as well as in *The Red Box* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, “Machiavellian” young Asians make sure that their transgressions are committed out of parental sight.⁴² If they go to *bhangra* raves, or have secret assignations, they do so during school hours. Otherwise, they confine their explorations of the forbidden to the covert realms of fantasy and daydream, like Nasreen in *The Red Box*. In *Anita and Me*, Meena, not yet attuned to this etiquette of secrecy, commits an unwitting and rather public *faux pas*, declaring that she “could shag the arse off” her favourite song.⁴³ Chastised by her father,

⁴⁰ Op. cit., pp.6-7.

⁴¹ Op. cit., p.160.

⁴² Randhawa, op. cit., p.6.

⁴³ Op. cit., p.115.

“in a tone of voice I had not heard before, which shot right off the Outraged Parent clapometer”, Meena learns to exclude discussion of certain matters and activities from the domestic realm.⁴⁴ Although this strategy is motivated, to a large extent, by the fear of discovery and its possible consequences, it also demonstrates recognition of, and tacit respect for, the esteem in which her parents hold their inherited *mores*. Furthermore, as Randhawa elaborates, a considerable amount of guilt accompanies culturally transgressive acts in second-phase fiction: their executors are aware of the possible “treachery” they are committing by seeming to concur with the white denigration of their parental culture.⁴⁵

Several second-stage works use motifs of illness, deficiency or injury to suggest that the cultural separation diasporic Asian children seek from their parents is unsustainable, if not actually detrimental. *A Wicked Old Woman* offers several examples: Rani’s catatonia, and the complementary problems of sight that afflict mother and daughter, and are only corrected once a *rapprochement* between the women has been achieved. Tania (*LIAH*) finds herself drawn back into the orbit of her estranged family, not only by the illness her father suffers as he becomes increasingly distant from his children, but also by her own sense of deficiency, arising from her lack of contact with her family. Her state resonates somewhat with the “empty spaces” of which Harjinder (*H-J*) is aware, and that result from feeling compelled to “push away parts of yourself”.⁴⁶ Meena’s (*AAM*) accident results in, perhaps, the most obvious physical externalisation of her distance her from her parents. The dislocation of her leg is

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.116.

⁴⁵ Op. cit., p.7.

⁴⁶ Op. cit., p.84.

emblematic of the psychological malaise created by her split loyalties: a part of her body, like a part of her mind, is “pointing the wrong way” compared to the rest of her.⁴⁷

In keeping with this emphasis on literal and metaphorical illness, second-phase diasporic narratives characterise the parent as a potential source of strength and regeneration. This is in marked contrast to their depiction as debilitating forces in *Sumitra's Story's* more obviously first-phase treatment of the topic. The healing process depends on a greater degree of proximity between generations; for, as *Hari-jan* makes clear, the parent is the conduit through which the child re-admits the inherited culture and begins the process of becoming whole.

I realised now that Mum had tried to rescue some of that [disavowed part of myself], keep it going with her rules and regulations... This other ‘Me’ *took life from* the familiarity of sounds, images thoughts that came from that part of my self.⁴⁸ (My emphasis.)

Randhawa's treatment of the parental imposition of cultural rules offers a more positive reading of what is portrayed in some earlier diasporic narratives as the tyrannical conduct of the Asian elder. Indeed, *Hari-jan* undertakes an active refutation of this rather stereotypical notion, emphasising that inter-generational reconciliation will only work if certain conditions, incongruous with the absolute subservience of the child, are observed. The crux of every successfully (re)united family in second-phase fiction is the ability and willingness of each generation to recognise its difference from the others, and to accommodate these distinctions in a spirit of compromise. Thus, in exchange for

⁴⁷ Op. cit., p.279. The extent to which Meena's injury is attributable to Anita's influence, and her pathologising of all things Asian, is suggested by the fact that the pony that throws her to the ground has a particular rapport with Anita. Furthermore, Anita is momentarily endowed with “the alert, challenging look of a wary horse”. Ibid., p.239.

⁴⁸ Op. cit., p.84.

abiding by her mother's rules, Harjinder (*H-J*) is also able to bend them with maternal agreement.

The ability to compromise is also at the core of Sunita's (*LIAH*) relationship with her parents, who encourage their daughter to identify with her Indian heritage by apparently granting her the space to *not* do so. Indeed, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* points to the emergence of an even more harmonious stage in parent-child relations: Krishan, a recently qualified doctor, regards his parents as "quite good mates".⁴⁹ Something of this is also evident in *Transmission*. Anjali is expected to attend her parents' Diwali celebrations and be "the perfect Indian daughter"; however, she is subjected to no serious curtailment of her choices or actions, even when she fails to meet her side of the bargain in its entirety by leaving the party early.

Ma wrinkled up her face and then said, "Achha, ok. But make sure you just slip away, I will tell [the guests] you have gone later." Hurray. I raced upstairs to change. I knew ma would be ok about it...⁵⁰

What *Transmission* depicts is commensurate with a concern discussed in Chapter 3: the second-phase valorisation of multiple locations of arrival. While the family home is her principal abode, Anjali is also able to retreat comfortably to other environments.

Moving in her other circles with little obvious interference from her family, she regards its Indianness with affection, appreciates its contrast with her other *milieux*, and actively seeks it out: "I *wanted* to go home...*wanted* to see maama ji [maternal uncle] and Dad playing chess" (my emphasis).⁵¹

⁴⁹ Op. cit., p.226.

⁵⁰ Op. cit., p.56.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.191.

A further development evident in second-phase fiction is its greater assertion of the positive role played by grandparents. Nanima in *Anita and Me*, unlike Sumitra's (SS) grandmother, is a cherished member of the family, and an enriching presence in her granddaughter's life. Responsible for sparking Meena's greater interest and pride in her parental 'homeland', Nanima's relationship with the girl is the counterpoint to that between Meena and Anita. While Anita erodes Meena's confidence by assuming that she will conform to English ways, Nanima encourages her granddaughter's growth and healing by not expecting that her conduct will be identical to that of a Subcontinental child. The reparation of Meena's selfhood through her grandmother also resonates with her altered perception of community and belonging. The erosion of the boundaries between 'here' and 'there', discussed in Chapter 3, follows the integration of 'then' and 'now' represented by the connection of grandparent to grandchild.⁵²

In second-phase writing a more sympathetic attitude is evident towards the alienation experienced by grandparents in the diaspora. Randhawa highlights their bewilderment at this "topsy-turvy life where grandchildren couldn't understand them and they in turn couldn't understand what went on in their families anymore".⁵³ *A Wicked Old Woman* does not, however, suggest that the elderly choose to stay within a cultural timewarp, and are thereby complicit with their isolation. Rather, the novel is sensitive to the loneliness they suffer, living as appendages to nuclear families occupied by work and study. Randhawa offers a testament to the older generation's openness of character by portraying how, from their anomie, the peripatetic grandfathers forge allegiances that traverse cultural and generational divides. Arvind and Bahadur are

⁵² *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* also places considerable emphasis on the valued presence of grandparents. The wisdom of the elders in Syal's later novel – particularly on matters of marriage and relationships - is often presented in terms of its universal applicability.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p.89.

accepted as “our youngsters”; for, despite having made some unconventional life choices, they nonetheless evince a connection with “the old ways” of the extended family through their care for the elderly.⁵⁴

The developmental quality of second-phase narratives is also evident in their suggestion that *intra*-generational relationships benefit from communication between different age groups. In *Amritvela*'s ‘homeland’ narrative, Meera is unable to participate in the concerns of her generational peers; and at her ‘welcome’ party, she only finds genuine comfort in the supportive comments of the much younger Vijay, and in the presence of Kesru, the elderly servant from her childhood home. Her most profound relationship is with her great-aunt, whose influence in reminding Meera of the diversity *and* connectedness of India enables the younger woman to accept the differences between herself and her contemporaries. The restorative nature of this inter-generational exchange is marked by Meera’s acquisition of her great-aunt’s diary. Its original, dated entries are overwritten with the word ‘ram’, whose meaning - ‘that which dwells in us all’ - provides Meera with a succinct representation of Bibiji’s philosophy. It functions as a symbol of how the demarcations of time, including those that separate generations, may be obliterated.

Intra-generational relationships are represented as similarly, but reparably, fractious in several other diasporic narratives - a tendency that is symptomatic of how, in second-phase fiction, the focus often falls as much on the divisions *within* Asian British communities as on their separation from the ‘host’ population. It is within this context that *A Wicked Old Woman*'s “mentalscapes” of walls and closed doors may be

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.155 The shed in which the old men meet, with its “rickety door”, may, therefore, be seen in symbolic terms: outside the boundaries of the conventional home and its exclusivist connotations, as discussed in Chapter 3; and a place of ‘illicit’ refuge to which newcomers can gain access. Ibid., p.154.

read; and one area in which their relevance may be discerned is in the rivalry between Kuli's sons.⁵⁵ The development of more harmonious relations between Kuli (*AWOW*) and her children goes some way towards alleviating the antipathies that have developed between the siblings: with inter-generational lines of communication re-opened, Kuli is able to exert her influence to bring the men together in common cause. In *Anita and Me*, the cultural 'nourishment' provided by her connection with Nanima, prompts Meena to refashion herself into a more 'proper' Indian daughter. Her efforts are not confined to "prepar[ing] for the eleven-plus...grow[ing] my hair long and vaguely feminine...and introduc[ing] myself properly to that anonymous army of blood relatives".⁵⁶ Crucially, they also extend to "be[ing] nice" to those former objects of vilification, Pinky and Baby.⁵⁷

Something of this causality is also evident in *Hari-jan*. Harjinder's more conciliatory relationship with the older generation ultimately restores her connection with her contemporaries. Although she initially dismisses the notion of the 'harmony committee' as an outmoded relic of the "old, dreary, paunchy and boring" generation, Harjinder eventually comes to accept its validity.⁵⁸ That she does so is, in no small part, attributable to the strength she derives from the reinvigorated Indian identity that her mother's ministrations have fostered. It enables her to regard the cross-cultural alliance of the School Committee as a forum in which she can participate more actively, and endows it with a feasibility that she was previously unable to endorse. The expansion of Harjinder's inter-generational contacts is, therefore, the precondition of her integration into her peer group.

⁵⁵ Nasta, op. cit., p.205; Monteith, op. cit., p.33.

⁵⁶ Op. cit., p.284.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Op. cit., p.78.

Gender and inter-generational negotiations

First-phase novels suggest that the forces that separate parent from child vary according to gender. The schismatic quality of father-son relationships is attributed to divergent political and cultural interests, foregrounding issues of class or national-cultural identity, rather than of gender. Male relationships over three generations in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* follow a repetitive pattern of mutual rejection between fathers and sons, conditioned by the changing political world in which each cohort finds itself. Hamid's Anglophilia is not simply contrary to his father's cultural identifications, but also a strategic choice: the "calculated precision in his manner and appearance" is a lubricant in his negotiations with the agents of imperialism and independence, and the arbiters of his social position.⁵⁹ However, if one focuses less on the means by which each generation seeks its advancement, and more on the fact that the retention of power remains a constant from father to son, some degree of continuity is evident alongside the apparent rejection of the paternal example. While political strategies may vary from generation to generation, the conservation of privilege, from which Baba Jan, Hamid and Saleem all benefit, does so rather less.

Hosain's novel resonates with *The Nowhere Man*, inasmuch as the divisions between Srinivas and Narayan are engendered more by tactics than by ultimate goals: both men believe in the necessity of freeing India from imperial subjugation. However, the narratives differ in their representations of the 'homeland' family. In Srinivas' (*TNM*) recollections, it is sufficiently elastic to accommodate the divergent viewpoints of fathers and sons that break up the family in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Hosain's portrayal of the virtually unbridgeable split between generations of Subcontinental men

⁵⁹ Op. cit., p.86.

has more in common with Markandaya's vision of the *diasporic* family, which is depicted as incapable of withstanding the weight of irreconcilable beliefs. The assimilationist Laxman's desire to forge a different cultural identity for himself leads to his virtual disavowal of his father - a state of affairs that only starts to be reversed towards the narrative's end.⁶⁰ Like Saleem, Laxman displays a selective self-interest towards his father and the precedent he represents. He regards Srinivas and the culture for which he believes he stands with distaste; but he shows no particular inclination to critique the conventions - of inheritance, in particular - from which he would benefit.⁶¹

The representation of relationships between mothers and daughters in the first phase is altogether more irresolute and pluralised, and thus devoid of the clarity of schism evident between fathers and sons. It is, therefore, more difficult to draw the kind of direct parallels between novels that are possible with inter-generational relationships between men. Nonetheless, all of the splits that emerge between mothers and daughters emanate from concerns about their social construction as women which, as discussed in Chapter 1, is directed towards the perpetuation of a patriarchal social order. Depictions of mother-daughter relationships more often than not emphasise their ambivalence or fragility. Hosain's portrayal of Majida's relationship with Zahra (*SOABC*) underscores the latter's ambivalence. By agreeing to marry a man of the family's choosing at an appropriate age, Zahra enables her mother to fulfil her cherished wish of discharging her social obligations in the approved manner. Zahra clearly enjoys the glittering social life made available to her by this dutiful act of conformity to maternal precept; but there is a

⁶⁰ Srinivas condemns Narayan as blind for failing to see how his passive conduct supports the exercise of imperial power. In turn he is similarly dismissed by Laxman for underestimating how his visible difference from the majority population of Britain determines his treatment. Markandaya's use of the motif of blindness reminds the reader of the common origins of each father-son dispute - the exercise of colonial power.

⁶¹ V. Rangan, 'The Nowhere Man: A Critical Analysis' in Prasad (ed.), op. cit., p.187. Guruprasad regards Laxman's awareness of his inheritance as evidence of his latent Indianness. Op. cit., p.182.

strong suggestion that she finds a particular relief in no longer having to live under the austerity of her mother's rule.

“I was brought up to do my duty.”

“Your duty according to whom? Look at your nails, smart and long; your mother thinks such talons impure and irreligious. Come on, do your duty,” and I reached for the scissors.

Zahra pulled her hand away as if pricked by a thorn, “Laila, don't.”⁶²

Like her cousin, Zainab, Zahra basks in the approval she attracts for respecting social traditions - dictates she has internalised to a sufficient extent that their self-evident, unquestionable truth is largely taken for granted.⁶³ She does, however, crave the relative social freedoms that are only permitted to the married woman, just as Zainab dreams of the kind of romantic love that she publicly ridicules. Nonetheless, having accepted that a woman's overt interrogation of the *status quo* is disgraceful, the girls do not challenge that which seems immutable, and focus instead on whatever joy they can extract from their situation. Majida's efforts to ensure her daughter's eligibility as a wife are, therefore, the source of Zahra's pleasure *and* her frustration. While her male cousins are able to openly challenge their father's dictates in order to attain some measure of freedom from his jurisdiction, Zahra must *conform* to maternal expectation if she is to eventually escape her mother's vigilance through marriage.

Nectar in a Sieve, however, locates the ambivalence about gendered *mores* as much in the mother as in her daughter. Rukmani harbours private reservations about the customary lot of the 'homeland' woman; and while she may express these most readily

⁶² Op. cit., p.148.

⁶³ Laila's reference to her cousin's squinting eyes which turn inwards underscores Zahra's lack of critical vision. Ibid., p.16.

in relation to Ira's misfortunes, they are clearly informed by some of her own tribulations. The sympathy mothers have for their transgressive daughters is one way in which their unease with the social patterns they are expected to uphold is made evident. Furthermore, the solidarity between generations that, in the previous section of this chapter, emerged as an especially strong second-phase phenomenon, can be detected in some first-phase writing that foregrounds the issue of femininity. Nandi's mother in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* does what she can to assuage her husband's anger at his daughter's apparent immodesty. However, the acceptance of a daughter's transgression is at its clearest in *Nectar in a Sieve*, where Rukmani's unswerving love for Ira contrasts with Nathan's (initial) rejection of his prostitute daughter.

The capacity of mothers to forgive their daughters' 'wrongdoings' highlights one respect in which *Sumitra's Story* is anomalous among first-phase texts. The novel focuses on how the critical disposition of diasporised daughters opens up a chasm between generations of Asian British women. To this end, as discussed in Chapter 1, Mai is depicted largely as an unquestioning - indeed, unthinking - adherent to Subcontinental constructions of womanhood. Furthermore, Mai seems incapable of hoping or imagining that her daughters might lead lives different from her own. However, she is not portrayed as unremittingly coercive: a hint of flexibility is evident on the day-trip to Littlehampton when, crucially, she is not under the jurisdiction of Bap. She encourages the girls to enjoy the freedom of the boat ride to an extent that might not have been possible with her husband present, even though she has little wish to participate herself. This is the clearest of the novel's scarce suggestions that Mai's orthodoxy is more indicative of her *husband's* priorities, to which she is obliged to accede. Furthermore, Smith makes some attempt to lift the ambivalence of the mother-daughter relationship out of an exclusively Indian context. By paying passing attention

to the mutual incomprehension between generations of *white* women, the novel attempts to universalise somewhat Sumitra's increasing distance from Mai.

Between Rukmani's accommodation and Mai's regulation lies the relationship between Abida and Laila. The women's connection is initially reinforced by the untypicality of their characters and circumstances. Both have a love of learning that goes beyond the level and scope deemed appropriate to a woman: Abida is "the only one of [her] aunts whom [Laila] had seen with a book in her hand".⁶⁴ Furthermore, Abida's unusual status is compounded by the fact that, because of her father's decisions, she remains single at an age significantly beyond that by which most women would be married. What drives the women apart are the limits to Abida's non-conformity, and Laila's willingness to overstep these. On questions of duty, the older woman is uncompromising, as evinced by her agreement to marry a "tall, thin, negative man" of her family's choosing.⁶⁵ Furthermore, she cannot countenance the idea that what it is to be dutiful may be susceptible to changing social *mores*: "Some things never change. Obey your elders and do not hurt them... You must learn that your self is of little importance. It is only through service to others that you can fulfil your duty."⁶⁶ It is, therefore, the case that Laila's marriage appears to Abida a selfish betrayal of (what should be) the inviolable priority of family interest.

By focusing so attentively on Laila's iconoclasm, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is the first of the selected novels to utilise the parentless child as a symbol of the potential disruption of inter-generational patterns. The orphan is a common folkloric figure, often compelled to undertake an arduous journey through hostile environments,

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.139.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.112.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.252.

and with little support, in order to arrive eventually at a state of self-realisation and independence. Although Abida performs a quasi-maternal role, the passage of traditional values through a real mother is absent from Laila's life, rendering her an outsider to the inheritance of conventional norms in a way that the fatherless Zahra is not. It is this peripheral status that enables Laila to break away from familial and social precedent by marrying outside the expected parameters. This depiction of the motherless daughter as a creature without cultural moorings both resonates and contrasts with that in *Sumitra's Story*: the unwilling and highly critical Talika is thrust even more firmly into her father's regulatory grip by the death of her mother, and the additional domestic burdens she is obliged to shoulder.

The second-phase treatment of men's inter-generational relationships is continuous with that in first-phase works, inasmuch as younger males show little desire to emulate their fathers' examples. In *The Red Box*, Jayesh, as discussed earlier, illustrates this division, refusing to accept the kind of work that his father was obliged to do. However, Sheikh's novel, in common with other second-phase texts, also suggests that divergence from the paternal precedent is sought only in certain respects. Jayesh's case attests to a strong urge to escape the poverty trap in which his first-generation immigrant father is caught. In *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, greater emphasis is placed on the younger man's desire to not be restricted by the sexual morality of older generations. Deepak's compensation for dutifully taking over the family business is to be "as undutiful as could in his private life"; and his fear of becoming like his father is at its most intense when he contemplates the limitation of sexual opportunities this would impose on him.⁶⁷ Neither his nor Jayesh's rejection of the paternal precedent extends to examining the basis of male privilege in Asian cultures, the benefits of which

⁶⁷ Op. cit., p.166.

younger men seem happy to continue enjoying. Prem (*LIAH*) derives comfort from the knowledge that “he had done his best. His son would do the same for him. Some things would never be broken”.⁶⁸ But his concern about the settlement of his father’s estate illuminates the calculation behind his efforts to preserve the traditional patrilineal pattern of inheritance.

Continuity can also be found in later works’ emphasis on how the demands of tradition create the distance between generations of women. Rani’s narrative in *The Hope Chest* delineates how, in the ‘homeland’, a mother’s imposition of orthodox expectations can open up a chasm between herself and her daughter.⁶⁹ This is also true, to some extent, of relationships between diasporic women, most notably those portrayed in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*. Tania for example, feels alienated by the fact that her mother, though “not a small woman...shrivelled to the size of a pea around her husband”.⁷⁰

Training began early in our house, not in the expected areas, cooking, shopping, cleaning...what [mother] taught me was more of a spatial exercise: how to take up as little room as possible. How to read the moods of everyone in the room and flow smoothly about them, adapting to the edges and hollows, silver and silent as mercury...and most importantly, [to] save any rages and rumbles for the privacy of my dark bedroom.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.331 The Laxman-esque quality of his motivation is underlined by the fact that, although Prem does not put the kind of distance between himself and his father that Laxman does, Mr. Tendon nonetheless spends his later years in his son’s home “tucked away in the corner at the end of the corridor, *almost* shouting distance away from the other bedrooms and the downstairs family rooms” (my emphasis). Ibid., p.296.

⁶⁹ As discussed in Chapter 2, Rani uses her illness and then her art to provide a tacit critique of her mother’s conformity to social precept.

⁷⁰ Op. cit., p.143.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.143-144.

The ultimate aim of Mrs. Tendon's "training" is to reinforce Tania's eligibility as a supportive (or undemanding) wife - a role that Tania never assumes within the course of her mother's lifetime.

An inter-generational distance of similar genesis is also evident in *The Red Box*. Nasreen takes considerable pride in conforming to parental expectations; but, through her contact with Raisa and Tahira, she starts to question aspects of their validity. A model daughter, she spends much of the narrative abiding by the 'head down, work hard' approach to life valorised by the older generation.⁷² However, she also feels intense guilt about the way in which her obedience prevents her from taking a stance on vexatious questions of injustice. Nasreen's difference from her parents, like Sumitra's (*SS*) and Tania's (*LIAH*) from their respective mothers, foregrounds the issue of gender. The Ehsans' conviction, that it is best for their daughter to maintain a low profile, is - in part, at least - implicitly informed by the 'homeland' norms that deem it inappropriate for a girl to be disobedient, and to draw attention to herself, as Tahira does. For this reason, Nasreen does not participate in the demonstration against Jamshid's expulsion; and her suppressed desire to do so results in her physical and verbal attack on another pupil. Despite the embarrassment Nasreen feels in the immediate aftermath of her outburst, its 'purgative' effect seems to be a factor in enabling her to realise her *own* burgeoning identity.

⁷² Haleh Afshar claims that, for Asian parents, "approval at school is assumed to ascribe immense status, not only on the pupils concerned, but also on the whole family who can bask in its reflected glory". See 'Schools and Muslim Girls: Gateway to a Prosperous Future or Quagmire of Reason?' in Rohit Barot (ed.), *Religion and Ethnicity: Minorities and Social Change in the Metropolis* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1993), p. 57.

The suggestion in a number of second-phase texts, that relationships between white mothers and daughters are driven by dynamics similar to those in Asian *milieux*, is a further point of continuity between the phases of Asian British women's fiction. The most concerted attempt to universalise the exchange between female generations occurs in *The Hope Chest*, in which the story of Ruth and Sophie's fractious relationship runs parallel to, and at points intertwines with, the narrative lines that focus on the novel's Pakistani women. The narrative structure underscores the frequency with which mothers seek self-validation in their daughters' conformity to the pattern of their own lives. Furthermore, second-phase writing elucidates how widely - both culturally and temporally - the alienating effects of maternal expectation are experienced. A passing reference in *A Wicked Old Woman* to a mother slapping her daughter, and to the child's retort with a kick, serves to represent the "tangle of hate" between generations of females as an experience that crosses cultural boundaries.⁷³

Alongside these continuities, clear developments are apparent in the second-phase treatment of gender in inter-generational relationships. Later works are more overt in their depictions of how men's reluctance to challenge the gendered *status quo* is underpinned by a desire to retain the existing division of labour, and custodial power over women. In some respects, Akash (*LIAH*) is from the same mould as his elders, despite his 'new man' veneer: a noticeably hands-off father, who bristles with resentment when asked by his wife to help shoulder the practical domestic burden. Younger diasporic men also continue to exploit their social advantage, often focusing on their right of control over the conduct of girls. Arif's power over Tahira rests to a large extent on his threat to make public the fact that she is no longer a virgin. His attitude is one side of the coin of which Jamshid's is the other face; for Jamshid's

⁷³ Op. cit., p.37.

characterisation of an English girl as a “prostitute” also demonstrates a belief that the worst insult a woman can suffer is to have her sexual morality impugned.⁷⁴ His vigilant attitude towards Asian girls is not simply a response to the racist threat posed by white pupils; it also, as his chastisement of Tahira demonstrates, reaffirms traditional conceptions of women’s *izzat*.

Another way in which second-phase writing is developmental is in its greater attention to how diasporisation inflects and diversifies the retention of male privilege from one generation to the next. *A Wicked Old Woman* suggests that Britain, a world in which “Boys were okay, Boys Rooled, Boys were Tops”, reinforces Asian patriarchal values, and does so insistently from an early age, as indicated by the playground argot of these slogans, and their assertive capitalisation.⁷⁵ It is, therefore, unsurprising that Anup, the most receptive of Kuli’s sons to these messages, carefully maintains his Indian identity - in part, because of the gendered advantages he knows it bestows upon him. However, the emergence of a reconstructed Asian male identity is also raised in works of the second phase. *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, for example, suggests that it may be possible to socialise men in ways that break with existing custom. Deepak is especially disconcerted by the presence at the film launch of a younger generation of successful, intelligent men who possess “soft edges”, ‘feminine’ qualities and a capacity for self-irony that Deepak himself has never been encouraged to develop.⁷⁶

Suresh in *Hari-jan* represents a similar divergence from characters such as Arif in *The Red Box*. His development is largely attributed to the diasporised sensibilities of

⁷⁴ Op. cit., p.11.

⁷⁵ Op. cit., p.101.

⁷⁶ Op. cit., p.166.

his mother: while she is as assiduous as Harjinder's mother in familiarising her child with the culture of the 'homeland', it is also clear that her son's Indianisation does not extend to preferential treatment on the grounds of his sex. He is expected to carry out the household tasks that would normally be seen as the preserve of the female, and must exercise the same degree of social circumspection as Harjinder. Therefore, his 'chivalrous' concern for her cannot necessarily be classified alongside Jamshid's (*TRB*) proprietorial 'protection' of girls, as it emerges from a more empathetic understanding of how the restrictions to which she is already subject may be tightened further.

The somewhat greater sympathy daughters have towards their mothers' traditionalism is one indication of how the writers of the second phase develop the representation of women's inter-generational relationships. This is a marked shift from the precedent of *Sumitra's Story*, implying that younger women are capable of understanding (if not agreeing with) the orthodox reasoning of the old, just as some mothers in the first-phase are able to accommodate the transgressions of the young. Chila's (*LIAH*) realisation, that her conformity to Subcontinental *mores* tacitly reinforces the systematic devaluation of her own sex, threatens to shatter whatever concord exists between a mother who places her faith in tradition, and a daughter who, having learnt to do the same, "should have been happy, and ...wasn't".⁷⁷ The implosion of their relationship is forestalled by Chila's recognition of the constraints on her mother. As a first-generation immigrant, entrusted with maintaining the ways of the 'homeland', she is afforded social approval for endorsing her own secondary value, and that of her daughter.

[Chila] looked full on into her mother's eyes and paused, wrong-footed

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.199.

because she saw there something baffling and unexpected. Her mama was afraid. Afraid that Chila might utter words that would shatter the fragile throne upon which she sat, afraid that her daughter's as yet unspoken misery would now keep her awake for the rest of her nights because she, as her mother, should have known...⁷⁸

Tahira in *The Red Box* is often exasperated by her mother's superstitions, fears, and assumptions about the family's return to Pakistan. However, she is tacitly conscious that many of these concerns are engendered or exacerbated by her intimate knowledge of the position females occupy within Pakistani culture. Consequently, there is also a palpable bond between mother and daughter based on their understanding that women are subjected to harsher scrutiny than are men. This mutual solicitousness is also evident in second-phase 'homeland' narratives, most notably *The Hope Chest*. Reshma is reluctant to divulge much detail about her life as a new wife, even though Rehmat Bibi is desperate for assurances of her daughter's well-being. Her circumspection is reinforced by her awareness of the guilt Rehmat Bibi feels for agreeing to the girl's marriage at such a young age.

"Do they treat you well?" her mother pursued hastily...Reshma looked up, noticing the anxiety in her mother's secretive whispers, and something inside her changed colour, slowly, inevitably, like peaches do, in the sun... Her mother looked older, tired and more fragile than ever before, she did not need any more worries, Reshma decided in that moment and responded to that need without the slightest hesitation.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.199-200.

⁷⁹ Op. cit., p.136.

A similar dynamic is evident between Raisa and Sabah (*TRB*). Resentful of her mother's attempts to curb her social activities, Raisa characterises Sabah as "spiteful", and "a bitch".⁸⁰ And yet, "in that moment [Raisa] saw her pale, worried face...and tore up [her] disgusting words".⁸¹

A further development in second-phase fiction is its positive representation of formidable mothers. A number in the selected novels vigorously take issue with the shortcomings of the country in which they have settled. A comparably interrogative assertiveness, in relation to either the 'homeland' or the diaspora, is not evident in first-phase works. The sense of wonder expressed towards these women is especially evident among daughters in diasporic narratives who have some inkling of the difficulties their mothers have faced in uprooting themselves to make a life in another country. Although she initially bristles at her mother's imposition of Indian customs, Harjinder (*H-J*) also recognises what an imposing figure she cuts. Her distinctive combination of personal strength and a high regard for tradition is congruent with the novel's assertion that the culture of the mother(land) be regarded as a source of enrichment, not debilitation. In *Anita and Me*, the contrast between the tomboyish Meena and her graceful, accomplished mother is a source of awe for the child who, in the most ordinary scenes, depicts her parent as imbued with goddess-like power and serenity.

...[E]ven at this distance her brown skin glowed like a burnished planet drifting among the off-white sheets of her neighbours. She was wearing one of her slop-around outfits, a faded Punjabi suit whose billowing trousers rippled in the breeze, mercurial wings fluttering at her ankles. She paused, gathering some bundle from a basket at her feet, and then with one motion

⁸⁰ Op. cit., pp.210-211.

⁸¹ Ibid.

shook out a peacock-blue sari which she began tacking to the washing line. It puffed outwards in a resigned sigh between her hands. She looked as if she was holding up a piece of the sky.⁸²

A concomitant of this development is the more varied attention that second-phase fiction pays to relationships between white mothers and daughters. These are not simply invoked to normalise the inter-generational dynamics between Asian women, but also by way of a contrast, against which the subcontinental mother is seen more positively. In *Looking for Maya*, Kavita's anxieties about Mira's welfare shine more brightly when compared with the fact that Tash's mother pays more attention to her boyfriends than to her daughter. Similarly, Daljit Kumar's (*AAM*) concern about Meena's welfare, conduct and achievements is in marked contrast to Deidre Rutter's indifference towards her daughters. Furthermore, Syal ascribes dangerously competitive subtexts to the relationships between Meena's friends and their mothers. Fat Sally's compulsive eating is contextualised by the svelte appearance of her flirtatious mother, while Deidre thinks nothing of seducing her daughter's boyfriend. Syal implicitly counsels a degree of caution about assuming that the Asian woman's liberation lies in her approximation of whiteness. While some aspects of the 'host' female culture may be attractive, others militate against the kind of supportive relationship that exists between Daljit and Meena.

Second phase texts are also characterised by the emergence of the female mentor who is neither old enough to be the protagonist's mother, nor young enough to be her peer - and is, therefore, capable of bridging the generational gap between mother and daughter. Varsha is to Harjinder (*H-J*) what Raisa is to Tahira (*TRB*). Both are

⁸² Op. cit., pp.12-13.

intimately acquainted with the dilemmas diasporisation can engender for second-generation immigrant women; and while they understand the attractions of assimilation, neither advocates overlooking the political inequalities that elevate certain cultural models of womanhood to aspirational ideals. The intermediate position these women occupy resonates with the transitional function they perform for those under their custodianship: enabling them to ascertain the most beneficial relationship they can have to the cultures their real mothers represent, by negotiating between the norms of 'home' and 'abroad'. This strategy also resonates with the second-phase utilisation of the orphan, exemplified by *The Coral Strand*. Sita discovers that she has a mother, whose absence is emblematic of her missing history. Her rediscovery of Ancient/Ferret does not, however, end in a permanent reunion, but in a rather more sporadic relationship. Through the mother who is neither entirely absent nor present, Randhawa signals the necessity of reconciliation to one's history and culture, without necessarily being confined within its ambit.

The importance of acknowledging *and* diverging from cultural precedent is congruent with the examples that emerge in second-phase texts, of women preemptively interrupting the inter-generational line. Some second-phase protagonists focus upon the avoidance of childbirth as a way of preventing the passage of gendered inequalities into a new - often, third - generation. The celebration of single status that marks out characters such as Tania (*LIAH*), Anjali (*T*) and Mira (*LFM*) either precludes the possibility of motherhood, or rectifies its 'wrong' - the latter being exemplified by the termination of Mira's pregnancy. In *A Wicked Old Woman*, misgivings about motherhood are also evident. Maya has an abortion, while Caroline's unease about the birth of her granddaughter openly articulates her fear of a pattern of gendered

disadvantage: “Another woman become a mother, another baby to become a woman, another woman to go through it all again”.⁸³

Other second-phase women focus on the mothering of sons as a means of disrupting the inter-generational passage of gender inequality. Something of Laxmi’s (*H-J*) efforts to ensure that Suresh does not develop a sense of masculine entitlement, apparent in so many other second-generation males, are echoed in Chila’s (*LIAH*) conduct. The priority she gives to the feminine pronoun when referring to her unborn child goes against the tendency of her mother’s generation to regard the birth of a male child as a blessing. The fact that Chila *does* give birth to a son, however, does not diminish her subversive intentions. Rather, through the possibility of raising a different kind of Asian British man, she is provided with an equally effective means of achieving her reformative ends. *The Hope Chest*, however, appropriates and redefines the symbolism of pregnancy, so that it represents a nurturing concern for the self, rather than for another. Rani’s painting of the Princess Pearl utilises the motif to signify the ‘gestation’ of a woman’s independent selfhood, and her imminent ‘birth’ into a self-determined identity.

The pearl was clearly suggested, a translucent embryonic sac that the woman clutched to her belly, as she stood, not curled around it like a snail, but upright, like a triumphant warrior... “I’ve merely begun to interpret the image, to decipher a message that was never more than a murmur, a voice always kept far, far outside my hearing. I will manage...at least I have a place of my own where I might begin to find myself.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Op. cit., p.48.

⁸⁴ Op. cit., pp.305-306.

Conclusion

The first-phase of South Asian diasporic women's writing suggests that the only way in which the splitting of the family may be avoided is through inter-generational negotiation. Families that do not implode under the impact of 'new' cultural values - of which *Nectar in a Sieve* contains the most notable example - are the exception. Most of the selected first-phase texts depict the emergence in both the 'homelands' and the diaspora of (sometimes irreparable) inter-generational schisms, where one cohort uncritically absorbs the challenging priorities of the new era, while its predecessor often clings to the assumed certainties of the past. The extent to which grandparents are able to ameliorate such divisions is limited. In the majority of first-phase texts, they are equally possessed of the absolutist views that create inter-generational fissures in the first place; and consequently, they often exacerbate whatever antagonism already exists.

Second-phase literature also represents the inter-generational split as symptomatic of a world in which old values and assumptions are under interrogation. The shift in focus to the diaspora places family relationships between Asian Britons under the spotlight, and provides a useful comparison with first-phase texts - especially when considered in the light of George's assertion that immigrant fiction often uses inter-generational repetition to illuminate the changing backdrop against which narratives unfold. In earlier works, such echoes are evident in successive inter-generational splits that do, indeed, testify to periods of considerable political and social upheaval: the preamble to Partition, and the migrations in which this most schismatic of events results. In diasporic narratives, a different situation pertains. The social climate in which immigrant children rebel against the strategies of their parents undergoes relatively little change; but because racism *continues* to blight the experiences of Asian

immigrants and their offspring, younger generations are compelled to assert their claim to Britishness in a different way to their parents.

The developments in second-phase treatments of family relationships outweigh the continuities significantly. The persistence of racism does much to engender more conciliatory relationships between parents and children than are evident in first-phase works. Younger Asian Britons are sensitive to the hardships their parents have suffered, and are conscious that among these is the denigration of the 'homeland' cultures that their elders hold dear. For this reason, perhaps, there is a more marked willingness to heed parental sensibilities - a possibility that is reinforced by the guilt that some second-phase protagonists display about their apparent complicity with the prejudices of the 'host'. Furthermore, a number of second-phase novels assert more emphatically the detriment that results from the estrangement of child from parent. Illnesses are used to symbolise the psychological malaise that often results from the cultural alienation of different generations. The necessity that those born in the diaspora know something of their inherited cultures is repeatedly asserted, underscoring the belief that, on its own, the adopted country cannot provide the Asian Briton with an adequately profound connection to land and history.

For these reasons, parents in second-phase writings are more readily depicted as sources of strength. They provide the missing pieces that the 'host' culture cannot furnish; and they enable their children to have access to alternative worlds, and other criteria of belonging and identity - experiences that, as discussed in Chapter 3, Cashmore and Troyna claim are vital to an immigrant's well-being. However, as in some first-phase writing, such influences are represented at their most valuable when

incorporated into dialogic exchanges between generations. This is a dynamic towards which much first-phase fiction aspires, but which is more readily realised in later works. The precondition of parent-child reconciliation, it is also the foundation upon which the greater prominence given to grandparents rests. The second-phase emphasis on family division is as evident in the depiction of *intra*-generational relationships, which testify to the internal hybridity of generations within the Asian British diaspora. The fact that these fissures between peers benefit from the improvement of inter-generational communication is, perhaps, attributable to the acceptance of difference that arises from negotiations between different age cohorts.

In first-phase writing, female inter-generational relationships are not represented as openly fractious. Whatever antagonisms do exist, especially in 'homeland' narratives, are not publicly articulated: dissatisfied daughters such as Zahra (*SOABC*) may regard their mothers as the architects of their disadvantage; but only in the diasporic narrative of *Sumitra's Story* does this erupt into open defiance. Within the 'homeland', the repetitive dynamic of female socialisation should, in theory, remain unaffected by the evolution of new political and social circumstances. In the diaspora, the disconnection of female identity from cultural context proves much harder to sustain. *Sumitra's Story* makes some attempt to universalise the estrangement of mothers from daughters by offering examples from other cultural *milieux*. As is the case with familial relationships more generally, the absence of any capacity to negotiate over matters of cultural identity results in the most profound splits between generations. The inter-generational relationships that remain intact, such as that between Rukmani and Ira (*NIS*), do so because the older woman recognises the personal disadvantage with which she may burden her daughter in the name of social stability. First-phase fiction also suggests that

the issue of gender is germane to the rupturing of the inter-generational line. The absence of a mother, more than that of a father, has the potential to disturb the continuation of the existing social order; and it is, perhaps, for this reason that Talika (SS) is taken so firmly in hand by her imperious father.

Continuity in the treatment of gender and inter-generational relationships is evident in various ways in second-phase diasporic fiction. The importance attached to the conservation of cultural ideals of womanhood across generations remains, as does the ambivalence that underpins many mother-daughter relationships. Furthermore, the inclusion of white mothers and daughters in diasporic narratives continues to reinforce the notion that the fractiousness of female inter-generational relationships is a wider phenomenon. Where male relationships are concerned, the eagerness of sons to diverge from the paternal precedent is reiterated. There is, however, a greater degree of attention paid to the selectivity with which this desire is exercised. In part, this is conditioned by the diasporic setting of most second-phase works; the 'non-homeland' backdrop it provides displays more clearly the calculation with which men invoke the traditional gender roles of the 'original' country, or discard them in favour of alternatives. This is compounded by the fact that the 'host' culture is represented as exerting an ambiguous influence on South Asian patriarchal norms. The experience of living in an environment in which feminism has a more obvious purchase than it does 'at home' results in certain aspects of Asian patriarchy being undermined. However, they can also be reinforced by the patriarchal biases that exist within the local 'host' societies.

It is also the case in second-phase writing that relationships between white mothers and daughters act as negative foils to their Asian counterparts. Contiguous with

this is the fact that the schismatic character of inter-generational relationships between Asian women is reduced or tempered in later works. Daughters are more conscious of the strictures under which their first-generation immigrant mothers are obliged to operate. Having been raised away from the 'homeland' environment, they have acquired, to a greater degree, the critical distance to examine whether femininity is the natural state it is claimed to be, or a social construction. Furthermore, they recognise that this luxury is not available to the mother herself, who has been raised to believe in the essential validity of gender roles, and to be complicit with the precariousness of her own social position. However, this does not mean that daughters necessarily abide by maternal dictates. The emergence of inter-generational mentors, and of daughters who have partial relationships with their mothers, reinforces the importance bestowed upon inter-generational negotiation elsewhere in this chapter: in the case of women, an appreciation of mothers' concerns, but an avoidance of confinement within their parameters.

Chapter 5

Class: Inequality, Division and Solidarity

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how social stratification is treated in South Asian diasporic women's writing. It is especially concerned with the ways in, and extents to, which social and economic inequalities circumscribe the experiences of 'homeland' and diasporic South Asians: their identities and affiliations; their norms of socialisation, and their quality of life. There are, therefore, several points of contact between this chapter and its predecessors. To some extent, it revisits Chapter 2's concern with the legacies of imperialism. The neo-colonialism of the diaspora is, in part, evident in the 'host' assumption that British culture is the norm to which immigrants should aspire. In this chapter, I consider whether class influences the inclination towards assimilation or traditionalism within South Asian communities, and the impact of any such dynamics upon the perception and treatment of the immigrant by the 'host'. This topic overlaps with that of arrival, discussed in Chapter 3 - a state that is, to a large extent, contingent on being accepted by the 'host' population. The possibility that the immigrant's class identity influences the readiness with which (s)he is granted social entry therefore demands consideration. Furthermore, if arrival is extended more readily to some immigrant classes than others, does the desire to return, literally or metaphorically, follow a classed pattern of distribution?

In keeping with this dissertation's gendered orientation, I also examine the relationship between social class and the construction of feminine identities in diasporic fiction. Sangari and Vaid repeatedly claim that the nationalist conception of womanhood, to which all Indian females were expected to aspire, tacitly served a classed agenda. They regard the selective readings of scriptural texts upon which feminine ideals were based as "related to the inegalitarian social structure" inasmuch as

“the formation of desired notions of spirituality and of womanhood [wa]s...part of the formation of the middle class itself, wherein hierarchies and patriarchies are sought to be maintained on both spiritual and material grounds”.¹ The ease with which *all* women could approximate the ideal form of female identity is, therefore, a contentious matter. Sangari and Vaid claim that the definition of middle-class femininity “*in opposition to women from the lower economic strata*” (my emphasis) meant that “women of the exploited classes may...have [had] closer group interests with men of their own classes than with women belonging to the dominant classes”.² My concern with the social economy of femininities, in the ‘homeland’ and the diaspora, focuses on one overriding question: do the works of fiction selected for examination suggest that gender-related issues can unite women who might otherwise be divided by class differences?

The caste system, which separates the population into four occupational categories, is one determinant of inequality in the ‘homeland’.³ Although they must be interdependent if society is to function effectively, castes are hierarchically organised according to their degrees of ritual purity. Thus, priests are of higher status than the ruler-warriors because they are not directly involved in the impure act of bloodshed. A “striking disjuncture... between caste status on the one hand, and power and wealth on the other” is, therefore, possible, as Malcolm Hamilton and Maria Hirszowicz point out - a thesis supported by the fact that the dominant landowners are not necessarily of the highest caste.⁴ However, given the occupational restrictions imposed on each stratum, Hamilton and Hirszowicz concede that economic power exerts as much of an influence

¹ Op. cit., p.10.

² Ibid., p.11, p.23.

³ These are, in descending order of status: the *Brahmin* caste of the higher priesthood; the *Kshatriya* caste of nobility and political rulers; the *Vaishya* mercantile caste; and the labouring workforce of *Sudras*.

⁴ Malcolm Hamilton & Maria Hirszowicz, *Class and Inequality in Pre-industrial, Capitalist and Communist Societies* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd., 1987), p.93.

on the caste hierarchy as do notions of purity.⁵ Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi pertinently observe that, while caste is determined by social honour, and class by economic status, “[t]he ownership of property is usually a precondition for social honour, in that a certain economic minimum is needed to maintain the [appropriate] lifestyle”.⁶ It is the entrenchment of *economic* inequality, rather than the ethos of purity, with which Nedeljkovic takes issue when, in her reading of *Nectar in a Sieve*, she claims that the caste system “relies on customs, rejects qualification by achievement, regulates the opportunities to move in the social scale and thus hampers any velleity [sic] of social improvement”.⁷

The economic stratification of Subcontinental society has been reinforced significantly by the feudal system, which Liddle and Joshi depict as highly inequitable and exploitative. Among other targets, their critique focuses on the abolition, under British rule, of the proportional link between rental payments and the size of the harvest. Combined with the lack of development in agricultural methods, the consequence of this reform was to compel tenant-farmers to pay more and more rent on the basis of the same amount of production”.⁸ Those unable to meet such costs were susceptible to eviction - a situation that widened the wealth gap between society’s best and worst-off. Furthermore, regardless of how the criteria of status change, the legacy of feudalism’s inequalities continues to be discernible. According to Liddle and Joshi, the ‘homeland’ middle classes, consisting of professionals and state administrators, mostly trace their lineage back to the propertied strata. Although many of them are employees,

⁵ Ibid. The fundamental unit of the caste system is the *jati* - an endogamous kinship group that is traditionally associated with particular occupations of appropriate status.

⁶ Joanna Liddle & Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste and Class in India* (London: Zed Books, 1986), p.70.

⁷ Op. cit., p.33.

⁸ Op. cit., p.71.

“the discrepancy between their income and that of the manual labourers is sufficient to place them economically and socially closer to the larger-scale employers”.⁹

Are the class identities of the ‘homeland’ society altered by their transposition to the diaspora? A sizeable proportion of post-war migrants come from the Subcontinental peasantry; so Brah’s observation of a “nouveau riche” element within Asian British society suggests that a degree of economic advancement is possible in the diaspora.¹⁰ Conversely, her characterisation of the contemporary Asian British population as predominantly working-class suggests that many of those who, in the ‘homeland’, were at the bottom of the economic ladder, have remained in the same position in the adopted country.¹¹ Economic identities cannot, however, be neatly separated from social identities. Like Bruce, Modood asserts the importance of class in determining the nature of Asian Britishness, attributing the conservatism of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis not only to their Muslim affiliations, but also to the fact that they are “more likely to come from rural backgrounds, and, in particular, from poorer rural backgrounds”.¹² Butler’s observations support Modood’s broad claims, but also draw attention to the ethnic character of the residential environment. She points out the greater degree of religious conformity in inner-city areas with large working-class populations; but she also remarks that this may have as much to do with the fact that inhabitants are surrounded by those of the same ethnic group, as it has to do with class.¹³ Middle class immigrants tend to maintain a stricter division between ‘home’ and ‘beyond’. By virtue of their education, occupations and places of residence, they are more likely to have regular

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Op. cit., p.48.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Modood, ‘New Forms of Britishness: Post-immigration Ethnicity and Hybridity in Britain’ in Sackmann, Peters & Faist (eds.), op. cit., p.83.

¹³ Op. cit., p.148.

contact with those outside their ethnic group, and to adopt practices from cultures other than their own. On matters of religious observance, working-class immigrants are more inclined to ignore any distinction between the private and public spheres. The signs of religious-ethnic identity are not confined to the home, but are carried beyond its threshold.

If immigrants' economic and social identities remain largely as they were in the 'homeland', this is, in part, due to their negative perception and treatment by the 'host'. One area in which this is discernible is housing, where Susan J. Smith claims that "the organization of residential space places many black people in the least well-serviced locations and in the poorest segments of the housing stock".¹⁴ However, the debilitating effects of class upon the immigrant's treatment by the 'host' are most clearly evident in the education system. The historical kudos attached to Western education as a means of social mobility is such that it "remains a coveted possession in the 'Third World'", and one that early Asian immigrants to Britain "assumed would enable their offspring to get better jobs than those which they had themselves".¹⁵ However, "most parents were unfamiliar with the history of educational disadvantage suffered by the white working classes in the localities where they themselves had now come to settle", and did not anticipate how this would detrimentally affect the opportunities available to their own children.¹⁶

Brah's research into young Asian Britons' experiences of schooling and careers advice clearly indicates that class prejudices can play a significant role in determining

¹⁴ Susan J. Smith, 'Residential Segregation and the Politics of Racialization' in Malcolm Cross & Michael Keith (eds.) *Racism, the City and the State* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), p.128.

¹⁵ Brah, op. cit., p.25.

¹⁶ Ibid.

access to opportunities. The explanation offered by one of her interviewees applies as much to white pupils in the school, indicating that the problems faced by Asian pupils are not of racist genesis alone.

I think schools in Highfields suffer from the fact that it is a working-class area. Teachers tend to think that pupils from this area are not clever enough, so they don't bother to train them. If you work very hard yourself you may do well.¹⁷

In situations such as this, it is conceivable that the politics of race might take second place to those of class. If it is the case that “working-class kids - black and white - face these problems more because middle-class teachers like middle-class kids”, the potential exists for the formation of inter-ethnic alliances, to challenge the classed assumptions of teachers and advisers.¹⁸ Brah also points out that “the responses of the [Asian] professional middle class” to racist discrimination “may differ from those of the ‘nouveau riche’; and the interests of these two categories are not the same as those of working-class Asians”.¹⁹ So even in situations where race *is* the crux of the matter, class identities may still take precedence.

Alternatively, where socio-economic status provides no guarantee of immunity from racist discrimination, class identities may be superseded by the prioritisation of race. The grave difficulties faced by educated first-generation immigrants in finding employment commensurate with their qualifications led a number to take ‘untypical’ jobs, working alongside those from the lower strata of ‘homeland’ society with whom they might not have mixed otherwise. Asian university graduates - some of whom came

¹⁷ Ibid., p.62.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.48.

from the more privileged end of the 'homeland' social spectrum, and were ultimately destined for employment in middle-class professions - also became involved in community and union activism alongside compatriots from the Subcontinental peasantry. The valorisation of collective resistance as the most effective response to systematic injustice did much to reduce the customary distance between different social classes.²⁰

Class also informs the production of gender identities - a topic to which I devote the second section of this chapter. Women are the embodiments of ethnicity and the badges of family honour; and their subjugation (or lack of it) is often an expression of the collectivity's place within the socio-economic hierarchy. The constraint of women is one criterion by which the purity of a caste is measured, and lower status groups seeking social advancement are expected to impose on their female members the kinds of restriction commonplace in the caste to which they aspire.²¹ However, the relationship between caste and female restriction is not a fixed one. Mysore Srinivas points out that some higher strata reject the 'Sanskritisation' of women in favour of comparatively 'impure' Western cultural norms - a practice that can be traced back to the imitation of ruling class habits under colonial rule.²² Furthermore, the correlation between femininity and status advancement is not confined to those who observe *caste* distinctions specifically. Ashraf Muslim women are characteristically subjected to more severe controls than are their lower status, non-Ashraf counterparts.²³ Improvements in non-Ashraf economic status tend to be accompanied by the imposition of Ashraf-style

²⁰ However, in organisations that defined themselves as workers' bodies, such as the Indian Workers Association, class and race engaged in a *mutual* articulation of interests, rather than one being given priority over the other.

²¹ See Liddle & Joshi, pp.59-61.

²² Ibid., p.6.

²³ Ashraf Muslims are descendants of the former ruling classes, while non-Ashrafs are converts from Hinduism. Ibid., p.59.

strictures on women – an illustration of Liddle and Joshi’s claim, that a certain level of economic security is prerequisite for the maintenance of an appropriate lifestyle. Only those with no need to exploit women’s labour can afford to keep them in the seclusion that ‘purity’ demands.²⁴

Ania Loomba observes that “the construction of an ideal *bhadramahila* (or gentlewoman)...entailed the isolation of upper and middle-class women from their lower-class sisters”.²⁵ If the construction of classed femininities in the Subcontinent has tended to expand the distance between women from different social strata, is this also the case in the diaspora? Amrit Wilson’s research into the gendering of immigrant experience suggests that it is. Despite strenuous denial by some of those implicated in its existence, a stark material and experiential gulf is apparent between diasporic women whose distinct class identities, Wilson suggests, derive from the stratification of ‘homeland’ society.

At a recent meeting of middle-class Asian women gathered to organise a conference of Asian women in Britain, I mentioned the word working-class. “What does it mean?” one of these exquisitely sari-ed ladies asked with a slight transatlantic drawl, “surely in this day and age we all work. We don’t live on unearned income or own stocks and shares.” Several others agreed with her...one tentative voice asked if I meant “deprived women like those in the East End”, but this too was slapped down by others - “in these days of inflation, aren’t we all deprived?”²⁶

²⁴ Paul A. Samuelson observes that “by the nineteenth century, and with Victorian England serving as a paradigm, there grew up the caricature of the lady incapable of performing economic functions outside the home. As Thorstein Veblen wryly observed in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*, status in an affluent society was proved by the uselessness of your chattels except for display.” See Paul A. Samuelson, *Economics* (Tokyo: McGraw-Hill Kogakusha Ltd.), 1976, p.791.

²⁵ Op. cit., p.219.

²⁶ Op. cit., pp.48-49.

The tone adopted by Wilson's middle-class interviewees suggests a degree of distaste for working-class immigrant women; and, therefore, the continuing prioritisation of class over gender affiliations in the diaspora. Furthermore, the "transatlantic drawl" to which Wilson refers is not simply an incidental detail. It is also a reminder that ethnic identities are inscribed by class; and the most cosmopolitan in the Subcontinent tend to be found among the higher strata of society, where the financial means necessary for regular foreign travel are concentrated. Hasmita Ramji's examination of diasporic women in middle-class occupations also suggests that they are especially receptive to the influences of other cultures. The "re-articulation of the household in the form of the nuclear family" is an option that may be neither open nor desirable to poorer women, for whom the extended family remains the most viable unit, economically.²⁷ Furthermore, confirming the idea that the middle classes maintain a firmer distinction between their private and public worlds, Ramji asserts that "there was a clear sense in which [middle-class] women were leaving their cultural differences at 'home' when they went to work".²⁸

However, Yasmin Ali urges caution about the extent to which self-determining middle-class diasporic women, functioning as "'interpreters' of their own working-class to white authority", reiterate existing white stereotypes of passive, impoverished Asian women.²⁹ This is a representation that Brah's research refutes, claiming that class of origin has less bearing on the development of diasporic femininities than does the length

²⁷ Op. cit., p.235.

²⁸ Ibid., p.234. Bhopal finds a direct relationship between levels of education and conformity with the arranged marriage system. Highly educated respondents perceived women in arranged marriages as "trapped, degraded and controlled". By contrast, "those women who had a lower level of education perceived arranged marriages as acceptable because they indicated the respect individuals had for their parents", and demonstrated a commitment to identification as Asian. Op. cit., p.127.

²⁹ Op. cit., p.104.

of time that an Asian woman has spent in Britain.³⁰ For example, on the question of women engaging in paid work, there was considerable agreement across the social spectrum. Although each respondent had a different investment in the issue, the overwhelming majority supported women's right to paid work, with only a small minority asserting that, for reasons of moral *izzat*, this would only be permissible in the form of 'homeworking'. Whereas in the Subcontinent access to alternative systems of thought - through, for example, education, and travel - is determined by economics, diasporisation, and the cultural politics of the adopted country, mean that 'other' norms of femininity are, in principle at least, available to women of *all* classes.

Cosmopolitanism, hybridity and interrogations of patriarchal norms, therefore, cease to be the near-exclusive preserve of the higher-status woman. The possibility that the interrogation of gendered *mores* may prove a conduit of cross-class solidarity between women is, arguably, strengthened in the diaspora.

Class: division and solidarity in the 'homeland' and diaspora

Approximately half of the selected novels from the first phase of South Asian diasporic women's writing are concerned with social inequality in the 'homeland', while the remainder address its impact upon the experiences of immigrants in the diaspora. However, little consideration is given in either type of narrative to caste hierarchies of religious derivation as a source of social inequality. One reason for this is, perhaps, a degree of doubt about the extent to which they continue to have any purchase in the 'homeland'. Hamilton and Hirszowicz point out that, in modern India, *jatis* increasingly ignore the convention of working only within their associated occupations - a practice that has gone some way towards the disengagement of caste from economic

³⁰ Op. cit., p.104.

class.³¹ Alternatively, writers may be reluctant to scrutinise a phenomenon that tends to be associated with a particular religion. Hosain's overt critique of pre-Partition communal antipathy is underpinned by a desire to emphasise common experience; and one way in which she does so is by emphasising the *reciprocity* of religious hatred. The selected diasporic narratives also pay little heed to caste systems as sources of social inequality. *The Nowhere Man* acknowledges Srinivas' Brahmin lineage, but not in any context that critiques its elite status. *Sumitra's Story* confines its concern with caste to its feminist interrogation of endogamy and the cultural insularity with which the practice is complicit.

The 'homeland' narratives of *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *Nectar in a Sieve* prefer to focus on the inequalities engendered by feudalism, between them portraying its effects on both ends of the social spectrum. Taken together, the novels suggest that every member of 'homeland' society is, in some respect, a victim of the invidious system of land ownership. *Nectar in a Sieve* focuses on the grinding poverty of the tenant farmer, leading a life of near-incessant and arduous labour to survive. It is, furthermore, a highly precarious existence, being at the mercy of the climate *and* the *largesse* of the landlord. Where the determination of the villagers' welfare once lay in the hands of its Headman, he is now of "no consequence".³² Instead there is "the Collector, who comes to these villagers once a year, and to him is the power, and to those he appoints".³³ As the narrative goes on to illustrate, it is the power to determine life or death, and the man-made forces that shape the life of Rukmani's family prove as destructive as those of nature.

³¹ Op. cit., p.91.

³² Op. cit., p.8.

³³ Ibid.

The link between *Nectar in a Sieve*'s representation of feudalism and *Sunlight on a Broken Column*'s is the avarice of the landlord classes. Indeed, Hosain's novel can, arguably, be read as a depiction of *talukdar* victimhood: the text portrays a social stratum unable to imagine life without the entitlements and riches to which it has become accustomed. Pride in one's heritage may be cloaked in the garb of *noblesse oblige*, but as a speech given by a representative of the landlords reveals, its foundations lie in greed: "We, the *talukdars* of Oudh are aware that the property - er - prosperity of our tenants is our proper - prosperity."³⁴ *Sunlight on a Broken Column* highlights the equanimity with which the social elite regards extremes of wealth and poverty. Furthermore, its complicity in the entrenchment of social division is underscored - by its efforts to maintain its distance from the rest of society, and by its judicious use of marriage (discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter) to reinforce its power and status. Consequently, the novel offers the reader a portrait of a quasi-caste system as tenacious as any of religious provenance - a key weapon in Hosain's critical arsenal against Muslim communalist agitation. Saleem's condemnation of Hinduism as a religion that "forbids people to eat and drink together", and in which "a man's shadow can defile another", sits uncomfortably alongside the socially insulated nature of his own, highly privileged existence.³⁵

First-phase narratives set in the diaspora also focus upon class identities and the extent to which these intersect with, or supersede, the racialised identities indigenous Britons impose upon non-white immigrants. *Sumitra's Story* and *The Nowhere Man* converge in their conviction that, for many whites, racial difference takes precedence

³⁴ Op. cit., p.152.

³⁵ Ibid., p.197.

over commonalities of class.³⁶ Jean (SS) does not allow the material disadvantage she shares with the Patels to overshadow their ethnic distinction. In *The Nowhere Man*, Mrs. Glass regards race as the foundation of an inherent, unspoken understanding between herself and her white neighbours that simply cannot exist with the Srinivases. However, both Smith and Markandaya suggest that economic considerations exert an influence on the relationship between immigrant and 'host'. *Sumitra's Story* represents Jean's bigotry as a product of her poverty and, therefore, of her own victimhood: "You must try to remember that the people here are...fed up of their living conditions. That makes them bitter and cruel."³⁷ Markandaya portrays the fear that informs Mrs. Glass' anger at the immigrant presence less sympathetically: "It's these people... They keep coming here, who asked them? One day they're poor, living off of the rates, the next they could buy us all up."³⁸ At the heart of Mrs. Glass' agitation is the possibility that the immigrant might overtake her position in the class hierarchy. As long as they are at the same point, she is assured of her higher status; for her colonial history has taught her that, chromatically and culturally, she is indubitably superior to any non-white. However, class advancement can, potentially, undermine such assurances, hence Mrs. Glass' insistence that there is "no call for [Laxman and Abdul] to go flaunting themselves in Bentleys".³⁹

Laxman's aggressive aspirationalism is driven by the hope that wealth and status will protect him from the worst manifestations of racism. However, his experiences also suggest that the likelihood of class being prioritised over race depends upon the socio-

³⁶ For immigrants, the priority given to race over class almost invariably works to their disadvantage. Compare this to the situation in 'Time is Unredeemable' (PF), in which "Mrs. Ram's dropped aitches [and] her ungrammatical colloquialisms" are barely registered by Asians who are, instead, dazzled by the fact that she is English. Op. cit., p.60.

³⁷ Op. cit., p.44.

³⁸ Op. cit., p.207.

³⁹ Ibid.

economic character of the given white *milieu*. In more affluent environments, Laxman is confident that he is more willingly accepted as an equal than is the case in poorer circles.

He, as English as English could be, converted into Them by criminal illiterates...looking about him at the congested if elegant appurtenances and accoutrements of Bond Street through which they, he and his Jensen, were spasmodically proceeding ...he would, he knew, be accepted. His voice, syllables, accent, syntax, the clothes he wore, his manners, his style - all would proclaim him to be the same.⁴⁰

Laxman's assumption is not baseless. His visible difference has evidently not proven a barrier to acceptance into the middle classes, as exemplified by Pat's family. Rather, it is characters of lower status, such as Joe's father and Fred, for whom a refusal to look beyond colour is most expedient. However, neither *The Nowhere Man* nor *Sumitra's Story* is wholly deterministic in its equation of class status and racism. Decency and kindness are traits also evident in non-elite characters such as Mrs. Pickering (*TNM*), Constable Kent (*TNM*), Martin (*SS*) and Maria (*SS*). The middle-class Marjorie Radcliffe (*TNM*), by contrast, displays none of the magnanimity and graciousness possessed by her husband.

Second-phase works of fiction are continuous with earlier texts in several respects. A number reiterate the first-phase claim that class advancement can challenge the glib assumption of some white Britons that they are inherently superior. In *Anita and Me*, The Kumars are, as Bromley observes, objects of ambivalence in the eyes of the villagers. "As part of a larger category of racialised 'others'", they are regarded with

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.269-270.

suspicion.⁴¹ However, as individuals, they are often treated with respect; for, compared to the majority of Tollington's blue-collar residents, the Kumars are educated and sophisticated. Sam Lowbridge's antipathy towards the family is not simply an expression of distaste for their ethnic difference; it is an altogether more complex reaction, drawing upon his recognition of the family's class identity. The unskilled teenager is all too aware that while he is effectively trapped in an environment that offers limited opportunities, his Asian neighbours have the education, professional knowledge and experience of upheaval that enables them to avoid a similar state of confinement. However reprehensible Sam's racist attack upon an Asian man, its origins in class frustration are underscored by the fact that his chosen target is someone who appears to be of the same *milieu* as the Kumars. In this respect, Syal gestures towards an understanding of the kind that Smith displays towards the possible genesis of racism in the white underclass.

Sam's ambivalent reaction to the Kumars also exemplifies the reiteration in several second-phase works that the class of the white Briton determines, to a significant extent, his treatment of immigrants. *Anita and Me* implies that some of the Kumars' neighbours insist upon the inferiority of non-whites because of their own, relatively low status. Like Fred Fletcher and Mrs. Glass (*TNM*), Deidre Rutter (*AAM*) *needs* to believe in the essential subhumanity of Asians, to compensate for her position at the bottom of the village pecking order.

[S]he was frightened of us. Of course it made sense; we were not...

the barely literate, perpetually grinning idiots I occasionally saw in TV comedies, or the confused, helpless innocents I spotted in bus and

⁴¹ Op. cit., p.145.

supermarket queues...Mama and Papa charmed people...they did not ask for approval or acceptance but it came to them nevertheless. Deidre 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.⁴²

In keeping with *Sumitra's Story*, Sheikh's representation of the working-class Essex environs in which *The Red Box* is set underscores the local white population's tendency to take its racial superiority for granted. The novel suggests that, by regarding the economic disadvantage they share with the immigrants as the grounds of competition rather than alliance, white teenagers are squandering a solidarity that is potentially to their benefit.

But what about the English children, the gorrais? How is it they're not able to see a meeting point between them and the PLO? Many whites here are really poor. You've only got to see the way some of them are dressed in this school, and the flats they live in. They're not exactly your powerful gorrais.⁴³

As in the first stage of diasporic fiction, middle-class environments are depicted as those in which Asians may find a greater degree of acceptance. Anjali's circle of graduate friends and professional colleagues in *Transmission* is at ease with her Asianness in a way that the society of 'back-room boys' and technicians is not: "'You've got a good tan. Been on holiday, love?" one of the men guffawed".⁴⁴ Raisa (*TRB*) describes the "world of the Sarah Lintons of Putney and the Horatia Greys of Knightsbridge" as one of "openness and interest" in which "I rarely felt that I was an

⁴² Op. cit., pp.215-216.

⁴³ Op. cit., p.89.

⁴⁴ Op. cit., p.211.

outsider”.⁴⁵ In such environments, where the ‘host’ members enjoy a greater degree of security, the immigrant presence does not represent the threat that it does in less affluent *milieux*. Rather, it has the capacity to be enriching, in every sense. The convergence of personal and business interests, exemplified in the first phase by Laxman’s relationship with Pat’s family, is echoed in *A Wicked Old Woman* by the marriage of Simon and Sangeeta - an event that represents the entrepreneurial vision as a shared philosophy that overrides other forms of cultural difference.

Alongside these continuities, second-phase treatments of class evince a number of developments. Novels that focus on, or allude to, the ‘homeland’ - though still concerned with the enormity of the wealth gap - focus as much upon the urban/rural dichotomy as upon the landlord-tenant relationship. In *The Red Box*, the divergent experiences of Nargis and Raisa delineate the vast material and social distance between the village peasantry and the urban elite whose roots lie in the landed classes. In contrast to the mill-workers and factory hands that make up Nargis’ family, Raisa’s relatives are “big and educated”, and have been raised in an environment of “sumptuous” wealth - “the great house in Lahore; the summer dwelling in Murree; the hired trains; the aeroplane. Few people lived like that in Pakistan.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, differences in linguistic proficiency emphasise the tension between the villages and the cities. Whereas the Rashids communicate in the dialects of rural Punjab, Raisa does so more readily and competently in Urdu, the standard tongue of the literate, urban classes. By means of this difference, the reader is reminded that, metaphorically as well as literally, Raisa and the Rashids speak different languages. Comparable differences in social experience are also represented, albeit in less detail, in *Hari-jan*. Whereas Ghazala is

⁴⁵ Op. cit., p.193.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.146, p.204.

descended from rural peasant stock, Harjinder's mother confidently proclaims herself part of "the *Malai de la Malai*", a privileged social circle that is "so matter of fact about diplomats, colonels [and] film stars".⁴⁷

The greater acceptability - and, consequently, better treatment - of middle-class Asian immigrants is depicted more explicitly in later writing. All of the Asian partners in mixed marriages and relationships are, in some respect, of this *milieu*: *Amritvela*'s Meera comes from an elite Indian family, while characters such as Tania (*LIAH*), Anjali (*T*) and Mira (*LFM*) have all, through education and/or profession, made their way into the middle classes. In *The Red Box*, Raisa finds communication with white men relatively easy, unlike Tahira, whose contact with the same has been overwhelmingly negative, and whose attitudes towards mixed relationships have been shaped by this experience: "It ain't right with gorrai. It don't even look right. You sort of wonder why the girl's with the gorra, or why he's with her. It ain't right."⁴⁸ The classed differentiation of Asians is also, as *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* suggests, apparent in the status of Indian fashions in the West. Subcontinental styles of dress, as interpreted by transatlantic designers and worn by the region's elite, are acceptable to an extent that the mass-produced garments worn by poorer immigrants are not.

Tahira's belief, that the middle-class Asian is more acceptable to white sensibilities, is manifest in her conviction that the designation 'Paki' encodes a particular contempt for the working-class Asian, who is perceived as the most 'other' of the immigrant population. That the middle-class diasporic Asian is assumed to be more Westernised is evident in the repeated 'blanching' of Raisa. As a child, she is

⁴⁷ Op. cit., p.64.

⁴⁸ Op. cit., p.185.

inadvertently 'lightened' by a bully who assumes her to be a "half-breed".⁴⁹ The pattern continues into adulthood, as the appreciative comments on Raisa's appearance made by a group of white schoolboys are attributed to their failure to recognise her Asianness: "They wouldn't go "cor" if she told them she was a Paki".⁵⁰ It is, to no small extent, because of her class that Raisa seems to enjoy a greater sense of arrival.⁵¹ The easy, familiarity and sense of ownership with which she describes her movements around South-West London's leafy suburbs is not evident in Tahira's relationship to the area in which she lives. The location of each woman's territories also denotes the extent of her arrival: Raisa's are safely within the boundaries of the city, while Tahira's are on the fringes. While these details are important at the level of the novel's realism, they also symbolise Tahira's marginalisation from the cultural centre.

Second-phase fiction deploys, in a way that is not apparent in earlier writings, the trope of the mixed relationship to underscore the shifts of power effected by immigrant social mobility. In *Anita and Me*, the onus of acceptability falls not onto Meena's shoulders, but onto those of white, working-class Sam Lowbridge: "Yow've always been the best wench in Tollington. Anywhere! Dead funny...*But yow was never gonna look at me*, you won't be staying will ya? You can move on..." (my emphasis).⁵² The changing ethnic dynamics that unfold over the course of Meena's relationship with Sam are also evident in the reverse stereotyping that Bromley detects in *Anita and Me*. In contrast to the situation discussed in Chapter 2, where the 'host' disseminates stereotypical representations of Asians, Bromley claims that the *white* inhabitants of Tollington "are often constructed as figures in a Dickensian gallery of working-class

⁴⁹Ibid., p.88.

⁵⁰Ibid., p.175.

⁵¹ See Chapter 3.

⁵² Op. cit. p.314.

stereotypes”.⁵³ What he doesn’t address is the possibility that this phenomenon is symptomatic of Meena’s relatively higher class status.

Other second-phase treatments of ethnic stereotyping offer more overt and direct portrayals of the shifting balance of power between whites and non-whites. While the *private* caricaturing of white habits and morals is evident in almost every selected text, it is rarely depicted as a public act, carried out within earshot of its targets.

Transmission is the first of the chosen works to break this pattern. The novel depicts a generation of Asian and black Britons that, partly because of its educational and professional success, feels able to satirise its contemporary white generation openly and with impunity.

There was a faint smell of washing-up liquid and the dishes draining upside down, soapy bubbles making a trail into the sink. “English people washing up!” Maggie and I had chanted at university when Chloe had started to wash up after our first meal together.

“What?” she had said, embarrassed.

“English people never rinse,” I’d explained.

“That’s why their head too full with Fairy Liquid,” Maggie had added and everyone giggled.⁵⁴

Srivastava’s examination of the ethics of representation includes other situations in which Angie is empowered by her class identity. She is highly conscious of how the perceived status of her occupation may give her an advantage over Kathi, the subject of the documentary on which she is working.

“I just felt that like because I was working in television that she was

⁵³ Op. cit., p.145.

⁵⁴ Op. cit., p.84.

impressed...And I played up to it. You know pretending I was streetwise but at the same time removed from her life, professional.”⁵⁵

Moreover, Angie’s willingness to leave undisturbed her colleagues’ assumption that she is of working-class origins is informed by her understanding that, being middle-class in profession and education, she will be regarded positively as ‘street-wise’, rather than in the more dismissive way to which Kathi is implicitly subjected.

Second-phase writing is also developmental in suggesting that, in the diaspora, unease with the social advancement of the immigrant is not confined to working-class environments. Several aspects of media politics, as depicted in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, testify to the existence of a similar discomfort within middle-class circles. The projects that Tania’s employers prefer to commission are those that, almost invariably, focus on the most disadvantaged immigrants. Although attention later shifts to the “ching cash registers” of the entrepreneurial classes, Syal suggests that a distinct *ennui* swiftly takes hold among the producers, as a result of this change of emphasis.⁵⁶ They attempt to return (albeit from a different angle) to the kind of terrain on which they feel more assuredly superior to the subjects of their films. Jonathan’s satirical use of the term “innit”, therefore, carries a weight of potential meaning.⁵⁷ His approximation of Asian cockney argot could allude to Chila’s working-class status. Euphemistically described as “innocence”, Jonathan is confident that it will captivate his established audience, which is accustomed to being presented with the alienness of the immigrant character.⁵⁸ If the comment is aimed at Tania, then it is a deliberate deflation of her success, pulling class rank by reminding her of her modest roots.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.96.

⁵⁶ Op. cit., p.62.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.63.

Perhaps the most dramatic way in which second-phase writing develops the treatment of class is through its greater concern with the socio-economic fissures within Asian British communities - a topic that is barely able to surface in the selected first-phase texts, as they focus largely on individual diasporic families. Several writers imply that 'homeland' class identities determine the extent of social mobility available to the immigrant in the metropolis. The strongest assertion that inherited class circumscribes diasporic opportunity is found in *The Red Box*, which suggests that uprooting and resettlement do little to disrupt the existing 'homeland' order of relations between different social strata.⁵⁹

How much difference was there...between Nargis Rashid giving up her time to clean Raisa Ahmed's house, and Nargis Rashid giving up her time to talk about the lives of Pakistani women? Hadn't Raisa's people always used people like her?⁶⁰

The Coral Strand also asserts the tenacity of 'homeland' class identities, but does so by focusing on *white* expatriate society. Emily and Thomas, like many Asian immigrants to Britain, have access to opportunities that would not necessarily be available to them 'at home'. However, as Linda Wiggins' patronising behaviour makes clear to Emily, the community of expatriates has recreated the British class hierarchy in India. The aftermath of Thomas' death brings home to her the extent to which her options are circumscribed by her modest origins. She "could polish her speaking manner, but she

⁵⁹ Sheikh also suggests that Britain's own structures of inequality do much to reinforce the social divisions transplanted from the 'homeland'. The novel's frequent allusions to the dilapidated state of South Park school represent it as a force for the further entrenchment of disadvantage, rather than as a means of overcoming it.

⁶⁰ Op. cit., p.54.

had no access to the networks of introductions. No doubt they had been here for generations too and had their webs well in place.”⁶¹

In contrast, *The Red Box* does not suggest that diasporic class identities are doomed to replicate their Subcontinental antecedents. Rather, as in the majority of second-phase fiction, the novel’s characters steer a course between determinism and self-determination. Although attentive to the social and economic limitations that operate ‘at home’ and abroad, later works are more emphatic about the opportunities to refashion inherited classed identities in the adopted country. This is a possibility to which the heterogeneous class composition of immigrant communities in novels such as *A Wicked Old Woman* often attests. In a number of second-phase works, self-employment is the principal path to class advancement. The successes of the Chaudherys (*TRB*), the Khans (*TRB*) and Pauli (*AWOW*) exemplify how the culinary, sartorial, and decorative customs of the ‘homeland’ may, in the hands of the canny immigrant, be turned to material advantage. Other novels emphasise the importance of education in enabling the working-class immigrant to escape the confines of inherited inequality. Despite Ghazala’s relatively poor background, *Hari-jan* never implies that her ambition to be a medic is beyond her reach. Both of Syal’s novels also place considerable emphasis on education as the passport out of disadvantage, with Tania and Prem (*LIAH*) providing especially striking illustrations of how an inherited class identity may be transcended in the diaspora.

The concomitant of ‘new’ diasporic class identities is the development of a competitive, materialistic culture of immigrant aspiration. Although adumbrated in the first phase by Laxman’s ambition, it is a more tangible phenomenon within the

⁶¹ Op. cit., p.100.

immigrant population in second-phase writing, and a focus of overt criticism for its divisive effects. Syal treats this development as an object of satire, concentrating on the oneupmanship of first-generation immigrants, who take great pride in the visible signs of their children's material success. The ironising of immigrant culture's more competitive aspects in *A Wicked Old Woman* is also emblematic of how second-phase writers feel sufficiently confident to stereotype their 'own' people.⁶² This tendency is not engendered by the kind of neo-imperial legacy that, in Chapter 2, effectively forces Laxman into a stereotypical view of his father. It is, instead, marked by a critical scrutiny of the upwardly-mobile middle-classes, whose competitiveness and complacency are among the novel's most frequent 'internal' targets

A gold plaque shone by the door announcing Anup's residence to the world. "Hello. I'm University Lecturer/Research Scientist, First Class Honours, Ph.D.-Anup." That wasn't what the plaque said but if he could with decency that's how Anup would want himself introduced, how he would want to be seen by the world.⁶³

The emphasis on academic success as a means of entry into safe, prestigious and lucrative professions, and the plaudits heaped upon those who heed its dictates, are undercut by *A Wicked Old Woman*'s references to "the DEAD bunch: the Doctor-Engineer-Accountant-Dentist" gallery of "cardboard cut-outs", who conform to limited notions of respectability and achievement.⁶⁴ Tania's (*LIAH*) documentary also articulates something of this critique. It is arguably the middle-class professionals, competent and successful in material terms, who imagine themselves to be the most

⁶² Sanjeev Bhaskar, Syal's television and film co-star, has claimed that "the ability to laugh at yourself only comes from a position of confidence, and we're the first generation who have been able to put our heads above the parapet". See E. Jane Dickson, 'Survival of the Funniest', *Daily Telegraph*, 4th July, 1998.

⁶³ Op. cit., p.98

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.57, p.92

possessed of emotional intelligence, and who are, therefore, the most ridiculed subjects in the film.

Other second-phase writers, however, take a more sombre approach towards immigrant ambition, highlighting the pressures it exerts on those within the ethnic population, and the exploitative practices to which it can give rise. *Hari-jan* illuminates the negative consequences of adding a material dimension to the moral imperatives of *izzat*. “Because it seems like all the Asians buy shops and all the Asians make money”, Ghazala’s father invests his savings in a business venture that, despite his best efforts, is unsuccessful.⁶⁵ Too embarrassed to seek help from those who have proven themselves by ‘making it’, he sees his entrepreneurial failure as a blight on his honour, and a sign of personal inadequacy. But Randhawa suggests that the real fault lies in the pressure this man feels to prove himself in an unfamiliar occupational realm.⁶⁶ *The Red Box* is comparably sombre in its depiction of how the Khans maximise the profits produced by their clothing business. The family is portrayed as capitalising on the disadvantage many of their - otherwise unemployable - Asian workers already suffer: by paying poor wages for punishing hours, and leaving dangerous working conditions unrectified. Indeed, Sheikh bestows upon the firm a neo-feudal character. The forbidding role played by the collector in *Nectar in a Sieve* is echoed in *The Red Box*: he would “be there the next morning” to gather the ‘harvest’ of completed garments from the poorly-paid, overworked seamstresses.⁶⁷ Similarly, in *The Coral Strand*, Mr. Kalyan’s “Indian Arts Exhibition” displays expensive pieces that, according to his nemesis, Steven Singh,

⁶⁵ Op. cit., p.56.

⁶⁶ Randhawa does not specify the source of this perception that all Asians are successful. The implication, however, is that it comes as much from within the immigrant community as from outside it.

⁶⁷ Op. cit., p.39.

are “ripped off from some poor villagers” who think that “the sun shines out of his arse” because he commissions their work.⁶⁸

The second-phase focus on class distinctions within immigrant communities moves away from the first-phase preoccupation with how the ‘host’ perceives the immigrant, towards a greater concern with the diasporic subject’s *self*-perception, and the extent to which racial or class identities take precedence. Several of the selected works suggest that race is prioritised over class. In *A Wicked Old Woman*, the friendship between Kuli and the mother of the murdered family exemplifies how the women’s class-based differences are overridden by their ethnic similarities: “the woman...would dart out and grab her, insisting that *behanji* [*dear sister*] come in for a drink, something to eat, at least for a taste of whatever special she’d been cooking” (my emphasis).⁶⁹ In the same novel, the campaign for Rani’s acquittal forces Kuli’s sons to put aside their class antipathies and rivalries, in deference to a cause that prioritises their common ethnic heritage, and the fact that - directly or otherwise - all of them have been touched by racism.

Randhawa reiterates this dynamic in *Hari-jan*, in the central friendship between Harjinder and Ghazala, as well as their families. The shared experience of being identified as ‘Asian’ in the country of resettlement supersedes their considerable differences in wealth, background and religion. Dhingra too asserts that racial solidarity can overcome class difference; and, like Randhawa’s works, *Amritvela* is attentive to the role that diasporisation plays in this process. However privileged her background, Meera believes that it has little bearing on her treatment in England, where her race is

⁶⁸ Op. cit., p.21.

⁶⁹ Op. cit., p.131.

perceived by the white population as the primary determinant of her identity.

Consequently, Meera feels a greater affinity with other non-white Britons who have suffered similar experiences of marginalisation, than she does with the many members of her Indian family who define themselves primarily by their class status. The critical distance bestowed upon her by expatriation makes it impossible for Meera to adopt the imperious manner towards social 'others' that comes so easily to her relatives in the 'homeland'. More than any other factor, her perception of the family's elitism awakens her to the impossibility of an easy return to her native country and her childhood home.

However, *The Red Box*, somewhat uniquely, insists that class differences prevail, and therefore have the potential to hinder racial solidarity. By her own admission, Raisa, in her youth, had "more in common with [her middle-class white friends] than with girls like Rezwana Shah", an Asian British contemporary from a less socially-advantaged background.⁷⁰ The distance of class is also apparent in Raisa's dealings with her cousin from Leyton.

She asked me about school, and what I did with my time. We must carry on meeting, she said; we were like sisters...I felt horrified by what she said. I didn't know her; I had nothing to say to her...Mariam didn't look much like Rezwana Shah, but the two sit in the same hidden corner of my mind.⁷¹

As an adult, Raisa's desire to be included in the ethnic collectivity is sufficiently strong for her to lie her way into admission.⁷² However, Tahira's keen eye for the differences between them - especially the classed nature of their life experiences and expectations -

⁷⁰ Op. cit., p.194. Raisa emphasises that her white, middle-class friends also felt more distanced from the working-class Judy Butlin, than from Raisa.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.221.

⁷² Raisa's actual contact with the area from which Nargis hails is limited to having "driven through it in 1979" and knowing "where it was on the map". Ibid., p.144.

militates against the racial solidarity Raisa seeks: “She ain’t like us. She don’t really mix with people like us. I don’t know no-one like her.”⁷³

Class and the circumscription of women

First-phase fiction tends to be highly critical of the ways in which class, power and gender converge. One area in which this critique is evident is in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*’s representations of marriage arrangements. These tend to depict a process in which women are deployed as tools of social and economic advancement. Although the unnamed Rani of Shahpur is deemed “‘C’ class” in origin, her family is able to ascend the social ladder by means of her marriage to “a husband of good blood” - a match secured by the family’s enormous wealth, and its reputation for providing “fabulous dowries”.⁷⁴ Zahra’s betrothal to a senior civil servant is approved as an expedient alliance between ‘old’ money and the *realpolitik* of the new administrative powers. By contrast, Laila’s marriage to a junior lecturer is regarded as a dereliction of duty; for, while the importance of breeding is invoked as the rationale for such objections, the crux of the matter is the possible dilution of the family’s wealth, influence and prestige.

Women, as the “gateways” to the family, are especially discouraged from reaching across social divides, including those that separate them from other women.⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid., p.66.

⁷⁴ Op. cit., p.151.

⁷⁵ Veena Das, cited in Liddle & Joshi, op. cit., p.60. Practices such as child-marriage, widow-burning and the removal of inheritance rights from women have been especially prevalent in the higher social strata. All three are means of ensuring that property is not lost, through women, to men of other families. Ibid., p.59.

If the treatment of class in diasporic women's writing interrogates the extent to which race can cohere immigrant populations, then the treatment of classed *femininities* asks how far gender can perform this function between women. Of the selected first-phase narratives set in the 'homeland', *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is the most attentive to this issue. The novel suggests that if the social circumscription of women's conduct is observed, class affiliations take precedence over those of gender. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a key text in this respect; of the selected texts, it is the first-phase 'homeland' narrative with the largest range of classed femininities. The observation of *purdah* is one of the most obvious means by which women from different class *milieux* are distinguished. Its practice is contingent on, and an expression of, the wealth that keeps the female members of the Ahmed family from the gaze of the outside world. The *zenana*, "self-contained with its lawns, courtyards and verand'd rooms", alerts the reader to the size of the family's home and, by implication, to the fortune it represents.⁷⁶ The Ahmed family's wealth also ensures the invisibility of its women by negating the need for them to venture beyond the walls of *Ashiana*. Whatever is needed, whether goods or services, can be brought to the house instead.

The deployment of norms of femininity to maintain distinct class identities is evident in the relationships between women of different strata, which *Sunlight on a Broken Column* represents as highly antagonistic. The importance of *purdah* in perpetuating these divisions is especially apparent in the contrasting attitudes Zahra and Laila display towards their female servants.

⁷⁶ Op. cit., p.18. The extent to which the seclusion of women is an expression of class is elucidated by Laila Ahmed, who emphasises the importance Muslims place on the allocation of separate quarters for the female members of the household. While modest homes may have a curtain to indicate the division between each sex's designated area, "among the upper classes this ideal...was given *architectural* expression. [Women's] rooms were distanced from the audience rooms and courtyards connecting with the outside world, and looked out onto interior gardens" (my emphasis). Op. cit., p.117.

“You blind fool,” shouted Zahra, “do you want to bury us in dust?

Can’t you see the *dopattas* are lying there, still wet?”...

“Zahra, you need not have shouted in that offensive manner.”

Zahra shrugged. “Offensive manner? She’s used to it.”

If I gave her a chance now, Zahra would mockingly reduce to mere printed hieroglyphics those books which had taught me to think of human dignity.

“You just raise them an inch off the ground and they’ll be making a footstool of your head,” warned Zahra.⁷⁷

Zahra’s education, conducted entirely within the home and, therefore, under the jurisdiction of her family, has instilled in her a highly imperious manner towards those deemed her social inferiors. However, Laila’s inability to treat the servants in the way that her cousin has learnt to regard as appropriate is attributed to her education outside the home, which has allowed her greater access to ‘other’ ideas. This engenders in her a greater capacity for communication across class lines with equally interrogative women, such as Nandi, with whom Zahra would be incapable of communicating on equal terms. Like Laila, Nandi is scolded by Zahra for daring to question the alleged moral superiority of the rich.

Purdah is germane to the moral distinction between women from different classes. The Ahmeds’ female servants in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* are obliged to be visible because of the nature of the work upon which their survival depends. Similarly, Rukmani’s (*NIAS*) freedom from physical restriction is dictated largely by economic imperatives: without her labour in the fields, the family’s existence would be even more

⁷⁷ Op. cit., p.45.

precarious than it already is. However, as Nandi (*SOABC*) explains, the consequence of necessity is that lower-class women are demonised as possessors of a less moral femininity: “we poor people get a bad name because we *cannot* stay locked up” (my emphasis).⁷⁸ Furthermore, she is convinced that “Respectability can be preserved like pickle in gold and silver”, and cites by way of example the case of a *Moulvi*’s [religious leader’s] daughter.⁷⁹ His wealth enables the *Moulvi* to arrange the termination of his daughter’s pre-marital pregnancy; and, with the offer of a large dowry, to secure a husband for her who will overlook the fact that she is not a virgin. The antagonistic relationship between poverty and the maintenance of acceptable standards of feminine modesty is, perhaps, at its clearest in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Rukmani, although unhappy about the moral consequences of her daughter’s prostitution, nonetheless knows that Ira’s actions represent a practical response to dire poverty.

Conversely, the overt *rejection* of *purdah* can also underscore the distance between women of different social classes by characterising the peasantry as the practitioners of traditional values, and the landowners as part of a cosmopolitan *avant garde*. Mrs. Wadia (*SOABC*) states “with a note of patronage” that she does not believe in the segregation of the sexes.⁸⁰ She is

very popular with the English, and referred to all English officials by their Christian names...She went to Europe every year, was prouder of Western culture than those who were born into it, and more critical of Eastern culture than those outside it.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.97.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.132.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.129

The ability to foster such a degree of familiarity with the West - especially its upper strata - is the preserve of the rich, internationally mobile and well-connected.

Furthermore, it gestures towards the history of collaboration with the British Empire, to which a significant proportion of *talugdari* wealth may be attributed. The imperially-derived connotation of urbanity attached to the disavowal of *purdah* is also apparent in 'Time is Unredeemable' (PF), where Bano's intention to wear her *burqa* on a shopping trip to the city elicits a negative response from Mrs. Ram - the *English* wife of an Asian acquaintance.

Mrs. Ram shrugged her shoulders and looked with distaste at the shapeless garment. In the car she said, "You must take it off when we get to the shop. It will attract ever so much attention, because no one that I know wears it any more..."⁸²

The equation of female restriction with higher status is, therefore, not a fixed one. Women practising the opposite are often, with as much pride as are their more orthodox counterparts, treated as mascots of class identity. For example, at Hamid's bidding, Saira (SOABC) is freed from the constraints of *purdah*, and encouraged to adopt a more Westernised appearance and manner. However, if one bears in mind that Saira's induction into modernity is a politically-astute decision made by her husband, a consistency becomes apparent inasmuch as the definition of this woman's identity remains the preserve of a man. The impunity with which Sita Agarwal (SOABC) conducts her affairs also underscores the moral privilege of the wealthy, especially given the opprobrium such actions would attract if committed by a woman of the lower orders. However, the mutability of female identities is barely evident in the selected

⁸² Op. cit., p.65.

diasporic narratives of the first phase, which emphasise the continuity of gender through times of upheaval. In *Sumitra's Story*, multiple diasporisations cannot relax the circumscription of women, who are expected to replicate the patterns of modesty, domesticity and endogamy that prevail in the original 'homeland'.

In common with its predecessors, second-phase fiction remains conscious of how class identities serve to separate women; and much of its attention is directed at the effects of class upon the practice of traditional feminine *mores*. *The Red Box*, in particular, replicates the assertions of its predecessors about the variety of elite feminine identities. The strict observance of *purdah* remains a feature of the upper-class woman's life, evident in the strictures to which the Said daughters are subject: "they're totally hidden away".⁸³ However, the novel is also emphatic about the self-conscious Westernisation of Pakistan's upper strata. Having married Raisa's father, Sabah - evoking Saira in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* - is "taught the chic way to wear a sari, the correct way to apply her Rubinstein creams" and told to "scent her skin not with attar, but with Chanel".⁸⁴ *The Red Box* also depicts a fast-living young set whose women, as much as its men, revel in their lack of convention as the mark of their class distinction. This situation too echoes the concerns of *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Although their elders urge them to mind their excesses in the interests of family reputation, it is clear that many of Raisa's 'homeland' peers ignore religious teachings on matters such as drinking and pre-marital sex.

Furthermore, their conduct is tacitly excused by older members of the family, who regard the gap between their liberality, and the austerity imposed upon the general

⁸³ Op. cit., 25.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.215.

populace by Zia ul-Haq's Islamization programme, as an index of their elevation above the masses. Phuppo Razia's consternation at the intensification of Sharia law is informed as much by the belief that her kind should not be subjected to the same treatment and expectations as 'ordinary' Pakistanis, as it is by a sense of the importance of female self-determination.

With all those TV programmes...on true Islam - all right, she knows it isn't their idea of Islam...there are people who think they can judge others, and so brazenly...

"...[O]nly last week or so, can you believe it, an educated woman was slapped by a man in a shop, a stranger, for not covering her head? Imagine, *this was in a well-to-do area!*"⁸⁵ (My emphasis.)

The continuity between first and second-phase writing is also evident in its attention to how class differentiates the consequences of a woman's rejection of traditional precepts. The wealth gap that separates Reshma from Rani in *The Hope Chest* is considerable, and influences the 'fallout' of each woman's separation from her husband. Reshma understands that Afshar Khan's monopolisation of power - of which her banishment from the marital home is an example - is made possible by her parents' poverty: "I should have known...my people are too poor to fight for me and my children! They could never afford to keep all of us."⁸⁶ Rani's separation from Kemal may be tantamount to social suicide; but the fact that *her* family's wealth has furnished the couple with most of the amenities of married life enables her to exercise a degree of self-determination that poverty places beyond Reshma's reach. Ahmed's depiction of

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.23-24.

⁸⁶ Op. cit., p.285.

the impact of wealth on women evokes the 'absolution' that money buys for women such as Sita and the Moulvi's daughter in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*.

In other respects, the treatment of marriage and class in second-phase writing is developmental. Greater emphasis is placed upon the ways in which classed perspectives determine the perception of marriage as a necessity for girls. Through the parallel narratives of Rani and Reshma, *The Hope Chest* undertakes a detailed anatomisation of marriage, focusing on how its customs are inflected by each family's class position. Although not an economic requirement, Rani's betrothal is, in her mother's opinion, an absolute obligation: vital not only to the family's moral reputation, but also to the consolidation of its social position through the mutually advantageous linkage of its wealth with Kemal's 'old' family name. However, Ahmad's focus on the opposite end of the social spectrum elucidates, more obviously than does first-phase fiction, the extent to which poverty determines the necessity of a daughter's betrothal. Hardship compels Reshma's parents to view their daughter first as a financial burden, and then as a potentially lucrative commodity in the marital marketplace.⁸⁷ By effectively selling Reshma into marriage, Aijab Khan and Rehmat Bibi are forced to be complicit with society's construction of their daughter as someone to whom autonomy is not extended.

Second-phase writing is also developmental in examining the relationship between 'homeland' and diasporic feminine identities. *The Red Box*'s emphasis on the differences between Raisa's relatively Westernised lifestyle and that of her interviewees is one example suggesting that the Subcontinental social economy of femininities may be reflected in the Asian population of Britain. In the sizeable and predominantly

⁸⁷ Poverty also lies at the root of Aijab Khan's disquiet about the attempts to save the life of Munni, his baby daughter.

working-class immigrant communities of East London and Essex, traditional constructions of gender continue to have considerable purchase; and although *pardah* is not practised to the same extent as in Pakistan, its traces are apparent in the vigilance to which Tahira is subjected.

“...[S]ay some uncle or relative saw me, they’d go round my house and say to my mum - your daughter’s wandering around the streets and things like that...she worries that other people will see me and come round the house and say things like - your daughter was out and wasn’t wearing a dupatta.”⁸⁸

The classed identities of women in the ‘homeland’ are reflected in the diaspora in other ways. Raisa’s wealth, for example, affords her an independence that Tahira can scarcely comprehend: “You’ve got a big place all to yourself...you’ve got it all to yourself. No husband or children or nothing. Just living on your own, doing what you like, no one to stop you.”⁸⁹ Furthermore, Raisa does not regard marriage with the same sense of inevitability that the Ehsan and Rashid women do. However, in order to minimise its illumination of the class gap, Raisa either avoids the topic or lies. Knowing that her ‘other-worldliness’ will be exacerbated by the fact that she remains single into her thirties, Raisa deducts four years from her actual age.

The diasporic dichotomy between the Westernisation of the middle classes and the traditionalism of the working class is also evident in the shifting parameters of Tanni Chaudhery’s gender identity. The acquisition of money enables her parents to move out of the poorer area inhabited by families such as the Rashids, who trace their lineage back to the Subcontinental peasantry. With the family’s departure comes a

⁸⁸ Op. cit., p.31.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.143-144.

freedom for their daughter that is unthinkable to her erstwhile peers, and that attracts their negative judgement. Underlying many people's concern about the conduct of the Chaudhery children is a tacit disquiet about Tanni's behaviour in particular.

[T]hings had changed. The Chaudherys had...sold their souls to make money, people said. It wasn't through drug-dealing; but they had still forgotten who they were. They sold alcohol in their restaurant and their children had too much freedom.⁹⁰

The mutability of female identity exemplified by Tanni is more fundamental and genuine than that experienced by Saira (*SOABC*) in the first phase. The majority of later narratives, which are largely concerned with diasporic experience, are emphatic of the ways in which feminine identities undergo genuine revision in new cultural environments. Many of these developments are underwritten by questions of class. Haleh Afshar points out that, although a

marked change occurs at adolescence in parental attitude towards their daughters' schooling, peer group pressure and outdoor activities, these tensions vary according to class position; as we move up the social ladder, there is a less strict approach to daughter's [sic] activities.⁹¹

In *Looking for Maya and Transmission*, Srivastava makes a point of portraying young, educated, professional women who are subjected to far less constraint than one might expect. Sunita, the most obviously middle-class of *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee's* protagonists in origin, is also granted considerable leeway by her parents on matters such as education, social life and marriage.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.61

⁹¹ Op. cit., p.62

Second-phase fiction is marked by a greater assertion that gender concerns *can* take precedence over class identifications, and have the potential to generate alliances between women from different socio-economic *milieux*. Whereas in the ‘homeland’ access to ‘other’ cultural influences is determined by wealth, in the diaspora it is potentially available to all, and ceases to be the preserve of a limited and privileged section of society. *The Red Box*, for all of its emphasis on the class divisions between its central female characters, nonetheless suggests that the frank admission by each of the extent of her (non-)diasporisation goes some way to reducing these fissures. It is this issue that illustrates the shortcomings of the class stereotypes that Tahira in particular attempts to apply to Raisa. The younger woman assumes (wrongly) that Raisa would not be subjected to any of the same controls as she is, overstating the relationship between her imagined freedoms and her economic class: “I bet your mum wouldn’t have worried. Rich people don’t have to, do they?”⁹² Furthermore, she believes that status affords Raisa a degree of sexual licence for which she herself would be castigated. Tahira is, however, unaware of the prohibitions that Raisa and her sister were, and are, required to respect.

Both Tahira and Raisa assert their right to self-determination, indicating that the interrogation of tradition and its impact upon women is a phenomenon that spans the social spectrum, and bridges the gaps between its constituent parts. Raisa’s detailed, epistolary account of her teenage years underscores the similarities between her attempts, and those of Tahira and Nasreen, to reconcile the Asian woman’s moral duty and identity with a desire for freedom from such strictures. Through the transference of speech patterns and sartorial habits between the women, Sheikh indicates their

⁹² Op. cit., p.31.

proximity and the influence each one has on the others. For example, Tahira's experiments with her appearance and speech respectively attest to the impact of Raisa's and Nasreen's views upon her own. Similarly, Nasreen's decision to cut off the long hair that Asian women traditionally sport resonates with the novel's emphasis on Tahira's habit of braiding, then loosening, her hair - a ruminative gesture that externalises her ongoing attempts to reconcile and unravel the competing cultural influences in her life.

The role played by diasporisation in reducing the gap between women of different classes is also apparent in *Hari-jan*. Harjinder and Ghazala both engage in a more assertive defence of their own inherited cultures, but interrogate their shared endorsement of gender inequalities. In *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, the social economy of femininities in the novel initially appears to conform to the pattern already outlined. Chila, who comes from a relatively modest background, is the most willing to conform to the traditional domestic role; while the more identifiably middle-class Tania and Sunita are sceptical about the priorities around which Chila builds her existence. However, Tania suggests that, behind closed doors, it is the women of the professional classes who cling most tenaciously to the dictates of tradition; for, in functioning as domestic lynchpins, "We hear our mothers' voices and heed them, to make up for all the other imagined transgressions in our lives".⁹³ Furthermore, it is Chila who experiences the most radical interrogation of her presuppositions, when she realises fully how she is devalued by the traditions she defends.

She would go into that front room right now and tell all these young girls to go away and pack a bag and travel and read and climb mountains and see the view from somewhere very high and bright and maybe send her a

⁹³ Op. cit., pp.145-146.

postcard so she could remind herself of a different view.⁹⁴

Consequently, although the three women embark on their journeys from different starting positions, the mutability of their respective femininities brings them to a point of convergence that elides the distinctions of class. This general dynamic is not confined to the diasporic narrative, but is also evident in the 'homeland' setting of *The Hope Chest*. Despite the classed differences between her women protagonists, Ahmad suggests, through the novel's intertwining narrative lines, that the denial of female autonomy is a common concern that overrides the differences of class. The possibility of cross-spectrum solidarity is one that Rani implicitly begins to grasp towards the end of the novel. Her re-imagining of the Princess Pearl as a representation of female self-determination draws upon the experiences of Rani's female acquaintances, and thus upon a range of social strata.

Conclusion

The first-phase focus on social divisions within the 'homeland' places considerably greater emphasis on economic inequality than on caste, with the feudal ownership of land being a particular target of criticism. The characteristic feature that defines various representations of feudalism is stasis. For the tenant farmer, this is manifest in a life of unceasing poverty and exploitation; for the landlord, it takes the form of being unable to imagine a life without privilege. First-phase narratives set in the diaspora tend to be concerned with the relationship between racial and class identities. The extent to which either factor is accorded primacy is depicted as contingent on the class of the 'host'. The prioritisation of race tends to characterise working-class

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.199

environments, where - in neo-imperial fashion - chromatic and cultural differences provide impoverished, white Britons with comforting 'evidence' of their indisputable superiority. Middle-class environments are more typically represented as those in which immigrants find a less grudging welcome. However, the relationship between 'host' class and attitudes is not entirely deterministic; first-phase diasporic narratives offer a small number of exceptions to what otherwise seems to be a broad rule.

The treatments of class in second-phase novels are continuous with those of their predecessors in a small number of respects. In the few depictions of the 'homeland' that are found in the selected second-phase texts, the vastness of the material and experiential gap between society's best and worst-off continues to be underscored. Later writing also remains concerned with the relationship between class and race; and again, working-class whites are represented as the most reluctant to acknowledge any common ground with their Asian counterparts. However, second-phase writing asserts more emphatically the disservice that working-class white Britons may be doing themselves by refusing to act upon their potential solidarity with similarly disadvantaged immigrants. By contrast, the entrepreneurship of the middle-classes is more emphatically represented as a form of identity that can bridge the racial gap that divides whites from Asians in the poorer sections of society. In support of this, the mixed marriage continues to function as an index of the greater degree of acceptance that Asian Britons find in middle-class *milieux*.

Developments in the second-phase treatment of class outnumber the areas of continuity. Many texts evince a greater concern about class divisions *within* the Asian British population - a marked expansion of the first-phase concern with class as a factor

in relationships between immigrant and 'host'. Second-phase writing makes more explicit the better treatment that is extended to middle-class Asians, who are often (assumed to be) more Anglicised than their working-class counterparts. The latter tend to represent Asianness at its most 'othered', and never figure as partners in mixed marriages. This tendency suggests that the acceptance of middle-class immigrants has as much to do with their greater conformity to 'host' customs, as with their entrepreneurial character. Furthermore, the extent to which the equality of the middle-class Asian is welcomed is open to question. A number of second-phase works suggest that a concomitant of Asian class advancement in the diaspora is the acquisition of a greater degree of power over the representation of white British subjects. However, (readings of) a number of the same texts also allude to the unease with which the exercise of this power is greeted, suggesting that there may be limits to the equanimity with which middle-class white Britons regard the advancement of the immigrant populations.

Where second-phase texts develop the treatment of Asian British communities, they tend to do so by examining the persistence of classed fissures. Sheikh suggests that the composition of the contemporary immigrant population reflects the class divisions of the 'homeland', but the majority of relevant works are also concerned with the opportunities in the diaspora to remake inherited class identities. A number bemoan the evolution of a highly competitive culture that sets great store by wealth accumulation and material success, and that pressurises those often least able to do so to embrace this acquisitive ethos. Furthermore, the 'justification' of exploitative practices in pursuit of wealth is held up for criticism, especially where it builds upon the existing disadvantage of other immigrants. In *The Red Box* especially, the exploitation of Asian by Asian is represented as tantamount to a diasporic reworking of the inequitable dynamics of

'homeland'. It is therefore unsurprising that Sheikh, more emphatically than any other second-phase novelist, insists that class often plays the greater role in the immigrant's self-perception, superseding the racial solidarities upon which other second-phase fiction writers place greater stress.

The first-phase treatment of how class and gender intersect emphasises the important role women play in the creation and perpetuation of class identities in the 'homeland'. One way in which this is evident is through marriage up or down the social scale - a process that is determined by others in the family, but in which women perform a vital function as brides. The maintenance of distinct class identities is also facilitated by the *mores* of femininity that prevail at different levels of the social hierarchy. These conceptions of womanhood are sufficiently divided (and divisive) that common issues of gender are rarely depicted in the selected first-phase works as having the power to bridge the gaps between social classes. Indeed, the divisions between strata are all the more emphasised by the important role *purdah* plays as an actual facilitator of differentiation, as well as a symbol of social division. The practice is implicated in the insulation of the elite woman from the rest of society, and helps to sustain the idea that the elite woman is a breed apart from the general herd of womanhood. *Purdah* also represents the moral division between women of different *milieux*, the alleged existence of which is a central tenet in the education of the upper class woman.

However, the rejection of *purdah* by the elite classes also testifies to the insularity of the upper classes, providing clear evidence of their cosmopolitan familiarity with the *mores* of the West. That this is so is due to a number of factors: a history of political complicity with the imperial powers; the concomitant aping of

Occidental manners; and the privileges that money can buy, such as international travel and a cosmopolitan education. The gap between the elite and the rest is further underscored by the relative impunity with which some women of the upper classes violate the conventions that circumscribe women's conduct. Money is represented as a means by which the dishonouring of a family's reputation by its women can be patched and mended. It also enables a degree of independence that renders questions of reputation and the favourable judgement of other members of society somewhat inconsequential.

Second-phase treatments of 'homeland' classed feminine identities are continuous with their predecessors in emphasising the separation of women from different strata by different conceptions of womanhood. The diversity of femininities found in the upper classes is reiterated in second-phase writing, with all of its manifestations emphasising the distance between the social elite and the rest of society. In some cases, women from wealthy families are kept away from the masses by means of *purdah*. In others they represent the special status of their class by exemplifying its self-consciously Westernised habits and the lesser importance of religion in determining their conduct. The relative facility that elite women have to flout feminine conventions is also reiterated, but is rendered more emphatic by its comparison with the - often dire - consequences that face poorer women who attempt the same. Furthermore, the social function of marriage, and the extent to which the conception of women as potential brides is inflected by class, is asserted more strongly by means of comparison across different social *milieux*.

Second-phase writing is developmental in its greater concern with diasporic experience, and the extent to which the social economy of femininities within the Asian British population reflects that in the 'homeland'. The emphasis is not, however, on wholly deterministic patterns of identification. Later works are equally, if not more, emphatic of the opportunities that immigration and integration into a 'new' culture offer for the refashioning of feminine identities - in ways that are more profound and genuine than the examples found in first-phase and 'homeland' narratives. Sheikh, especially, underscores the extent to which diasporic changes in class identity are often accompanied by alterations to gender identities. A number of second-phase writers also emphasise how diasporisation reduces the experiential gap between women of different classes in a way that is less readily apparent in the 'homeland'. They are able to engage in the kinds of unifying, interrogative endeavour that *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, through Laila and Nandi, represents as the exception, not the norm. Thus, where first-phase writing tends to suggest that class identities take precedence over the opportunities for female solidarity, second-phase writing is more inclined towards the reverse dynamic.

Chapter 6

Aesthetic Hybridity: Language and Intertextuality

Introduction

This chapter is consistent with its predecessors inasmuch as it is concerned with how South Asian diasporic women's writing represents the interaction between the inherited norms of the Subcontinent and the acquired norms of the adopted society. Where it differs from earlier chapters is its focus: instead of exploring cultural hybridity through the treatment of particular themes, it examines the stylistic qualities of the diasporic women's literary *oeuvre* to similar ends. At first glance the novels selected for consideration may not appear to be especially hybrid in style: they are written primarily in English, and adhere largely to the novelistic form, particularly its social-realist variant. However, closer examination suggests that they are, indeed, hybrid in character - a possibility to which some existing readings lend credence. Interpretations of, for example, Attia Hosain's works underscore their hybrid aesthetic. Anita Desai claims that "reading her prose brings one as close as it is possible, in the English language, to the Urdu origins and the Persian inspiration".¹ Mulk Raj Anand, though less concerned with Hosain's language, also attributes a "syncretic" character to *Sunlight on a Broken Column*:

The contents of the lives rendered are Indian, but the form in which these contents are unfolded is influenced by the patterns of the new twentieth century novels of the west.²

In this chapter I examine the relationship between cultural and aesthetic hybridity *via* three principal foci: language, intertextuality and the *bildungsroman* form. Each topic will be introduced and examined separately, with a view to establishing some ways in which the hybrid character of the selected works may be discerned.

¹ Anita Desai, Introduction to *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, op. cit., p.10.

² Mulk Raj Anand, 'Profile of Attia Hosain', *Commonwealth Quarterly*, 39, 1978, p.9.

Language and hybridity

One way in which the corpus' stylistic hybridity may be examined is through its incorporation of Subcontinental languages into English medium texts - that is to say, the bilingualism, if not 'multilingualism', that characterises a number of the chosen novels.³ Sociolinguists such as Jean Aitchison, who pays specific attention to the development of Pacific and African pidgin languages, have long documented the lexical and syntactic hybridisation that occurs when different languages come into contact.⁴ Aitchison, like Peter Trudgill, acknowledges how resistant the speakers of each constituent tongue can be to language mixing, especially where the erosion of the inherited language is equated with that of the national or ethnic identity with which it is associated.⁵ Thus, while studies such as Trudgill's and Aitchison's focus primarily on developments in grammar and vocabulary, they are also valuable insofar as they touch upon the broader cultural and political dynamics that underlie linguistic interaction. In this respect they draw upon the highly politicised treatment of linguistic hybridity found in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin which, in the course of considering its specific, 'local' circumstances, place considerable emphasis on the historical and cultural contexts of language use.⁶

For Bakhtin, an utterance has some especially distinctive qualities: it is never original; and, by virtue of its genesis from within complex webs of linguistic, historical and social discourse, it is always polyphonic. His vision of linguistic hybridity, as the juxtaposition of "different linguistic consciousnesses", foregrounds the inextricability of

³ Many of the selected texts include vocabulary from a range of Indic languages, hence my preference for the descriptor 'multilingual'.

⁴ Jean Aitchison, *op. cit.*, pp.191-207.

⁵ Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974), pp.141-168. p.118. However, Aitchison also points out that "decreolization" - the encouragement of a movement back to an 'unsullied' base language - can precipitate the death of a language. *Op. cit.*, p.210.

⁶ See, for example, Trudgill on the status of minority languages. *Op. cit.*

language and *Weltanschauung*.⁷ The utterance's hybridity lies not only in the relationship between its constituent languages, but also in the interaction between the different social positions and ideologies they represent. As their juxtaposition is mutually interrogative, each language is able to unmask the supposed naturalness of the other. In other words, the hybridity of the utterance reveals each discursive position it contains to be the construction of a *particular* historical and social consciousness, rather than the 'neutral' expression of universal and eternal values. Graham Allen characterises this tension as the "centrifugal" force within the utterance that disperses or erodes the self-proclaimed naturalness of a given discourse.⁸ Although always dialogic in relationship, the different ways in which the utterance's languages may engage means that linguistic hybridity is itself a hybrid concept. In its 'organic' manifestation, Bakhtin conceives of hybridity as a syncretic fusion of languages. By synthesising different systems of thought, the organically hybrid utterance is "pregnant with potential for new world views".⁹ Crucially, however, "the mixture remains mute and opaque, *never making use of conscious contrasts and oppositions*" (my emphasis).¹⁰ Where the "linguistic consciousnesses" are engaged in a more obviously frictional, interrogative relationship, Bakhtin characterises the utterance's hybridity as overtly political and 'intentional'.

How might Bakhtin's principles be applied to the polyglot character of much South Asian diasporic women's fiction? Trudgill characterises "language mixing" as "enabling a speaker to signal two identities at once".¹¹ The relevance of this claim to diasporic authors is clear, as it is one of the means by which they may write their

⁷ Cited in Young, *op. cit.*, p.20.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.22.

⁹ Cited in Young, *op. cit.*, p.21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p.123.

cultural duality into their works.¹² However, Amit Chaudhuri dismisses the equation of “a scattering of untranslated Indian words and phrases” with the Indo-Anglian writer’s cultural hybridity as a short-sighted, mimetic mode of interpretation that focuses on superficial marks of difference.¹³ What is striking is that neither Trudgill nor Chaudhuri addresses the nature of the *relationship between* English and Asian languages. Trudgill’s observations are suggestive of an implicitly harmonious co-existence between the subject’s various identities. A Bakhtinian approach to the reading of diasporic fiction - considering *how* multiple languages are written into the works under discussion and, especially, how they relate to each other - enables a more nuanced and politicised understanding of the cultural identifications and histories from which particular works emerge. Whether the relationship between languages is, indeed, harmonious is opened up to scrutiny. Chaudhuri also neglects the possibility that the inclusion of *untranslated* Indian words may serve a purpose other than the assertion of difference. As a number of the selected novels demonstrate, foreign terms often *are* translated for the reader. The effect of such choices upon the texts’ accessibility, therefore, warrants closer examination.

The ways in which diasporic texts mix Eastern and Western languages have been the object of piecemeal analysis. Of the extensive body of commentary that exists upon Markandaya’s works, for example, only P. Geetha overtly acknowledges that her art may be emblematic of “cultural miscegenation”.¹⁴ However, Geetha does not elaborate this claim sufficiently for it to be clear whether Markandaya’s use of language exemplifies such ‘inter-breeding’. Desai’s reading of Hosain’s works implicitly

¹² Op. cit., p.123, p.150.

¹³ Amit Chaudhuri (ed.), *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* (London; Basingstoke; Oxford: Picador, 2001) p. xxvi.

¹⁴ P. Geetha, ‘Images and Archetypes in Kamala Markandaya’s Novels: A Study in Cultural Ambivalence’, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 26.1, 1991, p.170.

acknowledges the autobiographical import of the author's style, with its suggestion that the mixed linguistic character of her works reflects her diasporisation. However, there is no specific commentary on *how* Hosain mixes Urdu and Punjabi with English.¹⁵ Sonita Sarker claims that *A Wicked Old Woman* is among a number of texts that "allows a carnival of voices to play", in reflection of their protagonists' "multiple consciousness".¹⁶ She, however, acknowledges the nature of the relationship between the languages in her assertion that "no single voice holds an incontestable place in the co-existence of disparate elements".¹⁷ My concern in this section of the chapter is to examine how far, and to what possible ends, the 'otherness' of Indic languages to the dominant English medium is emphasised in the selected texts. To put it another way, how do the multiple languages of South Asian diasporic women's fiction represent the politics of the cultural interface?

All of the selected first-phase texts are bilingual or multilingual, but the ways in which they incorporate Subcontinental languages into their English-medium narration vary. *Sumitra's Story's* diasporic narrative and *Sunlight on a Broken Column's* 'homeland' narrative place Indic words in overtly conflictual relationship with English. Markandaya's works tend to incorporate words from Subcontinental languages, thereby rendering them superficially less obtrusive; but, as I will argue, her writing is not necessarily devoid of the antagonistic dynamics that characterise language mixing in Sheikh's and Hosain's novels. *Sumitra's Story* and *Sunlight on a Broken Column* are both concerned with the incompatibility between Eastern and Western cultural

¹⁵ It is, perhaps, the fact of her diasporisation that also accounts for the lack of attention to Hosain's decision – and, indeed, that of other authors - to write largely in English. As it is, Chaudhuri insists that, where Indian writers are concerned, to write in English is to use a language that is "already theirs, linked not so much to the colonizer as to their sense of self and history". Op. cit., p.xxviii.

¹⁶ Op cit., p.14.

¹⁷ Ibid.

perspectives, and reflect this in their multilingualism: the antagonistic dynamic of the narrative is marked typographically, as words from Subcontinental languages are italicised. The visible distinction maintained between English and the novels' other languages reflects the discontinuity experienced by the young protagonists between the narrow ambit of family expectations and the more expansive scope of the wider world.¹⁸ It is also the case that *Sumitra's Story* is set in a period during which the immigrant presence in Britain is met with particular hostility. The marking of Asian words as a foreign presence in the novel is congruent with the unassimilable, alien status thrust upon - and sometimes, usually reactively, chosen by - the Asian characters in the novel.

In *The Nowhere Man*, Indic words are not marked in this way and remain unexplained in the narrative - a degree of 'normalisation' that is explicable, perhaps, by the fact that they appear in the Indian section of the novel.¹⁹ However, another purpose may underlie the fact that terms relatively unfamiliar to an Anglophone readership, such as 'dhoti' and 'khaddar', are treated, like 'khaki' and 'jodhpur', as if they have been so thoroughly incorporated into the English language that they have become 'indigenised'. It is possible that Markandaya is opting for a more ironic, less mimetic, relationship between the character of *The Nowhere Man's* multilingualism, and the cultural status of its immigrant protagonist. The novel's depiction of British colonialism in the 'homeland' is scathing, and occupies a crucial, explanatory position in the narrative. The 'India' episode's unmarked multilingualism perhaps functions as a wry counterpoint - one that contrasts the colonial capacity for linguistic and territorial

¹⁸ *The Hope Chest* provides another scenario in which the 'othering' of subcontinental languages pertains. The novel examines the possibility that women in different social environments may find common cause in issues related to their gender. The marking of Indic terms emphasises the breadth of the cultural gap that is bridged by Ruth and Rani's similar experiences of the orthodoxy of feminine identity, and the mother-daughter relationship.

¹⁹ This logic may also be applied to the unmarked use of South Asian languages in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

incorporation with the refusal of Britain's white population to absorb the immigrants from its former empire.

In *Sumitra's Story* - arguably the first-phase novel with the most profound sense of cultural antagonism - the deployment of a Subcontinental lexicon to underscore the interrogative relationship between 'homeland' and diasporic *mores* places particular emphasis on a certain pattern of imagery. Smith confines her Indic vocabulary to food, which has several levels of significance in the novel. It is repeatedly cited as the 'currency' of cultural exchange: in Uganda, food is shared between Sumitra, Rungi and Mary in the school playground, while in England, it is one of the principal channels of 'communication' between the Patels and their English acquaintances. It is also the means by which Sumitra carries out her first acts of cultural transgression, by consuming that which is strictly forbidden. However, food is also a recurrent motif in Sumitra's critical reflections on the gendered norms of Indian society. The incessant drudgery of women's household responsibilities is exemplified most frequently by the cycle of cooking in which Sumitra is expected to participate, whether as a daughter, a housewife or a mother. It is, therefore, the case that the novel's unassimilated Indic vocabulary highlights the centrality of gender, particularly the secondary status of women, to Sumitra's sense of cultural disjunction.

They were served a feast of *pooris*, vegetable curry and potato soup, followed by *gulab jamon* and *jalabi*. Martin, Mike and Bap were served first, with Bap commanding his wife and daughters to fetch another plate, some more water...Mai and Sumitra, both already tired from work and school, were...stirring yoghurt into *samosa* dough.²⁰

²⁰ Op. cit., p.69, p.89.

By remaining unassimilated throughout the narrative, this imagery functions as a marker of resistance. It represents a point of cultural principle on which Mai and Bap are unprepared or unable to compromise, and a Subcontinental norm of socialisation that Sumitra cannot internalise.

The sense of cultural antagonism conveyed by Smith's use of Indic vocabulary is reinforced by her deployment of language as a trope. One means by which the development of inter-generational schisms in the family is represented is through the ability and willingness of its various members to engage with 'other' languages. The resistance to linguistic hybridity of which Aitchison writes is exemplified by the contempt in which Sumitra's grandmother holds the "corrupted" Gujarati spoken by her expatriate descendants.²¹ The 'untainted' cultural orthodoxy she attempts to impose upon her granddaughters finds a parallel in her regard for (what she assumes to be) the purity of her native language. Similarly, the fact that Sumitra is receptive to Western influences is reflected in her aptitude for European languages, which stands in marked contrast to the difficulties her parents experience mastering the rudiments of English. Furthermore, the dissonant relationship between languages typifies the novel's highly pessimistic vision of cultural hybridity as an irresolute, antagonistic process of thwarted communication. Linguistic metaphors are used to convey the irreconcilability of the different cultural norms at work in the diaspora space.

Every single person was operating in their own alphabetical universe, but the letters existing in one did not exist in another...To Mrs. Baker, all Sumitra had done was to have a glass of orange juice in a pub with some friends. To Mai and Bap what she had done was to disgrace the family name...²²

²¹ Ibid. p.124.

²² Ibid., p.119.

Language is also the trope through which Smith delineates the limited understanding the Patel parents have of the culture of the adopted country. “It was as if everyone was using...different sound systems. There were some words that Mai would never be able to pronounce in English because they were sounds that could not be represented in Gujarati”.²³

Although the inclusion of Indic vocabulary in first-phase writing often signifies a state of cultural obstruction, the extent to which it proves a hindrance to understanding for the reader varies. Hosain’s works include glossaries, suggesting that her anticipated readership will include a section that is unfamiliar with the languages of the ‘homeland’ and, possibly, the cultural practices that are the usual context of their usage. Markandaya, however, provides neither glossary nor contextual explanation. This uncompromising strategy keeps intact the sense of India’s foreignness and distance, literally and metaphorically, from the country in which Srinivas has resettled. Furthermore, it encourages the perception that the novel’s depiction of India is imbued with authenticity - a tactic resonant with Trudgill’s suggestion, that switching between languages bestows a degree of intimacy and confidentiality upon the act of narration.²⁴ By adopting this strategy, Markandaya also imposes a tacit requirement that her readership be, or become, familiar with the Indic words that linguistically testify to the intertwined histories of the Subcontinent and Britain.²⁵

²³ Ibid., p.118.

²⁴ Op. cit., p.123.

²⁵ The absence of a glossary in *Sumitra’s Story*, while having a comparable effect, possibly serves a somewhat different purpose. The age of its protagonist has meant that the novel has been widely used as a class reader in schools. Smith’s refusal to translate its Indic vocabulary may be a deliberate strategy, intended to promote discussion between South Asian students - those with ‘expert’ status, and their non-Asian classmates.

There is some degree of continuity between first and second-phase treatments of language and hybridity, most clearly evident in the marking, or otherwise, of Subcontinental words as foreign to the main body of the text. The effect of this strategy in *Anita and Me* is comparable to its import in *Sumitra's Story* in the first phase: like Smith's novel, Syal's is concerned with its protagonist's experience of a disjunction between the world within the home and the environment outside. The compulsion Meena feels to adopt a separate persona for each *milieu* provides the most acute reminder that some degree of irreconcilability persists between her various cultural repertoires. This state of affairs is reflected in the novel's visible distinction between its 'major' and 'minor' languages. Furthermore, their representations of the 1970s remind us that the historical scopes of *Anita and Me* and *Sumitra's Story* overlap - a fact that is especially evident in the novels' respective treatments of the decade's social climate. Both protagonists are repeatedly made aware that their ethnic difference hinders their complete social acceptance by the 'host' population; and like the Indic vocabulary in the text, Meena is perceived and marked out as an alien, unassimilable presence. The integration of *unmarked* Indic words in *Amritvela* shares something of the effect of the same typographic convention in *The Nowhere Man*. Being set in the 'homeland' it is suggestive of the normality of this language within the Subcontinental environment.

The importance of the glossary also testifies to the continuity between first and second-phase writing. *Amritvela*, which is clearly aimed as much at a non-Asian readership as at the opposite, provides the glossary needed to accommodate the linguistic and cultural unfamiliarity of some of its anticipated audience. However, the majority of later works do not. Their refusal to provide the necessary translation places a very deliberate onus of responsibility upon unfamiliar readers to acquaint themselves

with the text's Subcontinental lexicon. This is congruent with the emphatic assertion of works such as *A Wicked Old Woman* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, that Britain's Asian communities are a permanent fixture on the country's ethnic landscape. The establishment of an Asian British population demands an effort on the part of the 'host' to learn more about the 'other' cultures in its midst, to complement the process through which the novels' characters must go to acclimatise themselves to British cultural norms.

There are, nonetheless, significant differences between the phases of diasporic women's writing. One is the incorporation of typographically unmarked words from Subcontinental languages into *diasporic* narratives, whereas in the first phase, this tends to be the case only in (sections of) novels set in the 'homeland'. There is some degree of variation in the use of this strategy in later fiction: in *A Wicked Old Woman* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee*, all Indic words are unitalicised. These works are especially emphatic about the Asianness *and* Britishness of their protagonists. By according Indic languages a status closer to that of English, they symbolically assert the integral presence of their Asian characters in the adopted society, and their (partial) assimilation into its dominant culture. However, the fact that the words themselves remain Indic suggests that aspects of the characters will remain more Asian than British. Furthermore, the unmarked multilingualism of *A Wicked Old Woman* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* is symptomatic how these narratives normalise inter-cultural navigation. In place of the jarring discomfort of cultural duality represented in *Sumitra's Story* and *Anita and Me*, these works implicitly assert that mobility between different *milieus* is an accepted fact of life for the novels' principal characters. Moreover, by unmarking their Subcontinental words, these novels tacitly urge recognition that cultural

vitality, like its linguistic counterpart, depends on the addition and absorption of new elements. The *Red Box* and *Hari-jan*, however, are characterised by the *partial* incorporation of South Asian languages. Both novels focus on teenage protagonists who, though of Asian descent, are British by birth. In these cases, the partial ‘normalisation’ of Indic languages occurs around characters who are attempting to heal the discontinuity between their inherited and acquired cultures, but are in the early stages of the process.

The development of linguistic hybridity in second-phase writing is also evident in the deployment of language as metaphor. In *Hari-jan*, the necessity of competence in an inherited language is emphasised, as “Angrezi [English] does not say everything there is to say in the world” and “you may have occasion to express certain feelings and...will want to do it with a certain style”.²⁶ This is reflective of the novel’s assertion that a sense of inherited tradition is vital to the well-being of the diasporised Asian - a necessary counterbalance to the pressures towards a complete cultural assimilation that still may not guarantee the non-white immigrant’s social acceptance. *Amritvela*, however, places more emphasis upon the inevitable cross-fertilisation of languages, than upon their incompatibility or complementarity. The similarity of English and Hindi vocabulary functions as an index of the cultural proximity between Britain and the Subcontinent, and the continued influence of British culture within the former colony. The similarity, for example, between ‘bearah’ [waiter] and ‘bearer’ indicates the English provenance of what the novel’s protagonist initially assumes to be a Hindi word.²⁷ Its existence symbolises how the hybrid products of cultural contact become

²⁶ Op. cit., p.14.

²⁷ In the case of *Amritvela*, the syncretic relationship between British and Indian cultures is asserted to such an extent that it is loan words from other European languages (such as *bonhomie*) that are marked as ‘external’.

imperceptibly absorbed into everyday usage, and is one of many pieces of evidence that force Meera to revise her conception of her native country as a locus of 'pure' Indian culture. Compared to *Sumitra's Story*, language in *Amritvela* provides a more incorporative metaphor of cultural relations, according to which elements from different sources are combined to generate new forms, and impurity is celebrated as the norm, not the aberration.

Second-phase writing's developmental quality is also evident in its provision, or otherwise, of glossaries. In texts aimed at younger readers, such as *Hari-jan*, the translation of Indic words is not only an attempt to 'admit' the non-Asian reader; it is also a tacit acknowledgement of the unfamiliarity that the British-born offspring of immigrants may have with aspects of their parental culture. The refusal of other second-phase texts, such as *A Wicked Old Woman* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, to gloss their South Asian cultural references is in keeping with their unmarked use of Indic words: a symbolic rejection of the 'outsider' connotation attached to words for which translation is provided. Thus, the absence of the glossary may also be seen as a retort to the assimilationist assertion that Indic languages, like their speakers, are interlopers in the diaspora space. However, it is not always the case in second-phase writing that the absence of a glossary is underpinned by this kind of combative political agenda. *Anita and Me* provides no list of translations of its Indic vocabulary; but as its Asian protagonist is relatively unfamiliar with the languages and customs of the Subcontinent, her ignorance resonates with that of the similarly unfamiliar reader. The explanation of Indic terms in the narrative itself is therefore possible, as it accords with the evolving cultural awareness of its central character.

Intertextuality and hybridity

The focus of this section is the citation of existing Asian and Western texts in the selected texts: the ways in which these are combined, and the cultural significance of such choices. Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality characterises the text not as an original work, but as a mosaic-like "permutation of texts", thereby drawing upon Bakhtin's conception of the utterance as an assemblage of elements from existing cultural, historical and social sources.²⁸ Kristeva offers a detailed elaboration of the intertextual 'space' occupied by the literary text, locating it on 'horizontal' and 'vertical' axes of reference. 'Horizontally', intertextuality is concerned with the text as a channel of dialogic communication between author and reader; 'Vertically', it maps the text's relationship to its predecessors. The axes of exchange operate simultaneously within the literary composition, so that its dialogue is *between* these dimensions, as well as within each one. Therefore, in reading the text, one is also reading its place in literary history.

What is especially valuable in Kristeva's conception of intertextuality is her emphasis on its transformative power. Anterior texts are not simply absorbed and repeated; they are remade in the act of quotation, and their "imperious, charismatic" status accordingly opened to question.²⁹ Again, Kristeva's indebtedness to Bakhtin is apparent - particularly the interrogative quality of 'intentional' hybridity, whose disruptive character undermines the notion of singular meaning or intention. As Allen points out,

intertextuality encompasses that aspect of literary and other kinds of texts which struggles against and subverts reason, the belief in unity of meaning

²⁸ Allen, *op. cit.*, p.35.

²⁹ Clayton & Rothstein (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.17.

or of the human subject, and which is therefore subversive to all ideas of the logical and the unquestionable.³⁰

However, it is certainly the case that the applicability of Kristeva's model of intertextuality to the South Asian diasporic *oeuvre* may have limitations. The idea that the text is endlessly indeterminate in meaning has been challenged by theorists who assert that the ability to recognise a literary work's referents - and, therefore, to interpret it - is circumscribed by the limitations of the reader's knowledge.³¹

Furthermore, John Frow and David Duff detect an imprecision in Kristeva's theories about the relationship between literary texts and the social conditions in which they are produced - one that, in their view, precludes a thoroughgoing consideration of how literature transforms or reinforces a given social ethos.³² Perhaps most pertinent to my concerns in this dissertation is the possibly ahistorical character of Kristeva's theory, which is at odds with the particular diasporic circumstances from which the selected works emerge. By endorsing a psychoanalytical approach that emphasises the hybridising eruption of subconscious drives into the conscious text, Kristeva's model of intertextuality risks removing the processes of intertextuality from the *specific* circumstances of history that Bakhtin is at pains to emphasise as the context of the linguistic act. Simon Dentith regards the differences between these critics' positions as symptomatic of their distinct conceptions of social liberation. Where Bakhtin conceives of unresolved struggle within particular social situations, Kristeva's vision, by "effectively deracinat[ing] the signifying process", sees liberation in the transcending of

³⁰ Op. cit., p.45.

³¹ For a summary of how Jonathan Culler, Michel Riffaterre, Wolfgang Iser and Michel Foucault have argued along these lines, see Clayton & Rothstein, op. cit., pp.24-27.

³² Ibid., p.57.

history.³³ This aspect of Kristeva's divergence from Bakhtin is evident in her assertion that the "several utterances, taken from other texts" do not exist in a relationship of mutual interrogation, but rather "intersect and *neutralize* one another" (my emphasis).³⁴

Although Anand sees the imprint of twentieth century Western literature on *Sunlight on a Broken Column's* form, Nasta detects the influence of "the cyclical oral tales of [Hosain's] native Oudh".³⁵ More often, however, Subcontinental textual influences are evident in first-phase fiction in allusions to religious concepts and narratives, derived from sources such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Krishna Kripalani claims that, although these "are hardly ever used as texts in schools and colleges, their main stories and characters are vividly real to most people, young or old."³⁶ The narrative structure of *The Nowhere Man*, as V. Rangan observes, is informed by the Hindu concept of *ashramdharam*, which describes the four life stages through which the 'twice born' Hindu male is expected to pass.³⁷ Certain aspects of the narrative underscore the relevance of the *ashramdharam* cycle to Srinivas' life, particularly its last stage. As Lipner points out, the mendicant, "fuelled by his austerities...is to be a living fire" - a description that presages the manner of Srinivas' death, and a factor to which Rangan points to substantiate his claims.³⁸ In *Sumitra's Story*, one of Sumitra's dreams refers to the Hindu pantheon:

[S]he saw Kali, goddess of war, waiting outside the school gates. The four-armed deity held Rita's dripping head in one hand, Jean's in the second,

³³ Cited in Allen, op. cit., p.58.

³⁴ Ibid., p.35.

³⁵ Op. cit., p.39.

³⁶ Krishna Kripalani, *Modern Indian Literature: A Panoramic Glimpse* (Rutland; Vermont; Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1971), p.12.

³⁷ V. Rangan, op. cit., pp.196-197. ³⁷ The description 'twice born' characterises physical birth as the 'first', and spiritual birth through initiation into Vedic study as the second. For a more detailed explanation see Lipner, op. cit., pp. 90-97.

³⁸ Ibid., p.97. A similar observation is made by A.A.Sinha. Op. cit., p.18.

while with the third and fourth she distributed National Front and Trotskyist literature...Sumitra screamed as she was born again and again and again. She screamed with each reincarnation, but nobody heard.³⁹

The striking feature in these examples is that the source material is disrupted in some way and/or is quoted in a disruptive context. Although Rangan claims that Srinivas progresses through the *dharmic* phases in the correct order, the character's movement through the cycle conforms less closely to the expected pattern than Rangan is willing to admit. Srinivas arguably goes through the 'householder' phase twice: once with Vasantha, and again with Mrs. Pickering. Furthermore, as G.M. Ram observes, the abandonment of the home in preparation for the more isolated stages of life requires a voluntary withdrawal from the world.⁴⁰ Srinivas' isolation is not chosen but is, rather, a position into which he is forced by the increasing hostility of white Britons towards non-white immigrants. Thus, the validity of Guruprasad's claim, that "the novel aesthetically realize[s] the impossibility of cultural transplant", is apparent in the displacement of the *dharmic* cycle from its customary path by expatriation.⁴¹ The invocation of religious texts in *Sumitra's Story* endows them with highly negative connotations. Kali symbolises a society riven by a near-apocalyptic level of conflict, within which Sumitra's split cultural loyalties are implicated. Furthermore, the self-

³⁹ Op. cit., p.72.

⁴⁰ G.M. Ram, *Bible of Hinduism: A Gospel of Social Reconstruction* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1985).

⁴¹ Guruprasad, op. cit., p.180. There are other respects in which the form of *The Nowhere Man* is symptomatic of the disruptive, interrogative character of hybridity that typifies the first phase of South Asian diasporic women's writing. A.N. Dwivedi suggests that Markandaya's works are usually circular in their use of flashback and/or flashforward but if this is so, *The Nowhere Man* does not conform to type. Opening with Dr. Radcliffe's diagnosis of Srinivas' leprosy, the narrative does eventually return to this point, but continues beyond it to examine the negative aftermath of the event. Despite the finality of Srinivas' death, the novel is marked by an overall sense of irresolution, as the reader is led beyond the point up to which the 'security' (or tragic inevitability) provided by foreknowledge operates. The consequences of Srinivas' demise, and the further development of the *zeitgeist* that is its social context, are beyond the prediction of the narrative. See A.N. Dwivedi, *Papers on Indian Writings in English* (New Delhi: Amar Prakashan, 1991), p.33.

empowerment with which Kali is credited - especially in contrast to Sita, the archetype of the loyal, self-sacrificing consort - is noticeably absent from Sumitra's circumstances. Indeed, it is Sumitra's *powerlessness* that pervades the quoted passage: the diasporic remaking of the self to which reincarnation may refer is represented here as a violent and painful process over which Sumitra has no control.⁴²

The treatment of Subcontinental intertexts in first-phase writing contrasts with that of Western source materials. Although no more prominent, quantitatively, than their Asian counterparts, intertexts from the Western canon tend to be kept largely 'intact', unlike most of their Eastern counterparts. In the selected novels, the principal Western intertexts are Shakespearean. Margaret Joseph, for instance, remarks upon the extent to which *The Nowhere Man* alludes to *King Lear* in its depiction of Srinivas' bewildered sense of desertion.⁴³ It is also arguable (although Joseph does not comment upon it) that *Othello* exerts an influence upon the novel, especially where the characterisation of Fred Fletcher is concerned. Their dangerous and destructive obsessions emerge from Fred's and Iago's respective beliefs that they have been 'short-changed' in life. Mrs. Fletcher regards her son's demonisation of Srinivas as evidence of a fundamental evil in his character. More clearly, his hatred is described as "monstrously grown since birth" - a phrase that bears a marked resemblance to Iago's characterisation of his plan to bring about Othello's downfall as "this monstrous

⁴² None of the selected texts draws directly upon the Arabic texts of Islam – the *Koran* and the clarificatory texts of the *Hadith*; metaphors relating to diasporisation are drawn largely from Hindu sources. There is, at best, some allusion in *Sunlight on a Broken Column* to the gap between Islamic ideals of marriage, and the social conventions that have come to surround the institution.

⁴³ Joseph cites, for example, the sympathetic role played by Constable Kent. Furthermore, she implies a correspondence between the texts in their use of the image of the blasted heath. Op. cit., p.79, p.193 Uma Parameswaran also claims that Markandaya's works are structurally similar to classical tragedies. See *A Study of Representative Indo-English Novelists* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1976, p.91. Joseph's assertion that the novel's action "is serious and of sufficient magnitude" (p.78) to warrant its consideration as a tragedy is the focus of a highly critical response from Jameela Bano. See 'The Nowhere Man: A Tragedy?' in R.K. Dhawan, op. cit., pp.187-201.

birth”.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Fred, like Iago, alights upon a convenient excuse to act out his hatred; but it is a justification that, as in Shakespeare’s play, is privately admitted to have little substance. *Sumitra’s Story*’s citation of *Macbeth* is less concerned with the play’s language, characterisation and dominant themes. It rests instead on the secondary issue of “the Banquo line” of hereditary kingship, as a metaphor for the inheritance of patriarchal cultural values by successive generations.⁴⁵

In each of these cases, the citation of a Shakespearean predecessor appears to be based largely on its congruity with the diasporic text, even though, in the case of *The Nowhere Man*, Iago’s relatively slick cunning also serves to highlight Fred’s lumpen buffoonery. There is little sense that transposition into a modern, immigrant narrative is intended in any way to destabilise the significance of the antecedent work. Thus, its citation is informed more by the reiterative processes of influence, than by the transformative dynamics of intertextuality.⁴⁶ It would also appear that the traces of Shakespearean precedent, especially in *The Nowhere Man*, are intended to confer on the novel the weight of archetypal relevance. To this extent, the text seems to be ‘guilty’ of Nelson’s charge that its immigrant narrative has to be stripped somewhat of its historical, cultural and social particularity, in order to function as a figure for a more widespread anomie.⁴⁷ However, the fact that Markandaya alludes to an anterior work that foregrounds the demonisation of a *black* man means that the circumstances of Srinivas’ persecution are not entirely overlooked but are, rather, incorporated into a

⁴⁴ Markandaya, op. cit., p.276. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*. Edition cited: J.H Walter (ed.), Oxford: Heinemann, 1976) Act 1.3, l.396.

⁴⁵ Op. cit., p.102.

⁴⁶ According to Clayton and Rothstein, the politics of influence (of which the imperious text is symptomatic) relegate intertextuality “under the slave names “context” and “allusion”, to an accessory role”, rather than an interrogative one. Op. cit., p.17.

⁴⁷ Emmanuel S. Nelson, ‘Troubled Journeys: Indian Immigrant Experience in Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man* and Bharati Mukherjee’s *Darkness*’ in Anna Rutherford (ed.), *From Commonwealth to Post-colonial* (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1992), p58.

grand narrative of race hatred. The transitional status of *Sumitra's Story* is evident in its more sparing and tenuous citation of literary precedent, which possibly symbolises the fragility of her characters' perceived connection with British society and history.

Continuity between first and second-phase intertextuality is evident in the possible influence of vernacular Subcontinental sources upon diasporic fiction. *A Wicked Old Woman's* spiral narrative may be read as an *homage* to the structure of the Indian oral tale, which Salman Rushdie has characterised as a form that “does not go from the beginning to the middle to the end of the story”, but instead “goes in great swoops...spirals, or in loops”.⁴⁸

Every so often [it] reiterates something that happened earlier...and then takes off again...[it] sometimes summarises itself and... frequently digresses off into something that the story-teller appears just to have thought of, then it comes back to the main thrust of the narrative.⁴⁹

Using the associative links of memory, overlapping characters and thematic proximity, the novel moves between periods, locations and characters in a fashion similar to that by which Rushdie characterises the oral narrative. Different aspects of the story are periodically revisited, enabling Randhawa to re-contextualise and expand upon each event or character.

The interrogative citation of the Hindu pantheon is a further respect in which inter-phase continuity is evident, as its female deities are still treated as emblems of the cultural hybridisation (not) experienced by diasporic women. As is the case in *Sumitra's Story*, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* evokes “Kali-centred female models” as the

⁴⁸ Cited in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, ‘Post-colonial Reconstructions: Literature, Meaning, Value’ in Dennis Walder (ed.), *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), p.300.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

archetypes of empowerment that South Asian women should be - but often are not - able to emulate.⁵⁰ The novel's trio of protagonists may also be read as an implicit reference to the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. However, where they are traditionally conceived of as male entities, Syal places their respective forces of creation, preservation and destruction firmly and emphatically in the hands of three women. She thereby challenges the active/passive, masculine/feminine dichotomies that underpin the characterisation of the cosmic powers in Hindu mythology. In this way, she begins to develop the second-phase citation of Subcontinental textual antecedents. However, it is arguable that developments in second-phase intertextuality are more clearly evident in the willingness of some of the chosen authors to *uncritically* assert the relevance of Hindu concepts. *Anita and Me* is the most instrumental in finding affirmative metaphors in Indian religious narratives. This is exemplified by the concept of reincarnation, which is not invoked in the negative context seen in *Sumitra's Story*, but as a positive emblem of the mutations of identity experienced by the South Asian migrant.

The development of intertextuality in second-phase writing is also marked by a more critical treatment of Western antecedents. In first-phase works, these tend to be cited to underscore their congruity with diasporic novelists' narratives. *Anita and Me*, however, evinces a more subversive, supplementary relationship of difference with its precedents.⁵¹ The novel's principal intertext - all but named in the narrative, but upon which there has been, as far as I am aware, no commentary - is Harper Lee's *To Kill a*

⁵⁰ Op. cit., p.209.

⁵¹ My use of 'supplementary' here draws upon Bhabha's characterisation of the term: "The supplementary strategy [as used in parliamentary procedure] suggests that adding 'to' need not 'add up' but may disturb the calculation". Homi K. Bhabha, 'Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation, op. cit., p.155.

Mockingbird.⁵² Rather than engaging with this text in the respectful manner that characterises Markandaya's allusions to Shakespeare, Meena ambivalently describes Lee's novel as "a book I had tried to read and found too dense, but which had recently won some big prize in America and was *supposedly* a great learning experience" (my emphasis).⁵³ Implicit in this quotation are a number of unasked questions that critique the nature of this learning experience, as well as the canonical status of the novel. Who, among its cast and readership learns? What do they learn? Why did they not know it before? Who has defined this learning experience as 'great'? As the answers are largely concerned with white characters, white readers and white critics, these tacit questions pose a cumulative challenge to the 'blancocentricity' of the novel, and the criteria by which it has been judged. This is the crux of *Anita and Me*'s retort to *Mockingbird*, as race provides the means by which Syal most emphatically distinguishes Meena Kumar from Scout Finch.⁵⁴ She implicitly reminds us that Lee's novel relates a story of anti-black racism from the point of view of a character who is not the direct object of such hatred. Meena, by contrast, is a witness to the mechanics of racism 'from the inside'. Through its difference from *Mockingbird*, Syal asserts the "learning experience" that her own text provides.

A concomitant of this more critical, second-phase treatment of a Western intertext is, arguably, the *absence* of obvious allusion to particular Western literary antecedents. In its place, some second-phase fiction appears to engage more with novels by other South Asian diasporic novelists. The intertextual relationship between works from within this *oeuvre* can take a number of forms. Randhawa's novels, for example,

⁵² Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Philadelphia; Lippincott; London: Heinemann, 1960).

⁵³ Op. cit., p.296.

⁵⁴ Both girls live in semi-rural environments. Furthermore, they are the daughters of highly-respected men who are, in some respect, outsiders to their environments - a fact that is both apparent to, and a source of contention with, their neighbours.

may be read as critical responses to *Sumitra's Story*; indeed, Randhawa has stated her awareness - and dislike - of Smith's novel.⁵⁵ The valorisation of the Asian runaway girl and Smith's conception of community as a closed, impermeable circle are rigorously interrogated in *A Wicked Old Woman*. As is the case with *Hari-jan*, the novel's emphasis on the rehabilitative powers of inherited tradition for women may also be read as a retort to Smith's demonisation of Indian culture from a Eurocentric feminist perspective. A further possible example of intertextuality within the South Asian diasporic women's *oeuvre* is provided by *Anita and Me*. Syal has stated, 'on the record', her belief that "unless you're writing something that resonates on a universal scale, it's not going to work".⁵⁶ As Bromley has observed, *Anita and Me* contains "a 'second', or shadow, narrative" concerning Tollington itself, and the demise of the identity that it has taken for granted.⁵⁷ The necessity thrust upon the Kumars as immigrants, to adapt to a new world, foreshadows the physical, social and cultural upheavals that Tollington's white inhabitants, seemingly secure in predictable lives, will soon have to embrace. In this respect, the novel takes an approach similar to that detected by Nelson in *The Nowhere Man*, of treating the immigrant narrative as a metaphor for a wider phenomenon that transcends ethnic particularity.⁵⁸

A number of second-phase writers have acknowledged the influence on their work of South Asian diasporic male authors, notably Hanif Kureishi. Srivastava has characterised *My Beautiful Launderette* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* as landmark texts

⁵⁵ This was stated in response to a question, asked during a reading at the Institute of English Studies, about the extent to which Randhawa 'writes back' to other diasporic writers. Although she expressed a wariness of being excessively influenced by others' writings, Randhawa admitted to disliking Smith's representation of Asian women as victims.

⁵⁶ James Rampton, 'No more Mrs. Patel for Meera' in *The Eye: The Independent*, 12th April 1997, p.45.

⁵⁷ Op. cit., p.148.

⁵⁸ Nelson, 'Troubled Journeys: Indian Immigrant Experience in Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Darkness*' in Anna Rutherford (ed.), *From Commonwealth to Post-colonial* (Mundelstrup: Dangaroo Press, 1992), p.58.

“in terms of making Asian Britain available as a subject to write about”.⁵⁹ Her works attest to Kureishi’s impact in their treatments of issues and relationships in ways that do not necessarily prioritise the protagonist’s ethnicity as the central ‘event’.⁶⁰ In common with *The Buddha of Suburbia*, both of the novels chosen from Srivastava’s *oeuvre* evince a strong concern with the ethics of artistic production, and an intimate familiarity with the geography of London.⁶¹ The obvious difference is that Srivastava places women at the centre of her narratives, but the ‘source’ to which she is responding is open to question. It is possible that she intends to supplement Kureishi’s prioritisation of the diasporic male by foregrounding the experiences of diasporic women - something that Syal has claimed she tried to do with *Anita and Me*.⁶² It is also conceivable that, in creating characters for whom ‘the clash of cultures’ is not a central concern, Srivastava is enabled by Kureishi’s influence to diverge from other (women’s) representations of diasporisation and femininity, which have tended to focus almost entirely on the struggles generated by the conflicting demands of gender and race.

The most innovative development in second-phase intertextuality is the introduction of the visual intertext. Again, a highly critical treatment of Western texts is evident. The prologue of *Anita and Me* utilises the unsettling, critical power of mimicry in its evocation of *Pathe* newsreel-style images of ‘primitive’ immigrants landing gratefully on British shores - precisely the images that, as discussed in Chapter 5, bear

⁵⁹ Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Launderette and The Rainbow Sign* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985); *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990); Moore-Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p.191.

⁶⁰ This tendency is clearly evident in Kureishi’s *Intimacy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), as well as in a number of the short stories in *Love in a Blue Time* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997) and *Midnight All Day* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999).

⁶¹ Particular narrative echoes, such as the parties towards the close of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Looking for Maya*, at which the respective protagonists celebrate career breakthroughs, underscore the similarity between the novels.

⁶² Moore-Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p.192.

little relationship to the elegant, erudite Kumars.⁶³ Meena's narration is punctuated by interjections - "I think", "probably" - that underscore her awareness of the selection at work in supposedly objective documents of immigrant arrivals, and how it supports neo-colonial conceptions of the colonised peoples inherent inferiority.⁶⁴ There is a distinct ambiguity about the manner in which Meena invites her reader to collude in acknowledgement of 'the immigrant narrative'. "You know" is not simply used as a marker of intimacy with an audience aware of how immigrant arrivals have been stereotyped.⁶⁵ The phrase also invites an admission of culpability from those who actively participate in the perpetuation of such narratives for their own ends: the interviewers and "middle-class white boys" that Syal also castigates in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*.⁶⁶

However, the most notable non-literary intertexts in second-phase works are 'Bollywood' movies, the highly formulaic products of the Bombay film industry that are typically punctuated by numerous song-and-dance routines.⁶⁷ Some second-phase novels satirically allude to the representation of different social groups in these works, but also suggest that these stock depictions may have some influence on actual conduct. In *The Red Box*, Mumtaz's parody of the Indian accent also suggests how the machismo of the typical leading man filters down into the actuality of male conduct: "Auddarling, lett uss gau tto the partty andd meett aul the heerroes!"⁶⁸ In *Anita and Me*, Syal evokes the conventions of Bollywood characterisation to satirise the rather

⁶³ See Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man', op. cit., p.86 for an explanation of the relationship between mimicry and mockery.

⁶⁴ Op. cit., p.9.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See Ganti, op. cit., pp.139-144.

⁶⁸ Op. cit., p.53.

formulaic manner in which her parents' friends express their outrage at Meena's unseemly conduct.

In a split second, my beaming admirers had become parodies of Hindi film villains, with flared nostrils, bulging eyes and quivering, outraged eyebrows. They only needed twirling moustaches and pot bellies straining at a bullet laden belt to complete the sense of overwhelming menace that now surrounded me.⁶⁹

The intertextual relationship with popular Indian film is also evident in second-phase fiction's use of the narrative conventions of Bollywood romance. The many obstacles that beset the relationship between Suresh and Harjinder (*H-J*) are evocative of highly popular plotlines within this genre. Often, a couple's relationship is initially antagonistic before blossoming into romance. Alternatively, it is complicated by factors such as social convention, family feuds, or the presence of an existing partner. Furthermore, the hyperbolic fashion in which the embraces in *Hari-jan* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* are described evokes the Bollywood aesthetic that, in deference to Subcontinental social inhibitions, allows sexuality to be the object of allusion but not explicit depiction. Its influence can be detected in Randhawa's description of Harjinder and Suresh

waltzing in each other's arms, looking up at a moon spinning faster and

⁶⁹ Op. cit., p.115. Innes claims that Syal "play[s] satirically and ironically with the stereotyped identities within and against which those of Asian and African descent in Britain find themselves living" (op. cit., p.238). It is a mark of Syal's self-reflexivity - and that of other second phase writers - that this satirical scope extends far enough to encompass the stereotypes that Asians impose upon themselves. Innes, op. cit., p.238. Gurinder Chadha's 1993 film version of Syal's *Bhaji on the Beach* incorporates some typical Bollywood elements into an otherwise (Western) realist narrative. These are most notably present in the scenes where Asha ruminates on her role as a wife and mother, and the constraints it imposes.

faster above [them], the dizzying dark dissolving everything between [them], feelings feelings [they'd] never felt before, kisses on kisses, a universe of fireworks sparking.⁷⁰

In *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* as well, Syal parodies the sexualised imagery of the genre in her evocation of “crashing waves, trains going through tunnels, fountains spurting into life, violins, anything”, as the backdrop to Sunita and Krishan’s kiss.⁷¹

These intertextual citations lack the barbed criticism directed at the newsreel footage in *Anita and Me*. In its place is an affectionately parodic acknowledgement of a genre whose *absence* of objectivity and restraint is clear.

Form and hybridity: interrogating the *bildungsroman*

This section of the chapter examines a topic already discussed through one particular generic focus. It is concerned with the relationship between South Asian diasporic women’s writing and the conventions of the *bildungsroman*, as one example of the intertextual hybridisation of form. Although Asian British fiction covers a number of different genres, I have selected this one as the most illuminating, as it is a form with which the majority of the selected works choose to engage. Henry and Mary Garland define the *bildungsroman* as “a novel in which the chief character, after a number of false starts, is led to follow the right path and to develop into a mature and well-balanced man”.⁷² Furthermore, it is a form in which “the element of self-realization is integrated in the author’s presentation of society”.⁷³ Schoene-Harwood characterises the *bildungsroman* as an account of the protagonist’s development “from an initial

⁷⁰ Op. cit., p.134.

⁷¹ Op. cit., p.30. Lest the influence escape us, the dust jacket for *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* mimics the kinds of stylised image and saturated colour typical of Bollywood promotional hoardings.

⁷² Henry & Mary Garland, *Oxford Companion to German Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1976), p.83.

⁷³ Ibid.

position of social ostracism to one of perfect societal integration”.⁷⁴ As Chris Baldick defines it, the classic *bildungsroman* is less gender-specific, and “follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, *through* a troubled quest for identity” (my emphasis).⁷⁵

There are several aspects to these descriptions that have implications for the ways in which diasporic writing is able to engage with the *bildungsroman*. Garland and Schoene-Harwood suggest that whatever concessions are made come largely from the protagonists, who must amend their ways to achieve the social integration that eludes them for much of the narrative. Tacitly, they are afflicted by character deficiencies; and only once these have been rectified does the reconciliation of protagonist with society become possible. Baldick’s definition implies that the central character’s troubled journey comes to an end; and all tacitly suggest that (s)he arrives at a state of rest. Of the selected first-phase works, only *Nectar in a Sieve* comes close to delineating a protagonist’s social integration, as Rukmani is reconciled with a world that has been, for much of the narrative, a source of discomfort and trial. Even then, the novel arguably diverges from the *bildungsroman* model according to which the central character changes, but society implicitly remains static, waiting for the narrative’s principal actor to ‘catch up’. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, the rural community experiences considerable upheaval, and it is to the unavoidable fact of *social change*, rather than stasis, that Rukmani must adapt. So, even though Markandaya’s novel approximates the *bildungsroman* in certain respects, it is still evident that the form has a limited degree of purchase in this example of first-phase fiction.

⁷⁴ Op. cit., p.159.

⁷⁵ Chris Baldick, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p27.

Schoene-Harwood claims that the *bildungsroman*'s "narrative inevitability of being eventually granted conclusive social integration is irreparably punctured by the post-colonial experience of cultural dislocation".⁷⁶ Cultural dislocation is, indeed, germane to the incompatibility of the *bildungsroman* model with first-phase fiction in a number of ways. However, where Schoene-Harwood characterises this as a *post-colonial* condition, the selected 'homeland' works suggest that it is a phenomenon that applies equally in the colonial context, especially when the protagonists are of the subject peoples. Many of the changes to Rukmani's village are consequences of imperial influence, and it is the advent of the foreign that effects her metaphorical and actual dislocation from her familiar environment. The same is true, to a degree, of *The Nowhere Man*. The novel's depiction of colonialism underscores the extent to which it is orientated towards disengaging the natives' sense of connection to their own country. Furthermore, it is the foreclosure of Srinivas' employment opportunities by the governing powers that forces him to dislocate himself from his 'homeland' and resettle elsewhere. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* too articulates concerns about the disjunctive effects of the imperial presence; but by also focusing on the collaboration of the *taluqdars*, and on the deficiencies of the nationalist opposition, Hosain multiplies the disengagement of her protagonist from her society. As Burton observes, the novel cannot be classed as a *bildungsroman* because it is a document of degeneration, not of growth.⁷⁷

The importance of *post-colonial* dislocation to the first-phase interrogation of the *bildungsroman* is more evident in the two selected first-phase texts set in Britain. Sumitra (*SS*), like Srinivas (*TNM*), undergoes a physical dislocation, but at the hands of

⁷⁶ Op. cit., p.159.

⁷⁷ Op. cit., p.107.

a post-colonial regime. Furthermore, the protagonists of these novels undergo metaphorical dislocations through their exposure to new cultural influences that undermine their investment in the norms of their inherited culture. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, the completeness of full arrival is withheld from Srinivas and Sumitra. The assumption of both protagonists is that a state of social integration is possible; and, aspiring to this condition, they assimilate many of the ways of their 'hosts' to this end. It is, however, withheld by the numerous white Britons who refuse to accept them as full, legitimate members of society because of their discernible 'otherness'. Srinivas' situation is exacerbated by the fact that, on occasion, his Indianness reasserts itself when he is faced with conduct that is deemed normal within the adopted country, but to which he cannot truly acclimatise himself. This is especially evident in situations where cruelty towards the weak, often represented by the mistreatment of animals, is foregrounded; for the spilling of blood is anathema to the ritual purity of the Brahmin.⁷⁸

[U]nmindful of mutilation, force-feeding, deprivation, the miseries of farm, market and slaughterhouse; or persuading themselves that animal flesh did not feel, which was the worst horror of all...they do not see it, they do not think about this side of things...[a]s she does not, he told himself, because, of course, she is one of them. It saddened him a little to think like this, since they were after all so close, in so many ways.⁷⁹

A possible further reason why the *bildungsroman* has little relevance to first-phase fiction is the role of gender in determining the ease with which its - mainly

⁷⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the significance of animals in *The Nowhere Man*, see Joseph, op. cit., pp.194-195; Prasad (ed.), op. cit., p.xxiv; Inamdar, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Op. cit., p.63.

female - protagonists are able to accept the *mores* of a given cultural environment. Gender is a significant factor in Laila's estrangement from her family in *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. The eclecticism of her education has introduced her to cultural perspectives that challenge the inherited social dictates by which she is expected to abide. In particular, the elevation of the individual will in much of the Western literature to which she is exposed at school undermines Laila's faith in a social ethos that constructs a woman's obedience to the wishes of others as her paramount duty. For this reason, hers is a journey towards maturity, but one that entails a growing out of, rather than into, her society. Other first phase narratives also centralise the disjunctive effects of gender. *Sumitra's Story*, in common with *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, portrays its young protagonist's difficulties with the gendered *mores* espoused by her parents and the majority of their diasporic compatriot community. Because it threatens to estrange her from 'her' people, this struggle renders the possibility of rejection by the 'hosts' all the more momentous. The search for a space that will accommodate the marginal subject - a characteristic, according to Bromley, of the diasporic interrogation of the *bildungsroman* - is doubled in the narratives of diasporic women.⁸⁰

In second-phase writing, the *bildungsroman* remains of limited relevance for some of the same reasons. The sense of divided selfhood that, in first-phase writing prevents the protagonist from feeling fully integrated into the native and the adopted societies persists into works from the second phase. It is especially marked in *Amritvela*, in which Meera's search for complete, unconditional belonging takes her from Britain - where she feels marginal and irrelevant - to India, the country of her birth. Her journey does not yield the expected results. Believing herself too Indian to be accepted as British, Meera also discovers, as discussed in Chapter 3, that she is too British to be

⁸⁰ Op. cit., p.115.

Indian in the way that would be congruent with the conduct of most in her family.

Meera's predicament reflects that of many second-phase characters who do not possess a sufficiently unitary identity to achieve the complete social integration eventually attained by the typical *bildungsroman* protagonist.

However, a number of developments emerge from the engagement of second-phase fiction with the conventions of the *bildungsroman*. The assumption that the society into which the protagonist seeks integration is itself unchanging is interrogated in *Anita and Me*, which reiterates, in a British setting, many of the issues that are discussed in *Nectar in a Sieve*'s first-phase, 'homeland' narrative. However, the consequences of this challenge are not confined to the novel's diasporic protagonists, but also extend to the inhabitants of Tollington. The place, as the villagers have come to know it, is on the verge of demise. With change not only looming on the horizon, but also taking place, unnoticed, in their midst, its inhabitants' insistence on clinging to a static vision of their environment ill-prepares them for a world that is, in fact, dynamic. Syal thus locates the *bildungsroman*'s problematic status in the gap between theory and actuality: that is to say, between the stable nature of its conception of society, and the actuality of porous social and cultural boundaries.

The importance of gender to the interrogation of the *bildungsroman* continues in the works of the second phase; but other factors, such as class and generation inflect the conditions of social dislocation in the diaspora. Gender, race, class and age are all implicated in Kuli's incomplete social integration in *A Wicked Old Woman*. The novel exemplifies one of the principal developments in the second-phase engagement with the *bildungsroman*: its greater tendency to subvert the form's conception of identity as a

state of fullness and singularity. Randhawa's vision of partial integration is powerfully (and seminally) evoked through a peripatetic narrative structure that emphasises the piecemeal nature of experience, knowledge and belonging. Furthermore, it underscores the fragmented nature of the self: "*half fact, half fiction, half something, half nothing, half a story, half a truth, half of this person and half of the other*" (my emphasis).⁸¹ In place of a "single, unitary, sharply defined portrait", more fitting to the *bildungsroman* convention, *A Wicked Old Woman* offers an altogether more postmodern depiction of its protagonist, exemplifying what Calvin O. Schrag describes as "a multiplicity of profiles and perspectives through which the human self moves and is able to come into view".⁸² Aspects of Randhawa's language reinforce the vision suggested by the novel's form. The absence of personal pronouns in a number of Kuli's recollections reflects the untenability of a sure and singular sense of 'I-ness'. Similarly her use of the present and/or continuous tense conveys the impression of characters still in process, thus evading the finality of completeness presupposed by the *bildungsroman*.

The conditions in which Randhawa's protagonist comes into view illuminate a further development in the second-phase subversion of the *bildungsroman*. Where first-phase texts challenge the tacit supposition that society remains stable, second-phase writing also takes issue with the notion that society is itself a singular entity. Kuli's journey through various ethnic, political and cultural environments highlights the fallacy of its customarily unitary conception, and emphasises that British society actually consists of numerous subcultures whose identities conjoin at some points and

⁸¹ Op. cit., p.42.

⁸² Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity*, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.1.

are disjunctive at others.⁸³ *Amritvela* also deconstructs the notion of a stable, singular society, but with regard to the Subcontinental 'homeland'. The gradual dismantling of Meera's imaginary 'homeland' forces her to question her assumption (and, perhaps, that of some of the novel's readership) that the country is a homogenous environment, consistent with her memories of the place.

“I feel that it's closed its doors on me. When I was a child and even later...when I would come to India, it was like magic...”

Dr. Shankar listens...

“Don't worry, Meeru. The promise and idealism you remember - it's all there and can be found – there are many Indias, you know!...There's sham and show as you say, but much else as well...”⁸⁴

Furthermore, although its depiction is replete with the (stereotypically) exotic details of heat, noise, bustle and colour, Jenny Fraser observes that the country is also portrayed as possessing a less obviously 'Indian', more anonymously 'international' character.⁸⁵ The cultural authenticity, untouched by Western hands, that Meera assumes the country possesses proves as elusive as the complete belonging she craves, but is ultimately glad not to find.

Second-phase fiction is also developmental in its treatment of social integration, which is depicted as a multiple phenomenon. *Looking for Maya* and *Transmission* insist on the feasibility of their protagonists finding simultaneous acceptance into a range of societies - not, as the *bildungsroman* form suggests, incorporation into one

⁸³ The conception of society that informs the *bildungsroman* is similar to Bhabha's characterisation of the "pedagogical" formation of the nation. "The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture" by a "continuist, accumulative temporality". 'Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation', op. cit., p.145.

⁸⁴ Op. cit., p.153.

⁸⁵ Jenny Fraser, review of *Amritvela*, *Wasafiri*, 9, 1988, p.37 See also Ralph Crane, op. cit., p.9.

environment. Furthermore, in first-phase writing, the emphasis falls more heavily upon how society, native and adopted, finds the protagonist to be deficient in some way. Later works accord a greater degree of agency to their characters to decide the extent to which they wish to integrate themselves into any *milieu*, especially if its dominant values are not entirely congruent with their own. Complete membership of a single society is, in a number of second-phase novels, *voluntarily* replaced by partial membership of several *milieux*, as has been discussed in Chapter 3's consideration of multiple arrivals. Indeed, because of this degree of volition, the works in question respond to the *bildungsroman* premise by actively celebrating their protagonists' incomplete sense of social integration. This condition is, perhaps, best represented in *Amritvela*, in which the discarding of the literary model is depicted symbolically. Meera's diary represents the *bildungsroman* ideal, and its entries, logged during her stay in India, chart her dissatisfaction that she does not possess the full sense of social incorporation she craves. However, by the end of the novel, Meera is able to ask for the diary be thrown into the Ganges - an act associated with the ritual disposal of corpses. The volume that has hitherto pathologised Meera's lack of belonging no longer has any value for her; and, in 'laying it to rest', she signals the 'death' of a fundamental tenet of the *bildungsroman*. Thus, one way in which the centrifugal force of intertextuality is exemplified is through the engagement of diasporic writers with a literary model whose emphasis on the attainment of stability is itself destabilised.

Conclusion

The transition from one phase of South Asian diasporic women's writing to the next is marked by the changing character of its aesthetic hybridity - a development that resonates with the evolving status of the Asian British population. First-phase writing evinces the most obviously 'intentional' linguistic hybridity, in contexts informed by issues of race or gender. It is most evident in works that, by marking them out typographically, refuse to assimilate any words of Indic provenance, thereby utilising them in conscious opposition to the texts' principal medium of English. The seeming incompatibility of inherited and adopted values is emphasised by this strategy, as is the belief of the 'host' in the inherently alien character of the immigrant. Even the apparently 'organic' hybridity that typifies the multilingualism of works set in the 'homeland' may serve a purpose as political as that evident in more obviously 'intentional' deployments of multiple languages. The ironic contrast drawn in *The Nowhere Man* between the fusion of languages and the separation of peoples exemplifies how 'organic' and 'intentional' linguistic hybridity may not always be easily separable.

The 'intentional' hybridity of language is emphasised most strongly in *Sumitra's Story*, which reinforces the conflictual character of its multilingualism in several ways. The high degree of selection Smith exercises in choosing the words to be rendered in Indic languages is fundamental to one of the novel's tactics. By focusing primarily on domestic imagery that is most frequently associated with women, Smith foregrounds the role of gender in precipitating the impasse between Sumitra and her parents. The deployment of linguistic tropes also lays considerable emphasis on the antagonistic nature of relationships within the family, as well as those between the family and the

'host' society. The strategies adopted by first-phase texts in addressing the reader unfamiliar with the Subcontinental languages vary. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* uses a glossary to 'welcome' its linguistically and/or culturally unfamiliar audience. Smith's text, like the majority of first-phase works, is less acquiescent: by not providing any form of translation, it forces the reader to do the work of familiarisation.

The 'intentional' character of first-phase linguistic hybridity continues into the second phase to some extent. *Anita and Me*, like *Sumitra's Story*, marks the dissonance between 'homeland' and 'host' values and practices by maintaining a typographic distinction between English and 'other' languages. However, *Amritvela*, in common with *The Nowhere Man*, does not, instead using Subcontinental languages in Subcontinental settings where they need not be marked out as foreign. The inclusion of the glossary also seems, in a number of cases, to be underpinned by an 'intentional' rationale that is congruent with its presence in first-phase texts. Where one is not provided, in texts such as *A Wicked Old Woman* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, part of the intention seems to be to throw the onus of discovery upon the reader.

Developments in second-phase multilingualism seemingly testify to a shift towards a more 'organic' conception of linguistic and cultural hybridity. Texts in which Indic words are indistinguishable from English often appear, in the second phase, to be orientated towards 'organically' hybrid ends. The presence of unmarked Subcontinental vocabulary in contexts that are not of the 'homeland' asserts the necessity of incorporating hitherto alien elements into the new environment of the diaspora. This is the condition that Aitchison characterises as most beneficial for the linguistic 'gene pool', being conducive to the survival of languages and, by extension, cultures. The

evolving linguistic character of South Asian diasporic women's writing reflects the growing assertiveness of the Asian British communities. Where first phase texts, through their 'intentionality', repeatedly address the exclusion of Asian immigrants from the fold of Britishness, their second phase, seemingly 'organic' successors vociferously demand inclusion. Again, the difficulty of distinguishing clearly between 'organic' and 'intentional' linguistic hybridity is underscored; for while many later works underscore their aspiration to a state of syncretic hybridity, this is underpinned by a consciousness that they are *working towards* this condition. In narratives focusing on teenaged protagonists who have achieved some degree of social incorporation, a proportion of Indic terms are typographically unmarked, while the rest remain visibly different - again symbolising that the characters are part of the way into the journey towards 'organic' integration.

The second-phase tendency towards an apparently 'organic' linguistic hybridity is also evident in the figurative uses of multilingualism. The foreign language is often represented in first-phase fiction as a source of linguistic corruption, or as impossible to learn, thereby symbolising the undesirability or difficulty of cultural hybridisation. In *Amritvela*, however, a greater emphasis is placed upon the proximity of supposedly distant languages, to underscore a vision that is the opposite of that propounded by the older Patels in *Sumitra's Story*. The significance of this trope is reflected in *Amritvela's* provision of a glossary. It is consistent with the novel's endorsement of learning about, and accepting, that which seems foreign and, thus, with its aspiration towards a more genuinely 'organic' vision of hybridity. However, in other second-phase novels, the *absence* of a glossary works towards similar ends; for, by not furnishing translations of Indic words, works such as *A Wicked Old Woman* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*

reinforce their refusal to represent these as foreign to the diasporic narrative. In second-phase texts with younger protagonists, the provision of translation implicitly testifies to a more assimilatory dynamic. The inclusion of the glossary, in these cases, often functions as a tacit acknowledgement that British-born children of first-generation immigrants may have a rather tenuous connection with the Subcontinent, more readily perceiving their 'home' culture to be that of the diaspora. *Anita and Me*'s frequently explanatory style of narration makes a statement - indeed, a concession - similar to that implied by the provision of translated vocabulary in *The Red Box* and *Hari-jan*.

To what extent is the character of hybridity, evident in the multilingualism of South Asian diasporic women's writing, also apparent in the corpus' intertextuality? In first-phase writing, it does not appear to be the case that particular Western and Eastern intertexts are placed in conflictual, 'intentional' relationships with *each other*, as is the case with linguistic hybridity. Rather, diasporic narratives seem to see themselves in 'intentional' opposition to *both* Eastern and some Western intertexts, thereby symbolising the 'unhoused' state that afflicts their central characters. Gender and race again appear to be key factors in the interrogation of antecedent works. Subcontinental religious sources are usually cited in contexts that question the extent to which they empower the diasporic subject - a tendency that, in the case of *Sumitra's Story*, appears to be underpinned by the protagonist's discomfort with the conceptions of womanhood that prevail in her inherited culture. The relevance of the *bildungsroman* form to South Asian diasporic women's writing is also called into question, not only by issues of race, but also of gender, militating against the ability of the female protagonist to feel at ease in what is, theoretically, her 'home' environment. The possibility that the protagonist changes in accordance with dominant *mores* yet remains socially unintegrated is an

outcome incompatible with the *bildungsroman* model, but one that is frequently realised in diasporic narratives that highlight the exclusionary practices of racism in the metropolis.

Despite the impression this creates, that diasporic narratives challenge the premises of Eastern and Western intertexts equally, there is one respect in which this does not hold true. The Shakespearean precedents that are cited during this period of diasporic fiction tend to be referenced in the respectful manner that Clayton and Rothstein claim is typical of influence rather than intertextuality.⁸⁶ This ‘merging’ of thematic interests avoids the consciously oppositional, interrogative dynamics of ‘intentionality’, and opts instead for conveying the impression of a more ‘organic’ fusion of interests, based on concordance rather than challenge. However, it is arguable that the extent to which diasporic women authors reiterate the concerns of specific works from the English literary canon is less symptomatic of an engagement *between* antecedent and successor, than of the “imperious” exertion of power by the former over the latter.⁸⁷

Second-phase authors appear to be less easily cowed by the English canon, and readier to carve out a niche for themselves within this corpus that does not depend on respecting the anterior text’s significance in its entirety. The critical treatment to which *Anita and Me* subjects *To Kill A Mockingbird* is extended to visual intertexts of Western provenance, whose racial biases are ‘intentionally’ critiqued by the non-whiteness of the South Asian diasporic narrator. However, where the *bildungsroman* is concerned, second-phase fiction tends not to simply hold the genre up to scrutiny. It also offers an

⁸⁶ Op. cit., p.17.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

alternative vision that, in addition to challenging the form, also reconstructs it in an act of partial rehabilitation. The crux of this process is the *bildungsroman*'s conventional emphasis on singularity, be it of society's or the protagonist's identity. While pluralising both of these supposedly unitary entities through their inflection by factors such as race and gender, South Asian diasporic women's texts such as *A Wicked Old Woman*, *Amritvela* and *Looking for Maya* retain the idea that social integration is a desirable outcome.

However, they represent it as an incomplete state, and boldly assert its value as a partial condition, thereby signifying the greater confidence with which second-phase writing engages with the Western canon. This is also evident in the *absence* of obvious Western intertexts, and in the corpus' self-referential citation. The evidence of influence from within the South Asian diasporic *oeuvre* suggests that, for Asian British writers, literary models may be best sought amongst those who have shared something of their particular experience. Moreover, it indicates a self-consciousness among diasporic writers that they are not only individual authors, but are also (perceived as) part of a distinctive literary corpus with its own, evolving tradition. This awareness has been advanced by the establishment of bodies such as the Asian Women Writers' Collective, whose manifesto is at once general and particular in focus.⁸⁸

A similar dynamic of challenge and endorsement is evident in the second-phase deployment of Eastern intertexts, both literary and visual. The concepts that are the focus of critical attention, especially from gendered perspectives, remain so into the

⁸⁸ The avowed aim of the Asian Women Writers' Collective is to "explore our common identities as Asian women and as black women, but without making invisible the differences in our experiences and cultures". Rukhsana Ahmad & Rahila Gupta, foreword to *Flaming Spirit* (London: Virago, 1994), p.vii. See also C.L. Innes, *op. cit.*, pp.237-238.

second phase. However, it is also the case that some - the notion of reincarnation being a case in point - are subjected to a more affirmative treatment in later texts. Indian narrative forms also find a new relevance in second-phase writing: the conventions of Bollywood romance are referenced in *Hari-jan* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha He Hee*, while the traditional structure of the oral tale becomes the conduit of *A Wicked Old Woman's* post-modern vision of the self.⁸⁹ The valorisation of non-linear narratives has been criticised by Chaudhuri as “surprisingly old-fashioned and mimetic: Indian life is plural, garrulous, rambling, lacking a fixed centre, and the Indian novel must be the same”.⁹⁰ However, as deployed by Randhawa, it is less concerned with the pejorative, chaotic connotations against which Chaudhuri’s characterisation cautions. Rather, in keeping with the second-phase reworking of the *bildungsroman*, it accords more with bell hooks’ assertion that “postmodern culture, with its decentred subject, can be the space where ties are severed, or it can provide the occasion for new and varied forms of bonding”.⁹¹ This fusion of Eastern form and Western philosophical conceit exemplifies the state of ‘organic’ hybridity towards which much of the *oeuvre* aspires.

⁸⁹ The implications of the addition of popular film to the repertoire of source materials are several. Arguably, it is reflective of the changes that the subcontinental migrations of the 1950s onwards have wrought on the overall composition of the South Asian diaspora in Britain. The chain-sponsorship mechanisms of this period enabled greater quantities of immigrants from the agricultural and unskilled classes to enter Britain, a number of them suffering from the low literacy rates that still prevail in rural parts of the subcontinent. For the British offspring of these immigrants, the cultural texts to which their parents have introduced them may well have included films as much as (if not more than) written works. The literary intertextuality of Hosain three decades ago does not necessarily have the same resonance for a contemporary readership, whose consumption of Indian popular culture is more likely to be cinematic in nature.

⁹⁰ Op. cit., p.xxv.

⁹¹ bell hooks, ‘Postmodern Blackness’ in Williams & Chrisman (eds.) op. cit., p.427.

Conclusion

Every preceding chapter, whether thematic or aesthetic in focus, is subtextually concerned with questions of cultural hybridity. For this reason, I devote the concluding chapter of this dissertation to examining this important idea: its provenance, its various manifestations, and some of the unaccounted-for spaces within its conception that Asian British women's fiction helps to illuminate. 'Hybridity' as a term was initially used in biological contexts, where it described the cross-breeding of plants or animals to create 'third' species. Thereafter applied to the mixing of races, cultures and languages, it has more often than not been utilised as a pejorative term, synonymous with sterility, or with the supposedly aberrant state of incompleteness that comes from being neither one, nor the other.¹ J.H. Taylor's 1976 study of Asian youths in Tyneside, *The Half-Way Generation*, evokes in cultural terms the negative characterisation of racial hybridity as the state of being 'half-bred'. This connotation is congruent with the volume's depiction of a generation suffering from its inability to find a comfortable location within or between the boundaries of its various cultural *milieux*. Why Taylor's subjects find themselves in this position, and the implications of their state for the conceptualisation of hybridity is a matter to which I will turn shortly.²

Taylor's pessimistic vision of inter-cultural suspension resonates with Salman Rushdie's assertion that hybridity sometimes takes the form of being "caught between two stools" - a potentially disabling condition that arises from being culturally 'unhoused'.³ Although some critics continue to be sceptical about the possibility of fully reclaiming a term with such a long history of negative association, hybridity has, in more recent times, undergone a positive and enabling revision. As Papastergiadis

¹ Young, op. cit., pp.1-28.

² This is a view that, in some examples of South Asian diasporic women's fiction, prevails in both the inherited culture of the 'homeland', and the adopted culture of the country of settlement.

³ Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands', op. cit., p.15.

observes, “the conventional value of the hybrid is always positioned in relation to the value of purity”; and purity - whether of ‘blood’, culture or language - is an ideal that is now, arguably, somewhat less tenacious than it has been.⁴ Homi Bhabha - perhaps the most influential, and certainly one of the most frequently quoted theorists of cultural hybridity - uses the term to explicate the potential productivity of being positioned between cultures, in what he names (in an allusion to the idea of the third species?) the “third space”.⁵ Being on or outside the cultural ‘perimeter fence’, it is a position from which one can interrogate more critically the assumptions upon which ‘insiderness’ is based.

The principal context in which Bhabha elaborates this concept is the colonial encounter in which, he claims, the imbalanced relationship between the rulers and the ruled can be brought towards a state of greater equilibrium by the colonised peoples exercising the interrogative power of cultural hybridity.⁶ In Bhabha’s model, the object of this hybridising intent is colonial discourse itself, the underlying assumptions of which are destabilised when viewed through ‘different’ eyes. For example, the idea that the imperial race possesses a distinct identity is generated by the colonisers’ insistence upon the absolute ‘otherness’ of the colonised peoples. The repetition of this assertion by the rulers is intended to reinforce the authoritative status of these discursive categories of difference. But, from a less compliant, more marginal position - such as that of the ruled people - the same insistence can be seen as symptomatic of the ruler’s

⁴ Papstergiadis cites Jean Fisher’s assertion that ‘hybridity’ is a concept too embedded in the discourse of biological purity and evolutionary hierarchies to be entirely free of these connotations. *Op. cit.*, p.258. See also ‘Global Proposals: A Conversation with Gilane Tawadros’: “Hybridity will always carry with it a kind of dystopian vision of plurality, which is chaotic and incoherent.” *Ibid.*, p.139. Nikos Papstergiadis, ‘Tracing Hybridity in Theory’ in Werbner & Modood (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.259. However, numerous recent examples of ‘ethnic cleansing’ attest to the continuing currency of cultural purity in emergent states.

⁵ ‘The Commitment to Theory’, *op. cit.*, pp.36-39.

⁶ Werbner is especially attentive to Aijaz Ahmed’s critique of (Bhabhian) hybridity as an ultimately ineffective form of oppositional politics. See ‘Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity’ in Werbner & Modood, *op. cit.*, p.21.

anxiety, that the difference upon which his superiority and right to govern rests may not be as complete and self-evident as he suggests. The “arrested, fixated form of representation” that is the stereotype is one area in which colonialism’s tendency towards discursive reiteration can be seen to destabilise its apparent confidence in its own assertions.⁷

The ability of the marginal viewpoint to effect such a disruption is due to the breach created in supposedly self-contained categories of identity by the ambivalence of colonial subjecthood. The ruler’s claim to superiority is based on the distance between his culture and that of the subjugated people. But the fact that colonial superiority *depends* on its ‘other’ to endow it with a distinctive character means that the relationship between ruler and ruled is as much one of proximity as it is of distance. The rejected ‘other’ is, in this respect, *part of* the colonial self. It is this frictional dynamic of simultaneous negation and affirmation that erodes the supposedly unimpeachable boundary on which notions of absolute cultural difference depend, and that lays colonial discourse open to the hybridising interventions of the colonised population.

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridisation, rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention.⁸

⁷ Bhabha, *op. cit.*, p.75

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.112.

Bhabha's re-conception of hybridity is, then, a hybridising act in itself. By examining it through 'other' eyes, the historically-dominant, negative connotations of sterility are interrogatively supplemented by another vision that emphasises productivity. Bhabha's version of hybridity stands in the gap between the 'two stools' model and Rushdie's more positively syncretic characterisation of cultural hybridity as "the great possibility that mass migration gives the world...impurity, intermingling...mongrelization...change by fusion, change by conjoining".⁹ The former implies that the boundaries around cultures remain intact and exclusive: one is either inside or outside. Mongrelization, however, indicates that these boundaries have been breached sufficiently that some kind of cultural inter-penetration is possible; and for this breakthrough to be possible, the purported fixity of the 'perimeter fence' must first have been destabilised.

In attempting to describe its negotiation of new cultural identities, several sociologists of the South Asian diaspora in Britain echo the Bhabian conception of hybridity. Bhachu, for example, writes of "British-Asian patterns of interaction, which will amalgamate both the traditional and the modern", thereby suggesting the erosion of concepts such as 'past' and 'future' that Bhabha's hybridity renders possible.¹⁰ Jackson and Nesbitt, in a declared rejoinder to Taylor's pessimistic view of a "half-way generation", insist that many of the Indian British children they have studied attest to the productivity of a "conversation between different world views", and display "multiple cultural competences".¹¹ Inasmuch as it addresses and purportedly enables the ongoing creation of new cultural identities, Bhabha's conception of hybridity would seem to be of considerable relevance to the ambit of South Asian diasporic women's

⁹ Salman Rushdie, 'In Good Faith', op. cit., p.394.

¹⁰ Op. cit., p.169.

¹¹ Op. cit., p.175.

writing. However, comparing the theoretical model of hybridity with the lived experiences of real and fictional protagonists, it is also possible that diasporic women's fiction, along with 'factual' diaspora history, illuminates some of the shortcomings that other critics have detected in Bhabha's model.

Perhaps the first relevant area of contention concerns the applicability of Bhabha's colonial scenario to other contexts, such as diasporas. By insisting on the capacity of minority groups to open up to question the discourse of nationhood, Bhabha suggests that diasporic hybridity can be theorised in terms similar to its colonial counterpart. This theme is developed in 'Dissemination', in which Bhabha points to the "gatherings of exiles and emigres and refugees" in the Western metropolises, and "the gathering of people in the diaspora" as possible sources of such dissidence.¹² Their voices, emanating from the margins of the state, have - potentially, at least - the ability to destabilise the authority of a "pedagogical" national discourse that characterises its people in fixed and homogenising terms.¹³ However, Monika Fludernik points out that the colony is a different cultural-political terrain to the diaspora, and that Bhabha takes insufficient account of this distinction.¹⁴ In the colony, the indigenous peoples, oppressed though they are, form the cultural and statistical majority, and as such are in a more secure situation than the immigrant communities of the West who are numerically and culturally minor. The extent to which the two situations can be treated as equivalent is, therefore, dubious. Fludernik's and Gayatri Spivak's respective assertions that

¹² Op. cit., p. 139.

¹³ Ibid., p.142, p.154. In similar vein, Edward Said cites Muslims in Europe and blacks in England as examples of "largely unaccommodated exiles...whose presence complicates the presumed homogeneity of the new societies in which they live". See *Representations of the Intellectual: 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.37.

¹⁴ Monika Fludernik, 'Colonial vs Cosmopolitan Hybridity: A Comparison of Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan with Recent British and North American Expatriate Writing (Singh Baldwin, Divakaruni, Sunetra Gupta)' in *Hybridity and Post-colonialism: Twentieth Century Indian Literature* (Tubingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1998), p. 262-263; p.274.

different kinds of colonial and neo-colonial encounter must be distinguished is thus an observation of considerable relevance for the examination and representation of cultural hybridity in the South Asian diaspora.¹⁵

Lola Young rightly claims that “it continues to be necessary to emphasize the asymmetries of political and economic power often involved in hybridised encounters”.¹⁶ Implicitly, Bhabha envisages the interrogative flow of hybridity more readily in one direction: that in which the marginal voice contradicts its centralised ‘other’.¹⁷ As the possibility of the opposite dynamic is given much less attention, this is one respect in which diasporic history and fiction illuminate the generalisations that afflict Bhabha’s conception of hybridising agency. It may well be that the diasporic imbalance of cultural and political power accounts, to some extent, for the ‘half-way’ state in which Taylor’s subjects find themselves. When questioned more closely in private, they reveal a much greater willingness to challenge the norms by which their parents live with more Westernised cultural values, than to reverse the process. In several ways, the representation of the cultural interface in Asian British women’s fiction underscores the unequal cultural circumstances under which the writers and many of their creations must live in the adopted country.

In Chapter 1, the intensity of criticism directed in first-phase writing at the gender norms of the ‘homeland’ is, arguably, a reflection of their pathologisation by the

¹⁵ Deepika Bahri & Mary Vasudeva, ‘Transnationality and Multicultural Ideology: Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’ in *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* (Philadelphia: Temple Press, 1996), p.84.

¹⁶ Lola Young, ‘Hybridity’s Discontents: Rereading Science and Race’ in Avtar Brah & Annie E. Coombes (eds.), *Hybridity and its Discontents: Politics, Science, Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), p.167.

¹⁷ Evans Braziel and Manmur are ‘guilty’ of a similar supposition. They credit Kobena Mercer’s model of hybridity with creolizing “the master codes of the *dominant* culture” (my emphasis) - but not the reverse. *Op. cit.*, p.5.

Western discourses that dominate in the diaspora. Only in the second phase is this critique balanced by a similarly interrogative attitude towards the patriarchies of the West - a fact that is, perhaps, indicative of the burgeoning confidence of the Asian British population, and the refusal of its younger generations to accept their representation as culturally aberrant and, therefore, justifiably marginalised. Furthermore, in Chapter 3, the depiction of diasporic Asians retreating into an unreconstructed version of Subcontinental life attests to the dominance in the erstwhile 'motherland' of conceptions of racial and cultural difference as absolutist as those found in colonial discourses. Again, it is in second-phase fiction that the right to arrival is asserted, a consequence of which is the gradual, hybridising erosion of the cultural boundary that theoretically separates the white Briton from the Asian incomer.

The other half of the equation that leaves Taylor's respondents apparently stranded in a cultural 'no man's land' may also be attributable to the imbalance of cultural and political power in the diaspora. Bhabha's somewhat unidirectional vision of cultural hybridity overlooks the possibility that marginal groups themselves may construct their identities in terms as homogenising, fixed and bounded as those used by the larger, hostile entity of the nation. Indeed, that they do so may be a *response* to the size and perceived threat of the 'other' that is the 'host' society. If Taylor's Tyneside Asians are a stranded 'half-way generation', then it is possible that essentialisms on both sides render them so. South Asian diasporic women's writing strongly suggests that a similarly "pedagogical" dynamic may be observed within Britain's South Asian communities

Indeed, their self-conception as 'communities' rather than 'populations' is often represented - especially in first-phase writing - as *necessitating* a homogenising

insistence on cultural authenticity. In Chapter 1, fear of the potentially 'polluting' impact of Western norms upon South Asian *mores* results, in first and second-phase writing, in a communal vigilance to ensure that women and children particularly continue to subscribe to the 'correct' values. This is also the case with the metaphorical returns represented in Chapter 3, which are contingent on compliance with unreconstructed cultural norms brought over from the country of origin. The "pedagogic" dynamic within South Asian society is further evident in Chapter 2. Depictions in women's fiction of Indian nationalism - and, indeed, neo-nationalism in the diaspora - underscore the extent to which women's incorporation into the movement requires them to forego their special interests, and concern themselves with priorities that are constructed as unifying in their generality.

Although Bhabha generally conceives of hybridity as a positive and productive process, he admits elsewhere that it can be "very difficult, even impossible and counterproductive to try and fit together different forms of culture and to pretend that they can easily co-exist".¹⁸ But the reasons why, and extents to which, this may be difficult beg certain questions. The subjects of Taylor's study are all male. How, if at all, would the parental pressures on them to remain within the cultural 'boundary fence' differ if they were women? In other words, is it possible that gender differentiates the extent to which living in the cultural interstices is "difficult, impossible and counterproductive"? Most of the problems with Bhabha's model of hybridity, to which writings about and from the South Asian diasporas draw attention, can be traced to its lack of specificity. And, while he is concerned with the internal hybridity of colonial discourse, Bhabha pays far less attention to the discordant voices within the *colonised*

¹⁸ Jonathan Rutherford, 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha' in Rutherford (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.209.

populace, exemplified here by his failure to address questions of gender. Fludernik observes that Bhabha follows Fanon in privileging the *male* colonial subject, with the effect that the differentiating influence of gender on the enactment of hybridity is overlooked.¹⁹ This is not to suggest that Bhabha is wholly inattentive to women: they are categorised alongside “the colonized, minority groups [and] the bearers of policed sexualities” as “dissonant, even dissident voices”.²⁰ However, by implicitly equating all of these marginal voices, Bhabha suggests that they are ordinarily muted to the same degree and by the same processes. What he does not consider is the possibility that women are both (neo-)colonised by the ‘host’, *and* rendered sexually minor by their ‘own’.

Given that the categories of ‘women’ and racialised ‘minority groups’ are of direct relevance to South Asian diasporic women’s fiction, the narratives themselves address the oversight that results from Bhabha’s failure to consider how those on the margin of a margin engage in hybridity. Several chapters suggest that gender is among the most important determinants of the (non-)hybridisation of Subcontinental customs, with women especially being represented as instigators in the interrogation of cultural boundaries and their fixity. Where Bhabha conceives of hybridity as an ‘outwardly’ directed mode of challenge to the dominant culture, women’s fiction repeatedly represents it as multi-directional, and as likely to be ‘inwardly’ orientated towards the inherited culture. In Chapter 2, the critiques of nationalism and neo-nationalism that emerge in narratives from both phases are overwhelmingly generated by women who are dissatisfied with the conservation of their social disadvantage in the name of cultural authenticity. The fact that their interrogative energies are directed at *both* nationalism

¹⁹ Papastergiadis, ‘Tracing Hybridity in Theory’ in Werbner & Modood (eds.), op. cit., p.49.

²⁰ Op. cit., p.4-5.

and imperialism emphasises the common elements between these supposedly oppositional ideologies, and initiates the erosion of the barrier discursively erected between them. The potential hybridising of 'authentic' South Asian norms is also evident in Chapter 3, in the scepticism with which a number of female protagonists view notions of return in particular, whether literal or metaphorical - largely because of the burden of responsibility their sustenance places on female shoulders. Similarly, in Chapter 4, the challenges to inter-generational patterns of social reproduction, especially in the diaspora, are at their most profound and complex when they occur between generations of women.

Furthermore, the kinds of hybridising enterprise in which women are shown to engage develop from the first to the second phase, underscoring the evolutionary passages of space and time. In earlier narratives, especially those set in the 'homeland', dissatisfaction with South Asian norms is normally articulated in private. The challenges to conventional dictates that do occur often do so through methods that lack an immediately obvious impact. Chapter 1, for instance, charts several examples of mimicry in both 'homeland' and diaspora narratives, where women combine an apparent adherence to traditional expectations with a refusal to accept their conventional import - a state of being, as Bhabha puts it, "both against the rules and within them".²¹ In both phases of diasporic writing, as discussed in the same chapter, more overt statements of dissent, interrogation and even rejection also emerge out of acts of mimicry on a number of occasions. However, what most of these representations of women underscore is that living between cultures, instead of being the liberating, and productive experience Bhabha tends to suggest, can be burdensome. It is especially so

²¹ 'Of Mimicry and Man, op. cit., p.89. Aspects of mimicry are evident in the actions of characters such as Nandi and Zahra (*SOABC*). Given that Bhabha elaborates a vision of mimicry in colonial contexts, the connection between imperialism and patriarchy is underscored by these first-phase examples.

when one is responsible for embodying the distinctiveness of the inherited identity that is itself the partial cause of dissatisfaction.

The examples detailed above are concerned with the hybridisation that results from the intersection of race with gender. However, other factors can also influence the ease with which the interrogative power of hybridity may be exercised, as Jonathan Friedman's observations on class suggest.

The urban poor, ethnically mixed ghetto is an arena that does not immediately cater to the construction of explicitly new hybrid identities...

The global, cultural hybrid, elite sphere is occupied by individuals who share a very different kind of experience of the world, connected to international politics, academia, the media and the arts.²²

As McLeod remarks, Graham Huggans also draws a distinction between "cosmopolitan, mostly voluntary, movements of intellectuals swapping one roof over their heads for another" and involuntary migrants and guest-workers "pushed about by the gusts of economic and political change".²³ These comments foreground a phenomenon that some of the selected texts are at pains to represent: cultural hybridity is not an option available equally to all members of subordinated groups.

The issue of class exemplifies how Bhabha's representation of the ruled peoples can itself occasionally border on the "pedagogical" - in this case, overlooking the different degrees and kinds of disenfranchisement within groups that he characterises as

²² Jonathan Friedman, 'Global Crises, the Struggle for Cultural Identity and Intellectual Porkbarrelling: Cosmopolitans vs Locals, Ethnics vs Nationals in an Era of De-hegemonisation' in Werbner & Modood, *op. cit.*, p.84.

²³ A.L. McLeod (ed.), *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2000), p.v.

marginal *en masse*.²⁴ Chapter 5's focus on representations of class emphasises the extent to which the supposedly unified populations of the 'homeland' and, especially, the Asian British diaspora are riven by internal differences. Both phases of diasporic fiction suggest that class determines the ethnic identity that the immigrant brings to the diaspora; and this, in turn, determines the readiness with which acceptance by the 'host' is forthcoming. Furthermore, as Avtar Brah and Annie Coombes remark, the "uncritical celebration of the traces of cultural syncretism" pays inadequate attention to "economic, political and social inequalities". These are phenomena that not only concern class, but also age. Chapter 4's focus on inter-generational reconciliations, especially in second-phase fiction, attests to a more developed consciousness in second-generation immigrants of the racial and sexual inequalities that have formed the identities of the first migrating generations.

Theorists of diasporic identities following in Bhabha's wake have sought to supplement the generality of his model of hybridity by focusing on how the dynamics of heterogeneity and dissonance operate *within* the black diasporic populations - a major theme in diasporic writing's representation of various South Asian populations. Stuart Hall is emphatic about how the adoption of an overarching black identity, while politically expedient in certain situations, is also insufficiently attentive to the actual hybridity of the subject, which "cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity".²⁵ Bhabha pays scant attention to the intersection of these positions. However, for Hall, they mean that productivity becomes possible *within* the subject; for, when engaged in the kinds of interrogative destabilisation that Bhabha describes, these cultural affiliations acquire gaps in their

²⁴ Fludernik also points to a similar tendency in the characterisation of the 'host' culture in terms of "unreformed Western chauvinism". Op. cit., p.49.

²⁵ Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities' in Procter (ed.), op. cit., pp.269.

respective boundaries that prevent their total exclusivity. As different aspects of identity take priority in different situations, the status of the individual remains in flux.

Therefore, what Hall's conception of hybridity allows for is mobility: for the individual's identity to be made and re-made repeatedly, without necessarily arriving at a single, permanent point of rest, where one aspect is finally privileged over the others.

Hall's diasporic aesthetic, characterised by the unsettling, recombination and "cut-and-mix" of cultural forms, resonates with the conceptions of diasporic identity also proposed by Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer, both of whom raise issues of particular relevance to the ambit of this study.²⁶ Gilroy is keen to emphasise the constructed, rather than essential, nature of blackness, including the ways in which it is represented as being outside 'Britishness'.²⁷ Furthermore, the possibility of culturally absolutist tendencies in migrant communities is one that Gilroy considers explicitly. He endorses polyphony and impurity as the characteristics of a distinctively mobile diasporic aesthetic, and is concerned by the limitations of valorising an atrophied, invented notion of authenticity and tradition as the only true expression of black identity.²⁸ Gilroy's vision is congruent with Hall's conception of hybrid identities as enabling the formation of temporary strategic alliances, depending on which aspects of identity take priority at a given time. But Gilroy also sees in this emphasis a possibly erosive threat to the political efficacy of blackness as a political rallying point. Chapter 5's focus on representations of class in South Asian diasporic women's writing voices a similar concern. Fictional depictions of class fissures within the Asian British population, and their interaction with other kinds of identification, raise pertinent

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 272-273.

²⁷ See, for example, 'Black and English: A Lived Contradiction' in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, op. cit., pp.20-22.

²⁸ See, for example, 'D-Max', op. cit., pp.116-118.

questions about the extent to which the politics of race or gender can supersede socio-economic difference.

Mercer, like Hall and Gilroy, underscores the importance of the individual's intersecting identities, conceived along similar lines such as race, class, gender and sexuality. He is emphatic about the necessity of "seizing opportunities in the gaps and fissures" created by their mutual friction, and utilising the possibilities of a distinctly Bhabhian hybridity in the service of a more obviously syncretic mode of practice – one that is distinguished by the "mixing and fusion of disparate elements to create new hybridized identities".²⁹ Indeed, he most explicitly of all the diaspora theorists discussed here, credits black women with "the pluralisation of black identities" during the 1980s (the period during which the developmental shift in the diasporic literary *oeuvre* becomes apparent).³⁰ Asian British women's writing, as represented in the majority of chapters in this dissertation, displays a marked concern with this discursive terrain, evinced in the various ways in which race and gender engage in mutual articulations and shifting relationships of supremacy. Something of this is exemplified by the concerns discussed in Chapter 5. The focus falls on the ways in which South Asian class identities are articulated through the conduct of women, and on the extents to which South Asian feminine identities are functions of class.

However, what is especially striking about Mercer's vision of diasporic identity for the purposes of this dissertation are the different axes along which it is plotted. He does not confine himself to considering the internal dissonance of the individual subject. He also places the diasporic subject *in history*, specifically citing the "spaces created by

²⁹ Kobena Mercer, 'The Cultural Politics of Diaspora' in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p.2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11.

our forebears” as the sites upon which the identifications of subsequent generations are built.³¹ This sense of identity formation and aesthetic development across time is especially relevant to my methodology in this study: the adoption of a two phase division of the Asian British women’s literary corpus is intended to illuminate the unfolding of hybridities over time. The aesthetic implications of this developmental focus are discussed in Chapter 6, where changes in the double-voiced character of South Asian diasporic women’s writing are mapped out in various ways. Aldon L. Nielsen’s elaboration of African-American intertextuality provides a useful point of reference here, as he asserts the interrogative potential of articulations from those who are neither wholly inside nor outside their adopted societies. Nielsen characterises African-American literary voices as simultaneously party to, and critical of, dominant modes of thought; and he stresses the necessity of reading black texts “in their fulsome implication in all English literature”, rather than confining their relevance within and to a separate category of ‘black writing’.³² The point is applicable to Asian British women’s writing, much of which aesthetically underscores its (non-)integration into the body of English literature. However, where Nielsen implicitly conceives of dominant modes of thought in terms of racial discourse, women’s fiction also foregrounds ideologies of gender as an integral part of the linguistic and intertextual nexus in which it is positioned.

Nielsen’s insistence that intertextual analyses of canonical American literature “read the production of racial difference as constitutive of, rather than reflecting social identities” is, nonetheless, relevant to the texts I have selected for examination.³³ The

³¹ Ibid.

³² Aldon L. Nielsen, *Writing Between the Lines: Race and Intertextuality* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p.22.

³³ Ibid.

discourse of race that hinders the inclusion of non-white citizens is unmasked as the product of historical circumstances, rather than the reflection of 'natural', biological lines of distinction. What South Asian women's writing also brings to the question of intertextual relations, often in their readings of Asian textual sources, is an equally strong consciousness of the production, rather than pre-existing fact, of gender difference. If its racial perspectives provide conduits of challenge to the homogenising 'blancocentricity' of English literature, the prevalence of female-centred narratives in many of the selected works is one of the means by which the phallogentricity of writings about and by South Asian men is illuminated.

Gilroy observes that the concept of diaspora is especially useful, "because it allows one to look simultaneously at the differences and continuities in black experience".³⁴ My intention in this dissertation has been to examine the same tendencies within Asian British women's experience, as represented in fiction. The qualities that render women's fiction distinctive also sometimes bestow upon it a resonance with the marginalisation of immigrants *in general*. The social status of women, as Nira Yuval-Davis describes it, reflects this paradox. Women are "on the one hand...always included, at least to some extent, in the constructions of the general body of members...of ethnic collectivities".³⁵ But, "on the other hand, there is always, at least to a certain extent, a separate body of regulations (legal and/or customary) which relate to them specifically as women".³⁶ Asian British women's writing possesses a similar status: sufficiently rooted in women's specific social and historical circumstances to remind us that 'grand narratives' of migration are created at the expense of respect for

³⁴ 'The Peculiarities of the Black English', *op. cit.*, p.54.

³⁵ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Ethnicity, Gender Relations and Multiculturalism' in Werbner & Modood (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.195.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

particularity; but also sufficiently alive enough to the most 'front line' experiences of cultural alienation as to be somewhat 'representative' of the whole.

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